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Spring-Summer 1999 / 5759

# *Shabbat Shalom*

*Eating and Drinking*

*The purpose of this journal is “to promote a climate of respect, understanding and sharing between Jewish and Christian communities; not only for the exercise of love and appreciation of the other, but also for the discovery of truths and values which surpass the genius of both traditions.”*

*This is the hope dreamed in the name of our journal, SHABBAT SHALOM: hope of reconciliation, hope of SHALOM, inspired and nurtured through a common reflection anchored in the experience of the SHABBAT.*

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### Shabbat Shalom

A Journal of Jewish-Christian Reflection

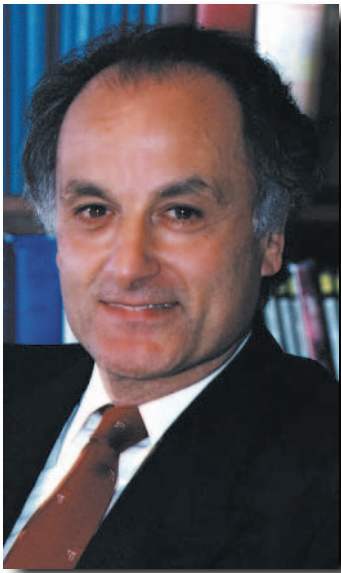
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Vol. 46, No. 1

## Eating and Drinking with God



Jacques B. Doukhan, D.H.L., Th.D.

**I**t is striking to see that at each stage of Revelation humans have been tested for their commitment to God through their submission to dietary laws. The only commandment Adam received in the garden of Eden was about a food distinction; it concerned the fruit he was “freely given” to eat and the fruit he was not allowed to eat. When Noah went out of the Ark, he was forbidden to consume blood. Because of their intimacy with the sacred, Jewish priests were to abstain from any alcoholic drinks. Later at Sinai, the Israelites received through Moses a series of dietary laws concerning

clean and unclean animals.

Biblical religion, whether it concerns the ordinary daily life or the high moments of a Jewish festival, is marked with food and drink or even with fasting or abstinence. The lessons from these unexpected duties are highly significant. The lesson is first of all religious. Through these laws the meal becomes a Mizvah, the table stands out as an altar and God is closer to humans; as they eat and drink to sustain themselves, they realize that they owe their biological existence to their Creator. The lesson is also ethical. These restrictions teach men and women to discipline them-

selves, respect life, dominate their persons, to submit their bodies and their appetites to the Spirit. But beyond religion and ethics, these laws contain a lesson about the nature of humankind. The spiritual and moral domains are related to the physical one. The health of the body is a spiritual requirement.

In this special issue of *Shabbat Shalom*, a professional dietitian, a rabbi, a theologian who specialized in biblical laws about food, and also a Jewish husband and wife involved in the business of kosher foods are sharing their reflections about what it means to be eating and drinking with God.



# Interview

## Rabbi Jonathan Tabachnikoff



**S** *habbat Shalom*\*: Eating and drinking food plays an important role in Judaism. Why?

**Tabachnikoff:** It seems that every Jewish holiday and event has special foods that are linked to it. The food complements the occasion and adds to the emotion and atmosphere in much the same way music and dancing and, at times, the lighting of a memorial candle might create the full feeling and experience of a Holocaust Remembrance week or Purim which we both recently celebrated. On a happy occasion we might have

cookies or special cakes. For example, on our New Year, we have apples and honey; on other occasions, we go so far as to fast and refrain from eating anything at all. The contrast is significant—fasting versus having

*The food complements the occasion and adds to the emotion and atmosphere in much the same way music and dancing . . .*

something sweet to add to our celebration. But there are many events where part of our tradition is not only to come to synagogue to worship as a community and to be a part of ritual celebration, but also to have a festive meal. It is a celebration and a gathering where we sit at a table together and we eat. It makes our celebration full and it brings it home, literally, into our kitchens and our dining rooms and makes it accessible for everyone.

***Shabbat Shalom:*** How would you describe or define the Jewish philosophy of eating and drinking?

Rabbi Jonathan Tabachnikoff is a Reform Rabbi at the Temple Sinai of Glendale, California. He grew up in Miami, FL as the son of a Reform Rabbi. He did his undergraduate work at Brandeis University in Waltham, MA and most recently graduated from the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, OH. He married a fellow classmate who is now also a Rabbi in Northridge, CA—Debbie Till. They were both ordained in June of 1998.

*As a child I remember as holidays would approach my mother would sit and make dough with us. We would sit in the kitchen and make triangle cookies for Purim and potato pancakes for Hanukkah.*

**Tabachnikoff:** I would say that there is a twofold or two-pronged approach to eating within Judaism. On the one hand, I think that it is taken very seriously because of all the traditions; some of them are more serious than others—but passed down still from generation to generation. For some people these traditions are taken very seriously because in their home it was the law: “it has to be this way because it always has been and because my mother was told by her mother that it had to be this way and my father told me, so it always is.” At the same time, it is not at all serious—it is a part of our celebration and our festivities. As a child I remember as holidays would approach my mother would sit and make dough with us. We would sit in the kitchen and make triangle cookies for Purim and potato pancakes for Hanukkah. We had huge parties in our home and I always remember that our house would smell like frying latkas for weeks because we would keep making them and making them endlessly. But in eight nights of parties people would eat a great deal! In my home growing up there was a certain smell that I associate with Shabbat. There was something different when I came home on Fridays from any other day of the week. I would walk into the house and there was that smell—sometimes it would be chicken, sometimes it would be brisket, but it filled the entire house. On any other night we

could have whatever, maybe take-out or maybe cooking, but Friday was always special and that smell was the first reminder that I wasn’t coming home to watch television or to go out to play, but today I needed to do homework and do whatever else needed to be done and then take a shower and get dressed because there was probably company coming and then it would be Shabbat. So food played a significant role in informing my family and me that a holiday was approaching so that we would see it on the calendar and perhaps prepare for it and buy something or have clothes cleaned so that we would have something to wear. But also one would go shopping for a meal and start cooking and preparing a meal and preparing yourself. I think that is part of “gastro-nomic Judaism.”

**Shabbat Shalom: Is the food only related to health issues?**

**Tabachnikoff:** The food is in no way related to health issues from the Jewish legal side. The laws were given in order for the Jews to follow. The laws were not given, *per se*, in order for the

Jews to be healthy. They were given as commandments. And those who are commanded must obey the commandments. And the rationale is that you obey because you are commanded by a commander. It is a sign of respect to obey those commandments. The issue of health is one that I consult a physician or a dietitian to find out how I can eat more healthy foods in my diet while observing my dietary laws and needs. So I try to incorporate those two ideas together as best as I can. But the health aspect of diet comes from physicians and dietitians. The Jewish legal command and commandments are totally separate when it comes to motivation. Linking the two is something that we have to struggle with but linking the health aspects to the commander of the commandments is something that I think we need to be careful not to allow.

**Shabbat Shalom: What are your religious practices in regard to food and drink? Could you justify or explain them?**

**Tabachnikoff:** My wife and I keep a kosher home. We buy all of our meat and dairy products from a kosher market or kosher butchers. Our groceries come from regular grocery stores but are packaged, sealed and labeled as being kosher. Sometimes it is a struggle to see something and think “I wish that I could have that sauce because I know I love that sauce” but it is

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not kosher, so I have to run around make phone calls and the odds are that if there is nothing in the sauce that is prohibited, there is another company somewhere that makes another brand of that same product that is kosher. Sometimes it is a little extra work and a little extra running, but I am getting good at it.

**Shabbat Shalom:**  
**Why are some animals clean and others unclean?**

**Tabachnikoff:** It gets back to the same question that you asked before about health with regards to the commandments about what we eat and how we eat. It is an unfair question to pose in the same regard. God commanded laws. The laws dictate that we eat only certain kinds of animals with certain qualifications. For example, a land animal must have split hooves and must chew its cud. If it doesn't meet these two requirements then it cannot be kosher. If it does meet these requirements it must be butchered according to Jewish law. There are different laws for seafood: they have to have fins and scales and those fish can be killed and do not need a ritual slaughter. But any kind of land or sea animal that does not meet these criteria simply do not meet them and cannot be kosher. Some animals are specified as not being clean. But it is a command and this is one of those cases where I think the answer is because God told us so and I don't think that any further rationale has any real weight

*The answer is because God told us so and I don't think that any further rationale has any real weight behind it; but I also think when it comes from such a high authority that it doesn't need any more justification.*

behind it; but I also think when it comes from such a high authority that it doesn't need any more justification.

**Shabbat Shalom:** **So it is a trust issue—that you trust God gave it for a reason?**

**Tabachnikoff:** The reason almost doesn't matter. If one holds God in ultimate authority and God says "Do this," one simply does. While one may be inclined to question and rationalize certain behaviors, I think that it is for our own benefit and a game that we play with ourselves. I don't know that we have a clue why God would command this and not that. It becomes an issue when we figure out how to make something once thought unhealthy more healthy, then suddenly the rationale disappears and people are no longer inclined to obey the commandment. The example that often comes up is with the eating of pork—why would God command us not to eat pig? Some would answer because God knew of the dangers of trichinosis. Now we know about trichinosis and we know how to prevent it and eliminate those bacteria in the meat—we simply cook it to a certain temperature and it is healthy or at least no longer a threat. So if the rationale before was do not eat this because it could make you sick and now we know how not to get sick, then rationally one should be allowed to eat that meat. That is the danger in try-

ing to rationalize a divine commandment. If the commandments are for us to follow and the rationale is because God commanded them, then there is no concern that it can be undone. The commander commands and we, who are commanded, interpret and follow in whatever way that we deem right and correct.

**Shabbat Shalom:** **Why not consume the blood?**

**Tabachnikoff:** The rabbis had, I guess we could call them, superstitions perhaps—at least beliefs that the life or the soul of the animal was contained in its very blood. There have always been particular laws and priestly rights which pertain to how the blood of sacrifices and offerings as to be drained, how they were to be offered, or how they were to be disposed of. Because the blood was thought to have life power or properties, it was something that we are not to consume. Here again, I think that the emphasis should rightly be placed on the commanded part. We are commanded not to, therefore we don't. Here there is more explanation about why it is not just that you are commanded, therefore you don't. I think it is spelled out a little bit more clearly, so because the blood is thought to have these life properties we have certain practices to try to eliminate as much blood as possible from meat before we eat it. The blood is drained as part of ritual slaughter and chicken and meat from kosher animals is then salted to extricate as much blood as possible so that as little as possible is consumed. It is still practiced today in Jewish butcher shops and in Jewish homes.

