



## **Kosher Vegetarianism, Benei Noah & Mashiah Commentary to Parashat Noah**

*By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok*

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The generation of Noah begins the drama of our modern world. In antediluvian days, life was very different. Torah teaches us about the centuries long life spans of people back then. Earth's climate and human DNA must have been vastly different from what we know today in order for people to have lived for so long. Interestingly we have Midrashim that do teach us that the DNA of antediluvian man (from Adam to Noah) must have been different from modern man. Up until the generation of Noah, human beings did not have detached fingers; they were webbed together in reptilian fashion. Maybe we were then genetically closer to the Nahash (serpent) than we would like to acknowledge.

Once the flood ended and Adamkind was wiped out humanity began anew. Thus our holy Sages have always referred to mankind as Benei Noah (children of Noah) and not Benei Adam (children of Adam), although this phrase is used in modern Hebrew. After the flood, G-d renewed with Noah the covenant that He made with Adam and added some mitzvot (commandments) to accommodate mankind's new genetic disposition.

One of the revolutionary differences between pre-flood and post-flood times was that G-d gave man permission to eat meat. Indeed, a literal interpretation of the pasuk can suggest that it is more than mere permission, it is a commandment. Apparently, vegetarianism is not the way of G-d.

I know many new-age type vegetarians who hold a type of smug arrogance thinking that because of their vegetarian lifestyle they are better than those people whom eat meat. They believe that vegetarianism makes an individual more spiritual. In their hearts, they desire the whole world to become vegetarian, which in their eyes would thus make us all more spiritual. Let me remind the smug vegetarian that we already had an epoch when all mankind was vegetarian and G-d had to wipe them all out. The greatest crime of the pre-flood vegetarian age was their acts of wanton, animal-like violence. Vegetarians claim that those who do not eat meat do not absorb animalistic qualities. Well, if this is so true then what happened with the violent vegetarian generation of the flood? I guess that vegetarianism didn't work for them. It won't work for us either.



HaShem commanded the consumption of meat as part of Temple sacrifice service. Both Kohen and layman were expected to eat the meat of the sacrifices, not just a small bite, but rather a full meal of it. The prophecies clearly state that when the Mashiah comes and the Third Temple is operational that sacrifices of animals will again be re-instituted and the eating of meat will again become the highest form and way to worship our Divine Creator.

Although the Torah implies to us that all mankind is to eat meat, our holy Rabbis have commented on this and said no, eating meat is not for everybody. An Am HaAretz is one who should not eat meat. Now before we ask why our Rabbis would say such a thing, let us first define the term Am HaAretz so that we can properly understand their intent.

While many might jump to the conclusion that an Am HaAretz is an ignorant person, we learn from Pirkei Avot that this is not true. In Pirkei Avot it says, "Ayn Bor Yirat Het, Ayn Am HaAretz Hasid (an ignorant person will not fear to sin, a Am HaAretz will not be pious). It is clear that Pirkei Avot is making a distinction between an ignorant person and an Am HaAretz. Thus, an Am HaAretz is not ignorant, however, this does not mean he is well educated.

The term Am HaAretz is a middle-of-the-road term to describe an average individual. He is not ignorant, yet neither is he highly educated. He has some learning, therefore he may be a righteous man, yet due to his lack of advanced learning, he cannot become a hasid, which is the appellation for those well skilled in learning and who thus adopt additional religious practices.

An Am HaAretz is not supposed to eat meat. Yet, why do our Sages teach us this? For the true and deepest of answers, we must turn to the mystical writings of the holy Ari'zal. In Parashat Ekev of Sefer Sha'ar HaMitzvot, we are introduced into the mystical teachings of gilgulei neshamot (the reincarnation of souls).

In a long and often complex lecture, the Ari'zal reveals to us that after death, sinful souls are often reincarnated into animals (kosher and otherwise). In order for these souls to be forgiven of their sins, redeemed and thus allowed to ascend above to the Garden of Eden, they must again experience the penalty of death. However, the mere death of the soul in the body of the animal is not enough to complete its rectification.

Those souls blessed to be incarnated into kosher animals must first be slaughtered in a kosher way in accordance to Torah law. Then their flesh must be eaten in a festive meal (seudat mitzvah) by those holy Rabbis who know the sacred yihudim meditations that enable the souls to ascend back on high. Any breach in this ritual and the entrapped souls can remain in their entrapment and descend even lower rather than ascend higher. In order to avoid this harm to fallen souls our holy Rabbis have advised that only those



individuals who eat meat with proper devotion should do so. Meat should be eaten as an offering to G-d and not just as a mere food for physical enjoyment. More on this subject can be found in my commentary of Parashat Ekev.

The Am HaAretz who does not keep in mind the elevation of souls while he eats should not eat meat and cause further damage to the souls. This is true everyday of the week, with the exception of the Shabat (and Yom Tov-holidays). It was not for naught that our holy Rabbis have taught us that there is no Shabat joy other than with meat and wine. The secret of wine will be discussed in another place. The secret of meat, we have a rudimentary understanding of. On Shabat, even an Am HaAretz raises up the fallen souls when he eats meat, regardless of his specific intentions. The reason for this is that the holiness of the Shabat and the Yamim Tovim arouse the souls to ascend. Therefore there is no joy, for the fallen souls; other than in eating meat on Shabat, which is their tikkun (rectification).

