

17

THE MORAL MARCH TO MEATLESS MEALS

The scripted Hebrew meat prohibitions versus the unscripted path to becoming vegetarian or vegan

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Abstract

The path to vegetarianism or veganism is typically gradual and unscripted. The usual moral (compassionate or environmental) and health motivations set goals to cut back or eliminate meat consumption, but there are no formal or informal instructions for how to achieve these goals. Instead, individuals make up their own evolving set of rules. In contrast, the rejection of pork (and other prohibitions) are precisely specified in the Orthodox Jewish tradition, which considers and resolves situations where there would otherwise be indecision. The contrast is clear for the issue of meat contamination, where the sympathetic magical “law” of contagion comes into play. This chapter, largely constituted by a debate between two fictional Orthodox Jewish rabbis, one a vegan and the other an omnivore, illustrates how some aspects of a path to vegetarianism could be scripted, with the aim of reducing but not eliminating conflict situations. The Hebrew tradition raises and attempts to solve some of the practical and conceptual problems of enacting prohibitions. A discussion following the dialogue deals with the similarities and differences between the Kosher dietary prohibitions and the Hindu beef prohibition, and the path to vegetarianism.

The following is primarily a set of conversations between two (fictional) Orthodox Jewish rabbis. Rabbi (abbreviated to Reb) Ruby is a vegan, while Reb Rozin is an omnivore, except that he observes the laws of Kashrut (including prohibition on meat of pigs and shellfish, as well as mixtures of meat and dairy in the same meal, and other elaborations of these prohibitions). The subject is the process of becoming a moral vegan or vegetarian, and the ethical and logistical dilemmas associated with dividing foods into edible and inedible in light of issues like trace contamination. They discuss the Hebrew dietary prohibitions, particularly against

consuming pork, and contrast the explicit rules of Kashrut about what foods are acceptable with the unscripted, informal, and individualized ways in which moral vegetarians decide what foods are acceptable. In these conversations, they debate many of the common arguments for and against eating animals.

[The rabbis are sitting outside together. Reb Rozin is consuming what looks like a cheeseburger.]

RUBY: Reb Rozin, I have to say, I am disturbed to see you eating what appears to be meat and dairy together.

ROZIN: Reb Ruby, be assured, I would never do such. The hamburger is Kosher, and what looks to you like a slice of cheese is actually non-dairy vegan cheese.

RUBY: Well, the Jewish laws, the Halacha based in the Talmud, dictate that one cannot do something that looks forbidden to others, so as not to set a bad example or to have them suspect you of sin.

ROZIN: Yes, you are correct, and that is precisely why I brought the vegan cheese wrapping and left it here on the bench so that you might notice on your own that it was non-dairy cheese, but I guess you didn't notice it. The Halacha permits it if there is a visual indication that it is not a transgression.

RUBY: Still, I find just the appearance of meat and dairy together to be upsetting.

ROZIN: Well, I do not, and as we both know, what I am eating is Kosher. Some observant Jews would do what I am doing, and some would not. I don't need to assure you that the hamburger meat comes from a kosher butcher, from a cow that was ritually slaughtered according to the Torah, with all blood drained out from the meat.

RUBY: I know the Torah permits both the non-dairy cheese, and the properly slaughtered cow, but that is not the ideal, and I reject all animal products.

ROZIN: That seems rather extreme, to me. The Torah explicitly allows us to eat meat. Genesis 9:3: "Every moving thing that lives shall be yours to eat; like the green vegetation, I have given you everything."

RUBY: Yes, but even what you cite indicates that there was a prior phase of veganism in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 1:29–30: "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 as food." This means that the ideal state is vegan!

ROZIN: Maybe it was ideal in the Garden of Eden, but after the flood, G-d¹ saw fit to allow humans to eat meat. Genesis 9:2: "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."

RUBY: Yes, but this was only as a response to the corruption and weakness of humans. Why should we not honor His original design, and live righteously, as vegans?

ROZIN: G-d meant to let humans eat meat. Not only is this said explicitly in the Torah, but G-d explicitly forbids the consumption of blood: Genesis 9:4: "You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it." There would not be an explicit prohibition on blood, stated a number of times, unless eating the rest of

the meat was permitted. Blood is the life essence. Blood is the symbol of life and is only for G-d. It wouldn't be forbidden unless there was a real tendency to like it. And G-d made us like it, so He is teaching us partial restraint, by letting us eat the bloodless meat.

RUBY: You can't really get rid of all the blood, if you could, the meat wouldn't be red. So G-d is really saying, don't eat meat.

ROZIN: I think G-d generally says what is on His mind. He could have just said, "Don't eat meat." G-d made me, and he made me love the taste of meat. I'm sure it tastes better with the blood, but I willingly make the compromise of eating more or less bloodless meat.

RUBY: G-d works in strange ways. Surely, He does not approve of the way, nowadays, most animals raised for food are treated, and eventually killed. That wasn't so in biblical times. To give all animals and plants into the hand of humans does not imply the right to mistreat and slaughter the animals with that hand. Rather, the Lord meant for us to *care* for the animals. That's why the Lord had Noah load a pair of each animal on to the ark. Didn't you once tell me that "Judaism is not about our rights, it's about our responsibilities"?

ROZIN: The Bible considers G-d at the top, then humans, and then all of the other animals. Where in the Bible does it say humans should be nice to animals, and not slaughter them? In the Bible, animals are like plants, not like humans. G-d gave explicit permission to eat meat He made us, and He made us love meat. And G-d loves meat. Look at all those animal sacrifices He asked for!

