



We are How We Eat: A Jewish Approach to Food and Sustainability *Hebrew/English Source Sheet and Study Guide*

This material was prepared by Rabbi Yonatan Neril and Evonne Marzouk of Canfei Nesharim, as part of the Jewcology project.

Outline of Topics:

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4. Eating in Holiness
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1. Jewish Festivals and their Agricultural Links

שמות כג:טז.

וְחַג הַקְצִיר בַּכּוֹרֵי מַעֲשֵׂיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע בַּשָּׂדֶה וְחַג הָאֶסֶף בְּצֵאת הַשָּׂנָה בְּאֶסְפָּךָ אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיךָ מִן הַשָּׂדֶה:

Exodus 23:16, Judaica Press translation

And the festival of the harvest, the first fruits of your labors, which you will sow in the field, and the festival of the ingathering at the departure of the year, when you gather in [the products of] your labors from the field.

רש"י לשמות כג:טז: וחג הקציר: הוא חג שבועות

Rashi to Exodus 23:16, Judaica Press translation

And the festival of the harvest: That is the feast of Shavuoth.

רש"י לשמות כג:טז:

בכורי מעשיך: שהוא זמן הבאת בכורים, ששתי הלחם הבאים בעצרת היו מתירין החדש למנחות ולהביא בכורים למקדש, שנאמר (במדבר כח כו) וביום הבכורים וגו':

Rashi to Exodus 23:16, Judaica Press translation

The first fruits of your labors: which is the time of the bringing of the first fruits for the two breads, which are brought on Shavuoth [and serve to] permit the new grain [to be used] for meal offerings and [also] to bring the first fruits to the Sanctuary, as it is said: "And on the day of the first fruits, etc" (Numbers 28:26)

משנה מסכת מנחות פרק ח משנה א

כל קרבנות הצבור והיחיד באים מן הארץ ומחוצה לארץ מן החדש ומן הישן חוץ מן העומר ושתי הלחם שאינן באים אלא מן החדש ומן הארץ וכולן אינן באים אלא מן המובחר ואיזהו מובחר מכמס ומזוניחה אלפא לסולת שנייה להם חפריים בבקעה כל הארצות היו כשרות אלא מכאן היו מביאים

Mishna Menachot, 8:1, translation by Rafael Fisch¹

All offerings of the congregation or of the individual may be brought from the Land or from outside the Land, from the new or from the old, except the omer and the Two Loaves, which may be brought only from the new and from the Land. And all may come only from the choicest.

דברים כו: ה-י

אַרְמִי אֶבֶד אָבִי וַיֵּרֵד מִצְרַיִם וַיִּגְרַשׁ שָׁם בְּמַתִּי מֵעֵט וַיְהִי-שָׁם לְגוֹי גָדוֹל עֲצוּם וְרַב: ... וַנִּצְעַק אֵל-ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶתְקַלְנוּ וַיִּרְא אֶת-עֲנִינֵנוּ וְאֶת-עֲמַלְנוּ וְאֶת-לַחֲצֵנוּ: וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה וּבַמַּרְא גָדֹל וּבְאִתּוֹת וּבְמִפְתִּים: וַיְבִאֵנוּ אֵל-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן-לָנוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וַיְדַבֵּשׁ: וַעֲתָה הִנֵּה הִבֵּאתִי אֶת-רֵאשִׁית פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-נָתַתָּה לִי ה' וַהֲנַחְתּוּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ:

Deuteronomy 26: 5-10, Artscroll translation

An Armanean tried to destroy my forefather. He descended to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation – great, strong and numerous... Then we cried out to HaShem, the G-d of our forefathers, and HaShem heard our voice and saw our affliction, our travail and our oppression. HaShem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, with great awesomeness, and with signs and with wonders. [G-d] brought us to this place, and he gave us this Land, a Land flowing with milk and honey. And now behold! I have brought the first fruit of the ground that You have given me, O G-d!

Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of emotion is evoked by the statement which was recited when the first fruits were brought?
2. What can this teach us about our relationship to our land and our food?

