

# Maachlot Assurot (Forbidden Foods)

## Some General Considerations

by Dr. Yossef Levinson

In Vayikra 11:1-47 Torat Moshe talks about forbidden foods. There are specific animals, fish, birds, winged insects, and other kinds of living things, which may be eaten, and those that may not be eaten. The criteria are stated in the section. Eating any of these forbidden living things as food, or even touching them when dead, causes tumah in a person. There are rules concerning things that come into contact with these living things when dead, as to how to make them tahor again. And there are rules concerning one who touches a carcass of both permitted and not permitted animals as to how to make oneself tahor again. But it does not require a korban.

What is the understanding of Torat Moshe concerning eating permitted animals, fish, birds, and other animate things e.g. crawling things—including the plant world? Humankind requires food to live. There are two sources of food, the plant world and the animate world. In Torat Moshe, humankind is permitted, indeed encouraged, to make edibles from each domain. There are conditions concerning when, where and how different kinds of foods are to be made. But in Torat Moshe, there is no question as to humankind eating from both the plant world and the animate world. If a person wants to limit edibles to one or the other of these worlds, no doubt such a person would be said to be amiss, though not prohibited from doing so. In this respect, such a person would be similar to a נזיר (Sefer Bamidbar 6:2).

The society described in Torat Moshe, is meat-eating. This is taken for granted in the sense that it was not questioned as to why eating meat and eating from the plant world is and/or should be. This is sociological. True, there is an account of the origin of humankind eating meat. But it is not a justification of why eating meat is permitted.

ויאמר אלהים הנה נתתי לכם את כל עשב זרע זרע אשר על פני כל הארץ  
ואת כל העץ אשר בו פרי עץ זרע זרע לכם יהיה לאכלה:

ולכל חית הארץ ולכל עוף השמים ולכל רמש על הארץ  
אשר בו נפש חיה את כל ירק עשב לאכלה:  
(Bereishit 1:29-30).

This is in effect repeated in the sippur of Noach and the Mabul. ואתה קח לך מכל מאכל (Bereishit 6:21). And after the mabul, it is implicit in:

כל רמש אשר הוא חי לכם יהיה לאכלה כירק עשב נתתי לכם את כל  
אך בשר בנפשו דמו לא תאכלו:  
(Bereishit 9:3-4)

This pasuk states the change from the plant world alone, to the inclusion of the animal world as edibles for humankind. All this is origin-talk, but no reason is given as to why eating meat was added to the edibles permitted for humankind.

It was also taken for granted without question, that something would be amiss in the lives of people if they excluded meat from their diet—the same for excluding the plant world. The unquestioned assumption on this is that there is something in meat, which when eaten and digested by a human, somehow energizes human life-energy. Together with this, is that no doubt, there was a long empirical tradition that led to the minimization and/or elimination of any adverse side effects from eating meat. Eating meat was not only healthy; it

was in no way unhealthy! In Torat Moshe, this fact was not at the level of being questioned, of being justified. As was said, this is sociological.

A hypothetical question arises here. Suppose that the same nutritional input from eating meat could be gotten from eating plant foods when specially prepared, or from other sources, such that there would be no need to use animals for food. Would Torat Moshe say that such a situation is a great advance in civilization, and hence would legislate that eating meat is forbidden? This hypothetical question of course presupposes that the overall ecological effects of humankind not eating animals do not increase the danger of the continued existence of human life on the planet and beyond. This is not an unreasonable assumption, but requires research.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of adequately answering such a counterfactual conditional based question about a past society, there is worth in attempting an answer. The basis of that answer resides in the overall approach in Torat Moshe, to living things—both the plant world and the animate world.

A first point is that humankind is sufficiently different from animals to reasonably say that whereas a human being killing another human being is murder, a human being killing an animal, whatever it is e.g. destruction—it is not murder. This does not mean that humankind has unrestricted freedom to kill animals—or plants—by reason of killing them not being murder. But it does mean that killing animals for the betterment of human life on the planet is a great good, if there are no other ways to achieve that betterment without having to kill animals. Notwithstanding that the meaning of betterment is ever open to ideational reconstruction, if killing an animal is required for saving a human life, or for the prevention and cure of certain diseases, or for medical research—given where medicine is today without a Lifonic physics of Chaya-Neshama-Guf existence, which to say the least, is not at its best—reasonable human responsibility requires the killing of animals. (Again, this presupposes that the overall ecological effects of humankind not eating animals, do not increase the danger of the continued existence of human life on the planet and beyond.) This is implicit in:

פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ  
וכבשה ורדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמים ובכל חיה הרמשת על הארץ:  
(Bereishit 1:28)