RUBY: The animal sacrifices don't mean He loves meat. After all, Judaism doesn't believe in a corporeal G-d who eats anything. In fact He doesn't have a body, so how can He eat at all? G-d has dominion over everything, and the sacrifice of animals is an explicit recognition of that fact. It is ridiculous to say that G-d loves and eats meat.

ROZIN: G-d is omnipotent. He could eat without having a body.

RUBY: I don't think we can be sure about what or whether G-d eats. But it is important to remember that after the flood, G-d permits meat eating with restrictions, but it is a concession. Some modern rabbis believe that the intent in the Bible is a diet free of animal products, as in the Garden of Eden. Some rabbis, like David Rosen, claim that one can infer from parts of the Bible that one should not cause unnecessary cruelty to animals. So, it is possible to derive from the Bible and the Talmud that the ideal state for Jews is to be vegan. And it is clearly the case that to be vegan is to be kosher. Virtually all the food restrictions in the Bible have to do with meat, and the mixing of meat and dairy. Orthodox Jews who must keep separate dishes for dairy and meat need not do so if they become vegan. It may be easier, in terms of daily life, to be a vegan than to eat meat and dairy. And doing so will respect a higher morality, a kindness to animals and to the earth. But back to our main concern. How do you feel about killing animals so you can have a tasty meal? Is your pleasure so much more important than their lives?

ROZIN: It isn't just my pleasure. Hundreds of people can get pleasure and nutrition from one killed cow. So far as I know, a full adult cow yields about 500 pounds of meat. So if a person eats a quarter pound of beef each day, 2000 people

can get meat pleasure for one day from eating a cow, or one person will eat a cow in about 6 years. So a 60-year-old, assuming beef is the only meat they eat, eating a quarter pound of beef a day, will eat only nine or so cows in their life.

RUBY: Yes, nine dead cows, for the pleasure of chewing on some beef. Doesn't it bother you that each person will kill nine cows in their life, just for some pleasant sensations in their mouth?

ROZIN: But we have to eat meat to flourish— it is a matter of life and death for us. Just as it is for the lions who eat zebra. How else can we get enough protein?

RUBY: Don't you know any healthy vegetarians? I haven't eaten any animals for 10 years, and I'm doing very well.

ROZIN: But they say meat is necessary for life, and everyone, well almost everyone, eats it.

RUBY: Just think, Adam and Eve, and Abraham and Sarah, Noah and so many others, ate no meat, dairy, or eggs. And most of these early Hebrews lived many hundreds of years, and they were healthy. It's not about health. It's killing versus pleasure. Seriously, don't you feel bad about that?

ROZIN: Yes, so meat may not be necessary, though it tastes wonderful. Why did G-d make animal flesh taste so good? To teach us restraint? Most scholars believe that thousands of years ago, humans were eating animals. Our teeth and our guts suggest that we ate both plants and animals.

RUBY: Sure, since the flood, and that's a long time, humans have been eating meat. But originally, perhaps like gorillas or orangutans, humans did not eat meat.

ROZIN: But all of those are wild animals. We *bred*, we *made* domesticated cows, so they are our creation, not G-d's.

RUBY: So you're saying we're allowed to eat things that are our own creation. So why not eat domesticated dogs and cats? By that logic, we could eat our *children*, *after all, we made them!*

ROZIN: Good point. Really good point. But not eating meat is so revolutionary. Almost everyone eats meat.

RUBY: Yes, and almost everyone eats pork, and the 1.3 billion people who live in China are the biggest pork eaters of the world, maybe half of the world's pork. So what? You represent a small but special minority. Anyway, you were on the way to being a vegetarian before we got started. You weren't eating pork and shellfish and that wasn't so hard. You're just expanding what you already do.

ROZIN: It's not the same. Pork is polluting, as the Torah says, while these other meats, like beef, are okay. Your motivation for eating them is very different— it's thinking about the animal's rights, not our moral purity. It's like the world's billion Hindus, who won't eat beef or kill cows. For them, cows are sacred, and it is because of the animal's soul that they don't eat beef. For them pollution comes from consuming/destroying something sacred. For us, it is not reverence for pigs, but rather it is G-d's word, and we find pigs disgusting, and consuming pork pollutes our soul.

RUBY: But you will note that many Hindus are vegetarians. Hundreds of millions of them, about half of the vegetarians in the world, aren't eating any animals at all.

ROZIN: Speaking of animals, you have a pet cat, yes?

RUBY: Yes, I do.

ROZIN: I bet your cat eats only kosher, no meat and dairy at the same time, no pork.

RUBY: That's right, my cat eats kosher.

ROZIN: But I bet your cat eats meat, like beef and chicken.

RUBY: Yes, she does. She needs to eat meat to be healthy.

ROZIN: Well, if the cat eats meat, why can't we?

RUBY: Because we are omnivores. We can eat a broad range of plants, and we like many of them. We also have more advanced mental abilities than cats. We may love the taste of meat, but we know it means killing animals, so we can refrain from eating meat and not kill animals. As stated in the Bible, we are higher creatures than other animals.

ROZIN: Okay, I don't eat pork, and I agree, cows are sort of nice, so maybe I will be able to eat less beef. I will sacrifice some pleasure, and I guess it won't be a problem. If I eat 50 percent less beef, then I will save the lives of half of the cows that I would have eaten.