2. Esau and Eating

בראשית פרק כה פסוק ל

וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אֵל יַעֲקֹב הֲלִעִיטָנִי נָא מִן הָאֲדָם הָאֲדָם הִנֵּה כִּי עָנַף אֲנֹכִי עַל פֶּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ אֲדָוִם:

Genesis 25:30, translation based on Soncino translation

And Esau said to Jacob: Let me swallow (hale'iteni) from this red red stuff, because I am tired. Therefore his name is called Edom.

משנה מסכת שבת פרק כד משנה ג

אֵין אוֹבְסִין אֶת הַגַּמֵּל וְלֹא דוֹרְסִין אֶבֶל מִלְעִיטִין...

Mishna, Tractate Shabbat 24:3, Soncino translation:

One must not stuff a camel [with food] nor force food upon it, but one may put food into its mouth.

בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשה סג סימן יב

וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו הֲלִעִיטָנִי נָא מִן הָאֲדָוִם, א"ר זעירא פער פיו אותו הרשע כגמל א"ל אנה פתח פומי תהי משתדר ואזיל, כהדא דתנינן אין אוֹבְסִין אֶת הַגַּמֵּל וְלֹא דוֹרְסִין אֶבֶל מִלְעִיטִין, מן האדום האדום, רבי יוחנן וריש לקיש ר"י אמר מיניה ומן פטרוניה, ר"ל אמר מיניה ומן דכוותיה

Midrash Genesis Raba (Vilna edition), 63:12, Soncino translation

And Esau said to Jacob: Let me swallow (hale'iteni), etc (Genesis 25:30). R' Isaac son of R' Ze'ira said: That wicked man opened his mouth wide like a camel's and declared: 'I open my mouth, and do you go on pouring in,' [hale'iteni bearing the same meaning] as when we learned [in the Mishna] : "You must not stuff a camel nor force food upon it, but you may put food into its mouth (male'itin)."

¹Eliner Library version, Maor Wallach Press, Jerusalem, 1994, p. 82

3. Food Security and Growing One's Own Food

תלמוד בבלי מסכת מנחות דף קג עמוד ב

אישתיק. אמר ליה ר' זריקא: מאי טעמא לא קא מהדר מר? אמר ליה: היכי אהדר ליה?
דאמר רבי חנין: +דברים כח+ והיו חייך תלואים לך מנגד - זה הלוקח תבואה משנה לשנה, ופחדת לילה ויומם - זה הלוקח תבואה מערב שבת לערב שבת, ואל תאמן בחייך - זה הסומך על הפלטר, וההוא גברא על פלטר סמיד.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Menachot, p. 103b, Soncino translation

He (Rav Bibi) remained silent. Thereupon R. Zerika said to him, Why does not the Master give an answer? He replied, How can I answer? Behold R. Hanin has said, It is written, And your life shall hang in doubt before you (Deuteronomy 28:66): this refers to one who buys grain from year to year;² “and you shalt fear night and day” (ibid): this refers to one who buys grain from week to week;³ “and shall have no assurance of your life” (ibid): this refers to one who has to rely upon the bread dealer.⁴ And I⁵ have to rely upon the bread dealer.

מהרש"א חידושי אגדות מסכת מנחות דף קג עמוד ב

והיו חייך תלואים גו' זה הלוקח תבואה כו'. ושייך זה בקללות דבשעה שהיו ישראל על אדמתן היה לכל איש מישראל קרקע אבל משגלו לא היה להם קרקע לזרוע

Maharsha (Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Edels –1555-1631, Poland), commentary to Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Menachot, p. 103b, translation by R' Yonatan Neril

“And your life shall hang in doubt, etc.” “This refers to one who buys grain, etc.” This deserves to be among the curses [stated in chapter 28 of Deuteronomy], since when the Jewish people were on their land, every man had land. But from when they were exiled, they did not have land to plant.