In Torat Moshe, ideas such as responsibility, obligation, rights and duties et.al. are exemplified only and exclusively in the human world (the *olam enoshi*). When one animal kills another, it is not murder. When an animal feeds its young, it is not from responsibility et.al. These are ideas, which at minimum presuppose a level of brain development that as yet no animal has. The burden of reasonable exposition is upon any who say that this is not so. Anthropomorphisms concerning the animal world abound e.g. the animal feels pain and/or pleasure just as the human being feels pain and/or pleasure, these being so similar as to be called the same. This, and every other anthropomorphism concerning animals, requires inquiry. Needless to say that without a Lifonic physics of Chaya-Neshama-Guf existence, no contemporary research will be sufficient to establish the sameness of pain and/or pleasure in animals and in humans. But such inquiry should continue, nevertheless. It is part of the sensitization literature functioning as an ideational field out of which it is hoped will emerge such a Lifonic physics.

The origin of the human species and survival of the fittest, however clarified and refined, are not entirely anthropomorphism-free. These so-called scientific ideas in evolutionary biology are not sufficient reason—neither for not killing animals, nor for killing animals.

Torat Moshe bespeaks a socio-cultural centrality of animals, in *korbanot*, in agriculture/herding, and in eating. By reason of this physical proximity of people and animals, there are laws concerning the relations between animals and people. But nowhere in

these laws is the idea that animals have rights or responsibilities. Animals are animals, and people are people. There is nothing in these laws that relate to the hypothetical question of eating or not eating meat. It says:

זאת החיה אשר תאכלו מכל הבהמה אשר על הארץ:  
כל מפרסת פרסה ושסעת שסע פרסת מעלת גרה בבהמה אתה תאכלו:  
(11:2-3)

I do not know why these are the criteria to differentiate between animals which are edible and those which are called tamei, and not edible. By the very fact that the forbidden animals are called טמא, it is not unreasonable that eating them somehow decreased or interfered with the life-energy in a person. But this is a speculation without observational evidence, notwithstanding that the definition of טמא in Torat Moshe is just that.

For sure, one of the ideas that is relevant here is the overall approach to animals in Torat Moshe. How did Moshe and Bnei-Yisrael look upon animals? How did the kohen, Aharon, who worked with animals in korban, look upon animals, the same or different from Moshe and the rest of Bnei-Yisrael? Did Moshe see himself as an animal, but with characteristics which make him distinctively human and higher than the animal world? When a person kills an animal for food, that is the thing to do. But when an animal kills a person for its food, that is a terrible thing. Or did Moshe see himself as a human such that although there appear to be some sameness between animals and people, they are different in every respect? What is loosely called eating by an animal is not the same with respect to eating by a human, so that it can be reasonably said that both are doing the same thing i.e. eating. No, an animal eating—better said, feeding—is something different than a human eating! It is the same concerning sexual relations, pleasure and pain, and even limbs and organs. The humanness of a human is a coloration that makes everything in the human different in some significant respect from what appears to be the same in an animal.

Difficult as it may be to comprehend this, it is the understanding of animal life in Torat Moshe. This is primarily by reason of there being an implicit Lifonic physics of Chaya-Neshama-Guf existence, coupled with the principle of צלם אלהים. (The 99.4 % sameness in the respective genetic codes of humans and some animals is not sufficient reason to relegate the humanness of humans to a metaphysical tenet. Any such conclusion must await a Lifonic physics—it will not be adequately explained by anything in contemporary biology!)

In Torat Moshe, there is צלם אלהים. It is degraded by two things. There is engaging in what is commonly accepted as animal-like behavior e.g. eating like an animal; having sex like an animal. And there is doing in public that which is commonly accepted as being exclusively private, the primary, if not exclusive example of which is having sexual relations. (There is a definition of pornography here.)

This taken for granted צלם אלהים in Torat Moshe, enters into an answer to the hypothetical question here. Eating meat like an animal e.g. eiver min ha-chai, does degrade the צלם אלהים. But eating meat, when properly prepared in accordance with the relevant laws, is in no way a degradation of צלם אלהים. On the contrary, in Torat Moshe, anything takes on a dignity by the very fact of it being used for the creative advance of humankind. This includes the eating of animals, and when properly bounded, their use to help maintain the continued existence of humankind. צלם אלהים is implicit in:

פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ  
וכבשה ורדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמים ובכל חיה הרמשת על הארץ  
(Bereishit 1:28).

Interestingly enough, צלם אלהים brings with it a sensitization to and a dignification of both the animal and the plant worlds. This is not only in their ecological fullness, but also in themselves as life-forms, especially when compared to the mineral world, and to the sun,

moon and stars in the sky. Granted that **צלם אלהים** is not sufficient reason for why eating meat is not only not forbidden, but encouraged in Torat Moshe, it is one of the colorations which enters into an adequate answer.

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