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\*This interview was conducted by Doug Hardt.

# Benjamin and Nora Atanelor



**E**ating and drinking are very important to the Jewish life, reports Nora, but not just for family time and togetherness. For those who follow Judaism more carefully, food is important primarily for the law and spirituality. “The way we eat and drink is completely related to the law and spirituality,” said Nora. “The law will keep us healthy. We must live according to the law.”

“For us, eating kosher food is a rule. Kosher food is different from other food. It is clean food.” (The dictionary definition of kosher is “prepared in accordance with Jewish dietary laws.”) Nora continued, saying, “You can iden-

tify kosher food by looking for the kosher sign on food packaging. There are two emblems. Look for the “k” or “u” in a small circle on the front of the package or label. Then you’ll know

*Kosher food is different from other food. It is clean food.*

it’s kosher.” The Atanelors said, “one doesn’t need to go to a specialty store to buy kosher food. Every store has kosher food or a kosher food section.”

All the Atanelors follow the health laws, even their grown

children who are married and on their own. “My family follows these laws because they are true.”

As we talked about the health laws the Atanelors explained some of them. For example, “the digestion system needs different amounts of time for meat and milk. We don’t eat dairy and meat together. We cook and serve them in and on separate dishes. If we eat meat then we will wait for six hours and then drink milk. This is from the Torah.”

One of the more commonly known laws is their abstinence from pork. “We eat no pigs. The law says we can’t eat animals that don’t have divided hoofs, cloven feet, and chew the cud. Pigs don’t

*Benjamin and Nora Atanelor own the Kosher Palace, a deli-grocery store in Queens, New York. The Atanelors are originally from Russia, but moved to Israel for 14 years. They moved once more to the United States and have resided here for the past 13 years.*



*Always good stuff for Sabbath. We start Friday at supper and continue through Saturday night. The whole family comes. It is wonderful.*

chew their cud. They eat everything that isn't healthy for people." Leviticus 11:7 says, "The pig, for even though it has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed, it does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean for you" (NRSV).

Another common practice is the Rabbi's inspection of the meat. "The Rabbi will go to the meat company and inspect the

we soak it for half an hour in water and then we put the meat in salt for another half an hour. The water and salt take out all the blood. Without this cleaning we eat none of it. This is the law. We will only eat at kosher restaurants for this reason," said Benjamin and Nora. Benjamin explained that the blood represents uncleanness. "Spiritually speaking, if there is no blood there is no life. We are blood and water."

And as for drinking, the Atanelors say, "It's okay as long as it's kosher. All alcohol must have the kosher sign on it. You can find it too."

The law greatly influences the Jewish eating

or another meat served with gefilte fish, stuffed cabbage, and crepe leaves with ground meal. With a big smile Nora says, "This is good stuff. Always good stuff for Sabbath. We start Friday at supper and continue through Saturday night. The whole family comes. It is wonderful."

I asked Nora if all the Jews kept the law and if they did not, what happened to them. Nora said, "The orthodox have to keep the laws. But many of the Jewish people aren't orthodox and

*I know what I am eating. I think I'm healthier. I know what I am putting in my body.*

don't keep the laws. There is no punishment for not keeping the laws. Everyone makes their own decision. Though it is preferred to follow the rules." She concluded by saying, "I know what I am eating. I think I'm healthier. I know what I am putting in my body."

As with many religions or groups there are those who follow the beliefs and there are those who don't. It appears that people are the same everywhere whether Jewish, Christian, or some other religion—some are more concerned with spirituality and practicing one's beliefs than others. May we learn from Benjamin and Nora Atanelor that beliefs exist for a reason (or in their case the law), health is important, and so is good food with your family!

\*This interview was conducted by Amy Beckworth.



meat. If he sees any sickness, damage, or a spot on the meat he will not allow it to go to the kosher butcher. If there is any damage like on the stomach or throat, we will not eat it. He also checks to see if the meat's veins are clean through the draining of blood."

"In order to have clean meat the first step is the Rabbi's inspection. The second step is that each person must clean the meat, even meat like chicken. To ensure this happening the kosher butcher makes sure the meat is accompanied with directions on how to clean the animal. What we do is

habits. But, eating also means family time, special meals, and special cuisines. For instance, one of the Atanelors' favorite meals is matzo-ball soup, which is wheat meal served with matzo crackers. Another favorite is the fried pastry-like potato treat called knish.

Sabbaths also mean special meals. A typical, traditional Sabbath meal may include chicken



# Winston J. Craig



**S** *habbat Shalom*\*: Would you tell us a little about why you agreed to be interviewed for our issue on Food and Drink?

**Craig:** In the American Dietetic Association we have about 70,000 members, and there are about 25 different practice groups, one of which is on vegetarian nutrition. The people who started those practice groups are all Jewish, and come from the Boston and Maryland ar-

reas. I've been involved in the executive committee now for about 4 or 5 years, and it's interesting to see and hear their views on vegetarian nutrition.

I don't know what brand of Judaism I'm dealing with. There are some groups that are very religious and strict, who write to companies to find out whether their ingredients have any animal origin. Even like if it's vitamin D, they want to know if it's from an animal or from

a plant source. But I think we share mostly common ground.

***Shabbat Shalom: Eating and drinking plays an important role in Adventism. Why?***

**Craig:** I think there are really two reasons it is so important for Adventists. First, Paul puts emphasis in First Corinthians, chapter 10, on present lifestyle as a preparation for the hereafter. It is also necessary for work on this earth, to reflect the image of God to others

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around us. Lifestyle must be connected to that, because you can't witness to God very effectively if you've got a migraine or a stomachache or a disk out of joint. Eating and drinking should make our mental and physical health somewhat stable, providing a strong undergirding for spiritual health and development.

Second, Ellen G. White wrote so much about tea and coffee and alcohol and a simple, balanced vegetarian diet. Her writings provided a great deal of cohesiveness for thinking about the unique lifestyle characteristics of Seventh-day Adventists.

***Shabbat Shalom:* How would you describe or define the Adventist philosophy of eating and drinking?**

**Craig:** Whenever you talk about Adventist philosophy, the general word that pops up is temperance. In the early days of Adventism temperance was the banner under which the movement rallied. Of course in those days it had specific connotations with alcohol, but I think in the modern thinking it means abstaining from those things which are detrimental to the spiritual life and physical health and being judicious about those things which are good: water, exercise, sexuality—everything in life which is important is done on a regular basis, but should be done with moderation. I wrote up this statement for one of my classes—"God wants us to be healthy and whole"—something I created for a class that gives some idea of what I think the unique Adventist perspective is on lifestyle.

***Shabbat Shalom:* So temperance isn't just about avoiding the bad things, but also includes mod-**

**eration in all of the good things?**

**Craig:** Yes. I grew up in an era when the current thinking in the church was "don't do this, don't eat this, don't go there." But today's emphasis on "wellness" as the buzzword has made a lot of younger health educators and health directors to emphasize the positive aspects of our lifestyle program—regular exercise, plant-based diet, moderation—instead of "don't do this, don't do that." The "don't do's" really run against the mentality of basic human existence. We like to be told "if you do this (instead), look how much more a successful, healthy life you can have. You can be rid of all the

. . . We're pushing more selecting a good diet and regular exercise—all the positive aspects of the health message.

We've really kind of dropped the word "temperance" from our vocabulary. What used to be known as the "Department of Health and Temperance" we now call "Adventist Health Ministries." The name seems to convey more of an attitude that health can be a ministry to our souls, our communities, and the world at large.

In my new book, *Nutrition and Wellness: A vegetarian way to better health*, the first chapter starts off with the acronym WELLNESS, basically covering the 8 natural remedies, done in such a way as to promote the positive aspects of health: Water—used internally and externally; Exercise

*When you speak about health, you can't really separate physical, mental, spiritual, and social dimensions.*

regularly; Life in proper balance; Loving relationships; Nutrition of good quality and proper quantity; Enjoy adequate rest; Sunlight and fresh air; Stress management. That's part of the approach I think a lot of us are taking today to present that we have a happy lifestyle—that God wants us to be happy. And all of the restrictions—alcohol, smoking, premarital sex, and all of that—are detrimental to being. I try to stress in my classes the idea of a "whole person." And whenever you do something bad to yourself physically, it disrupts social relationships, mental abilities, peace of mind, and spirituality. The Greek idea of seg-

menting and separating one from the other really has no basis in reality. When people have problems, they go to psychologists or nutritionists or pastors, and I think people get

the impression that life is fragmentary. But I think the biblical idea of *Shalom* integrates all of these ideas. When you speak about health, you can't really separate physical, mental, spiritual, and social dimensions. I really think that's the key to the Adventist view of health. Over 100 years ago, we had the idea of "holistic living," but I think we really dropped the ball somewhere and others picked it up and ran with it.

***Shabbat Shalom:* Is eating related only to health issues?**

**Craig:** When you eat, it's done in a social relationship and a cultural context. You can't change people's eating habits without changing their very sociocultural heritage. So, with that culture, of course, come religious connotations—the mixing of certain foods, hot/cold principles. It all becomes very complex. Food is not just eaten for strength; there's so much more. If you really want to get to

*Eating and drinking should make our mental and physical health somewhat stable, providing a strong undergirding for spiritual health and development.*

know people, you have to eat with them. I would have to say that food has to do with everything in life, really.

**Shabbat Shalom:** What are your religious practices in regard to food and drink? Can you justify your position?

**Craig:** My religious practice and my eating habits consist of following the original diet.

Man was created to live on fruits, nuts, grains, and vegetables—and the least processing of those foods as possible. It's when we process foods, extracting certain vitamins, sugars, oils—and those things are used in heavy amounts—that we have all the chronic diseases that we see today. I think if we look at the Creator and his manual, from Genesis 1, the principle seems to be simplicity, along with exercise, fresh air, sunlight—a natu-

created. So not only does a plant-based diet conserve the environment, and make more sense ethically, it's also better for you healthwise.

The leading nutritionists in the world, members of the World Health Organization, have made the statement that the optimal diet is low in fat, especially saturated (animal) fat, and high in complex carbohydrates—with an

abundance of fruits, grains, vegetables, and legumes. This diet, as opposed to a meat- and dairy-based diet, is their recommendation for the whole world. It's the consensus of all the leading nutritionists that a plant-based diet is the healthiest.