אבות דרבי נתן נוסחא א פרק ל

רבי אחאי בן יאשיה אומר הלוקח תבואה מן השוק למה הוא דומה לתינוק שמתה אמו ומחזירין אותו על פתחי מיניקות אחרות ואינו שבע. הלוקח פת מן השוק למה הוא דומה כאלו חפור וקבור. האוכל משלו דומה לתינוק המתגדל על שדי אמו: הוא היה אומר בזמן שאדם אוכל משלו דעתו מיושבת עליו. ואפילו אוכל אדם משל אביו ומשל אמו ומשל בניו אין דעתו מיושבת עליו ואין צריך לומר משל אחרים:

Avot d'Rabbi Natan, version 1, chapter 30, taken from multiple translations

Rabbi Achai ben Yoshiyah says: One who buys grain from the market- to what may he be likened? To an infant whose mother died and they pass him among the doorways of different wet-nurses and he is not satisfied. One who buys bread from the market- to what may she be likened? To one who is dug and buried. One who eats from his own is like an infant raised at his mother's breasts.

He would say, “During the time that a person eats from what he has grown himself—his mind is tranquil. Even one who eats from that which his father has grown or from that of his mother's or son's, his mind is not tranquil—and you do not [even] need to say [food grown] from that of others [non-relatives].”

Discussion Questions:

What is the benefit of growing your own food?

What are the drawbacks?

How do you think the rabbis would interpret our situation today?

² I.e., who has no fields of his own to cultivate but must purchase his provisions yearly.

³ Lit., ‘from Sabbath eve to Sabbath eve’.

⁴ For his daily needs.

⁵ Lit., ‘that man’. R. Bibi was in straitened circumstances and had difficulties in obtaining a living, consequently his mind was not at ease to concentrate on the question raised.

4. Eating in Holiness

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ג משנה ג

רבי שמעון אומר שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה כאילו אכלו מזבחי מתים שנאמר (ישעיה כ"ח) כי כל שלחנות מלאו קיא צואה בלי מקום אבל שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ואמרו עליו דברי תורה כאילו אכלו משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא שנאמר (יחזקאל מ"א) וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה':

Ethics of the Fathers (Pirke Avot), chapter 3, Mishna 3, Judaica Press translation

Rabbi Shimon would say: Three who eat at one table and do not speak words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten of idolatrous [lit. dead] sacrifices; as is stated, "Indeed, all tables are filled with vomit and filth, devoid of the Omnipresent" (Isaiah 28:8). But three who eat at one table and speak words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten at G-d's table, as is stated, "And he said to me: This is the table that is before G-d"⁶ (Ezekiel 41:22).

Be'er Mayim, Haggadah Shel Pesach, translated by Rabbi David Sears

"If three people ate together at one table and did not speak words of Torah, it is as if they partook of slaughter to the dead" (Avos 3:4). Citing a teaching of his master, the Baal Shem Tov, the Maggid of Mezeritch (R. Dov Ber ben Avraham, 1704-1772) said: Souls of the deceased are reincarnated in food and drink, waiting for a person to speak words of Torah and give them life. However, if one does not say words of Torah, he "slaughters the dead" who had been thus reincarnated and casts them back to the inanimate realm.

הרב נתן שטרנהרץ, חיי מוהר"ן, אות תקטו

הזהיר שלא לאכל בהלעטה הינו במהירות פְּדָרָה גְּרָגָרָן כִּי זֶהוּ פְּחִינָת: "הלעיטני נא" רק להרגיל עצמו לאכל במתינות בִּישׁוּב הַדַּעַת וּבְדָרָה אֶרֶץ פְּדָרָה שְׂאוּכְלֵי פְּדָרָה אֶרֶץ כְּשִׁיּוֹשֵׁב אָדָם חָשׁוּב עַל הַשְּׁלֶחָן כִּף יֹאכֵל תָּמִיד אֶפְיָלוּ כְּשִׂאוּכֵל לְבָדוּ

Chayey Moharan #515, by Rabbi Natan Sternhartz, translation by R' Avraham Greenbaum

Be careful not to swallow your food in a hurry. Eat at a moderate pace, calmly and with the same table manners that you would show if an important guest were present. You should always eat in this manner, even when you are alone.

