



בית העם

שיג ושיח ציוני

Land of Soy Milk and Date Honey

Vegetarianism and Veganism in Judaism and Israel

“The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men.”

- Alice Walker. Alice is a writer, social activist and the first African-American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize (1983).

During the last decade, the vegetarian and vegan trends have gained enormous momentum throughout the world. Israel has had a place of honor in this revolution. Is there a connection between the choice of a vegetarian / vegan diet and Judaism? How is it that Israel has the largest percentage of vegans and vegetarians per capita, and is one of the world's leaders in vegan cuisine?

This Beit Ha'am Booklet tackles these issues and more. After giving some food for thought, we invite you to take part in preparing a vegan dish to enjoy together.



“Thou shouldst eat to live;
not live to eat.”

“We are not only the tellers of our stories, we are the stories themselves. If my wife and I raised our son as a vegetarian, he will not eat his great-grandmother's singular dish.

Will ever receive that unique and most direct expression of love, will perhaps never think of her as the greatest chef who ever lived.

Her primal story, our family's primal story, will have to change”.

“Eating Animals” Jonathan Safran Foer

- Does food play a role in shaping a person's identity? If so, what is that role?
- What role does food play in your life and identity? Within your family? In the community you live in?
- Is there “anything Jewish” (values, customs, traditions, worldview, home and family background) in the way you perceive food? Choose what to eat? The rituals you perform?
- Do you see food as a means to relate to previous generations? To Jewish heritage?





Vegetarianism

- Do you agree with this interpretation? Can you think of other quotes from the Jewish scripture (the Tanakh) dealing with this subject?
- Do you see a link between the way you perceive Judaism and Vegetarianism?

“And God said, “Behold, I have given you every seed bearing herb, which is upon the surface of the entire earth, and every tree that has seed bearing fruit; it will be yours for food.” (Genesis 1:29)

“And God blessed Noah and his sons, and He said to them “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. And your fear and your dread shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the fowl of the heaven; upon everything that creeps upon the ground and upon all the fish of the sea, [for] they have been given into your hand[s]. Every moving thing that lives shall be yours to eat; like the green vegetation, I have given you everything. But, flesh with its soul, its blood, you shall not eat.” (Genesis 9:1)

From the verses mentioned above, one can understand that humankind was first instructed not to eat meat. According to the Torah, it was only after the flood of Noah that humankind was permitted to eat meat but with one reservation “flesh with its soul, its blood, you shall not eat.”

Rashi interprets this as: “flesh with its soul”: He prohibited them [to eat] a limb [cut off from] a living creature; i.e. as long as its soul is in it, you shall not eat the flesh [i.e. if the limb is cut from the animal while it is alive, it is forbidden to be eaten even after the animal expires.] “with its soul, its blood”: As long as its soul is within it. Flesh with its soul... you shall not eat: This refers to a limb of a living creature. And also, its blood, you shall not eat - This refers to blood of a living creature.



Veganism and animals' treatment

In the scriptures, we can find several indications of how to treat animals apart from questioning “should you eat them”. A weekly day of rest and the obligation to assist an animal that is under stress are just two examples:

But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord, your God; you shall perform no labor, neither you, your son, your daughter, your manservant, your maidservant, your beast, nor your stranger who is in your cities. (Exodus 20:10)

If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him (Exodus 23:5)

The actress Mayim Bialik (The Big Bang Theory) writes about the way Judaism sees animal treatment : “What I am asked a lot about, though, is the Jewish angle on my veganism. I get lots of questions: What about chicken soup? Isn't it a Mitzvah to eat meat on Shabbat? What do you eat on Passover? What about the Paschal lamb? What about honey cake for Rosh Hashanah?! Besides people asking how I can live without brisket or chopped liver, many people want to know if there is a religious or Jewish connection to veganism. In fact, there is.

For thousands of years, the importance of respecting animal life and minimizing pain and suffering to animals has been a part of Jewish tradition.