When it comes to drinking, it's fairly obvious that drinking water and fruit juice is quite harmless. But when you get into coffee, tea, and alcohol, things that Adventists have tradition-

Dragon in Disguise," which includes highway carnage, family dysfunction, high blood-pressure, and cancer among the many things that alcohol consumption can cause. If something's dangerous, it's smart to just stay away from it.

**Shabbat Shalom:** The Bible lists some animals as clean (fit for consumption) and others as unclean (unfit for consumption). Can you see any reason for this scientifically?

**Craig:** I have problems with it as a nutritionist, because when you look at all the epidemiological data about pork and beef, there's really not much difference; they're both high risk. I was just teaching this morning on diet and cancer. The latest book on this subject, *Food, Nutrition, and the Prevention of Cancer: A Global Perspective*, was published last year. It contains about 800 pages of material about how what we eat relates to the problem of cancer. It goes through all of the different cancers of the body. Continually you see meat and animal fat surfacing as two of the primary factors leading to cancer. But there's really no distinction between different kinds of meats. In fact, beef gets a worse write-up than pork in this book. So if you try to extrapolate the biblical standpoint over to scientific data, you're in trouble, because all the meats are considered problematic. Fish seems to be more on the safe side, but all the others seem to be equally damaging in terms of risk of chronic disease. So for me, it's difficult to talk about "clean" and "unclean" meats. The terms probably have more meaning than I am aware of as a nutritionist. It's probably more of a theological issue which I can't relate to as well. When it comes down to the wire, it

*If you really want to get to know people, you have to eat with them.*

*"More people die from eating too much than from eating too little . . . eat a third, drink a third, and leave a third of the capacity of the stomach empty."*

*Talmud b. Gittin 70a*

ral lifestyle as much as possible. Of course, we live in 1999, which is pretty far removed from the Garden of Eden.

I think another part of it is from the standpoint of ethics. Do we really have license to take another life, even one of an animal, just to satisfy our appetites, when a plant-based diet is better for us anyway? We can also look at it from an ecological view. Plant-based eating conserves the world's resources. That's been well documented in many places. The air would be cleaner, the water would be cleaner if we didn't eat meat. The waste from meat-processing plants and "factory farming" is just a tremendous ecological disaster, a crisis we've

ally been warned against—I think there's good evidence that the stimulatory effects of caffeine are not healthy for our already-overstimulated society. Alcohol is one of the severest depressants around and is associated with about 20 evil things. In my book there's a chapter called "Alcohol—A

*People who are committed to God will eventually ask themselves, what can I do, or what should I avoid that will make me a better servant of God or a better reflector of His love?*



really comes down to the animal's background, what it was fed, how it was medicated, its living conditions. It seems, at least today, that the safety of animal products depends on how we are producing those products.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Why does the Bible tell us not to eat the blood of an animal?

**Craig:** The only thing I can really designate is that the blood is the life current that connects the cells together. So it supplies glucose and oxygen, but it also receives all the toxic and waste products from the cells. It's also where all the infectious agents are carried. So there's just danger, in the sense that it contains all the toxic elements. I wouldn't really call it the sewer, but it's kind of like the canal that traffics around the body, picking up all of the waste products. If there is disease in one part of the body, then it is going to get transmitted to the other parts of the body through the blood. I would think that getting rid of the blood would get rid of a lot of the risk of contamination. It's more a physiological or biological question than it is a nutrition question, I think.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Do you have a special meal that characterizes Adventist cuisine?

**Craig:** That's really a cultural question, more than anything else. Even if they're all Adventists, if you were to ask an American or an African American, or a European, or an African, or a Hispanic, you'd get very different answers as to what is typical cuisine. I can tell you what I associate in my life, but even I am not fully representative of my culture within Adventism. Traditionally Adventists do eat a lot of vegetables, a lot of salad—more than

the general population. But I think that maybe the general population has caught up with us, with more people realizing the benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables against chronic disease. But the question is really too cultural to give a broad answer.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Is it a religious value to be a gourmet?

**Craig:** The idea of simplicity is typical to Adventist thinking. And usually the word gourmet is associated with richness and complexity. But if you take the real meaning of a gourmet, someone who is continually experimenting and testing and trying new frontiers, I don't think there is necessarily any religious connotation to that. Some people are just that way and like to try new things. Other people like the status quo, like more traditional foods, and don't particularly want to try anything new. But I don't think there's anything wrong with either position.

**Shabbat Shalom:** What happens if an Adventist does not follow these health rules? Does that person still remain an Adventist? Is that person "lost" to God?

**Craig:** I guess my first reaction is that we don't really have rules, as such. But we do have principles and guidelines that help us to choose. Basically the principle is that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. So we want to keep our bodies, minds and spirits in the best shape possible. People who are committed to God will eventually ask themselves, what can I do, or what should I avoid that will make me a better servant of God or a better reflector of His love? Sometime or other they will come upon lifestyle—how you dress, how you spend your time, what you watch, what you read,

whom you associate with, what you eat, what you drink. So there is a connection between spirituality and lifestyle, but there are millions of people out there who don't know about Adventist lifestyle, and who are close to God. The health message can help us to be better people. It doesn't make us better people—only God can do that. It may help us to maintain a better connection with God. Is a person who doesn't do those things lost? No. I believe that those who are reckless in eating and drinking are often reckless in morals. I think it has to do with choices, discrimination, and carefulness.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Are Adventists more healthy, better people, closer to God because of their eating and drinking?

**Craig:** I'd like to believe so. There are many elements which factor into spirituality, so I don't know about that. Certainly, the question about better health should receive an affirmative response. It's been well documented that, as a whole, Adventist men live about seven years longer (and Adventist Women about three years longer) than their non-Adventist neighbors. There are more than 265 research papers in the literature about Adventist lifestyle and its effects on health. But it's not just what we eat and drink; there are many more factors in lifestyle than just what we eat and drink.

But when it comes to spirituality, I don't really know that there's any measuring stick we can use to measure one person's spirituality against another's. So I'm not even going to go down that path.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Thank you very much for doing the interview.

**Craig:** It's been my pleasure.

*It's when we process foods, extracting certain vitamins, sugars, oils—and those things are used in heavy amounts—that we have all the chronic diseases that we*

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\* Interview conducted by Jay L. Perry.

# Jiří Moskala



**S** *habbat Shalom:* Eating and drinking plays an important role in Seventh-day Adventism. Why?

**Moskala:** Seventh-day Adventists are people of the Bible. In the Hebrew Scriptures, there is great emphasis on a relationship with God, as well as on our behavior, how to live. It is important to notice that one of the first instructions God gave to humans was in re-

spect to eating—God blessed humans, then he gave them instruc-

*The biblical dietary regulations reveal that God cares about what humans eat.*

tions about procreation, rulership, and food (Genesis

1:29). The very first command God expressed is related to eating (Genesis 2:16-17). Also in the key passages of the Bible there are references to eating or not eating in connection with the Flood, the covenant with Abraham, the gift of law on Mount Sinai, the sanctuary, etc. The same is true in the New Testament. For example, Paul encourages believers that what they eat or drink, or whatever they do,

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they should do to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

If it is for God and the writers of the Bible so significant to speak so extensively about eating, I think we need to take this matter seriously and search for its meaning. The biblical dietary regulations reveal that God cares about what humans eat.

**Shabbat Shalom: How would you describe, define, the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of eating and drinking?**

**Moskala:** The Adventist philosophy of eating is anchored in Creation. This is the theological starting point. Without this belief, in my judgment, there is no real basis for healthful living from a religious point of view. In the Bible, God is presented as our Creator. He says yes to the human body and rejoices over it. He creates and provides food. Our God is not a God of ascetics: He gives life and life abundantly. God gives us an appetite and thousands of taste buds so we can rejoice in life.

*Our God is not a God of ascetics: He gives life and life abundantly. God gives us an appetite and thousands of taste buds so we can rejoice in life.*

jeopardizes life. Because of Creation, we discern carefully what is useful for our bodies and what is harmful, what to eat and drink and what to avoid.

Of course, it is not something to practice in isolation. Humans were created holistically. Eating and drinking habits are part of the holistic biblical teaching which I would like to describe through the acronym CREATION: The letter C stands for “choice” (because right choice is the first step toward good health),

ment” (because what lies outside us also influences our mood as well as our health), the letter A stands for “activity” (because to be active physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually brings satisfaction, enjoyment, and increases our health), T stands for “trust” (because trust in God, our faith, and hope affect our happiness), the letter I is for “interpersonal” (because social life and quality interpersonal relationships are irreplaceable dimensions in our life), the letter O stands for “outlook” (because outlook colors our perspectives on life and our attitudes), and finally the letter N represents “nutrition” (because nutrition is the physical fuel that drives the whole system of our life). Thus, food plays a significant part in the holistic activities of humans. This philosophy brings together all the necessary elements for a full life.

Thus, the whole spectrum of living is important. Harmony among the elements is a goal. To cultivate a sense of humor is one of them. You cannot take yourself too seriously and live happily and healthily.

**Shabbat Shalom: Is food related only to health issues?**

**Moskala:** Not according to Hebrew Scriptures. Health is included, but it is not a primary factor. The concept of holiness is closely associated with Mosaic food laws. God’s people have to be holy as God is holy. There is also an ethical and theological element: total obedience to God. God said so, I obey because I personally know my loving and sovereign God. God provides food and says what is best for humankind. Where food is associated with idolatrous practices, biblical dietary laws form a strong wall against them. Pentateuchal

*CREATION: The letter C stands for “choice” (because right choice is the first step toward good health), the letter R is for “rest” (because proper rest and relaxation are an important remedy for stress, tiredness, and pressures of life), the letter E represents “environment” (because what lies outside us also influences our mood as well as our health), the letter A stands for “activity” (because to be active physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually brings satisfaction, enjoyment, and increases our health), T stands for “trust” (because trust in God, our faith, and hope affect our happiness), the letter I is for “interpersonal” (because social life and quality interpersonal relationships are irreplaceable dimensions in our life), the letter O stands for “outlook” (because outlook colors our perspectives on life and our attitudes), and finally the letter N represents “nutrition” (because nutrition is the physical fuel that drives the whole system of our life).*

Adventists put an emphasis on life, because Creation is about life, and food sustains life. Without it there is no life. Therefore, we want to avoid anything which

the letter R is for “rest” (because proper rest and relaxation are an important remedy for stress, tiredness, and pressures of life), the letter E represents “environ-



## *Pentateuchal food laws teach separation from wrong habits, not separation from people.*

food laws teach separation from wrong habits, not separation from people.