הרב צדוק הכהן, פרי צדיק, קונטרס עת האוכל, אות ו

...כי ההנאה שיש להאדם מן המאכל אם נכנסת לנפש הא-להית וחלק א-לוה ממעל שבו, היינו כשהוא מכיר שה' יתברך ברא את המאכל הזה ומחיהו ונותן לו הויה וקיום והוא נותן בו טעם והנאה ונותן לאדם חשק שיתאוה לו ושיטעום בו טעם טוב ושיוסיף בכוחו וחיותו... אבל כששוכח זה ואוכל להנאת עצמו למילוי התאוה זה מצד נפש המתאוה הבהמית שבאדם וכאילו מקריב לה קרבן וזהו זבחי מתים ממש שכח זה ותאוה זו הוא כדרך שאמרו (ברכות י"ח ב) רשעים בחייהם קרוים מתים שהחיות הוא דמיון בעלמא אבל באמת הוא מיתה והקרבנות הוא זבחי מתים ותקרובת עבודה זרה שזוהו עבודה זרה השכחה מה' יתברך ומילוי כח אחר חוץ מכה ה' יתברך. והעצה לזה הוא שולחן שיש עליו דברי תורה שהמאור שבה הוא המברר שמכיר שהוא מה' יתברך, כי חכמה לשון הכרה כידוע וזה גם כן כוונת הברכה שתיקנו חכמים קודם אכילה שענינה ההכרה שה' יתברך הוא הבורא ומהוה מאכל זה שיהיה מאכל :

Rabbi Tzadok Hacohen, Pri Tzadik, Treatise on the Time of Eating, section six, translation by R' Yonatan Neril

...The pleasure to a person from the food can come to the Godly soul if a person recognizes that God created the food and gives it life, vitality and taste and gives a person desire for it and to taste it... But when a person forgets this and eats for their own pleasure to satisfy their desire, which comes from the desiring animal soul within a person, it is as if the person is offering [their animal soul] a sacrifice. Then the person is like that which the Sages said about the wicked, that in their lives they are called dead, because their life force is a fantasy, and [eating to satisfy one's desire] is death and is like bringing an offering of death and offering idol worship, because *this is idol worship—that a person forgets God and fills with a different force other than God*. And the

⁶ Note of Soncino edition: By designating the Altar as 'table', the text is taken to convey that there are times when the table of man can become as hallowed even as the altar — when it is consecrated by words of Torah spoken at the table.

advice [to prevent this is eating at] a table that has divrei Torah where the illumination in it is the clarification that recognizes that it comes from God. Because the Hebrew word chochma (wisdom) implies awareness, and this is also the point of blessing which the Sages instituted before eating, to be aware that God is the Creator and gives life to the food so that it be food.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת חגיגה דף כז עמוד א

...רחמנא קרייה עץ, דכתיב +יחזקאל מ"א+ המזבח עץ שלש אמות גבוה וארכו שתים אמות ומקצעותיו לו וארכו וקירתיו עץ וידבר אלי, זה השלחן אשר לפני ה'. פתח במזבח וסיים בשלחן. רבי יוחנן וריש לקיש דאמרי תרוייהו: בזמן שבית המקדש קיים מזבח מכפר על אדם, עכשיו - שלחנו של אדם מכפר עליו.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Hagigah p. 27a, Soncino translation

...Scripture calls it [the altar in the Temple] wood, for it is written: "The *altar*, three cubits high, and the length thereof two cubits, was of wood, and so the corners; the length thereof and the walls thereof, were also of wood; and he said unto me: 'This is the *table* that is before the Lord'" (Ezekiel, 41, 22).⁷ [This verse] begins with the altar and ends with the table! Rabbi Yochanan and Resh Lakish both explain: At the time when the Temple stood, the altar used to make atonement for a person; now a person's table makes atonement for him.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the difference between food eaten at a table at which words of Torah are spoken?
2. Why does the number of people at the table matter?
3. What is the relationship between the altar and the table?

5. Agriculture in Israel and Local Food Production

בראשית פרק מט פסוק א

ויקרא יעקב אל בניו ויאמר האספו ואגידה לכם את אשר יקרא אתכם באחרית הימים:
הקבצו ושמעו בני יעקב ושמעו אל ישראל אביכם:

Genesis 49:1-2, Judaica Press translation

Jacob called for his sons and said, "Gather and I will tell you what will happen to you at the end of days. Gather and listen, sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel, your father."