RUBY: Good start.

A month later

RUBY: How are you doing, eating half of the beef you used to?

ROZIN: It is okay. I sort of feel a little noble about this. Maybe I can cut down to one quarter of the meat I used to eat.

RUBY: Are you cutting back on other types of meat, or just beef? I know you've always eaten a lot of chicken.

ROZIN: Well, cows are more like humans, and they are probably smarter than chickens. I just don't think that a chicken life is worth as much as a cow life.

RUBY: Okay, so you are trying to spare the most meaningful lives. We already calculated that you might eat about nine cows in a full life time. Well, you get about 3 pounds of meat from an adult chicken, as opposed to about 500 pounds from an adult cow. That means you have to kill about 170 chickens to get the same amount of meat as the meat from one cow. Do you think 170 chicken lives are worth less than one cow life?

ROZIN: I never thought of that...I guess 170 chickens are worth more than one cow.

RUBY: And given that the average American eats about 40 pounds of chicken a year, or about 13 chickens a year, that equals about 800 chickens over a 60-year span. That's a *lot* of lives. So are you going to cut back on eating chicken as well?

ROZIN: It's the logical thing to do. I will cut back on both of them, 50 percent down in each. Actually, it won't be as hard because I like beef more than chicken, and I've already cut back on that.

A month later

ROZIN: I have done it; I am 50 percent down on chicken and beef. It actually wasn't so hard, but I do crave beef.

RUBY: Do you also crave pork?

ROZIN: I've never eaten pork, but I am curious to know what it tastes like, and I sort of like the smell of bacon.

RUBY: Interesting. I have always found pork and bacon disgusting, and recently, in my tenth year as a vegetarian, I came to find beef disgusting, so I am not tempted to eat it.

ROZIN: I guess you are lucky, you don't have temptation.

RUBY: I did at the beginning, but it passed with time. Have you considered becoming a partial vegetarian, by cutting out all mammals and birds from your diet?

ROZIN: That's asking for a lot.

RUBY: You know that killing half the number of chickens, maybe 400 in a lifetime instead of 800 is an improvement, but you are still killing animals. It is not as bad to kill one person than two, but only a little better.

ROZIN: You know, it is really hard to eat *no* mammals or birds. Eating is a lot less pleasurable, and it's socially difficult. Most other people eat meat, and they would have to make special food for me.

RUBY: Come on, you are used to that, when you eat with people who aren't kosher.

ROZIN: True, but this is a bigger imposition.

RUBY: But isn't it worth the slight imposition to not kill animals? And by eating delicious plant-based food, maybe your friends will consider cutting back on their meat consumption, like you.

ROZIN: Yes, but it is practically impossible to eliminate *all* meat. For example, some vegetable soups are made with chicken broth. Or, let's say I am eating an entirely vegetarian meal, but I am sitting next to someone who is eating a hamburger. Some of those beef molecules from the sizzling hamburger could get in the air, and I could breathe them in. I don't know if we could ever fully avoid taking in meat.

RUBY: Well, you know that Jewish scholars have devoted a lot of time and thought to this, because we worry that the whole world is contaminated. Do you know, according to a friend of mine who is a geologist, if someone in Europe drinks a glass of water, they consume at least a few water molecules that went through Adolf Hitler!

ROZIN: Wow, that is disturbing, but you have to have water. But as you note, we Jews have solved the contamination problem, getting around all those tiny amounts. We have the 1/60th rule. If a contaminant falls into an otherwise kosher food, by accident (or you don't know about it), and the volume of the contaminant is less than 1/60th of the total, it remains kosher.

RUBY: Yes, weren't our ancestors clever, thorough, and creative? But it's even better than that. Suppose you're at a cookout, and some bacon, 1/80th, accidentally falls into your kosher food. It's still kosher, right?

ROZIN: Right.

RUBY: But now, suppose in that same food, some shrimp, 1/90th of the volume, also falls in by accident. Now $1/80 + 1/90$ is more than 1/60. And if you remember your calculus, lots of tiny amounts of non-kosher foods could easily accumulate to more than 1/60.

ROZIN: And our Talmudic ancestors figured out a way to deal with that too, as I remember. Only the principal (highest concentration) contaminant matters, so one doesn't have to worry about all those epsilons.

RUBY: Right, so we can use our kosher laws to get around the problem of meat micro-contamination for vegetarians. The 1/60th rule for all meat.

ROZIN: Nothing is simple. Of course blood is a big prohibition, but you can't get all the blood out of the muscle before you eat it, and you probably can't get enough out so it is less than 1/60th, so that rule doesn't hold for blood. But generally, the 1/60th rule solves many problems. So I could go on a mammal- and bird-free diet. But if I *know* that some gelatin, derived from pigs, is a micro-contaminant (less than 1/60th) in an otherwise kosher food, I'm not sure I can eat it.

RUBY: That is a problem. It has to do with what it means to be "by accident." You didn't put it in, but you know someone else, by definition intentionally, put it in the food. By the way, although I know the 1/60th rule, I wouldn't eat anything that I knew had any pork in it. I would just find it disgusting.

ROZIN: Well I wouldn't find it disgusting, and because it is acceptable according to the laws of Kashrut, I would eat it. In a way I should get more credit than you, because I have to overcome temptation, and you don't. Anyway, okay, I don't want to kill nice animals. I will try it. But wait. Sometimes you can eat meat and not be a party to killing animals.

