

It's Not Your Meat
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This past summer in my capacity as Northeast Regional Director of the UMJC I was visiting Camp Ohr L'Dor, a Messianic Jewish teen camp about an hour north of New York City. While speaking to a group of teen girls that had just returned from a camping and canoeing trip I inquired how they enjoyed the food on the trip. I was specifically interested in their reaction since I was aware that the food had been entirely vegan on their trip. One of the teens, a delightful and caring young lady surprisingly blurted out, "It was ok but I need my meat." I responded to her, "But that is the point, it's not your meat!" She and the other teens laughed, yet I hope I did not intimidate or embarrass her; this was certainly not my intention. I deemed it important though that she might understand and that the meat she craved, just like everything else "All belongs to Adonai." (Psalm 24:1)

On its face the issue of animal welfare to has no direct relevance to the growth of Messianic Judaism. But if we are to ever emerge from our self-induced coma of individual and communal narcissism, Messianic Judaism must discover and excavate a mine of inherent values beyond our own ecclesial survival. Just as participating in a funeral has long been considered one of the great acts of *gemilut hasadim* (the responsibility toward acts of loving kindness), since the dead cannot reward the participant, so the care and protection of animals offers great ethical promise since it can only limit our own profit, self-desires and conspicuous consumption.

Torah and Talmud are replete with commands and ordinances concerning the humane treatment of animals, or protecting them from *tza'ar ba'alei chayyim* (*Bava Metzia 32b*, *Shabbat 128b*), literally hardship to their lives. Deuteronomy 25:4 legislates, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing, recognizing the cruelty of prohibiting an animal from eating while it labors in the presence of food. Likewise another *mitzvah* (Deut. 23:26-26) within the same weekly *parsha* permits a person who labors in a vineyard to eat while he works, yet prohibits him from carrying away any produce. The Talmud extends this permission and prohibition to any fields of labor where produce comes from the earth (*Bava Mezia 87b*). So, by extension we can deduce that God extends like compassion to animals as he does to humans.

The Apostle Paul evokes this passage in defense of his own rights to compensation and, like Talmud, extends this concept from animals to humans.

"Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.' Is it about oxen that God is concerned?" (*1Cor.9: 7-9*)

Of course Paul is not arguing against God's concern for the animals but creating a *kal va'homer* argument that might be stated, "If God cares so much for the rights of oxen, then how much more will he be concerned with the well-being of His servant?" It would appear from this intertextual threading that how we treat members of the animal family bears some relevance and resemblance to how we will treat members of the human family. Rabbi Joseph Telushkin draws an interesting parallel.

Perhaps the cruelest act that a parent can endure is to see his or her children being killed. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, the biblical archetype of a sadist, was so enraged at King Zedekiah for leading a revolt against him that after he captured the king, he murdered Zedekiah's two sons in his presence, then blinded him, so that the death of his sons would be the last thing that Zedekiah would see (II Kings 25:7). In more recent times, the Nazis often delighted in murdering Jewish children in the presence of their parents.

A Torah Law prohibits treating animals in the way that people like Nebuchadnezzar and the Nazis treated human beings: Thus, Deuteronomy 22:6 rules that if a person comes across a nest of birds, he cannot take the mother bird with the young, but must send the mother away to spare her feelings. Concerning the rationale for this law, Maimonides writes, "for the pain of the animals under such circumstances is very great" (*A Guide to the Perplexed* 3:48)¹

John Wesley, founder of the evangelical movement Methodism, went even further in his empathy when he pondered whether some divine justice might await mistreated animals in the afterlife, finding a "plausible objection against the justice of God, in suffering numberless creatures that had never sinned to be so severely punished" in his sermon entitled the "Great Deliverance."

But what does it answer to dwell upon this subject which we so imperfectly understand? It may enlarge our hearts toward these poor creatures to reflect that, vile as they may appear in our eyes, not a one of them is forgotten in the sight of our Father which is in heaven.²

The catechism of the Catholic Church recognizes kindness to animals as part of human debt to the Creator.

Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them with providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory. Thus men owe them kindness. We should remember the gentleness with which saints like Saint Francis of Assisi or Saint Philip Neri treated animals.³

¹ Joseph Telushkin, *The Book of Jewish Values: A Day-By-Day Guide To Ethical Living* (New York: Bell Tower, 2000)

² John Wesley, Sermon Sixty, "The Great Deliverance," ed. Sarah Anderson (Nampa, Ind.: Wesley Center for Applied Theology at Northwestern Nazarene University, 1999)

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Sec. 2415-2418 (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1994) pp. 580-581

Given the imperative for animal welfare in both Jewish and Christian traditions, why then does it seem that sermons are rarely spoken today on the subject and in fact many self-proclaimed “believers” are oddly and outspokenly hostile to the concept? I believe the reason is twofold. First, many intuit that care and concern for animals might require self-limitation, discipline and sacrifice. Furthermore, concern that religious and governmental polities might increase such limitations is again understood as an impingement upon the right of the individual to have unbridled choices. The second reason I believe is merely an extension of the first. In a society obsessed with self-gratification, the imposition or even the suggestion of limits is generally met with suspicion. Perhaps this is why limiting human consumption or use of animals has been postured as a competition for the greater good of each. The Catholic catechism goes on to state,

The Creator however, entrusted animals to the stewardship of those he created in his image. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food or clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals, if it remains within reasonable limits, is a morally acceptable practice since it contributes to caring for or saving human lives.

It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly. It is likewise unworthy to spend money on them that should as a priority go to the relief of human misery. One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons.⁴

This statement lacks any prohibition beyond the generalizations “if it remains within reasonable limits” or “to suffer or die needlessly.” No effort is made to define the limits of use or suffering, leaving unqualified discernment to the individual. Can it not be argued that any money spent on animal care could instead go to the relief of human misery? How should these expenditures be weighed against those funds that are spent on

⁴ Ibid

the priority of human leisure, which is given as an appropriate reason for animal domestication? From this we can extrapolate that it is more worthy to spend money to train a horse or a greyhound for racing which is an enterprise of human leisure than it is to treat an animal for health related issues since these funds could have been used to feed the poor.

Similarly Moses Isserles, the 16th century codifier of Jewish Law states, “Whenever it is for the purpose of healing there is no prohibition against cruelty to animals.” (*Shulchan Aruch, Even haEzzer 5:14*) Still there are moral questions which must be answered. How much pain is permissible to cause to animals? And how substantial must the gain to human well-being be? It is certainly not unusual today for the development of cosmetics to be positioned under the rhetorical cover of human healing.

When animal advocacy is properly understood as balancing the greater good of Adonai’s creation, then reasonable controls can be considered. Dr. Avraham Steinberg, the author of the three-volume *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* offers the following guidelines concerning the treatment of animals in research of human diseases:

1. Whatever is needed to cure a sick patient, even one who is not dangerously ill does not violate Jewish law against cruelty to animals.
2. There is need to militate against the pain of experimental animals as much as possible and to provide proper nutrition.
3. It is preferable to use lower forms of animals since they do not have as well developed nervous systems.
4. One should use the fewest animals possible consistent with the experimental needs.
5. Wherever alternatives, such as tissue cultures or imaging techniques are available they should be used.

6. Animal experiments should not be done to reconfirm well known and well documented findings.⁵

I am not arguing for or against any of Dr. Steinberg's guidelines for the practice of medical ethics, rather I am observing that he has taken into account both contemporary medical needs and the Jewish mandate to alleviate animal suffering. This condensed list represents a very brief distillation of Dr. Steinberg's much more exhaustive conversation of medical ethics for animal experimentation based upon Jewish law, but it highlights an important value set. Steinberg's ethics guard against commercial distortion of Judaism's assertion that human need trumps animal suffering. Dr. Steinberg repeatedly invalidates excesses that can be commercially motivated.

The conceptualization of competition between animals and humans has been unfortunately elevated, confused and distorted by many of the proponents of "animal rights". Peter Singer, a professor of Bioethics at Princeton University has been one of the most outspoken, prominent and controversial of animal advocates. His seminal work *Animal Liberation* has been cited as a formative influence on leaders of the modern "animal liberation" movement. The central argument of the book is an expansion of the utilitarian idea that "the greatest good of the greatest number" is the only measure of good or ethical behavior. While I agree with this important value, faith commitment does not allow this to be the only mitigating qualifier of Messianic Jewish ethical values. Singer believes that there is no reason not to apply this assertion to other animals, arguing that the boundary between human and 'animal' is completely arbitrary. There are more

⁵ Avraham Steinberg, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics*. (Jerusalem, Feldheim Publishers, 2003) Volume 1, p. 258-272

differences between a great ape and an oyster, for example, than between a human and a great ape, and yet the former two are lumped together as 'animals' while we are 'human'. He popularized the term "speciesism", to describe the practice of privileging humans over other animals. The fact that Singer is an atheist removes the only logical reason to give such a privilege to humans and to do so in a hierarchical sentient relationship to humans; divine impartation.⁶

In particular, Singer argues that while animals show lower intelligence than the average human, many severely intellectually challenged humans show equally diminished, if not lower, mental capacity, and that some animals have displayed signs of intelligence sometimes on par with that of human children. Singer therefore argues intelligence does not provide a basis for providing nonhuman animals any less consideration than such intellectually challenged humans.