A) The Tribe of Judah

בראשית פרק מט פסוק יא

אֲסֹרֵי לִגְפֵן <עירה> עִירוֹ וְלִשְׂרָקָה בְּנֵי אֶתְנֹו כִּפֶּס בִּיַּיִן לְבָשׁוּ וּבָדָם עֲנָבִים <סוּתָה> סוּתוֹ :

Genesis 49:11: He [Judah] ties his he-donkey to a vine, and to the branch [he ties] his young she-donkey. He launders his garment in wine, and his robe in the blood of grapes.

רש"י בראשית פרק מט פסוק יא

אסרי לגפן עירה - נתנבא על ארץ יהודה שתהא מושכת יין כמעין, איש יהודה יאסור לגפן עיר אחד ויטעננו מגפן אחת, ומשורק אחד בן אתון אחד:

Rashi "He binds his foal to a vine": He [Judah] prophesied concerning the land of Judah [namely] that wine will flow like a fountain from it. One Judahite man will bind one he-donkey to a vine and load it from one vine, and from one vine branch [he will load] one young donkey. [From *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 98:9]

⁷ The verse's use of 'before Hashem' in relation to a person's table is understood to imply speaking words of Torah at a table in which food is eaten, as stated by the above Mishna in Pirke Avot 3:3 (see Rashi there, and Chidushim to Ein Yaakov).

רש"י בראשית פרק מט פסוק יא
כבס ביין - כל זה לשון רבוי יין:

Rashi "He launders...with wine"

All this is an expression of an abundance of wine. [From Midrash *Genesis Rabbah* 99:8]

תלמוד בבלי מסכת כתובות דף קיא עמוד ב
ושמא תאמר, אין בו טעם? ת"ל: הכלילי עינים מיין, כל חיך שטועמו אומר לי, לי ;

Babylonian Talmud-Tractate Ketubot 111b, Soncino translation

And in case you should think that it is tasteless it was expressly stated, His eyes shall be red with wine, any palate that will taste it says, 'To me, to me'.

B) The Tribe of Zebulun

בראשית פרק מט פסוק יג
זבולן לחוף ימים ישפן והוא לחוף אנניות ונרכתו על צידן :

Genesis 49:13: Zebulun will dwell on the coast of the seas; he will be at the harbor of the ships, and his boundary will be at Zidon.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה דף ו עמוד א

אמר זבולון לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבוננו של עולם! לאחיי נתת להם שדות וכרמים ולי נתת הרים וגבעות, לאחיי נתת להם ארצות - ולי נתת ימים ונהרות. אמר לו: כולן צריכין לך על ידי חלזון, שנאמר +דברים ל"ג+ [עמים הר יקראו]... ושפני טמוני חול. תני רב יוסף: שפני - זה חלזון, טמוני - זו טרית, חול - זו זכוכית לבנה

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, p. 6a, Soncino translation:

Zebulun said before the Holy One, Blessed is He: Master of the Universe, to my brothers you have given fields and vineyards, but to me you have given mountains and hills. To my brothers you have given lands, but to me you have given lakes and rivers. [G-d] answered him: They will all need you for the *Chilazon* [which is found in your territory]. (A creature that emerges from the sea and climbs into the mountains. Techelet is made from its 'blood.')

C) The Tribe of Isaachar

בראשית פרק מט פסוק טו
וירא מנוחה פי טוב ואת הארץ פי נעמה ויט שקמו לסבל ויהי למס עבד:

Genesis 49:14-15, Judaica Press translation

Issachar is a bony donkey, lying between the boundaries. He saw a resting place, that it was good, and the land, that it was pleasant, and he bent his shoulder to bear [burdens], and he became an indentured laborer.

רש"י בראשית פרק מט פסוק טו
וירא מנוחה כי טוב - ראה לחלקו ארץ מבורכת וטובה להוציא פירות:

Rashi "He saw a resting place, that it was good"

He saw that his territory was a blessed and good land for producing fruits. [From *Targum Onkelos*, *Bereshith Rabbathi*]

D) The Tribe of Asher

בראשית פרק מט פסוק כ
מאשר שמנה לחמו והוא יתן מעדני מלך:

Genesis 49:20, Artscroll Rashi translation

From Asher-- his bread is rich, and he will provide kingly delicacies.

