

1. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb 415

There are probably no creatures that require more the protective Divine word against the presumption of man than the animals, which, like man, have sensations and instincts, but whose body and powers are nevertheless subservient to man.

We began as vegetarians

2. Genesis 1:29, 9:3

And G-d said: Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with fruit of the tree bearing seed, to you it shall be for food.

All that crawls that is alive will be for you to eat; like vegetation, I have given you all.

3. Deuteronomy 12:20-21

When G-d broadens your borders, as He has told you He will, and you will say, "I will eat flesh," for your spirit will desire to eat flesh, at every desire of your spirit you shall eat flesh. When the place G-d will choose to place His name will be distant from you, and you will slaughter of your cattle and sheep, which G-d has given you, as I have instructed you. You shall eat it in your gates, at your every desire.

4. Rabbi Moses Nachmanides, Commentary to Genesis 1:29

Moving, living spirits have a soul of some degree, in which regard they resemble thinking spirits. They can make choices to help themselves and to feed themselves, and they flee from pain and death... When they sinned, and all flesh warped its path on earth, it was decreed that the animals should die in the flood. For Noach's sake some of them were saved to maintain their species, and so G-d gave humanity permission to slaughter and eat animals; the animals were only maintained for Noach's sake.

But how can you do that?

5. Talmud, Shabbat 140b

Rav Pappa said: One who could drink beer, and instead drinks wine, is violating the prohibition, 'Do not destroy.' But this is not so – the concern for destroying one's body is greater.

6. Talmud, Bava Metzia 85a

A calf was being brought for slaughter, and it hid its head under Rebbe's garment. It was crying. Rebbe said, "Go; you were created for this." In Heaven they said, "Since he does not have mercy, let suffering befall him."

One day, Rebbe's maid was sweeping out the house. She swept out some rodents. Rebbe said to her, "Leave them be, for it is written, 'His mercy is upon all of His creations.'" In Heaven they said, "Since he displayed mercy, We will have mercy upon him."

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Man becomes the torturer of the animal soul, which has been subjected to him only for the fulfillment of humane and wise purposes; sometimes out of self-interest, at other times in order to satisfy a whim, sometimes out of thoughtlessness – yes, even for the satisfaction of crude satanic desire.

Behold! Here you are faced with HaShem's teaching, which obliges you not only to refrain from inflicting unnecessary pain on any animal, but to help, and, when you can, to lessen the pain whenever you see an animal suffering even through no fault of yours...

Above all, those to whom the care of young minds has been entrusted, see to it that they respect both the smallest and the largest animal as beings which, like man, have been summoned to the joy of life and have been granted sensitivity. And do not forget that the boy who, in crude joy, finds delight in the convulsions of an injured beetle or the anxiety of a suffering animal will soon also be dumb towards human pain.

8. Exodus 23:5

When you see your enemy's donkey sprawled beneath its load, shall you abstain from aiding him? You shall aid him!

9. Talmud, Berachot 40a

Rav Yehudah taught, citing Rav: One may not eat until he has first given food to his animal; it is written (Deuteronomy 11), 'And I will put grass in your field for your animal,' and then, 'And you shall eat and be sated.'

10. Rabbi Moshe Isserles, Shulchan Aruch Even haEzer 5:14

For medical benefit or other benefit, there is no problem of painning animals. Therefore, one may pluck a live goose's feather [to use as a quill] without concern for painning animals - but we do not do this, for it is cruel.

The Philosophy of Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook – "A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace"

11. There is a natural drive for righteousness, and this will return - Paragraph 1

It would be a desecration for this enslavement [of animals] to be imprinted eternally upon the world of G-d, who is good to all and whose mercy is on all of His creations... Especially, when the Torah has already testified that there was a time when Mankind, as a whole, aspired to be elevated to this high ethical level.

12. Our sins have dragged us down – Paragraphs 3 and 4

3: There is here [in Deuteronomy 12:20-21] a hidden rebuke by the wise, and a boundary-setting alert. It is as if to say that so long as your inner ethic is not repulsed by eating animal flesh in the way that it is repulsed by human flesh [you shall eat animal flesh]... For when the time comes that human ethics are revolted by animal flesh because of the ethical revulsion involved, then you will not desire at all to eat any flesh, and you shall not eat it.

4: After the [physical] weakening of the human being, which flowed from his ethical fall, it became appropriate to eat flesh.

13. And so we may eat meat, to survive while we grow – Paragraphs 2 and 1

2: The Torah prepared its illumination in the measure appropriate for Man – with the calculation of the G-d who knows all, giver of the Torah – such that through this Man will also come to intellectual illumination.

1: There is no doubt for any intelligent, thinking person, that the reign mentioned in the Torah, "And they shall rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the beasts and the entire land and all that crawls upon the land," does not refer to a tyrannical ruler's reign, exploiting nation and servants only to execute his personal wishes.

14. Taking on vegetarianism prematurely would be catastrophic – Paragraph 4, 6

4: How absurd it would be, if while his impurity was in him he would extend his hooves and turn to this distant righteousness, being generous with animals as though he had already completed his accounts with human beings, created in the image set by G-d...

4: Without doubt, this would cause great damage. When animal lust to eat flesh grew, it would not distinguish between human and animal flesh, since this [vegetarianism] would prohibit animal flesh with a legal prohibition, and murder and slaughter of people, for consumption of their flesh, would be widespread.

6: The human sensitivity for the good and the just seeks to fulfill its task; it also knocks, at times, on the doors of the heart of the wicked, forcing them to seek to quiet their natural hunger for righteousness... Sometimes you will see a cruel, wicked person choose an ethical path, rejoicing to do something righteous to quiet the rebuke of his innards and the natural regret which beats in his heart...

15. Spiritual growth should bring us to illumination – Paragraphs 7-8

7: Our holy Torah is named "Torah [guide]", indicating that its nature is to guide us on the path of life and goodness.

8: Covering the blood of beasts and birds is a kind of Divine protest, opposite the permission which results, fundamentally, from Man's damaged spiritual state... the Torah says, "Cover the blood, hide the source of your humiliation, and your ethical weakness."...