God provides food for people and the whole world. This is in contrast to the Mesopotamian stories in which human beings are expected to provide food for the gods.

**Shabbat Shalom: What are your religious practices in regard to food and drink? Could you justify them?**

**Moskala:** God wants our complete welfare, health, peace, and harmony. He wants us to live according to His principles of life and happiness. This is why I do not eat unclean food and do not eat blood. In the Hebrew Scriptures, God forbids the eating of unclean animals and blood. For the same reason, I do not drink alcohol, or coffee, and do not use drugs. Also, overeating and drunkenness are condemned.

According to the first Creation story, God gave a vegetarian diet to humans. No death was involved in this provision. It was life-oriented food. The principle of life along with the principle of separation presented in the second Creation account is related to right choosing among the trees of the garden of Eden and is the foundation for the theology of eating.

Originally in the Garden of Eden, God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a symbol of human limits. Only by respecting these boundaries can humans enjoy a full life. They had to respect God's decision and trust Him for what is good to eat and what is not.

**Shabbat Shalom: Why are**

**some animals clean and others unclean?**

**Moskala:** The distinction between clean and unclean animals appears only after sin, and more precisely after the Flood. There are several important factors which are involved in this distinction. To state it simply, clean animals reflect the best, the ideal of creation. Generally speaking, life is respected by them. They are vegetarians (this is the Edenic original food prescription) and their

## *Behind the Pentateuchal dietary laws is the theological Creation-Fall-New Creation pattern.*

behavior is nonviolent. They do not shed blood.

Unclean animals to the contrary are carnivorous and eat blood. They are usually wild. Some of them were used in war, or were needed as beasts of burden for transportation; they were not suitable for human consumption (think, for example, about scavengers and all insects), were

naturally repulsive, or were used in idolatrous rituals. They are far away from the ideals of the original Creation. Clean animals are linked with life, and unclean animals are tied to death. Creation is an overarching criterion for the Mosaic dietary rules.

Behind the Pentateuchal dietary laws is the theological Creation-Fall-New Creation pattern. God set the all-important life-related principles in the Garden of Eden and gave the ideal vegetarian diet instruction. Through sin the food regulations were modified, and after the Flood, flesh was allowed to be consumed by humans but not the blood, as a reminder of original life. God intended to teach humans a moral lesson of self-discipline by thoughtfully choosing what is right in the matter of eating.

In my dissertation "The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals of Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale (An Intertextual Study)," I differentiate between two basic types of uncleanness: ritual and natural. Natural uncleanness relates only to the dietary laws, and is permanent with no rituals involved. Only these laws of uncleanness belong to universal law.

**Shabbat Shalom: Why not the blood?**

**Moskala:** Blood is a symbol of life. When God permitted hu-

*It is also significant that the very first usage of alcohol in the Bible in relationship to Noah's drunkenness is very negative and associated with sexual misconduct (Genesis 9:20-24).*

*The second instance related to drinking is associated with incest (see the story of Lot and his two daughters in Genesis 19:30-38).*

*The laws of clean and unclean animals were not given to God's people in order to become holy. God made them holy. They keep these laws to stay in a right relationship with God and maintain holiness, not in order to gain it.*

mans to kill animals and eat meat, he restricted the access to life by the prohibition to eat blood. By doing that, people are showing respect for life. Hunting for pleasure is not allowed in the Bible, only the hunting or killing of animals for the purpose of food. This prohibition is valid in all ages.

In order for humans to eat flesh, they have to kill the animal. They take life. The prescription not to eat blood (it means some blood remains in the flesh) is also a reminder that a life is taken, something sacred is missing, a creature is dead which cannot be replaced. In other words, humans should feel guilty about

**Moskala:** My reason is two-fold: ethical and theological. They are complementary. I do not eat meat out of my respect for life. I do not want to kill animals. To that must be added respect for God's creation order, respect for the Creator Himself.

**Shabbat Shalom: Why don't you drink alcohol?**

**Moskala:** Alcohol is a cause of many evils. The Bible clearly speaks against alcoholism. But I do not want to use any, because it is something which can harm me, my service for God, or even my neighbor. With alcohol all three issues are involved, because it immediately attacks our thinking

strictly forbid drinking alcohol. It was only forbidden for special groups of people, such as for the priests in service, for the Nazirites, for the kings, and for the Recabites (Leviticus 10:9; Numbers 6:3; Proverbs 20:1; 23:20-21; 23:29-30; Jeremiah 35:6). But most important is to know the biblical intention in that regard. According to my understanding, it is an abstinence, even though there is no proof text for it. Because we are in the service of our Lord without break and have received a special call to live for him and represent him well, I think it is proper to abstain from the drinking of alcohol.

It is also significant that the very first usage of alcohol in the Bible in relationship to Noah's drunkenness is very negative and associated with sexual misconduct (Genesis 9:20-24). The second instance related to drinking is associated with incest (see the story of Lot and his two daughters in Genesis 19:30-38). These two first cases connected with the intake of alcohol form a negative model and give a bad impression in the Scriptures for its consumption. Let's keep in mind that in the Bible the first instance of an account is a key and usually decisive for all other usages.

Other reasons are very practical. While driving you cannot drink alcohol. It can cost you your life or the life of someone else. In our lives, we are always on the road, therefore we need to behave responsibly. I also do not want to be a bad example to my children. I want to help them not to fall into the trap of alcoholism which starts with the first drink. Could you imagine the loss of respect for me if my family would experience seeing me drunk? Why then would my children take seriously my words?



taking life and then eating animal flesh to satisfy their needs or desires. Blood is crying out that life was taken.

**Shabbat Shalom: Why are you a vegetarian?**

abilities and dulls them. So I do not drink it.

The Bible gives some directives in that line and leads to abstinence even though there is no unambiguous teaching which would

Research demonstrates that drinking is harmful to our health. Many modern studies give new evidences for that. The whole body is affected. The brain cells die in vast numbers and nothing can repair the harm caused by the intake of alcohol.

**Shabbat Shalom: Do you have a special meal that characterizes Seventh-day Adventist cuisine?**

**Moskala:** No. But I love fruit salad together with oats. I drink a lot of water and fruit juices. I eat a lot of fruit and try eating vegetables as much as possible even though I am not fond of vegetables. I eat whole-grain bread, usually baked at home by my wife and my daughters. I avoid fatty or fried food, and use sugar and salt sporadically.

**Shabbat Shalom: Is it a religious value to be a gourmet?**

**Moskala:** God created by separation. He teaches us by everyday choices to separate good from evil, good from harmful in the sphere of eating and drinking. To discern this is a crucial activity in life. In that sense it is important to be a gourmet, because God wants us to give only the best to our body.

**Shabbat Shalom: The best only for our body—what about our taste?**

**Moskala:** Taste is a wonderful gift of God. We should enjoy eating! The same is true about the smell. The natural smell of bread or fruits is extraordinary. Unfortunately, it is also easy to misuse taste. It is sad that the lives of many people are ruined because they indulge in their appetite, and taste becomes their master. But if it is guarded in right perspective, taste is one of the great and genuine joys of life! What's wrong with enjoying the taste of an apple or an orange? God's gift must be used and not denied.

**Shabbat Shalom: If a Seventh-**

## *God's law is not a rule to be obeyed, but rather a story to be lived.*

**day Adventist does not keep these rules, what happens to him? Does he still remain an Adventist? Is he lost for God?**

**Moskala:** If an Adventist does not respect these practices, he disrespects his Creator. Something very important is missing. Creation order is distorted. A right relationship with nature is also lost. Adventists are a people dedicated to God, neighbor, and nature. How can one confess to believe in God, have hope in the future, and not pay attention to His law?

We were created in God's image. Our whole being must reflect God's perfection. Therefore, we need to give glory to God in all aspects of our being including the physical one.

**Shabbat Shalom: Are Adventists in better health, better people, closer to God, because of their eating and drinking?**

**Moskala:** Better health, yes; some scientific studies prove it. Better people, not necessarily, even though the faith in the Holy One, Creator and Redeemer, should change them to be a loving and lovable people. Closer to God because of their different eating and drinking habits—no! We are not closer to God by what we eat or do not eat. Eating and drinking habits are an expression of faith.

We do not believe that we can be saved on the basis of food. We avoid certain things not in order to earn heaven, but because we are saved. Deuteronomy 14:1 stresses this truth. Using my own words, God states there: "You are my children, holy, saved, therefore do not do this." To live in

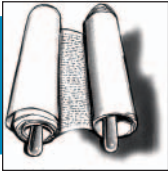
right fellowship with God means that we want to live according to our best knowledge of the revealed principles related to health and complete harmony.

The laws of clean and unclean animals were not given to God's people in order to become holy. God made them holy. They keep these laws to stay in a right relationship with God and maintain holiness, not in order to gain it. People of God should not observe these laws to obtain salvation and holiness, but they should keep them because they are saved and made holy. It is impossible to earn holiness. A person can walk in it, but cannot create it. One can lose it, but cannot form it or command it. This is beyond human reach. One may only receive it as a gift from God.

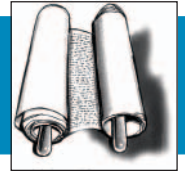
To be a Seventh-day Adventist means to have a deep relationship with God and with other people. The stress on Creation also implies the care for nature. A set table is and must be a testimony for God. It is a wordless confession of faith that we respect life and our Creator, and preserve God-given boundaries and His order.

We are what we care for. The way we express our care for our Creator and His creation shows who we are. If we care for the Creator, we care for His creation. Thus, the Mosaic dietary laws also lead us to ecological or environmental concerns. You know, God's law is not a rule to be obeyed, but rather a story to be lived.





# Hebrew Scriptures



## Eating is Holy

Jacques Doukhan, D.H.L., Th.D.

