

## Vegetarianism and Religion

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Some so-called "religionists" use the excuse that we have "dominion" over the animals. Dominion should not be taken to mean "abuser" or "exploiter." The original Hebrew word for "dominion" is "yirdu" and it connotes a sort of stewardship or guardianship. In other words, we are given the command to "care for" our more humbly endowed brothers and sisters, the animals, and not eat them. Therefore, a King or Queen who has dominion over their kingdom does not give them the right to kill and eat them! It is their duty to protect, care, help and even love them. Obviously we should not be so dogmatic that we should die during a time of drought, flood or famine before eating animals but this situation should rarely occur.

There is a tremendously disregarded biblical command which seems to be overlooked "tzar baalay hayyim." This is Hebrew. It is the mandate to have compassion for animals and appears throughout biblical literature. The problem of animal abuse, however, is quite widespread. In the United States alone, every year, more than five billion animals are killed for food and 100 million animals are needlessly tortured in research laboratories. With regard to religion - some people will say that religion is a matter of faith not dietary preference. This is true but what if one's dietary preference affected one's faith? Religion deals with ethics, morals, compassion and mercy and as Isaac Bashevis Singer has said, "How can we pray to God for mercy if we are not willing to extend mercy to others?" This is just common sense. It's simply unfair that we do not extend our sense of mercy to the animals. This is a biblical precept. We tend to ignore biblical precepts that do not strike our fancy. Can we be willing to change our hearts but not our diet? The two are actually inseparable. To claim that these can be separated is sheer hypocrisy! Man does not want to be killed yet he kills. Man does not want to be the victim of injustice yet he is unjust. This sort of paradox makes a mockery of religion. Violence begets violence. There is also the saying "One who lives by the sword will die by the sword" or "as ye sow, so shall ye reap". In actuality, this is the same as karma. Unfortunately, it is rarely extended to the animals or our diet.

Major stumbling blocks for many Christians are the belief that Christ ate meat and the many references to meat in the New Testament. Close study of the original Greek manuscripts show that the vast majority of the words translated as "meat" are "trophe" and "brome." These words simply mean "food or "eating" in the broadest sense. In the Gospel of St. Luke 8.55, we read that Jesus raised a woman from the dead and "commanded to give her meat." The original Greek word translated as "meat" is "phago", which means only "to eat." The Greek word for meat is "kreas" ("flesh") and it is never used in connection with Christ. In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God gives permission for man to eat everything that moves. He soon after, however, says that man should still not eat the blood of animals and soon after that He reveals a sort of karma that awaits those who slaughter animals "By their own hands shall ye be slain" (Genesis 9.5). This verse is very rarely quoted by Christians trying to justify their concession for meat eating. In the very first chapter of the first book of the Bible, a non-meat diet is recommended. God

says, "...I have given you every herb-yielding seed which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree-yielding seed - to you it shall be for food." This is Genesis 1.29.

The biblical verse which gives us dominion over the animals appears in Genesis 1.26. The verse recommending a vegetarian diet appears in Genesis 1.29 only 3 verses later. In other words, God gives us dominion over the animals and only 3 verses later prohibits their use for food. Implicitly, the dominion He gives us cannot include using animals for food. As quoted in the "Talmud", human arrogance can be summed up like this: "When man shall become proud in his heart, remind him that the little fly has preceded him in creation"!