RUBY: What?

ROZIN: Well, I will give you an example: roadkill deer. They are already dead, and you are not participating in killing if you eat them.

RUBY: I suppose that's true, if you don't find it disgusting.

ROZIN: I don't. I might even wait near a place where road kills frequently happen and get some morally-okay meat that way. But I'll give you a more common example. Suppose you are eating with a friend in a kosher restaurant, and she is eating a kosher hamburger. She can't finish it. The server will take her partly eaten hamburger and throw it out in the kitchen. Now I could eat that left-over, destined to be waste, without being involved in killing. What do you think of that?

RUBY: You could, if you don't find someone else's food disgusting.

ROZIN: It is challenging, sort of Talmudic, to consider ways of eating meat without participating, at least indirectly, in killing. So here's another one. Now I couldn't eat pig eyes, but I could eat cow eyes and be a moral vegetarian.

RUBY: What?

ROZIN: The cow eye, for us, is a waste product. *No one* kills a cow for the eyes. So if I eat the eyes, I am morally okay.

RUBY: That's really disgusting, but fair enough. That's a big difference between Kashrut and vegetarianism. For us, pigs and shellfish are inherently polluting. But for a moral vegetarian, meat eating is only immoral for a consequential reason, either participation in killing, or as you know, another moral reason— participation in a food system which is not sustainable.

ROZIN: Well, it's hypothetical. I too find cow eyes disgusting. But there is a case where I could be involved. I'm pretty sure moral vegetarians are most upset about eating baby animals.

RUBY: Right, because they are cute, and because they have so much more life to live.

ROZIN: Right, so veal is a big no no. But I love calf's liver, and in the USA (not France), calf's liver is not popular, so it is essentially a waste product. No one here kills a calf for the liver.

RUBY: That's true, but by eating that, you are contributing to the economic value of killing the calf.

ROZIN: True, I guess, but the calf will be killed anyway. I think I can eat road kill deer, unfinished cow meat, and calf's liver, at least in the USA.

RUBY: By that logic, you could also argue that you could eat beef tongue. No one kills a cow for the tongue.

ROZIN: Wow, that's right, and I love tongue. Thanks.

RUBY: But with most of your exceptions, except the road kill, you are contributing to the income of the people who kill animals. And you still don't get around the issues of how the animals are treated before they are killed. But okay for the road kill, and maybe the unfinished food, if you don't find it disgusting.

A month later

RUBY: How are you doing?

ROZIN: Fine. I've cut way back on mammals and birds. I do still crave them, and once in a while, at a good restaurant, I will eat something really good and meaty. And then there is, of course, the waste meat I eat. And I don't worry about traces. So I'm pretty good, morally.

RUBY: That's a lot of progress! Of course, you don't eat shellfish, but you're still eating fish, no?

ROZIN: Yes. Fish spend most of their lives in the ocean and have a normal life until they are caught, and I imagine, sometimes they are killed rapidly, like frozen.

RUBY: Some fish are farmed under crowded conditions. Don't you think that fish feel pain? Even freezing is a slow and painful death, and besides, they would likely suffocate before they freeze.

ROZIN: Who can tell?

RUBY: Well, you seem to think cows can feel pain.

ROZIN: Yes, I do.

RUBY: So you *think* cows feel pain, and you *think* fish don't. Are you going to make a major moral decision on such flimsy evidence?

ROZIN: Yes. It's all I have. Maybe asparagus feels pain?

RUBY: Asparagus doesn't have a nervous system. But okay, I can't prove fish feel pain, but if you ever saw a fish struggling after a fisherman reels it in and it is on the ground, gasping, you have to admit that it's upsetting. But okay, so you *think* cows feel pain?

ROZIN: Yes.

RUBY: So why do you not eat beef, but you do drink milk?

ROZIN: You don't kill cows to get milk.

RUBY: Well, actually you do. What do you think they do to the male offspring of dairy cows? They don't produce milk. They either kill them, or fatten them

up some, and then kill them. And regardless of the calf's sex, they're usually taken away from their mother within a day of being born.

ROZIN: But that's not directly about the milk-producing cows.

RUBY: No, but it's a significant part of the process. And what do you think they do with a dairy cow after she can't produce milk anymore?

ROZIN: I can guess what happens. But you know, cows have to die.

RUBY: You would think after producing milk for years for humans, the cow could retire in a grassy field for the rest of her life.

ROZIN: That would be nice.

RUBY: But you agree that cows feel pain. So humans have bred cows to have big mammary glands, and to produce lots of milk, which causes pressure... that probably hurts.

ROZIN: When they get milked then, it is a great relief.

RUBY: Yes, like when you wear really tight shoes, so when you take them off, you will feel good. And what do you think happens to the baby cows that are supposed to get the milk?

ROZIN: I hope they can nurse, with the excess milk going to humans.

RUBY: A very small number of farms do that, but in many farms, they are taken away from their mother within a day of being born, so all the milk can go to humans. Is that fair, is it kind to the cow mother to take her offspring away?

ROZIN: I guess not.

RUBY: And I'm sure you know that in some modern dairies, cows are kept in small stalls, so they can't move around much.

ROZIN: I don't like that. But they are kept at a good temperature and they get quality food. Maybe that's a perfect life. Maybe they have a rich inner life? Maybe it would be better if they had a television, or could go outside.

RUBY: I don't know about TV... but walking in a grassy field would be humane.