While Singer has been logically anti-abortion, stating that it is wrong to kill an innocent human and a fetus is as innocent as a human can be, therefore it is wrong to kill a fetus. But his equating of a newborn to a fetus has given both liberals and conservatives reason to pause. In his book, *Practical Ethics*, Singer states,

I have argued that the life of a fetus (and even more plainly of an embryo) is of no greater value than the life of a non-human animal at a similar level of rationality, self-consciousness, awareness, capacity to feel, etc., and that since no fetus is a person no fetus has the claim to life as a person. Now it must be admitted that these arguments apply to the newborn baby as much as to the fetus. A week-old baby is not a rational and self-conscious being,

⁶ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals*. (New York: Random House, 1975) Singer through out this work equates human dominance to inter-species racism.

and there are as many nonhuman animals whose rationality, self-consciousness, awareness, capacity to feel, and so on, exceeds that of a human baby a week or a month old. If the fetus does not have the same claim to live as a person, it appears that the newborn baby does not either, and the life of a newborn baby is of less value to it than the life of a pig, a dog, or a chimpanzee is to the nonhuman animal.⁷

For Singer the value of life is contingent upon its ability to experience pleasure and pain primarily. The ultimate goal is for a life to experience pleasure. I will mention again that Singer, who is an adamant atheist, would not ascribe any inherent moral worth or value that is endowed by a creator. Therefore he perceives of everything as a contest for power pitting each species against the other in an assertion of self-interest. In the end it is the most powerful that ascribes the value of life in Singer's thinking, so in this way Singer, who is motivated by his hatred of human power, steps in a trap created by his own philosophy. Though he often evokes his own family history of Holocaust survival, he cannot avoid the ideological comparisons between his own insensitivity to all human life and that of Nazi sympathizers.

The "animal rights" organization PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) attempted to turn the table on these comparisons with the provocative 2002 advertising campaign "Holocaust On Your Plate" which equated the eating of meat to genocide. Despite the fact that key leadership figures in PETA are Jewish, they could not mollify the Jewish community, which was outraged by the diminution of the unique horror of the holocaust. Though PETA has made many important contributions toward raising the awareness of animal exploitation and abuse, the extravagances of their public persona

⁷ Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, rev.ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p.169

have tended to marginalize the organization and have added to the perception of the human v. animal dichotomy. PETA and like thinking proponents have, in my opinion, jeopardized public concern for animal welfare by erroneously making it an issue of animal rights.

As I established earlier, the ethical priority of choice has made the public forum a battleground for special interests groups. Already overcrowded by the human interest, the larger public is not ready to negotiate with an animal population presumably lobbying for rights and liberation. But are they? Are animals really concerned with equality or inherent rights? **Were the emphasis placed upon human responsibility to act kindly rather than on animals' rights, activists like PETA might be more persuasive.**

As a result the animal v. human dichotomy has been intensified by the polarization of the issue between political conservatives and liberals. As an example, the Boston Herald's conservative columnist Don Feder wrote of Peter Singer,

The two halves of Mr. Singer's philosophy (animal rights and the denial of rights to human "non-persons") are symmetrical – fewer people, more room for animals. A Los Angeles talk-show host Dennis Prager puts it; "Those who refuse to sacrifice animals for people will end up sacrificing people for animals." Mr. Singer proves Mr. Prager's thesis.⁸

The political lines are clearly drawn and they have often served as religious boundaries as well. Feder and Prager are both religious "neo-conservatives" as well as political conservatives, who have equated the culture wars with the battle for faith in contemporary American society. Though neither Feder nor Prager are official

⁸ Don Feder, "Professor Death takes Ideas to Princeton" Boston Herald, October 28, 1998

spokespersons for any coalition of the religious right, both are representative of this socio-religious sub-culture and are indicative of its broad animus toward animal activism. Unfortunately, in the midst of the cross polemic the essential issues of animal as well as human welfare are both being subverted. Mathew Scully, a former speechwriter for George W. Bush, comments on Feder's article in his bestselling book *Dominion*.