רש"י בראשית פרק מט פסוק כ

מאשר שמנה לחמו - מאכל הבא מחלקו של אשר יהא שמן, שיהיו זיתים מרובים בחלקו, והוא מושך שמן כמעין. וכן ברכו משה (דברים לג כד) וטובל בשמן רגלו...

Rashi to Genesis 49:20, translation from Artscroll Rashi

From Asher-- his bread is rich: Food which comes from the portion of Asher, will be rich, for there will be many olives in his portion, and it draws forth oil like a spring. Similarly did Moses bless him: "and dip his feet in oil" (Deuteronomy 33:24)...

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Jacob's blessings revolve so much around food?
2. If you lived in Jerusalem 3,000 years ago, where would your wheat, wine, olive oil, and fruit likely come from?
3. Where does it come from today?

6. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook on Eating Meat

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, selections from "A Vision of Vegetarianism And Peace," (*Chazon HaTzimchonut V'HaShalom*), from chapters 1, 2, and 12, translated by Rabbi David Sears⁸

The Just Treatment of Animals

There is a fundamental branch of human advancement that according to the present state of the prevailing culture, exists today only in the pleasant dream of a few extremely idealistic souls: an innate ethical striving for just, humane feeling that is fully attentive to the fate of animals.

Certain cruel philosophies that base their ethics on human reason, especially those that deny belief in God, have advocated that man completely stifle within himself any sense of justice for animals. However, they have not succeeded, nor shall they succeed with all their self-serving cleverness, in perverting the innate sense of justice that the Creator planted within the human soul. Although sympathy for animals is like the glow of a smoldering ember buried under a great heap of ashes, nevertheless, it is impossible for them to negate this sensitivity within every feeling heart. For failing to heed the good and noble instinct not to take any form of life, whether for one's needs or physical gratification, constitutes a moral lack in the human race.

Our sages did not agree with these philosophical views [that suppress a sense of justice for animals]. They tell us that the holy Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi was visited with afflictions because he told a calf being led to slaughter, that had sought refuge in the skirts of his garment, "Go! This is the purpose for which you were created." His healing was also brought about by a deed, when he showed mercy to some weasels (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Bava Metzia* 85a)... It is impossible to imagine that the Master of all that transpires, Who has mercy upon His all creatures, would establish an eternal decree such as this in the creation that He pronounced "exceedingly good," namely, that it should be impossible for the human race to exist without violating its own moral instincts by shedding blood, be it even the blood of animals.

Man's Original Diet Was Vegetarian

...The Torah attests that all humanity once possessed this lofty moral level. Citing scriptural proofs, our sages

⁸ Rav Kook was the first chief rabbi of pre-state Israel. Translation from [A Vision of Eden: Animal Welfare and Vegetarianism in Jewish Law and Mysticism](#), Orot: Spring Valley, NY, 2003

explain (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Sanhedrin* 57a) that Adam was not permitted to eat meat: "Behold, I have given you every tree... yielding seed for food" (Genesis 1:29). Meat was permitted only to the children of Noah, after the Flood: "Like the green herb, I have given you everything" (Genesis 9:3). Is it conceivable that this moral excellence, which once existed as an inherent human characteristic, should be lost forever? Concerning these and similar matters, it states, "I shall bring knowledge from afar, and unto my Maker I shall ascribe righteousness" (Job 36:3). In the future, God shall cause us to make great spiritual strides, and thus extricate us from this complex question.

Vegetarianism and Enlightenment

When humanity reaches its goal of complete happiness and spiritual liberation, when it attains that lofty peak of perfection that is the pure knowledge of God and the full manifestation of the essential holiness of life, then the age of "motivation by virtue of enlightenment" will have arrived...⁹ At that time human beings will recognize their companions in creation: all the animals. They will understand how it is fitting from the standpoint of the purest ethical standard not to resort to moral concessions, to compromise the Divine attribute of justice with that of mercy¹⁰ [by permitting humankind's exploitation of animals]; for they will no longer need extenuating concessions, as in those matters of which the Talmud states: "The Torah speaks only of the evil inclination" (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Kiddushin* 31b).¹¹ Rather they will walk the path of absolute good. As the prophet declares: "I will make a covenant for them with the animals of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; I also will banish the bow and sword, and war from the land..." (Hosea 2:20)

Discussion Question:

1. Based on these sections of Rav Kook's teachings, what are some of his main ideas about eating meat, in our time and in a future time?