ROZIN: In some dairies, the cows are outside, and just come in to be milked. But you know, it's not obvious to me that, in a stall where they could turn around, get good medical care and have comfortable temperatures, they aren't in cow heaven. After all, I bet there are many people who would consider it great to sit on a sofa all day and watch television, with pizza and soda served up a few times a day. Maybe, if they were sitting on a padded and comfortable chair with a toilet installed under it, they wouldn't have to get up at all.

RUBY: Nonetheless, considering the discarding of the newborn, and the dairy cows' fate to be killed when production drops, out of compassion, you should stop eating dairy products. So that means no more milk, or cheese, or yogurt. Dairy should be prohibited. You already practice a dairy prohibition. You can't eat dairy with meat by the laws of Kashrut, and you can't even eat dairy for up to 6 hours after eating meat.

ROZIN: I guess it all depends on how the cows are treated. If they could nurse their young and move around more, it could be fine. Humans could tell us how bad it would be for them to stay in a room with just a television, pizza, and soda, but cows can't tell us. I guess it all depends on what cows like. Maybe we could give them a choice of a stall with hay, and an open field with grass. I have a friend

in the dairying business, and he says he would rather be a cow in a modern dairy, with some access to the outside, than on a traditional small farm. Better food, and much better medical care.

RUBY: But you will admit that some dairy cows, we don't know what percent, are probably treated in an inhumane manner.

ROZIN: Yes.

RUBY: So unless you can know in detail how they are treated, it is better to give up dairy products.

ROZIN: Well, the same holds for meat. If cows are raised in an open field, and killed humanely, one might feel it is morally okay to eat them. Of course, we don't care about that for pigs, because we will never eat them, but I feel bad for pigs that are mistreated.

RUBY: Well, I just don't like killing animals so we can eat them. I don't like cutting their lives short, but I can understand that some would feel it is okay to eat cows if they were treated well before being killed. But back to milk, you don't know how dairy cows are treated, unless it is your cow, or it is from a farm you know, so why not just stop eating dairy products?

ROZIN: Maybe. At this rate, there may soon be nothing left for me to eat. You kill a plant when you eat it, except for fruit. Eating, by its nature, involves killing living things.

RUBY: There are some people who worry about that, but I don't. Fruitarians, of which there aren't many, will only eat the fruit, seeds, nuts and things like that because that doesn't involve killing the plant.

ROZIN: So they think it is OK to "sterilize" a plant, but not to kill it. That's a questionable distinction.

RUBY: It is always difficult to make distinctions like this. That's why we have the Talmud to think it all through over the centuries. And we vegans and vegetarians can profit from that.

ROZIN: OK. Look, I will cut back on dairy products, especially because of the separation of the mother cow from her calf. But I will eat eggs. I know you are going to tell me about the crowding and cruel treatment of chickens, but some of them are probably treated well, and since I can't tell, I will just consume the eggs. And I think they are not fertilized, so I am not going to kill future chickens. Maybe commercial chickens are happy with their food, medical care, and when they are prevented from pecking and hurting each other.

RUBY: But they may be deprived of natural social interactions. There is probably more potential pecking damage because they are kept in such crowded conditions, where they often don't even have enough space to turn around. That's another long argument. Very long. We don't have Talmudic wisdom to tell us what to do about eggs or milk, so we have to figure it out on other grounds. But not harming animals is a basic principle.

ROZIN: I personally think that not harming animals is important, but I don't think you can find anything in the Hebrew Bible that says humans should be kind to animals, that they should treat animals better than plants.

RUBY: That may be true. There is some disagreement about that by biblical scholars, and there are some references to being kind to animals in the Talmud.

The old texts may not say anything about being kind to animals, but not all of our morality comes from the Bible.

ROZIN: What about insects? There are a lot of different cultures where people enjoy eating them.

RUBY: I haven't eaten insects, and can't say I've ever given it much thought.

ROZIN: Well, they are technically animals, and maybe they feel pain. That's a big issue for you.

RUBY: Yes, that would be an issue. Because they're so small, if they do feel pain, eating half a pound of them instead of half a pound of beef or chicken might cause even more suffering.

ROZIN: But the Torah says it is okay to eat a few kinds of insects. Leviticus 11:21–23: “Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth. Even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust after his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind. But all other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an abomination unto you.”

RUBY: Yes, I guess I knew that, though of course insects have six legs. But from the language in Leviticus, we don't know precisely what the species were. And of course, these species were in the Middle East, not the United States.

ROZIN: That's pretty technical, but it is in the Torah. I think I would eat locusts, grasshoppers and beetles, at least out of curiosity, to see if they tasted good.

RUBY: There are about a million species of insects. You think that because the Torah allows the consumption of four species, you can eat any of them? And then there is the pain issue for insects, but I will admit, that in terms of the environmental costs, insects are a lot better than cows or chickens.

ROZIN: So here's what I'm going to do. I don't want to hurt mammals or birds. Certainly, I don't want to kill them. So I won't eat them, with the protection of the 1/60th rule, so I can still survive, and don't have to worry about contamination. But I will eat road kill and waste meat because that doesn't involve my participation in killing. And as a reward to myself, I will allow myself to have some really good beef or chicken once in a while, like at a very good restaurant. And maybe fewer dairy products... but I keep thinking of Hindus. They revere cows and don't kill or eat them, but they consume a *lot* of dairy. Indians eat more yogurt than any other country. Maybe they treat their dairy cows well, I guess they must, because they are sacred. So I think I could eat yogurt in India, and in some cases, dairy in the USA.