I think from both the left and the right they are bringing to the fairly simple questions of human love, duty and kinship a preoccupation with human power. Professor Singer sees human power and he hates it. So he drags it into his bio-ethics lab and turns the terror back on man himself. Mr. Feder and Mr. Prager (a theologian) see human power and love it – a little too much. So with other conservatives they invent, as we'll see, unfeeling creatures and “generic beings” and false dilemmas, lest any animal get in the way of man's designs, caprices, or commercial aims. Fixation on power, they would all abuse power, in Professor Singer's case by killing off the two things that not only infants and unborn children but our fellow creatures, too depend upon most in the human heart – reverence and mercy.⁹

The main point that Scully, who is a card-carrying neo-con, so aptly distinguishes is that often this false dichotomy of what is good for the animal is bad for the human is really a protection of the commercial interests of the few and the powerful. Over emphasis on the protection or dismantling of human power is fruitless without an appropriate understanding of human responsibility and love.

This is where I wish to return the discussion to human responsibility as image bearers of the Creator. To do so I will again first contend with the theological content, paying special attention to what we can learn from the text itself, but also to what Messianic

⁹ Mathew Scully, *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002) p.23

Judaism, seeking a moral vision, might learn from how we approach the text. I will then again discuss the socio-moral implications.

The World of the Torah; A Tough Place for Man or Beast

At first glance Torah can be a tough read for those concerned about animal welfare. Much of the cultic material, especially in Leviticus 1-7, concerns itself with sacrifice, which is more than occasionally of the animal variety. We must understand the animal sacrifices in Torah within the cultural and cosmological context of ancient Israel and its surrounding neighbors. While it is true that many of the particulars of Israel's sacrificial cult were borrowed from the surrounding culture and parallel cultures of pagan neighbors, the sacrifices they offered are to be understood theologically according to the particular character of their God and in accord with the peculiar covenantal relationship that he enacted with them. In this respect Israel's sacrificial system is, again, a domestication of existing practices by inculcating God's highest values into a normative ritual milieu. The community of faith in the Hebrew Scriptures put incredible energy and attentiveness into these offerings as material gestures, which defined the importance of God for the life of the community. The various sacrificial practices prescribed for Israel were vehicles designed to celebrate, affirm, enhance, or repair the defining relationship between them and God.

No doubt Israel's devotion to God was of little consolation to the animal population in their camp, but it can be argued that the detailed regimen would have proved limiting and more humane than the practices of neighboring sacrificial cult. This is later understood

and augmented in the derivative rabbinic tradition of *shechita* (humane ritual slaughter). Certainly the teachings of Torah were instructive to Israel regarding the value of all life. But the drama of sacrifice and its ancillary teaching on the preparation of meat for consumption would prove additionally instructive. Prohibitions against eating blood (Lev.17) and “cooking a young goat in its mother’s milk” (Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 14:21) ritualize the sanctity of all life.

It should be noted that the sacrificial systems of the ancient world were threatening to human life as well. It is well documented that human sacrifice was not an uncommon practice on the Sumerian plain or the Phoenician coast. The bible also records the abominable practice of human sacrifice among Israel’s neighbors to pagan idols. On several occasions in Scripture an extreme sacrifice of a child is made to God (Jer.19:5; Micah 6:6-8; Judges 11:29-40; 2 Kings 3:26-27). These are rare occurrences that need not be explained away as an embarrassment. I think they are best to be understood, as barbaric as they seem to us, as indications of the depth of urgency that was felt in regard to ceding what is of worth over to God, in the context of a world that did not condemn, rather normalized these sacrifices. Though silent on a few occasions (Judges 11:29-40; 2 Kings 3:26-27), at other times God strongly condemned the action (Jer:19:5).

It is in the context of these human sacrifices that Torah introduced the concept of animal sacrifice as substitutionary. God’s command to offer all firstborn sons to him is ameliorated by the counter command to redeem them with an animal sacrifice (Ex. 22:28-29; 34:19-20). This can be understood in each case contextually by the divine self-

attribution of compassion. In essence a compassionate God provided a way out, by concurrently engaging and reforming the abominable practices of the ancient world. What I think is essential in understanding the impact of the ritual is that it is nullified unless the exchange of innocent life can evoke sentimentality. Though clearly the human life is valued higher in Torah, in the sacrificial cult, an animal's life is considered to be of great value to be offered as ransom for the firstborn of Israel. Torah's identification of animal life with human life, which is created in the image of God, demands that we place higher value upon these lives than mere property.