The Torah discusses numerous ways to minimize the cruelty of animals and emphasizes their treatment, including, for example, the requirement that animals be fed before we ourselves sit down to eat. The Torah discusses the intimate and significant relationships we humans have with animals, and it designates animals' rights as unique and valuable.”

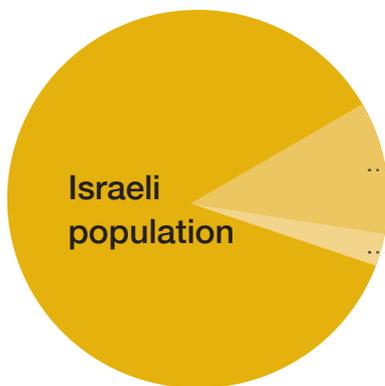
- How does the Jewish tradition affect your attitude towards animals?
- If not the Jewish traditions, what does affect your attitude towards animals? What set of values?
- How can we reconcile the contradictions between Torah's compassionate attitude towards animals and carnivorous dishes that have taken root in Jewish tradition for hundreds of years?



Israel

“For the Lord your God is bringing you to a good land, a land with brooks of water, fountains and depths, that emerge in valleys and mountains, a land of wheat and barley, vines and figs and pomegranates, a land of oil producing olives and honey” (Deuteronomy, 8:4-5.)

Fun facts about Israel



13% Are vegetarian

5% Are vegan

10 members of the Knesset are vegan

2016 one of the world leaders on this trend



The IDF provides vegetarian meals upon request



thousand enjoy a vegan BBQ on independence day



The IDF provides faux-leather shoes to vegan soldiers after approval



the only place in the world where you can find vegan Domino's pizza



30% more women are vegan/vegetarian than men



Tel Aviv was awarded the most vegan friendly city in the world by the Daily Meal magazine

- Do you see a connection between the way Judaism treats animals and what is happening in Israel?
- Why do you think Israel has become one of the world leaders in vegetarian and vegan cuisine?



The Israeli President, Reuven Rivlin, is vegetarian



Ori Shavit, Israeli Blogger

"We are a young nation... we are a nation of immigrants. Our culture is still evolving. It's still growing and changing all the time and because we came here from so many different countries and cultures, people are sort of flexible. In Israel, people like to try new things. They're less scared. They like innovation."

From Time Out Tel Aviv (Israeli culture magazine)

"Vegetarianism has become a cool personality component which nowadays every celebrity likes to brag about. Vegetarianism and veganism are, first of all, symbols of rebellion, and being a (rebel) has become a desired and popular characteristic... vegan choices provide a perfect answer to the loathing that many around the world feel now towards the greedy and damaging capitalism. Israeli consumers have recently discovered this power... everyone has an impact and that is something everyone understood even more recently. Today people realize that one person who stops consuming meat, eggs or milk becomes a significant factor. You no longer have to wait for legislators to enact laws or even to a mass of consumers. Today people can act individually. This gives enormous power to the 'simple people'."

- Which explanation do you relate more to? Can explain why?
- Do the same features (flexibility, rebellion, innovation, need for change, desire to influence, global social trends) help explain the Israeli craze over veganism? Do you see this expressed in other fields? If so, can you explain?

- Should the IDF, which has many complex missions, dedicate time, effort and resources to address some individual soldiers who choose a vegan way of life? What does this way of handling these issues say about the army?
- Can you think of any other grouping in the army that requires unique consideration?
- Should public bodies provide any special treatment to vegetarians/vegans?

From "Shavuz" - Israeli soldiers portal

"In recent years, the IDF has decided to provide about 100 vegans a substantial increase in their salary. In order to be recognized as vegan by the army, both from ideological or health reasons, you need to submit a request to your unit. Approximately 50 applications for allowance in respect of veganism are requested per year. Special shoes are manufactured for vegans made from synthetic materials, but identical in form to the standard military shoes.

Keeping a (vegan diet) diet for combat soldiers is a bit more of a challenge, since they spend days in the field and their diets consist largely of tahini, vegetables and legumes. For them, special measures have taken place such as allowing them to store their vegan food in the refrigerator in the headquarters office."