Indeed, Rabbi Yosef Karo, the author of the Shulkhan Arukh was told by his Magid (angelic guide) that one should not eat meat other than on Shabat and Yom Tov, and even then only sparingly. Thus, we see that while vegetarianism is a foreign (and possibly forbidden) practice under Torah law, the gluttonous eating of meat, without any spiritual intent is also a practice to avoid. Not only is eating too much meat very unhealthy to the body, as RaMBaM has taught, it is also unhealthy for one's midot (personality). As with all things in Torah, there needs to be balance. Not too much, but also not too little, but everything in its place, everything is its right measure.

These teachings about vegetarianism should be as applicable to the Gentile as they are to the Jew. This brings me now to briefly discuss the covenant that G-d made with Noah and thus with all his descendants, the human race, the Benei Noah. We usually refer to those Gentiles who have abandoned the idolatries of the world's religions and embraced the Sheva Mitzvot as Benei Noah. In reality, we are all Benei Noah, (Noah's children), Jew, Gentile, righteous and idolater alike. Yet, it is the righteous Gentiles who live by Noah's covenant that merit to be called his children, not only in blood, but also in his righteousness.

One of the most neglected mitzvot that can be so easily performed today is outreach to the Benei Noah communities popping up all around the world. RaMBaM has written that we are commanded to teach the Sheva Mitzvot (universal laws) to everyone. The Hatam Sofer has written that we should take advantage of the present time when communications between Jews and Gentiles is so open and feasible.

These bands of brave, courageous Gentile souls face the ridicule and disrespect from their families and friends because they have given up the idolatries surrounding them and instead chose to walk the path that G-d has ordained for them. These Benei Noah



seek with much thirst to learn everything they can about what the Torah holds as applicable to them. The Orthodox Torah communities around the world need to become more aware of Benei Noah activity and to support and guide these groups in their spiritual endeavors.

What does eating meat and Benei Noah have in common? The answer is that both point to the coming of Mashiah. The holy Mekubalim view the course of human history as revolving around the gathering of all fallen souls. At one time in history, G-d had planned to work with all mankind as a united whole to bring rectification to all. Yet, when mankind was united as one, during the generation of the Tower of Bavel, rather than seek to serve G-d, mankind allowed themselves to become the prey of the mighty hunter Nimrod, who craftily captured human souls and formed the first world dictatorship.

Rather than submit to G-d, united mankind instead became subjugated to a man. G-d, therefore, intervened again in human history and broke Nimrod's stranglehold on mankind and then scattered everyone to the four corners of the Earth thus creating the seventy different nations of mankind. By doing this G-d created necessary differences between men so that no one man would ever be able to come again and take control of everyone, to make them rebel against Heaven. In order to teach and guide divided mankind back to Him, G-d chose His People Israel to be a "light to the nations."

In modern times, we hear politicians talk about a New World order and a one world government. This is an attempt to revive the empire of Nimrod, the archetype of dictators. Thus we see as the world become a smaller place, where everyone can now be in contact with and know about everyone else, people from very different backgrounds are unnaturally being forced to share the same living spaces or to compete for the same resources. This is a recipe for conflict and disaster. Eventually, human conflicts will rise to the level of absolute intolerance. Yet, rather than call for G-d to intervene, mankind will call for another Nimrod to unite them and to restore order. Then, the reincarnation of Nimrod will arise and take control of a world government. Our holy Rabbanim has prophesied his coming. They called him Armilus.

Armilus will gather the nations of the world around him and will proclaim himself the world's true leader. Only Yisrael, the nation of HaShem will resist him. The wrath of Armilus will then rage against Yisrael and Jews all over the world. We see the beginnings of this happening right now with the tense situation in the Middle East, world opinion growing against Israel and a sharp rise of anti-Semitic acts against Jews worldwide.

Yet, the Mekubalim teach us, only when all the fallen souls have been gathered together and each is given every opportunity to arise again to holiness will Mashiah come. Therefore, with every piece of meat we eat with proper devotion, we elevate fallen souls

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and thus bring Mashiah closer. With every Gentile who repents of the world's idolatries and embraces the Sheva Mitzvot, we bring Mashiah ever closer. Armilus is coming. His job will be to polarize the world between the forces of those who rebel against G-d and between those who submit to His blessed Will. Torah prophecy is clear that all Israel will do teshuva (repentance) and serve our Creator, yet prophecy is also clear to state that millions and millions of righteous Gentiles will also arise at this time and serve HaShem as do their elder brothers, the Benei Yisrael. With the worldwide explosion of Benei Noah groups everywhere, we see this beginning to happen.

We therefore have a messianic obligation of tikkun olam (rectification of the world). As the Ba'al Shem Tov has taught, we must elevate our souls by rectifying the aspect of Mashiah within ourselves. This we do in many ways, one of which is conscious eating, with intent to serve G-d, rather than be served by Him.

Next, as we turn our attentions outward to call wayward Jews back to Torah, let us not shirk our Halakhic obligation to also call out to the Benei Noah and to teach them. When we accomplish both these tasks, the fallen souls that are destined to be gathered will then be gathered. Indeed, Mashiah will then come. May it be soon. Pray for shalom in Aretz, yet be ready for an even bigger war.