It is also helpful to understand the animal sacrifices as occurring within the confines of the *Mishkan*. The regimen of the sacrificial cult (Lev.1-7) occurred directly after the *Mishkan* was completed and filled by the presence of God (Ex.40: 34-36). The ritual of *Mishkan* building is a sacred drama of world building in which Israel participates with God, bringing His cosmic plans into their socio-moral plane. Jon Levenson describes the parallels between the construction of the *Mishkan* and the construction of the world.

The function of these correspondences is to underscore the depiction of the sanctuary as a world, that is, an ordered supportive, and obedient environment, and the depiction of the world as a sanctuary, that is a place in which the reign of God is visible and unchallenged, and his holiness is palpable, unthreatened and pervasive.¹⁰

The *Mishkan* does more than complete the cosmic design; it effectively reclaims creational intentions from the disruptive forces of chaos and human sin and re-creates the primordial hopes. Since the *Mishkan* is Israel's primary locus of worship, the acts of

¹⁰ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) p. 86

Mishkan building and occupying bind together Israel's vocation with God's re-creational purposes.¹¹

It is here in the *Mishkan*, a ritualized world that represents the consummation of God's work of creation as well as the rescue of peaceable order from the forces of chaos, that Israel is brought face to face with the horror of animal death as a conciliatory measure for human disobedience. By engaging in this sacrificial drama, Israel is urged toward contrition and is asked to assume their role as a "kingdom of priests."

It would be difficult to reflect on the sacrificial system from a Messianic Jewish perspective without taking into account what the Apostolic Witness has to say about it. While Romans and Hebrews both seem to agree that Yeshua as a sacrifice to God has replaced the "well worn" system of the Hebrew Scriptures, replete with animal sacrifices, our entire understanding of Yeshua as priest and sacrifice is cast in the categories of Israel's sacrificial practices. Without taking seriously the efficacious material gesture, as well as the pure brutality of animal sacrifices, the Apostolic Witness claims simply do not work.

Like the ritual slaughters in the *Mishkan*, the sacrifice of Yeshua begs us to examine our damaged relationships with God and with man, bringing the cosmic drama of chaos versus order into the arena of the world we occupy, initiating the peaceable kingdom of God. Just as empathy with the sacrifices in the *Mishkan* caused the worshiper to be

¹¹ I treat this topic thoroughly in *Origins and Destiny*.

disemboweled before God, so Yeshua invites us to pick up our crosses daily. This becomes mere metaphor unless we can identify with the sacrificial death of Yeshua, informed by the historical material gesture of animal sacrifice in all of its brutality. I am yet unsure if eating meat during or following the participation in *Hazikaron* makes poignant or banal the sacrificial work of Yeshua.

It is interesting to note that when Yeshua gave himself as a vicarious sacrifice, he promised the contrite thief who was crucified with him that he would “be with me in paradise (*paradeis* lit. garden)” (Luke 23:43). This allusion to *Gan Eden* begs us, along with its scriptural connections to the sacrifices in the *Mishkan*, to consider Yeshua’s sacrifice as intended for reparation of the relational disharmony wrought by human disobedience.

Eating East of Eden

By every indication, in the two “utopian” scenarios in Scripture, both humankind and the animal population are portrayed as vegetarians. The first scenario is directly after the creation when humankind dwelt in *Gan Eden*.

God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And it was so. (Genesis 1:29-30)

The second is envisioned in the prophetic mind, a reality greater than the present, a Messianic Age when all of the world will be in harmony represented by the reformed eating habits of nature's predators.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard lie down with the kid;
The calf, the beast of prey, and the fatling together,
With a little boy to herd them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
Their young shall lie down together;
And the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw. (Isa. 11: 6-7)

But what occurs in between, the space in time that we occupy is most germane to our discussion. A cosmic rift initiated by human disobedience entered into the socio-moral plane. The severed relationship between God and humankind is as portrayed in Scripture is more than metaphysical, having damaging effects upon the entire world order. As a result of human evil, the fragile harmony that exists between humans and animals, and all animal life itself is consequently threatened. Following the divine pronouncement of the ensuing curses wrought by human disobedience, God clothes the man and women with animal skins (Gen. 3:21). Apparently neither vegetation nor human ingenuity was adequate to hide the naked exposure of mankind after its fall. The implication is clear, human moral failure costs more than human lives.