**“E**ating can be holier than fasting,”<sup>1</sup> writes Martin Buber. Because the God of Israel is the God of Creation, eating is indeed an important part of our response to Him. It is, therefore, our duty to eat and drink so that we remain alive and thus testify to the living God. It is also our duty to *enjoy* eating and drinking, because this act is the best expression of our thankfulness to the One who gave us all this food. This is just a matter of elementary politeness. To enjoy eating and drinking is saying “yes” to Creation, to mark our appreciation for God’s gift. The religion of Israel is not a religion of asceticism such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and a certain Christianity which refuses to eat and drink because they believe that by so doing they will draw closer to

their God. The God of the Bible defines Himself as the God of life, the God of all flesh. In fact, only the one who eats and drinks can worship the Lord. “*Eyn kemah ein Torah, eyn Torah ein kemah,*” says the Talmud: “No flour no *Torah*, no *Torah* no flour.” In other words, spiritual values will not be found apart from the simple physical act of eating and drinking. It is noteworthy that the first time the word “give” (*natan*) is used in the Bible it is relation to the food that God “gave” to mankind:

And God said, “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose

fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food” (Genesis 1:29).<sup>2</sup>

This is why in the Bible eating is an integral part of religious life. Every religious manifestation, every ritual, every Jewish festival is in one way or another related to eating and drinking. Still today in Jewish families, the meal is marked by prayer. In Jewish tradition, the table is viewed as an altar. Before we begin the meal, we season the *hallah* bread with salt as a reminder of the ancient sacrificial offering (Leviticus 2:13). The New Testament carries the same religious association with food. Yeshua who shares the bread with his disciples sanctifies the meal and enjoins his follow-

*To enjoy eating and drinking is saying “yes” to Creation, to mark our appreciation for God’s gift.*

## *At the time of Creation, death was not yet a part of life.*

ers to do the same. From that moment, his disciples will remember the lesson and repeat the "Lord's supper." In this tradition also, eating and drinking has become an important religious matter.

### **The Original Diet**

Now, if indeed, "eating and drinking is holy," we cannot just eat like puppies and eat just anything. The acute awareness of God's involvement in the most trivial act of human existence obliges men and women to think about what they eat. This is why the Bible goes so far as to prescribe a special diet in tune with the God above. Because He is the God of Creation, the God of life, He expects that humans follow a diet that preserves life. Therefore, the same vegetarian principle governs both human and animal behavior: "Also to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food" (Genesis 1:30). The sacredness of life is thus affirmed from the very beginning in the most fundamental act of biological life. At the time of Creation, death was not yet a part of life. Man, woman, and animals were still in a non-threatening environment. It was still the time when everything was "good" (1:10, 12, etc.) and even "very good" (Genesis 1:31). The world was "not yet" affected by evil and death. It is only when the first man and the first woman decide to depart from the way indicated or rather "commanded" (*tsiwah*) by God that suddenly a new perspective is looming:

"You shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Isn't it significant that the first commandment, the first *mitzwah*, given by God to humans concerns food! According to the Bible, the very serious question of the destiny of mankind and ultimately of the world has been played on the trivial matter of eating.

Then, the biblical record tells us about the first death; the slaughter of an animal (Genesis 3:21), quickly followed by the first murder (Genesis 4). And a few chapters later, the trend reaches its climax in the dramatic picture of human wickedness in its fullness: "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11). In response, God sends the flood; the earth is covered with water and for a moment the soil cannot produce vegetable or fruit.

### **The Compromise of God**

God then makes a compromise with the survivors of the flood. He adds meat to the original vegetarian regime (Genesis 9:3). Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook used to argue that it is the human corruption and violence that led God to that compromise.<sup>3</sup> According to the ancient rabbis, the permission to eat meat was none else but "a concession to human weakness."<sup>4</sup> As a result, the ecological balance is affected and the relations between men and animals are changed. In the biblical Creation story, man has domin-

ion over the animals (Genesis 1:28); now, it is the fear and the dread of humans which "shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, . . . and on all the fish of the sea" (Genesis 9:2). This mention of the change already suggests the biblical atti-



tude towards eating meat. It receives a negative connotation.

### **Meat Without Blood**

This is immediately confirmed by the particular restriction that is, however, attached to this tolerance: "But you shall not eat of the flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Genesis 9:4). *It is noteworthy that this usage is totally absent in the ancient Near East and is enjoined on all.* Good health reasons may explain this biblical precaution. From medieval physician Maimonides to contemporary scientist H. Baruk,

*According to the ancient rabbis, the permission to eat meat was none else but “a concession to human weakness.”*

many medical scholars have shown the dangerous effect of the consumption of blood, for it contains all the toxins of the animal; today, under the threat of AIDS, we don't need more evidence. But health is not the reason given by the Bible. The biblical principle underlying this restriction is the sacredness of life: because “life is in the blood.” It is also significant that right after this verse the biblical text associates this restriction with a curse: “Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it” (Genesis 9:5). Furthermore, the text concludes with the most dramatic warning that concerns the killing of humans: “Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed” (Genesis 9:6). Ultimately, the image of God, God Himself, is affected in this process: “For in the image of

with blood with idolatry and murder (Ezekiel 33:25-26)! The same lesson of the sacredness of life is behind another dietary restriction: “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk” (Exodus 23:19). Besides the probable health reason against the abuse of cholesterol, or cultural reason against the fertility cults, or ethical reason against the cruelty of associating the dead kid with the milk of its mother, this principle contains another lesson: the dead animal should not be associated with the source of its life—the milk of its mother. Just as we should not eat meat, a dead body, with the blood that is supposed to give its life, we should not eat meat with the milk that is supposed to give it life. Likewise, the interdiction to eat from “the muscle . . . on the hip socket” (Genesis 32:32) which reminds of the extraordinary fight between Jacob and the angel points to the same association of thought; for the forbidden piece of the animal is derived from the

laws of *kashrut* discourage even more the eating of meat by surrounding this act with all sorts of rules (*shebita*, salting). In fact, the Bible reports several occasions when God tried to put the

Israelites back on an exclusive vegetarian regime and to discourage them from eating meat. When Israel had just been redeemed from the Egyptian bondage, it seemed to be the ideal moment to start afresh. God sent the manna, some kind of vegetable bread (Exodus 16:4) of which the “taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil” (Numbers 11:8).

But the Israelites complained and asked for meat. God reluctantly gave up. The biblical text speaks about God's anger (Numbers 11:1) and clearly suggests that He does not approve of their request for meat (Numbers 11:4; Deuteronomy 12:20; cf. Psalm 106:14). The Hebrew word *taawah* which describes their intense longing to eat meat is usually associated with evil (Proverbs 21:26) or reprehensible lust (Psalm 45:11; Hebrew v. 12). And when God failed to convince the Israelites to follow His vegetarian regime, He then did everything to disgust them from meat: “Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. . . until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you” (Numbers 11:18-20; cf. Numbers 11:32-34).

*This regular emphasis on the sacredness of life as one prepares to engage in eating meat suggests the biblical intention to discourage eating meat.*

*“Those who have eaten at one table and have not said over it words of Torah, are as if they have eaten of the sacrifice of the dead. But those who have eaten over one table and have said over it words of Torah are as if they have eaten from the table of God.” Pirke Aboth 3:4*

God He made man” (Genesis 9:6). The idea of sacredness of life receives here the stamp of God. Eating an animal with its blood is here associated with the worst ethical iniquity, the killing of man, and even the worst religious iniquity, the killing of God. No wonder the prophet Ezekiel associates the act of eating meat

part of its body that provides its sexual vitality.

Undoubtedly, this regular emphasis on the sacredness of life as one prepares to engage in eating meat suggests the biblical intention to discourage eating meat. Feelings of guilt and fear are supposed to be around as a prelude to the carnal meal. The Jewish

### **Clean and Unclean Meat**

The Mosaic laws of clean and unclean meat are another testimony of God's attempt to discourage the consumption of meat. To the restriction regard-



*Behind the laws of clean and unclean animals lies a strong reference to the Creation story of Genesis 1, a context where life is celebrated—life without death.*

ing blood, God added a long series of prohibitions. Not just any animal is allowed to be eaten: among the beasts of the land only whatever “divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud” are eatable (Leviticus 11:3). Animals that do not fill all these requirements such as the pig (Leviticus 11:7) and the hare (Leviticus 11:6) are prohibited. As for the animals in the air, the biblical text gives a long list of forbidden birds, mostly birds of prey (Leviticus 11:13-19; Deuteronomy 14:12-18). On the basis of these lists, the Talmud gives the names of 24 forbidden birds (*Hullin* 63b). Several reasons have been suggested by the rabbis and the biblical scholars to explain these laws of “clean and unclean” meat. Spiritual reasons, because unclean meat would obstruct human intelligence and spirituality (the Talmud); ethical reasons, because such a discipline will help refine moral conduct such as obedience and self-control (Midrash), or even compassion (Rabbi Kook); health and hygienic reasons (Maimonides). None of these reasons is given by the Bible. One reason is given implicitly through the numerous echoes and literary parallels between Leviticus 11 and the Creation story in Genesis 1. The same technical words and stylistic expressions are used (“beasts of the earth,” “creeping animals,” “after its kind,” etc.). Furthermore, the listing of animals in Leviticus 11 follows the same sequence as the passage of the Creation story covering the sixth day (Genesis 1:24-26). After the creation of the animals

of the earth (Genesis 1:24-25; cf. Leviticus 11:2-8), the creation of man is related successively to that of the animals of water (Genesis 1:26a; cf. Leviticus 11:9-12), that of the animals of the air (Genesis 1:26b; cf. Leviticus 11:13-23), and that of the animals of the earth and of the reptiles (Genesis 1:26c; cf. Leviticus 11:24-43). Lastly, in Leviticus 11 as in Genesis 1:24-26, the relation between humans and animals has its counterpart

*Life is sacred because God is life; life is holy because God is holy.*

in the relation between humans and God. In Genesis 1:20, the duty of domination over the animals is associated with the fact that humans are created in the image of God. Likewise in Leviticus 11, the duty to distinguish between clean and unclean meats is associated with the fact that human holiness reflects divine holiness: “You shall be holy; for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44, 45).

This connection between the two texts suggests that behind the laws of clean and unclean animals lies a strong reference to the Creation story of Genesis 1, a context where life is celebrated—life without death. Why should we respect the laws of clean and unclean meat? For the same reason that we have to refrain from blood—because of the sacredness of life. It is, indeed, significant that the carnivorous animals are prohibited and generally the animals that are permitted to be eaten do not

feed themselves with meat. The principle behind the *kosher* laws is simple: life is sacred. This is why the biblical ideal diet can only be the vegetarian one. This is the one that was given at Creation in the Garden of Eden; “The first man was not allowed to eat meat,” says the Talmud (*b. Sanhedrin* 59b). This will also be the regime of the “world to come” (Isaiah 11:7; cf. Isaiah 65:25; Hosea 2:18). This is why the biblical reason behind the dietary laws is not just ethical, hygienic, or religious; it is all these within the reference to the God of life, the living God. This is, in fact, the only explicit reason given by the Bible: “For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves,

and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44-45).