7. Jewish Views on Reincarnated Souls in Food

Sefer HaPeliah, s.v. *U'r'ei v'havain*, pp. 282-283, translation by Rabbi David Sears

The verse states: "For your soul desires to eat flesh..." -- "your soul" alludes to a kindred [reincarnated] soul, which thus "belongs" to you [and desires that you redeem it]; "...after all the desire of your soul you may eat flesh" (Deuteronomy 12:20). That is, your intention must be to spiritually elevate the soul for which you are responsible that dwells within the food. However, the one who eats must be spiritually elevated in order to accomplish this task. Then the Holy One, blessed be He, will prepare for him appropriate food. If the one who eats does not have this intention, but eats merely to satisfy his craving, the [captive soul within the] food will ascend above to its proper place, whereas the one who eats will descend to the spiritual level formerly occupied by the [soul that had been captive within the] food he consumed. Thus, the status of a human may become exchanged with that of an animal, and vice versa.¹²

Consider this well, my child, and you will see that the Tannaim (Mishnaic masters) and Amoraim (Talmudic masters) permitted meat to themselves alone, for all their deeds were for the sake of Heaven. Thus, our sages ask, "And as for others, when is it eaten?" and they reply, "From one Sabbath eve to the next,"¹³ for then Divine mercy prevails, and one's intent is perfect. Moreover, one who saves a soul of Israel is considered to have kept the entire Torah.¹⁴ However, in these subsequent generations, when the commandments have come to be

⁹ The term *"he'aras ha-sechel* is from Rabbenu Bachya ibn Pakuda, *Chovos haLevavos, Sha'ar Avodas Elokim*, chap. 3, a favorite passage of Rav Kook.

¹⁰ *Midrash Bereishis Rabba* 8:4.

¹¹ See *Sefer Halkkarim* 3:15.

¹² R' Chaim Vital citing the Ari in *Sha'ar HaMitzvos* (below) apparently disagrees with the contention of the author of *Sefer HaPeliah* that the transmigrated soul may be redeemed even in the absence of proper intent by the one who consumes the food.

¹³ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Pesachim* 49b

¹⁴ This appears to be a variant of the Mishnaic teaching: "If one saves one soul of Israel, it is as if he had saved an entire world"

performed as if by rote, even Talmudic scholars should not risk losing their souls as a consequence of eating meat. Nevertheless, one who understands the meaning of eating, and the mystery of the verse stated above, is permitted to eat meat [and in so doing, engage in the risks of elevating the reincarnated souls contained therein].

Indeed, we find that our sages were so moved by this concern that they declared: "One ignorant of Torah (*am ha'aretz*) is forbidden to eat meat."¹⁵ Since an *am ha'aretz* is comparable to an animal, for what purpose may he consume the soul of one who is superior to him, and himself turn into an animal that will be consumed by another *am ha'aretz*, and still not attain purification? By eating without proper intent, he will bring about his own destruction. It is better for such a person to consume the herb of the Earth, rather than damage his soul.

Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, *Rimzei Yisrael*, translated by Rabbi David Sears

...Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, create the various sorts of food and drink that man craves? The reason is because there are actually sparks of Adam hidden in the mineral realm (*domem*), in vegetative life (*tzomei'ach*), in the animal kingdom (*chai*), and in mankind (*medaber*). They long to attach themselves to holiness... All the food and drink a person consumes contains sparks which actually belong to him, and which he must rectify...

Discussion Questions:

1. According to these sources, what is the spiritual significance of our consuming food?
2. How might we eat differently if we took this into account?

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(*Sanhedrin* 37a); also cf. Talmud Yerushalmi, *Sanhedrin* 4:9, and *Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer*, 48 (115a), both of which omit the phrase "of Israel."

¹⁵ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Pesachim* 49b