Sub-categories: MLC Forum, Food & Eating, Nature?

Tags: Animal, Animal offerings, Cruelty, Meat, Refinement, Vegetarian

Dear Simon,  
  
       Under separate cover I have sent you the truth about that "lovely piece of veal" you so much enjoyed.  G-d never intended us to treat our fellow creatures in such a hideous way, as we find on today's factory farms.  Kosher doesn't make it any less pardonable.  If it wasn't for the plain stupidity and/or arrogance of Noah, we would still be eating the healthy foods that G-d created for us.    
  
       Every creature is born with intelligence and instinct.  Just because we can't seem to understand each of our fellow creatures, doesn't mean that lobsters feel no pain while dropped, alive, into a pot of boiling water.  Though I am aware that shell fish are "unclean," and not to be consumed, it doesn't make the many other cruelties less onerous.    
  
       So, the next time you're eating in some "posh" Manhattan *kosher* eatery, maybe you'll give your tastebuds something less cruelly produced.  
  
Regards,  
XXXXX

Dear XXXXX,  
  
I appreciate your kind advice and your enlightening about the cruel methods used to produce veal. I will be careful in the future. Is there a way to cleanse my taste buds?  
  
I do however want to share with you what a great mystic said about a vegetarian who was questioning the consumption of meat at a festive meal: "And do you know what is happening in the vegetable world?!..."  
  
You write that "Every creature is born with intelligence and instinct. Just because we can't seem to understand each of our fellow creatures, doesn't mean that lobsters feel no pain while dropped, alive, into a pot of boiling water." Are you aware that every vegetable also has a soul, as does every mineral? The fact that we are not in tune with the vegetable’s experience that does not mean that it doesn't feel pain when it is torn from its roots and consumed! And the same goes for minerals. What right do we have to take *anything* in this world, tear it away from its life and annihilate its individual experience in order to sustain ourselves?!  
  
The answer my friend, is that indeed we have no right! In fact, damaging any part of the universe is prohibited by the Torah. Everything that exists -- mineral, vegetable or animal – has a divine purpose and is sacred. The only reason that we have the right to consume any food at all is because G-d who created the entire universe gave us permission to do so, and that permissions to eat includes the animal kingdom as well as the vegetable and the mineral.

However this permission has a fundamental condition: That we use the energy we obtain from the food for constructive, higher purposes, to transform this world into a better and holier place. Mystical texts teach us that when we consume other components of the universe and using the energy we obtain in doing so for a higher purpose, the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms become elevated. Indeed, uplifting the world in this way is part of our purpose, and that is why we were created in a way that we are dependent on nourishment from sources outside of ourselves and are not self-sustaining.

When indulging in a meal just to satisfy ourselves with no greater purpose, we indeed have no right to destroy other creatures — whether they be animal, vegetable or mineral.

May we all be blessed with appropriate sensitivity to the world around us – particularly to other people, and to recognize our responsibility to uplift the world, transforming it into a better, divine, place.

This, in other words, was the main point of [my article](http://www.meaningfullife.com/torah/holidays/6b/The_Power_of_Five_SecondsCOLON_Jewish_Obsession_with_Food.php).

In response to your criticism on Noah, it is true that as you write Adam and Eve were vegetarians and prohibited to eat meat, and that the consumption of meat began with Noah after the Flood. However, you are mistaken when you write that "if it wasn't for the plain stupidity and/or arrogance of Noah, we would still be eating the healthy foods that G-d created for us."

It wasn't Noah that introduced human consumption of meat; it was G-d. As specifically stated in Genesis 9:3 (and explained in the Talmud Sanhedrin 109 — cited in Rashi’s commentary on the verse), beginning with Noah, G-d allowed man to eat meat, lifting the prohibition that had previously been in place. (Besides for the fact that Noah is called a tzaddik in Torah [Gen. 6:9] — so I am not sure where you get the inspiration to qualify Noah's “plain stupidity and/or arrogance....”)

The reason the consumption of meat had previously been prohibited, is that with the sin of the tree of knowledge, the world lost its natural state of spiritual refinement and man was no longer in a position to elevate meat. But then G-d did subsequently go on to allow the consumption of meat, and it cannot be that G-d sanctioned something evil.

One may feel inclined to argue that on the contrary, with mankind having further deteriorated in Noah’s time, with the world in an even lesser state of refinement, perhaps it should have been even more important to avoid the consumption of meat?! Yet, G-d did introduce the practice, allowing meat to be eaten. Why? Because today our role is to refine and elevate all of existence–including the more challenging elements.

This explains the consumption of meat in the Holy Temple offerings and in Shabbos and holiday meals, and the fact that many deeply sensitive–and certainly not cruel—tzaddikim ate meat.

All the above notwithstanding, eating meat must be approached with caution — even more care than consuming other foods—for meat is difficult to refine. That is why we find many righteous people eating meat sparingly if at all.

While these are just brief points on a topic that requires more elaboration, I hope that they provide some insight.

May we all be blessed to learn from the Torah how to be sensitive to the world around us — especially to other people, and to recognize our responsibility to transform the world, uplifting it and making it divine.

Best wishes,

Simon Jacobson