**Wine and Tobacco**

It is interesting to note that the same religious reason is given by the Bible to justify the prohibition of alcohol. The priests are enjoined to abstain from any alcoholic beverage precisely because of the principle of holiness: “The Lord spoke to Aaron, saying: ‘Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean’” (Leviticus 10:8-10). From this

verse, the rabbis of the Talmud concluded that the priests had to be totally and always abstinent from any alcohol: "May not one be permitted to draw the deduction that it is forbidden to drink wine and strong drink only when in the act of entering the tabernacle of the congregation, but it is permissible to drink before entering the tabernacle? The following verse, 'that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, between unclean and clean' (Leviticus 10:10), does not allow such a deduction" (*Bava Metzia* 90b). To be sure, the Bible does not categorically forbid the drinking of wine, but the warning against wine is repeated over and over again in the Scriptures: "Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper" (Proverbs 23:31-32; cf. Proverbs 20:1). And the fact that the first consumption of an alcoholic drink was associated with great immorality (Genesis 9:21; Genesis 19:31-32) suggests from the start the biblical ideal of abstinence. Besides the religious reason of holiness and the ethi-

cal reason, the Bible mentions also the value of life as a justification for abstinence from alcohol: "You shall drink no wine, you nor your sons, forever . . . that you may live many days in the land where you are sojourners" (Jeremiah 35:6-7).

In fact, the biblical principle of the value of life goes beyond the eating of meat and the drinking of alcohol; it applies to a lifestyle which may affect our health and ultimately destroy our life. On the basis of the *halacha* (traditional law), "you should preserve your life" (*ushemartem et nafshotechem*), Rav Ovadia Yosef, chief rabbi of Israel, wished that the use of tobacco should be forbidden for a Jew.<sup>5</sup> On the same matter, Rabbi Zalman Schachter thinks that it is inconsistent to keep *kosher* and indulge oneself in habits that are dangerous to our health: "There is a painful incongruity in the idea of a *halakhic* authority inhaling deeply on a cigarette as he ponders a question of *kashrut*. Can a substance at the same time be *kosher* and dangerous to health?"<sup>6</sup>

Life is sacred because God is life; life is holy because God is holy. The message of the sa-

credness of life and the obligation to make life holy shouts loudly throughout the pages of the Scriptures as a call to the Jews but also to any human being, not just in the abstract as a truth to understand or to learn in our minds, but in the concrete of our flesh; because the God of Israel is the God of Creation, the God who animated our earthly bodies and gave us thereby the capacity and the duty to enjoy life, even the spiritual life.

<sup>1</sup> Martin Buber, *Hassidism and Modern Man*, ed. and trans. Maurice Friedman; intro. Martin S. Jaffee (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988), 32-33.

<sup>2</sup> All biblical quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> Louis A. Berman, *Vegetarianism and the Jewish Tradition* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1982), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Isaac Kook, *Fragments of Light: A View as to the Reasons for the Commandments* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 318.

<sup>5</sup> Hervé Aarone Mimoun, *Notions de Santé et de prévention dans la Tradition Hébraïque* (Sarcellas, France: Otsar, 1985), 87.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Louis A. Berman, XVI.

## A Hassidic Story

*The old slaughterer died and the elders were looking for a replacement. One of the elders interviewed a candidate and observed him slaughtering an animal. When asked by another elder about the results of the test, he gave a long sigh. "What is it?" asked the other, "Did he do something wrong? Did he forget the right water for the prayers? . . . Did he sharpen the knife and moisten the blade?" "Our old slaughterer," replied the other, "moistened the blade with his tears."*

## Who is for Dinner?



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Since everyone eats and drinks, rules about eating, along with distinctive dress, have the capacity to be among the most powerful reinforcements of religious identity. Moreover, besides sustaining life, taking meals together is one of the best ways of forming bonds between people and creating community. These aspects of dining were even more important in ancient times than now, and it is not surprising that both Judaism and the early Christian movement placed a great deal of religious importance upon meals.

In the Bible two parties shared a banquet meal in or-

der to make a covenant with each other, as did Jacob and Laban in Genesis 28:28-30.

*Besides sustaining life, taking meals together is one of the best ways of forming bonds between people and creating community.*

Even a covenant with the Lord was ratified by a solemn, joyful meal (Exodus 24:11). But

in contrast to ancient pagan conceptions, Israel never thought that they needed to offer food to God because He needed it; rather they acknowledged that He was the source of their nourishment (cf. Psalm 78:19, 20; 23:5). Feasts were the major social occasions, marking weddings, funerals, arrivals and partings.

Of special importance was table fellowship. It usually meant acceptance into one's group. It established a bond. It drew a social boundary, and it drew the eating companions into the inside of that boundary. This gave the banquet an almost sacramental character. Outsiders were those with



whom one would not share a meal. Various considerations made it unlikely that Pharisees would dine with non-Jews or even with *ammei ha-aretz*. Essenes would not eat with non-Essenes.

There was a certain amount of merry ritual connected with banquets, among both Jews and non-Jews. Table etiquette was expected, and one can read an extended discussion of the behavior that was required in a book that was very popular among Jews in the first century C.E. (*Sirach* 31:12-32:13). One should do nothing that would spoil the occasion for the other participants, not speaking out of turn or interrupting the singing. Gluttony and drunkenness were strongly discouraged.

For Jewish people it was important not only how one ate, and with whom, but what one ate. The principles of *kashrut* are well known, and in the ancient world even non-Jews knew well that Jews do not eat pork. According to Leviticus 11 several types of creatures are never to be eaten. These included, besides scavengers, carnivorous beasts, and among birds the raptors. It was further required that the vessels and hands with which one ate should be washed. All of this may originally have had a hygienic purpose, but in later centuries that was disputed, with some authorities saying *kashrut* is a purely spiritual matter or simply a demonstration of obedience to laws of which the purpose is unknown. Among the authorities who perceived a rational basis of *kashrut* were the first-century philosopher Philo Judaeus of Alexandria and the medieval theologian

Moses Maimonides.

Imagine that you were invited to dinner in Eretz Israel in the first century. What would it have been like? Instead of sitting at the table you would recline, which was also the custom among Greeks and Romans. The diners ate from

*Most people were virtual vegetarians for economic reasons.*

a common dish placed on a portable three-legged table. The food might consist of bread, lentils or peas, oil, dried figs or other fruit. Perhaps there would be some vegetables. (Remember that there were no potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants, squash, or corn until the discovery of the New World!) On Sabbath there might be some fish. Meat was eaten only on special occasions or sparingly as a condiment. Most people were virtual vegetarians for economic reasons. Wine, almost always mixed with water—usually three parts

*Can we indeed have “garbage out” without “garbage in”?*

of water to one of wine—was served in a small cup placed directly into your hand because it had such a narrow base that it could not be set on the table when filled.

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. many rabbis actually advocated that Jews

become vegetarians out of mourning. Others pointed out that the original diet of man before Noah's flood was vegetarian (see Genesis 1:29; 2:16). The majority of rabbis felt, however, that most people would be unable to abide by such a rule (*Baba Bathra* 60b; cf. *Pesachim* 109a). But they decreed that the nine days leading up to the Ninth of *Ab* (the commemoration of the destruction of the Temple) should be meatless.<sup>1</sup> The ideas of vegetarianism and sobriety were in line with certain currents among moralists in the Graeco-Roman world who advocated abstemiousness and even asceticism, such as the Pythagoreans. Even Plato was a vegetarian. There were similar traditions in Judaism—the Rechabites, the Nazirites, and probably the Essenes.

The great religious meal *par excellence* was *Pesah*, the Passover *seder*, on the fourteenth of *Nisan*. It commemorated the miraculous deliverance from bondage. At this meal all reclined, even women and children, in equality before God. It was a full meal, rich in symbolism, but lamb, the unleavened bread, and the wine were the central elements. After the destruction of the Temple the lamb could no longer be sacrificed, and that left the bread and wine in the center.

It should not surprise us that Yeshua received all this and transformed some of it. The *haburah* of his disciples was bonded together in fellowship meals culminating in the *Pesah* feast that began the central Christian ceremony, the communal meal now known as the Lord's Supper (Mark 14:12-26

and parallels). Like the Passover feast, the early Christian observance was a full meal, often called the Agape, or Love Feast (Jude 12), but eventually it was reduced to only bread and wine because of abuses in the Gentile environment. The Apostle Paul laid down rules for its observance, at the same time that he emphasized that the meal bonds the believers together as one body (1 Corinthians 10, 11).

At points Jesus broke with the practice of Pharisees and Essenes, but at the cost of being attacked for it. We see this in two areas. For one thing, he showed a disturbing lack of selectivity in whom he was willing to accept into his circle of table fellowship. The Gospel of Luke is particularly keen to report this. In Luke 15:2 we find religious people leveling this criticism at him: "This man receives sinners and eats with them." Indeed, he was receiving even tax collectors! The word "receives" suggests that he not only accepted their invitations (as he did from Zacchaeus), but he actually played host to them. Unlike John the Baptist, Yeshua was not reputed to be an ascetic (Luke 7:34), nor did he enjoin his disciples to fast the way John and the Pharisees required their disciples to do (Mark 2:18-20).

Besides his inclusive conviviality, another point of conflict was Yeshua's cavalier attitude toward the Pharisaic rules of purity. He did not care whether his disciples washed their hands before eating (Mark 7:1-23). In fact, his attitude toward the entire oral law was ambivalent at best (Matthew

## *They should not only abstain from blood but also abstain from what*

23:2-4) and flat-out negative in many cases. It is not what goes into you that defiles you, he proclaimed, but what comes out of you: evil thoughts, words, and deeds.

With these words did Yeshua sweep away the entire Mosaic system of *kashrut*? Did he, in fact, think that hygiene is of no account? Can we indeed have "garbage out" without "garbage in"? The point is debated by exegetes,<sup>2</sup> but it is clear that Yeshua was speaking in a context that did not regard the hygienic explanation of *kashrut*. It was merely a ritual duty. The mentality is well exemplified in the Mishnah tractate *Yadaim*, where the amount of water poured over the hands is scarcely enough to sanitize them, and the water can be poured out of any vessel, even one made from cattle-dung (*Yadaim* 1:1, 2). Yeshua seems to be saying, If you want *kashrut* to be purely a spiritual matter, not a matter of physical hygiene, then let's start at the right end of things.