RUBY: You may be right.

ROZIN: But you know, if everyone starts drinking skim milk, then cream will become a waste product, so I would be able to eat whipped cream and some ice cream. That would be great.

RUBY: Only if you could call cream a waste product. You see how complicated this is— can I eat this, can I eat that? We don't have this problem with the laws of Kashrut. You know, as far as observing Kashrut, if you follow the laws, your life is straightforward, and you are not always worrying if it is okay to eat something. As my friend and colleague, Reb Levi Haskelevich has told me, it is easier to be 100% orthodox than 90% orthodox. If 90%, you are always worrying about

which 10% you will allow. And I would say that the two stages of rejecting animal foods that are most stable, most free of constant decision problems, are vegetarian and vegan.

ROZIN: I get it. And you are going to say, for being a moral vegetarian, it is better to go 100% and be a vegan. Then it is just no animals or animal products, with some rule about unintentional traces. It's easy to make food decisions. It is easier to be 100% vegan than a 90% vegan. Why worry about what you can eat?

RUBY: You know a small group of Rabbis now believe the intent of the Bible is to eliminate animal product eating, and that's why there are so many complicated meat and dairy rules. The simplest way to keep kosher is just not to eat dairy or meat. Vegan food is kosher, and vegan restaurants are kosher. There is now a growing movement for religious vegan Jews in Israel, making up about 5% of the population, the largest vegan incidence in any country. 100% vegan is 100% kosher, and you don't have to worry about mixing meat and milk, or have separate dishes for meat and milk.

ROZIN: But I still feel okay eating waste meat, some insects, eggs, and a little dairy. Just as a special treat, once in a while, I might eat a delicious piece of meat or some ice cream... of course, not at the same time. And there won't be too many hard decisions, because it is easy to distinguish animals from plants.

RUBY: Okay, your choice. But that treat does involve killing an animal. And, every time this opportunity arises, you have to *think* about whether it is okay to treat yourself and kill.

ROZIN: Yes, it is a weakness, but I eat less than 1/60th of the meat I used to eat!

RUBY: Hah! I have been making you feel bad every time you come by, but I want you to feel good about what you have done. You are doing even more to make the world a better place, over and above saving animal lives and avoiding animal mistreatment. You know that recently, there has been a lot of attention to the idea of sustainability. The earth's population is growing, and we will need food to feed everyone. That means resources and land. And meat is a very expensive way to feed people. It takes about 8 pounds of corn to get one pound of beef. Now beef meets all of our needs for a range of amino acids, the components of protein. Corn does not meet those needs, nor do beans. But corn and beans together provide a satisfactory "profile" of required amino acids, and they are the staples of traditional Mexican cuisine.

ROZIN: But I, like most people, maybe even Mexicans, like beef better than corn and beans. So once again, there is the pleasure issue.

RUBY: Yes, but if you are a vegetarian or vegan for reasons of compassion, a positive side effect is that you are helping the environment.

ROZIN: It's like a free add-on. A positive side effect. I'm for the environment. I like the idea of a positive side effect.

RUBY: Right, and more and more, the sacrifice of pleasure is less and less. First of all, many vegetarians and vegans get to dislike the taste of meat. Second, modern society is getting better and better at making plant foods that taste like meat. Now that doesn't work for me, because I find imitation meats disgusting, but you really love meat. They make stuff from plant proteins that really looks and

smells like meat. It has the texture of meat, and much of the flavor. And now, they can get bacteria to make heme, a blood component that imparts a meat flavor. There are some entirely plant-based “burgers” you can buy now that taste just like meat. And this is just the beginning. It’s going to get easier and easier to be a vegetarian. If you’re kosher, you will be able to have something that looks and tastes like a grilled cheese with bacon and lobster sandwich, but is entirely made from plants!

ROZIN: What about cultured meat? No animal is killed, just a sampling of some muscle cells.

RUBY: That’s a real challenge for vegans. If they find meat disgusting or bad tasting, cultured meat would be of no use. But for compassion and the environment, it should be fine. Cultured pork muscle might be an attractive option for some vegans, but for kosher Jews, it is a definite no. Their issue is not compassion or the environment, but that pork is spiritually and inherently bad. Same with beef for the Hindus. There are many motivations for meat avoidance. Meat eating is really psychologically complicated.

ROZIN: Okay, I have made some substantial changes in my diet, motivated by compassion for animals and concern for the environment. But I want to push back a little, moving on from my example of cultured meat. A big question is whether the aim of vegans is reducing animal suffering and avoiding killing, and improving the environment, or just not eating any animal products. Cultured meat would save animal lives. Consider a predator animal that is killing many herbivores. Killing it would save animal lives, and then eating it should be okay. Is it even possible to be a pure vegan, given all the problems of contamination? You could make vegan contamination rules, as in the kosher tradition, but why should you? The Hebrew view is that pork is inherently polluting, but that is not the vegan view for animal products. Trace contaminants have no significant impact on animal lives or suffering or on the environment. So cutting out 99% of animal products is almost the same as cutting out 100%, and it is a lot harder to cut out 100% than 99%. Purity is really hard to achieve, with minimal gain and great cost.

RUBY: These are good points that I frankly hadn’t considered.

ROZIN: And then there is the question of “what is meat?” Insects are animals, related to crabs, lobster, and shrimp. Eating insects, and farming them, could save many other animal lives, and be good for the environment.