As described by the first two commands given in Genesis, humankind was given the responsibility of being the image bearers of God in this world in two distinct ways. . First, humanity is commanded to have dominion in this world. "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth (Gen. 1:28)." The second divine charge to humanity is to

“till” (*l'avdah*, literally to serve or to worship) the ground (2:15). While the command is very much the same as the first command, it is actualized quite differently. In the first, humans image God as kings, but in the second, as servants. Dominion or mastery does not suggest unbridled freedom to ravage, exploit and exhaust the rest of the animal kingdom, rather as the only beings created in the image of God, humans are expected to be benevolent rulers, serving the creation as He does. This command is later replicated to Israel as an archetype of a renewed humanity when it is commanded to be a “kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6)” charged with the responsibility of partaking in the restoration of the relational order between God, humankind and the cosmos.

It would appear from the narratives of Genesis 1-2 and from the messianic expectations of Isaiah 11, that animals were originally intended for a more intimate relationship with humanity than a mere food source. In Gen. 2:18 God declares, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.” But there is a gap between this declaration and the creation of the women from the rib of man in verse 21. In between, in verses 19 and 20 God creates the animals from the dust of the earth just as he did the man. Also the animals are brought before the man who is given charge to name each of them, “but for Adam no suitable helper was found.” From this we might infer several thoughts. First, this reiterates the idea of man as the benevolent ruler. Although the animals were created much as he was, only the human is able to participate in the creative task of naming. Second there is a clear intimacy between Adam and the rest of the creatures, not only does he know the animals well enough to give them suitable names, but there is an implied potential for one of them to be his special mate. One *aggadah* goes so far as to

suggest that Adam had sexual intercourse with each of the animals before determining that the chemistry was wrong (Yevamot 63a). Whatever the unstated process of evaluation was, the Torah is clear that it is only after eliminating the rest of the animal world, as suitable mates, then God provided one that Adam could say was “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh (v.23).” Michael Wyschogrod comments on this odd narrative and its implications.

For me, the most important lesson that emerges from all of this is recognition of the proximity, from God’s perspective, of human beings and animals. However great the gulf may be from a human perspective, from the perspective of God who is infinitely above both humans and animals, the gulf is not as absolute as it seems to humans. It is, of course, that only the human being was created in the image of God which at the very least means that humans are closer to God than animals. But it does not mean that the gulf between humans and animals is as absolute as that between humans and God. Humans and animals are both finite creatures and while, in the final analysis, only women is the proper companion of man, animals are also companions though less than satisfactory ones.¹²

Given the level of companionship intended between humans and animals it is understandable why, in the original scheme of creation, animals were not on the menu. Despite the implications of the animal skin clothes provided by God at the end of Genesis 3, there is no explicit mention of humans eating animals until after the flood. That God permits the eating of animals is best understood as a concession to the innately evil character of humankind. God restates the command to “Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth (Gen. 9:1),” but now it is followed by the sober evaluation of the relational disharmony.

¹² Michael Wyschogrod and R. Kendall Soulen ed., “Revenge of the Animals” *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations, Radical Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004) p.109

The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky—everything with which the earth is astir—and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hand. Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these. (Gen.9: 2-3).

Recognizing its ineradicably evil disposition, God acknowledges that rather than a benevolent ruler who serves creation; man has become a predatory dictator, a rather distorted image of the Creator.

Along with the permission to eat animals though, comes an immediate set of prohibitions against eating animal blood and shedding human blood (Gen.9: 5-6). It is almost as though God expects that when man kills animals, the taking of human life is a near probability. Though Torah contains a great deal of instruction concerning which meats may and may not be eaten, it seems rather easy to conclude that God would prefer His image bearers to be vegetarians.

Between the two “Utopian” scenarios of creation and consummation, Scripture establishes a trajectory whereby redemptive revelation initiates the return to *Gan Eden*, a peaceable kingdom of God’s intended order. Though he is not a theologian and his writing is non-religious in orientation, Mathew Scully has captured, I believe, the essence of Scripture’s eschatological trajectory, describing the potential relationship between humankind and animals and how it reflects upon the relationship between people.