How were these matters understood by early Christians after Yeshua? The same context appears to be in control. In Acts 10:9-16 the Apostle Peter is shown a vision of unclean creatures, and a voice says, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." Peter replies, "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." The voice replies: "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." But the meaning of the vision and the voice is revealed in the immediate sequel: the unclean animals signify Gentiles, and the purpose of the vision is to per-

suaude Peter to preach to the household of the centurion Cornelius. Here *kashrut* is a metaphor.

Did early Christianity excuse non-Jewish believers from observance of the dietary laws? The prototypical kosher law is one of the so-called Noachide laws: abstention from blood (Genesis 9:4). It is noteworthy that when the early Christian leaders gathered in Jerusalem to discuss how to deal with non-Jews who accepted the Christian message (Acts 15), they decreed that they should not only abstain from blood but also abstain from what has been strangled, both matters of *kashrut*. This may be a case of synecdoche.

Some early Jewish Christian groups, such as the Ebionites, renounced flesh-eating and wine, and apparently some Gnostic groups did likewise. But ultimately only ascetics chose such a lifestyle. Paul actually denounced those who made it a requirement (Colossians 2:20-23). Yet Paul and the other apostles warned against gluttony, drunkenness, and any kind of overindulgence. Self-control, they said, is one of the "fruits of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:23; cf. 2 Peter 1:6). Within those limitations, God's gifts are to be received with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4:3, 4).

<sup>1</sup>See Louis A. Berman, *Vegetarianism and the Jewish Tradition* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1982).

<sup>2</sup>For an argument that Yeshua was not doing away with Mosaic *kashrut*, see the recent article by David Merling, "Clean and Unclean Meat," *Ministry* (June 1999): 28-30.

## Wine and Spirits

A. Hadas

**T**he question of alcoholic beverages has been the concern of many religious communities. For both Jewish and Christian communities, drunkenness is considered morally inadequate. Yet, we often fail to perceive behind the usual reasons given for drinking, “to forget,” “to have a good time,” a more profound motivation.

I believe that the true motivation behind drinking alcohol is a philosophical motivation, and what is more, a spiritual motivation. Indeed, people drink to temper the ho-hum routine of their life. Their drinking stems from a profound dissatisfaction with life as it is manifest, from an obscure feeling that beneath everyday existence there lies a deeper, truer reality. People drink to explode the bounds of their own nature, to press beyond the obsession with survival, to experience pure sensations, unaffected by the ailments of life. By drinking, they hope to pierce through

the veil of appearances (the “maya” to use a more exotic term) to the truer reality. One that is more intense and more vivid. A reality where one has the liberty to create. As such, the motivations behind alcohol drinking can be considered to be philosophical—the intuition that present reality is but an illusion under which lies a truer reality—and spiritual—the attempt to

*“Let him drink  
and forget his  
poverty  
And remember his  
misery no more”  
Proverbs 31:7*

unveil a deeper reality of an otherworldly aura. But can the effects of alcohol be considered aspiritual experience? Is this why

we drink “to life?” to this other life we experience in drunkenness, of pure joy and elation?

This question takes us into the nature of spirituality. Indeed, what do the Jewish and Christian traditions consider spirituality to be, and in the light of their conception of spirituality, how may we characterize the experience of drunkenness?

Strikingly, in both traditions, as opposed to other forms of spirituality (which we will expose further down), true spirituality always leads to action. There is no such thing as a gratuitous spiritual experience in the Judeo-Christian traditions. A genuine spiritual experience always propels us back into human reality, into action.

Moses, upon witnessing God’s glory, didn’t soar into the heavens. He came back down bearing the tables of the law. The apostle Paul, upon his blinding encounter with God, became one of the most influential apostles. Indeed, there is not spiritual experience

per se, for its own sake. For as such, it would only grasp the mind, having no effect past the moment of representation; it would not affect the body, nor existence. Worse yet, it could be an illusion, a mere dream. In order to be credible, to be whole, a spiritual experience must permeate existence, it must merge with everyday life, guiding every action, every word, and every motivation.

The spiritual experience of alcohol remains an isolated experience which does not overflow into daily existence. His attempt at grasping the deeper reality having failed, the drinker is forced back to everyday life (with a hangover at that). On the other hand, he who has had a genuine spiritual experience comes back to reality with the power to create anew; to change everything. Such is the test of a true spiritual experience: if one comes back from it enlivened to exert one's creative power on reality.

The spiritual experience triggered by alcohol is hence an aborted one, which doesn't mature to ethical fulfillment. And what is more, it is a dangerous experience (and I speak not even of its hazard to health; it is dangerous in another sense).

Indeed, drunkenness as a spiritual experience is no new concept. Alcoholic beverages and other drugs were featured ingredients in ancient religions and cults. The Greek mystics already used wine to produce a state of euphoria characteristic of Dionysian cults (note that Dionysos came only later to be associated with wine by reason of the ecstasy his disciples experienced which could be compared to that achieved in drunkenness). Ancient Hindus also used a drink called "soma" in order to induce in the drinker a hypnotic state.

In both cases, the individual is in a position where he does not know what he is doing. He is

transported beyond his will and power; his liberty is thus withdrawn. There is a danger associated with this state of being, as with any kind of possession, that the individual, instead of becoming creative, should instead become destructive. A genuine spiritual experience cannot occur in a state of unconsciousness. As such, it could again be mistaken for a dream. The true spiritual experience must take place while the subject is fully conscious; he must be able to remember his experience. He must be able, throughout the whole experience, to abort it were his discerning powers to reject the force moving in him. He must be able to judge the potential effect of his actions, so as to inhibit any potentially destructive action. There can be no true spirituality without the discernment of the mind. This is what Emmanuel Levinas states in *Difficult Liberty*: "The spirituality of Israel resides in her intellectual excellence." Our situation as spiritual creatures in no way excludes the exercise of our critical powers. Likewise, our critical powers in no way exclude us from having a spiritual, even mystical experience.

The spiritual experience brought about by alcohol leaves the subject completely oblivious

as to what is going on. And thus, it takes on again the form of a mirage, with no lasting effect. Moreover, it is a potentially dangerous state, during which the unconscious subject is no longer able to discern between creative and destructive actions.

Thus, the drinking of alcoholic beverages, although motivated by a philosophical and spiritual intuition, and in spite of its feature role in ancient cults and religions, does not qualify as a spiritual experience. First because it does not motivate for action (worse yet, it decreases our potential for action); second, because it remains an unconscious experience where the subject does not remember nor can monitor. The mental state triggered by alcohol leaves no trace, either in the memory of the subject, or in his subsequent behavior, and may easily be dismissed as illusory. There is no genuine spiritual, mind-broadening experience to be found in alcohol. Although the motivations are pure and even legitimate—we want, we need to forget—in choosing this path we may lose in the process what we were looking for in the "mystical" experience of alcohol, that is, the best of what we have: ourselves.





## Not Just a Matter of Taste

*The Example of Daniel*

Jacques Doukhan, D.H.L., Th.D.

**N**ebuchadnezzar knew that the best method to alienate Jews, transform them into harmless puppets, was to change their diet. It is through eating and drinking that the king would try to shake their Jewish identity.

Daniel shares the same concern as any Jew in exile: kosher food.

Daniel teaches us that faith involves both the soul and the life of the body, and that religion concerns itself also with alimentary issues . . .

The first problem of a Jew in exile, a Jew who wants to remain a Jew, concerns eating and drinking—the heroic example of Daniel and his three friends at the

court of Babylon is a perfect illustration of his dilemma. Nebuchadnezzar knew that the best method to alienate Jews, transform them into harmless puppets, was to change their diet. It is through eating and drinking that the king would try to shake their Jewish identity. In response, it is also through their eating and drinking that the Jews choose to shape their resistance and preserve their identity.

### **Alienation**

The Babylonian enterprise of alienation was not limited to the intellectual domain but touched the most intimate aspects of everyday life, especially the diet. Thus the king “determines” the menu. The verb used here in the form wayeman (determined) has in the Bible no other subject but

God Himself, and appears otherwise only in the Creation context (Jonah 2:2 in Hebrew; English, 1:17; 4:6-8). The unexpected use of that verb in relation to Nebuchadnezzar suggests that the king in “determining” the menu takes the place of the Creator. A more careful observation of the meals reveals the king’s intentions, which are anything but candid. Indeed, the “meat-wine” association characterizes both in the Bible and in ancient Middle-East cultures the ritual meal taken in the context of a worship service (Deuteronomy 32:38). To participate in such a meal implied submission to the Babylonian cult and recognition of Nebuchadnezzar as god; for according to Babylonian religion, the king was considered as god

on earth. The daily ritual consumption of meat and wine was therefore not only destined for nourishment but aimed more specifically at making those involved to be adorers of the king. The Hebrew expression in verse 5 rendered literally as “they shall stand before the king” alludes to this function; it is a technical expression for those consecrated to religious service. It can be found in 2 Chronicles 29:11 where it describes the function of the Levite at God’s service. The Hebrews are not only indoctrinated, but also threatened in their most personal habits, so as to deeply affect their mentality and to convert them to the cult of Nebuchadnezzar. To mask this transfer of authority, the names themselves of the Hebrews are distorted:

—Daniel, in Hebrew “God is my judge,” is converted to Belteshazzar which signifies “may Bel [another name for Marduk, principal Babylonian divinity] preserve his life.”

—Hananiah, meaning “grace of God,” becomes Shadrach, “order of Aku” (Sumerian god of the moon).

—Mishael, “who is like God,” changes to Meshach, “who is like Aku.”

—Azariah, signifying “YHWH has helped,” becomes Abednego, which means “servant of Nego” (deformation of “Nabu” god of wisdom).

### Resistance

But their determination surpasses the surface of the words and focuses essentially on the gastronomical domain. The same Hebrew verb *sam* is used to refer to Daniel’s resolution (“resolved”; verse 8) and to the giving of new names (“gave”; verse 7) by the chief of eunuchs. Through these echoes, the author intends to show that Daniel’s response is directly connected to the alienating attempt of the

king. To preserve his identity, Daniel chooses to eat and drink differently. He asks for vegetables and water.