RUBY: Well, insects may have some virtues as a human food. They are often seen as disgusting, but disgust can be overcome, and if they don’t suffer, this is an arguable point from the vegetarian perspective.

ROZIN: And finally, you point out that if Orthodox Jews became vegan, they could abandon all the rituals involving animal products, like not mixing meat and dairy, and even having separate dishes for meat and dairy. But these rituals have meaning, they connect us to our ancestors, and are expressions of our membership in our tradition. Food is a lot more than nutrition and pleasure, it is about identity, social interaction, moral values, and for many people, spiritual beliefs. My Judaism is very important to me, and I do not want to abandon the rituals that connect me to it.

RUBY: Okay, I get it. Meat is really complicated. This is just a first chapter in our discussions. We will have to continue to get to the meat of the matter.

General discussion

The above dialogue raises many issues about meat consumption and avoidance. We discuss them here out of the dialog context, to identify some fundamental issue and conflicts, and address some strategies to improve animal welfare and promote environmental sustainability. Across the world, meat is one of the most preferred and one of the most prohibited foods. This is true in both traditional and modern Western cultures (e.g., Fessler & Navarette, 2003; Rozin, 2004). The chemo-sensory attraction of meat is similar across most cultures, and at least in Western cultures, across millennia. But the problematic aspects, which motivate the prohibitions, have changed over the millennia, especially in the last 50 years. The compassionate component of meat avoidance, the discomfort about animal suffering and the killing of animals, has almost certainly been present for millennia. The health concerns are modern, rising to prominence in about the last 50 years. The articulated environmental concerns are even more recent, and appear to be rapidly spreading (e.g., Fox & Ward, 2008; Rosenfeld, 2018; Ruby, 2012). However, the spiritual concerns were predominant in biblical times, and are present in many traditional cultures. In the rabbi dialog we have presented, we see the contrast between an ancient, specific set of spiritually-based meat prohibitions, and the modern, morally-motivated movement to reduce or eliminate meat intake. The compassion and more abstract world-oriented environmental concerns are not present in the Hebrew scriptures. It is the word of God that establishes the Hebrew meat prohibitions, and consumption of the prohibited animals acts against the soul, spiritually polluting the self.

We highlight in the rabbi dialog two problems with most prohibitions. One is defining the category of prohibited foods. For example, are insects meat? Is there a sense in which a plant-based imitation meat that looks and tastes like meat belongs in the “meat” category? The second is the universal problem of micro-contamination. The Hebrew Bible sets up rules about this, but vegetarians and vegans have to invent, perhaps with advice from others, what the operative rules are. To what extent do vegetarians and vegans actually make up their own, perhaps idiosyncratic contamination rules, and to what extent do they just decide in the moment when they face a contamination issue? Alternatively, how do personal links between vegetarians and vegans, or organizations or communities of vegetarians or vegans, locally construct rules that apply to their group?

The dialogue illustrates how the two laws of sympathetic magic bear directly on Kosher practices, and also on the path to vegetarianism (Rozin & Nemeroff, 2002). The opening scene of the dialog has to do with whether the appearance of violating the kosher laws (non-dairy cheese on meat) is itself a violation. The law of similarity holds that “the image equals the object – if it *looks* like a tiger, it *is* a tiger.”

Although there is a suggestion in Jewish law that this holds, in fact, Orthodox Jews differ on whether it is acceptable, for example, to consume vegetarian bacon bits (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1992). Similarly, it is our observation that vegetarians differ on the acceptability of imitation meat (“looks like meat, is meat”). Of course, the law of similarity is highly adaptive in the ancestral environment, and operates in animals as well as humans. It is only in the modern era, with an abundance of images, that the operation of the law is problematic. The last ten tigers you saw were almost certainly images of tigers.

The law of contagion holds that once in contact, always in contact. When two objects come into physical contact, there is a transfer of essence from one to the other. So far as we know, this is a uniquely human cognition, but it is present in hunter-gatherers and subsistence agriculturalists (Apicella, Rozin, Busch, Watson-Jones, & Legare, 2018). Because of issues of micro-contamination, the enactment of this law is problematic, since molecular levels of contamination are ubiquitous (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994). Here, the Kosher laws address the problem directly with the 1/60th rule, whereas the budding vegetarian has to improvise, as we have discussed. An interesting question here is whether Orthodox Jewish vegetarians “import” the kosher dietary rules to help them deal with issues like contamination. Informal interviews with a few such individuals suggest to us that in general, they do not import these rules, but more systematic study is warranted.

The avoidance of meat, for spiritual, health, compassionate, or environmental reasons, is opposed primarily by the pleasure most people get from consuming meat. At one level, giving up meat is like giving up cigarettes: there are positive hedonic forces on one side, and less proximal forces on the other side. In both cases, there is a long-term health concern, which is better documented and more extreme for smoking. But the liking for cigarettes must overcome an initial aversion, whereas for meat, there is probably some innate appeal. Most critically, the forces acting against liking for meat are much more diverse than those against cigarette smoking, and include at least three types of moral forces (compassion, spiritual/divine, and environmental; see Ruby, 2012, and Rosenfeld, 2018 for an overview).