“In a drop of rain can be seen the colors of the sun,” observed the historian Lewis Namier. So in every act of kindness we hold in our hands the mercy of our maker, whose purposes are in life and death, whose love does not stop at us but surrounds us, bestowing dignity and beauty and hope on every creature that lives and suffers and perishes. Perhaps that is part of the animals’ role among us, to awaken humility, to turn our minds

back to the mystery of things, and open our hearts to that most impractical of hopes in which all creation speaks as one. For them as for us, if there is any hope at all then it is the same hope, and the same love, and the same God who shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”¹³

Examining the Social and Moral Implications

I strongly suspect that Mathew Scully is on to something. Concern for the welfare of animals should be a reflection of how we view all life, and the creator of life. In this respect, the way we treat animals can have the capacity to transform our relationships with men and God as well. Yeshua teaches in the Sermon on the Mount to “love your enemies (*Matt.5: 43*).” Torah teaches to even extend concern to the animal of an enemy. “If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it (*Ex. 23:5*).” The intention of the command is to prevent an animal from suffering due to a dispute between its owners. A third century midrash though, teaches how obedience to this command can enhance and repair your relationship with such an enemy.

Rabbi Alexandri said: Two donkey drivers who hated each other were walking on a road when the donkey of one lay down under its burden. His companion saw it, and at first passed on. But then he reflected: Is it not written in the Torah, “If you see your enemy’s donkey laying down under its burden...”? So he returned, lent a hand, and helped his enemy in loading and unloading. He began talking to his enemy: “Release a bit here, pull up over there, and unload over here.” Thus peace came about between them, so that the driver of the overloaded said, “Did I suppose that he hated me? But now look how compassionate he has been.” By and by, the two entered an inn, ate and drank together, and became fast friends. What

¹³ Scully, p.398 quote taken from Revelation 21:4

caused them to make peace and become fast friends? Because one of them kept what was in Torah. (Tanahuma, Mishpatim 1)¹⁴

The point is that the bible teaches us how to treat all with dignity and compassion, friend and foe, man and beast and even our enemy's beast. There is much that we can learn not only from Torah, but also from the rabbinic tradition that can help us to live in accord with God's highest values as we endeavor to ascertain them. The rabbinic tradition for keeping Torah can surprisingly help facilitate living out the moral vision of the Besorah as well, if the two are understood in a comprehensive narrative scheme where the latter does not abrogate the former.

The keeping of kashrut can help to create an environment whereby compassion for life is inculcated at each meal. All of my children have grown up separating meat and dairy. In a society where meat comes in shrink-wrap and milk in a carton, awareness of milk as a picture of life and meat as a picture of death can be overlooked. But by following the rabbinic tradition derived from Torah (*Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 14:21*), my children have learnt a lesson in the sanctity of life every time they have set the table separating meat and dairy. By eating only kosher meats presumably we are assured of the highest emphasis placed upon making the slaughter of the animals fast and humane. While I believe modern *shechita* needs to enter the 21st century¹⁵, it still represents a tradition of higher accountability. Also, the unique nature of *shechita* lowers the possibility that we

¹⁴ Hayyim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Rawnitzki ed.s, trans William G. Braude, *The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha-Aggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992) p. 459

¹⁵ There have been countless articles in the past 2 decades concerning the potential for new standards of kashrut that take into account the most modern standards of slaughter, humane treatment of animals, sustainable agricultural measures and social justice issues.

are contributing to the practice of raising animals on a factory farm where they are raised in confinement and tortured for the extent of their lives, all for the sake of improved profits and lower price points. It should be easy to conclude that more expensive meat is a small price to pay for obedience to the commandments, greater identification with the community, and Godly observance of the sanctity of life. Besides, if the increase cost of meat leads to lower personal consumption, all the better.

Talmud recognizes that the eating of meat is a concession to human desire. Though it teaches that both meat and wine should be served at every festive occasion (*Pesachim 109a*), it also teaches “A man should not eat meat unless he has a special craving for it (*Hullim 84a*).” In this respect the tension between the *olam ha-bah* (age to come) and the *olam ha-zeh* (present age) are upheld. I have already expressed my opinion, based on the narrative flow of Torah, that vegetarianism is God’s ideal. However, if God allows for concessions so must we. Still, any efforts we can make to place limitations upon ourselves can only prove to be helpful, not only in decreasing the suffering of the animal population, but also by training us to be better stewards of the Earth’s resources which are not ours but Adonai’s. (*Leviticus 25:23*)