Beyond the “healthy choice” issue, the concern is essentially religious. This is already hinted at in the text by Daniel’s desire to “not be soiled” (verse 8)—language of religious implications found in the Levitical context of prohibited foods (Leviticus 11:29-40). Daniel shares the same concern as any Jew in exile: kosher food. Yet there is more here: the phrase that Daniel uses to designate the menu he wishes to have is a literal quotation from the text of Creation. The same Hebrew words appear with the same associations: “vegetables,”<sup>1</sup> “given,” “to be eaten” (Genesis 1:29). In reformulating the same expression, Daniel is affirming that his God is the Creator, and not the king. Thus, his motivation is the same as the one implied in the Levitical laws of kosher: his faith in the Creator. Indeed, the dietary laws of clean and unclean meats are also written in the book of Leviticus so as to remind of the event of Creation in Genesis 1.<sup>2</sup> In his oppressed condition where Daniel cannot control his food, he wisely then chooses to be vegetarian. This is the safest way to keep kosher and also the most explicit testimony of his faith in the God of Creation. By doing so, Daniel speaks a more universal language designed to reach the Gentiles who observe him at the table: his God is the God of Creation and therefore also their God.

### Faith and Existence

But beyond his apologetic concern and his desire to remain faithful, Daniel’s behavior contains an important lesson regarding the too often ignored connection between faith and existence. The religion of Daniel is not limited to spiritual beliefs or to abstractions, but implies also his

engagement on the concrete level of existence. Daniel teaches us that faith involves both the soul and the life of the body, and that religion concerns itself also with alimentary issues that can seem disconcerting to our mind-sets rooted in Platonistic dualism. It remains nonetheless a biblical concern. The first test humans were exposed to was of alimentary nature. Adam and Eve determined their destiny and consequently that of humanity on the basis of a very simple dietary choice (Genesis 3). Later, Levitical laws on clean and unclean meats develop this same principle in establishing a link between food and holiness (Leviticus 11:44-45). The ideal of the priests includes abstaining from alcoholic beverages so as better to distinguish that which is sacred and that which is not (Leviticus 10:8-11). In the desert, the Israelites learn the same lesson. From falling quails to sprouting manna, the events are permeated with implications of a religious nature. Daniel is no innovator. His religious concern with diet is rooted in biblical tradition.

### Holy and Human

One must, however, observe that in spite of the rigor of Daniel’s attitude, he remains profoundly human. Daniel is not an ascetic, far from it. In fact, the young Hebrews are handsome and their faces are not downcast as the official of the king thought they would be (verse 10). In a minimum time span, ten days,<sup>3</sup> proof was provided that the abstention from meat and wine does not exclude one’s enjoyment of life. One must also note Daniel’s behavior toward the king’s official. His religious convictions and his ideal of sanctity do not make him arrogant or sinister. On the contrary, Daniel approaches his superior in humility “and asks for permission” (Daniel 1:8). He even maintains with him

relations of friendship and respect (verse 9). This attitude contains an important lesson to be meditated upon by all those obsessed by holiness. Holiness does not exclude humanity; it implies it. To drape oneself in the starched mantle of justice is not holiness nor is disincarnated detachment from reality or any enjoyment. It is a distorted idea of holiness that has long been evidenced by somber and emaciated “saints,” mindless of good food and laughter, who have rendered religion intolerable to the rest of us wretched and finite beings. In reaction, humanistic movements of all sorts have appeared with slogans of love and fraternity. The law of God has become suspect, and holiness has lost its rigor. Biblical thought transcends these extremes; and, as said by Abraham Heschel, the secret lies in being both “holy and

human.”<sup>4</sup> Daniel is after all a pleasant fellow, well in flesh, but he is also a saint as he makes no compromise and remains faithful to the end.

<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew term used here for “vegetables” is derived from zera which means seed and implies everything which grows on the face of the earth, including cereals, fruits, and vegetables.

<sup>2</sup> The text of Leviticus 11 which records these laws uses the same technical words and stylistic expressions (beasts of the earth, creeping animals, after its kind, etc.). Furthermore, the listing of the animals follows the same sequence as in Genesis 1:24-26 (the sixth day of creation). After the creation of the animals of the earth (Genesis 1:24-25; cf. Leviticus 11:2-8), the creation of man is related successively to that of the animals of water (Genesis 1:26a; cf. Leviticus 11:9-12), that of the animals of the air (Genesis 1:26b; cf. Leviticus 11:13-23), and that of the animals of the earth and of the reptiles

(Genesis 1:26c; cf. Leviticus 11:24-43). Lastly, in Leviticus 11 as in Genesis 1:24-26, the relation between humans and animals has its counterpart in the relation between humans and God. In Genesis 1:20, the duty of domination over the animals is associated with the fact that humans are created in the image of God. Likewise in Leviticus 11, the duty to distinguish between clean and unclean meats is associated with the fact that human holiness reflects divine holiness: “you shall be holy, because I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44-45).

<sup>3</sup> The number ten symbolizes in the Bible a minimum (Genesis 18:32; Amos 5:3; 6:9). It must be added that the number ten is represented in Hebrew by the smallest letter of the alphabet, yod. In a temporal context, it symbolizes a time-span where one is put to the test. A countdown of ten days exists also between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, as a time of preparation and testing.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: 1955), 238.

## “Could Daniel’s 10-Day Diet Make a Difference?”

Evelyn Cole-Kissinger, MS, RD, IBCLC

*“Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see. So he (the chief official) agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food” (Dan 1:12-15).*

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I challenge you to try a plant-based diet for just 10 days. See if you can feel the difference—physically, mentally and spiritually.

### 7 Steps to A Healthy Lifestyle

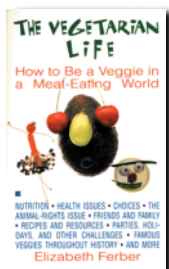
1. Eat more vegetables.
2. Eat more fruit.
3. Eat more whole grains.
4. Eat more beans.
5. Drink more water.
6. Eat meals at regular times.
7. Go for a walk every day.

Crowd out a lot of other high fat, high sugar foods by following the 7 Steps to A Healthy Lifestyle. Every meal, ask yourself, “What am I eating that is high in fiber?” “How much of my meal is from plants?” Drink water to crowd out other beverages with caffeine, sugar, additives and alcohol. Get regular exercise to motivate you to continue making healthy choices.

Focus on getting MORE of the “good stuff”—plant-based foods. Instead of dwelling on, “Oh, I shouldn’t eat this or I can’t have that,” focus on what enriches your health. It becomes more of a present than a punishment. It’s kind of like living a passionate life for God. When you focus on following God’s plan, your thoughts are centered on the positive instead of focusing on avoiding sin.

When you experience more energy, clearer thinking, and possibly a change in your body size and health, you may actually learn to prefer plant-based foods. I do. Consider Daniel’s 10-Day Diet and see what difference it will make for you.

# Recent Books



## The Vegetarian Life

Elizabeth Ferber

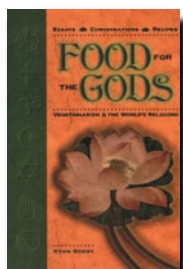
232 pages

Vegetarianism may be the wave of the future—but it doesn't mean being a veggie is always easy today. If you've chosen the vegetarian life—or if you're thinking about it—you need answers on everything from nutrition questions to how to deal with your still-carnivorous friends and family. With dozens of simple recipes for meatless dishes, *The Vegetarian Life* is the perfect introduction for the new vegetarian—featuring helpful, practical information.

## Food for the Gods

Rynn Berry

374 pages

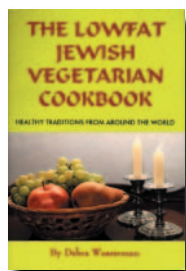


Taste the mouth-watering recipes of vegetarian master chef Brother Ron Pickarski. Savor the cuisine of the first woman to gain access to the sacred temple kitchens of southern India. Learn the culinary secrets of the Taoist vegetarian tradition. Discover the world's great religions with your mind and your palate. *Food for the Gods* is food for the mind and a feast for the senses.

## The Lowfat Jewish Vegetarian Cookbook

Debra Wasserman

224 pages

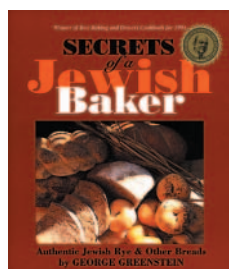


Jewish people throughout the world traditionally have eaten healthy vegetarian meals. Enjoy these delicious recipes and share them with your family and friends.

## Secrets of a Jewish Baker

George Greenstein

368 pages



In *Secrets of a Jewish Baker*, Greenstein reveals the unwritten tips that were passed down in his family throughout three generations of bakers. Whether novice or expert, any home chef

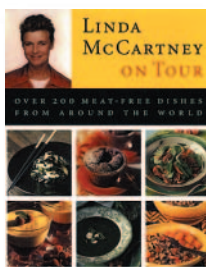
can master bread-baking with this book as a guide.

“This is the first book that writes with first-hand authority about the making of challah, authentic Jewish sour rye, and the still rarer Polish ‘corn’ bread, a superb rustic rye loaf that contains no corn at all” (John Thorne, *Cookbook*).

## On Tour

Linda McCartney

191 pages



As a passionate vegetarian, Linda's love of animals and desire to see a nonmeat-eating world led her to write her first cookbook, *Home Cooking*, which became the definitive guide to making meat-free meals. Following its success,

she created a line of ready-made meals which is now the number-one favorite with families in Britain. Her second cookbook, *Linda's Kitchen*, secured her reputation as one of the world's leading vegetarian cooks, and this international recipe collection, *On Tour*, brings an exciting new dimension to meat-free cuisine.

## Diet for Transcendence

Steven Rosen

136 pages

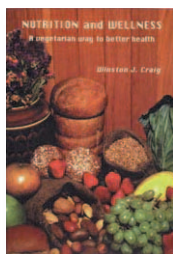


“Drawing from a wealth of original religious documents and texts, author Steven Rosen takes us on a fascinating journey back in time to explore the essential and often misunderstood roots of the world's major religious traditions, to discover how vegetarianism was a cherished part of their philosophy and practice” (Nathaniel Altman, *Eating for Life*).

## Nutrition and Wellness

Winston J. Craig

351 pages



From vitamins and minerals to food and water safety, author Winston Craig provides the reader with important information on how every human being can be happy and enjoy a full measure of good health.



Shabbath Shalom  
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רוך ארצה יהוה.  
אלהינו מלך העולם  
המוציא לנו מן  
הארץ

בין

Blessed be thou O Lord  
our God King of the Universe  
who causes the earth to yield food for all.