There are two major reasons to study the development of vegetarianism in individuals. One has to do with understanding moral decision making, and a second, more practical reason, is to promote more prosocial behavior with respect to animal welfare and the environment. First, becoming a vegetarian is a very apt arena in which to investigate the conflict between pleasure and other motives (health and/or moral). It is particularly interesting because one’s own health can be a powerful motivation, but is qualitatively different from the moral concerns about divine commandments, animal welfare, or environmental sustainability. One would expect that the nature of the opposition to pleasure would have implications for how the vegetarian pathway is negotiated. Clearly, a vegetarian motivated primarily by health concerns would experience a major change in diet if research uncovered that eating meat was actually very healthy, but this discovery would likely have minimal influence on a vegetarian primarily motivated by moral concerns. Attitudes to meat and meat preferences may manifest in different ways: for example, morally

motivated vegetarians are more likely to find meat disgusting, and hence internalize their meat avoidance, than are health motivated vegetarians (Rozin, Markwith, & Stoess, 1997). Of course, many vegetarians have multiple motives (e.g., Amato & Partridge, 1989; Rosenfeld, 2018; Rozin et al., 1997; Ruby, 2012).

Most critically, on the pathway to moral vegetarianism or veganism, what are the more common strategies, and what is the role of social forces and informal norms? We suspect, because vegetarianism and veganism minimize eating conflicts, that they are the most common “stopping” points on the moral meat rejection trajectory, but this is, of course, an empirical question (see Amato & Partridge, 1989; see also Piazza et al., 2015, for some supporting evidence). The moral meat trajectory offers moral psychology a very dynamic arena, with many instances of morally-laden choices made on a daily basis, and in the absence of an agreed set of laws or rules.

Every possible bite of food can have moral consequences. People have to find ways to negotiate this so they are not confronting moral dilemmas so many times a day. The Hebrew dietary laws, motivated by divine commandments, provide an articulated, scripted base for meat prohibitions. The problem of contamination is explicitly articulated, and boundary rules are established. There is variation, of course, in degree of orthodoxy, but the dietary laws are established early in life. The situation for the beef avoidance of approximately a billion Hindus is similar, though the contamination rules are less articulated. It is not a matter of compassion or health, but rather a divine conception of life that includes reincarnation. Some of the same doctrines that support beef avoidance are generalized, for hundreds of millions of Hindus (about half of the world’s vegetarians) to rejection of all meat (Caplan, 2008; Preece, 2008; Spencer, 1993).

Psychologically, the more interesting situation is the often gradual avoidance of meat, as illustrated in Reb Rozin’s journey toward vegetarianism. There are moral dilemmas all along the path, often starting with a rejection of meat of (baby) mammals (see also Piazza, this volume). At each “stage,” there are boundary issues (what is a baby, what is a mammal, what about levels of contamination?). Amato and Partridge (1989) began to sketch out the stages of becoming a morally motivated vegetarian, but we do not yet know in any detail how the mental conflicts and boundaries are negotiated at each stage in the vegetarian journey. Our recent work (Ruby, Rozin, Gendelman, Li, & Peelish, in prep; Ruby, Quai Hoi, & Rozin, in prep) suggests that a first stage is what we call *conflicted omnivores*. These are people who feel bad about eating meat (for moral and/or health reasons) but continue to consume it. This may be followed by reduction in amount consumed (see Reb Rozin), or in the categorical rejection of certain types of animal food.

The second reason for studying the development of vegetarianism is to facilitate discovering strategies for decreasing meat intake, a practical result which will benefit animals and the planet. There are “how to” books that present a stage of actions that will lead to the goal of vegetarianism or veganism (e.g., Fraser, 2007; Greger, 2015). We hope they are more successful than diet books oriented toward weight loss. A growing numbers of authors are also making the case for incremental solutions, such as substantial reductions in meat intake, and have drawn

attention to the difficulties of truly being a “100% pure” vegan (e.g., Kateman, 2017; McWilliams, 2015; see also Leenaert, this volume). The Hebrew dietary laws, the Muslim avoidance of pork, and the Hindu prohibition of beef, along with the fact that roughly half of the world’s vegetarians are Hindu, offer one mode of decreasing meat intake, but each of these depends on religious beliefs. For the less religious or secular world, ways of reducing meat intake are less likely to be divinely inspired, but can be, and often are, deeply moral (Rosenfeld, 2018; Ruby, 2012). Raising consciousness about the moral costs of eating meat provides one avenue, along with providing more and more sensory appealing meat substitutes. Of course, as we have noted for orthodox Jews, plant-based imitations of pork may only be effective for those who do not behave in accord with the law of similarity. Furthermore, we should never underestimate the power of social pressure in influencing food choice, which is emerging in some groups of Westerners, and is already present in much of Hindu India (e.g., Appadurai, 1981; Caplan, 2008; Nandy, 2004).

We consider the documentation of, and the understanding of, the process of becoming vegetarian or vegan as a major project, an important way of understanding moral change in moral psychology, a fundamental aspect of understanding the relationship of humans to their food, and an important contribution to the creation of a world that is kind to all animal life and is sustainable. We will need to learn from many sources and disciplines; this chapter represents the blending of information from ancient biblical sources and scholarly work on the modern dilemmas concerning meat consumption. We are just beginning to approach the meat of this very important problem.

Note

- 1 In some Jewish traditions, it is a convention to refer to the higher power as “G-d” in written form, because of an interpretation of Deuteronomy 12:3, in which Jews were instructed not to erase or deface the Name of God. By only writing the name in an incomplete form, this precludes anyone else from later defacing the name.

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