

(Dvar Torah continued from front page...)

so bitterly about missing meat that God sent enough quail to kill them (Bemidbar 11:4-34).

With the building of the Mishkan and institution of the sacrifices, the consumption of meat was both limited, and elevated, further. One could only eat the meat of certain kosher animals (see Vayikra 11 Parashat Shmini, and Devarim 14:3-21 in our parashah), and only then when bringing them as a *korban shelamim* (peace offering) - the main course of a shared holy meal with the priests and God. And to the prohibition of consuming blood, the Torah added the prohibition of eating meat with milk - like blood, another symbol of life.

With everything trending in that direction, it may seem odd that in our parashah we find a verse that widens the consumption of meat. Deuteronomy 12:20 says "When the LORD your God expands your borders, as he has promised you, and you say, 'I shall eat some meat', because you long to eat meat; you may eat meat whenever you wish." We might have expected this to mean that altars would be set up throughout Israelite territory so that one would not have to travel to bring and consume sacrificial meat. But with the Torah's preference for a single sacrificial center, and its repeated injunctions not to do as the idol worshipers had done and build multiple altars, meat-eating becomes disconnected from sacrifices. Slaughtered properly, meat can be eaten whenever and by whomever.

And that brings us to today. There is a strong Torah-case to be made for vegetarianism as God's preferred way for us to eat. At the same time, the concession God makes to our nature seems to reflect the deep desire many people have to eat meat, and the great satisfaction they get from it. But even if we accept the latter argument, the rules of kashrut and the connection of meat-eating to Temple worship call upon us not to eat meat casually or with abandon.

This can express itself in any number of ways. There are many who, in imitation of Rav Kook, only eat meat on Shabbat. There are others who are particularly careful about the treatment of the animals when they are being raised, transported, and slaughtered. More humane treatment raises the price of the meat they consume, leading them to eat meat more rarely. Still, others try to stay conscious of what they are eating by witnessing or even conducting the ritual slaughter themselves. At the Conservative Yeshiva, multiple students study each year with Rabbi Shlomo Zacharow to do proper *shechita* (kosher slaughter).

When the Torah permits us to eat meat "*b'chol avat nafshecha*" (Devarim 12:20-21) we can translate it, as some do, to mean "to our heart's content." But we can also see in the Torah's use of "*nefesh*" (soul) as the source of this desire, a hint to bring a greater degree of soulfulness and elevated consciousness to our consumption.



## TORAH SPARKS

### Parashat Re'eh

#### Shabbat Rosh Hodesh

August 31, 2019 | 30 Av 5779

Annual (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17): Etz Hayim p. 1061-1084; Hertz p. 799-818

Triennial (Deuteronomy 15:1-16:17): Etz Hayim p. 1076-1084; Hertz p. 811-818

Haftarah (Isaiah 66:1-24,23): Etz Hayim p. 1085-1087; Hertz p. 818-819

## D'var Torah: All Your Soul Desires

*Rabbi Andy Shapiro Katz, Conservative Yeshiva Director of Engagement*

One of the great pleasures of visiting Israel for many kosher-keepers is the ready availability of kosher meat and meat restaurants. Whether we're talking about high-end cuisine or street food, the quality, variety, and value in Israel put Manhattan, Teaneck, Paris, Los Angeles, and Miami to shame. The poultry is raised locally, but the vast quantity of red meat on offer is a mix of domestically raised sheep and cattle and imports from South America or Central/Eastern Europe. Whereas in the past meat was likely to appear only for Shabbat and holiday meals, as Israel has developed into a wealthier country, meat consumption has gone up dramatically, even as Israelis continue to love their fresh fruit and vegetables.

But despite Israeli and Jewish love for meat, our Torah is far more ambivalent. A simple reading of Bereishit reveals that God's plan had been for humans and animals to eat the yield of seed-bearing plants and trees, and "every green herb." (Bereishit 1:29-30). It is only after the world has fallen so completely and God brings a flood to wipe it out that Noah and his family are given permission to eat meat. But this concession, perhaps necessary to keep humans from eating each other, came with the caveat not to eat either blood or limbs torn from a living animal. This move acknowledged our animal nature and placed us at the top of the food chain, but it also sought to "humanize" our consumption as well.

**Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center for Conservative Judaism**

Agron Street 8 • P. O. Box 7456 • Jerusalem, Israel 94265

Tel: 972-2-625-6386 • israel@uscj.org • uscj.org • conservativeyeshiva.org

(Dvar Torah continued on back page...)

We see meat again being given as a concession when the Israelites were in the desert. God wanted the Israelites to eat only the manna, but they complained

## D'var Haftarah: Miraculous Birth

*Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

Since Rosh Hodesh is on Shabbat, the cycle of the seven haftarot of consolation is broken with the reading of the special haftarah for Shabbat Rosh Hodesh. The haftarah which would have been read this Shabbat will be combined with the haftarah which will be read on Shabbat Ki Tetze since the two haftarot are adjoined in the book of Isaiah. The haftarah that we read this Shabbat is, nevertheless, considered appropriate to the theme of consolation since it also includes a message of redemption.

The miracle of birth is a common redemptive theme, and, how much more so, the experience of a miraculous birth. The redemptive activities which accompanied the return from Babylonian exile are described in those terms: "Before she labors, she gives birth, before the birth pangs come upon her, she delivers a boy. Who heard the likes of this, who has seen things like these? Can a land go through a birth in a single day, can a nation be born in a single breath? For Zion went into labor, gave birth to her children. Shall I cause labor and not bring about birth? said the Lord. Shall I bring about birth and block the womb? Said your God." (66:7-9)

The miracle of sudden birth is used here as a message to the mother, "Zion", the symbolic name of the Judean homeland, as a sign that its redemption will be quick like a sudden birth. Even more remarkably, the birth would be without birth pains. This, coupled with the idea that the redemption would be inevitable, mark it as miraculous. (S. Paul, Isaiah 40-66, Mikra L'Yisrael, pp. 562-4)

Birth is a miraculous wonder but it is not without its tedium, hard work and pain. Still, it is a wonder of the human condition that once it is done, humans are conditioned to set the latter aside. This is why we can imagine the wonders of birth without all of the toil associated with it. The prophet is asking his audience to think of the "rebirth" of the nation that way.

Historical processes tend to grind away in a slow and methodical way, much like childbirth. It is hard to see and/or sense the miraculous nature of events, especially when they take place in the actual hard work of transformation. The prophet is asking those involved in the return from Babylonia to look at the events they are living through poet eyes and to allow themselves to feel its miraculous nature.

We are not trained today to have the eyes of a poet, to see the miraculous in the banal drudgery of the details of life. Still, the making of a nation out of the ruins of what once was but had been destroyed, even with all the debates and battles, all of the conflicts and setbacks, the anxiety over the moral dilemmas of founding a

nation is still a miracle of mythic proportions. The prophet urges us not to lose sight of this.

## Parashat Re'eh Self-Study

*Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

This parashah is full of various topics that touch life as it will be conducted once we enter the land and have a central religious/cultic place of practice for both public and private events.

- 1) Once the people enter the land, they will spread out over a large area. Nonetheless, they are commanded to come 'to the place that the LORD will choose' to bring their various gifts and sacrifices (12:4,11,18). What are the benefits of a central shrine?
- 2) If a prophet arises with the message 'let us worship other gods' and accompanies this message with signs that come true, we are not to listen to that prophet (13:2-6). Why does God not prevent the prophet from misleading us?
- 3) 2 sets of laws are placed next to each other; those pertaining to forbidden bodily signs of mourning and those of animals forbidden to eat (14:1-21). Both state 'for you are a holy nation to the LORD your God.' How does that explain the rationale of these Mitzvot?
- 4) The source of the Mitzvah of Tzedaka is found in 15:7-11. 'If there is among you a needy-person, from one of your brothers, in one of your gates, in your land...' Why does the Torah stress the closeness of this person to us?
- 5) Shavuot and Succot are presented here as harvest holidays (16:9-17). We are commanded to be happy together with our families and the Levite, the sojourner, the orphaned and the widow. Why is special attention called to include these people in our festivities at a harvest holiday?

*At the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem, we offer students of all backgrounds an opportunity to engage with Jewish texts in a dynamic, inclusive, and collaborative environment. We help students gain the skills necessary for Jewish learning and spiritual growth as individuals and in their communities in North America, Israel, and around the world.*