

The Shamayim V'Aretz Institute Passover Supplement

Edited by Melissa Suran



SHAMAYIM | מכון
V'ARETZ | שמאים
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Contributors:

Rabbi Dr. Shumly Yanklowitz,
Dr. Richard Schwartz, and Yossi Quint

Mission

The Shamayim V'Aretz Institute is a Jewish animal welfare organization that educates, trains leaders, and leads campaigns for the ethical treatment of animals.

About us

"Shamayim V'Aretz" means "Heaven and Earth" in Hebrew. The goal of Jewish life is to bring Heaven down to Earth and to sanctify the world through all of our just and holy endeavors. The Midrash teaches that there is a temple located in the heavens that sits directly above the temple on earth (*Genesis Rabbah 69:7*). The same God who makes the heavens radiate also illuminates our earthly existence. We are the stewards of the Earth seeking to ensure that Heaven still has a place on earth by removing injustice, oppression, and suffering from our midst. The animal kingdom is the most abused of all sentient beings. By protecting the most vulnerable creatures on earth, we return the holiness to our world by bringing Shamayim back down to the Aretz, by bringing Heaven back down to Earth.

Shulchan Orech

Rabbi. Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz

Founder & CEO of the Shamayim V'Aretz Institute

The *Shulchan Orech* is the meal portion of the Seder – also known as everyone's favorite part! But while many view it as the time to eat and schmooze, it also happens to be one of the most important elements of Passover.

The *Shulchan Orech*, "the set table," is similar to the *Shulchan Aruch*, the premier code of Jewish law, as it reminds us that proper Jewish eating guided by ethical and spiritual principles has the power to sanctify an order in our lives. There is a unique traditional order to the Seder meal, which like all festival meals, is infused with *simchat yom tov*, "the joy of the holiday" – not to be confused with *simchat kereiso* ("a joy of the stomach"), which Maimonides explains is a pleasure that neglects the poor (*Hilkhos Yom Tov 6:18*). When individuals are merely fulfilled by their own food consumption, there is no room for others. But at the Seder meal, we are to ensure the inclusion of the hungry and less fortunate at our table – and in our joy. Eating is made holy and truly joyous when it raises our awareness of others in need.

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Tonight's meal is a cheerful food meditation – intensely focused moments on food and joy – and is an attempt to jubilantly “set the table” for a year of enacting justice through our food consumption choices.

Isaiah Berlin taught that we must embrace both negative liberty (freedom from) and positive liberty (freedom to). We are concerned with our personal freedom as well as constructing a healthy and just society for all. Bakunin, the 19th century Russian philosopher, explained that:

I am not free if you, too, are not free; my liberty must be reflected in the freedom of others - the individualist is wrong who thinks that the frontier of my liberty is your liberty - liberties are complementary - are indispensable to each other - not competitive...I am free and human only so far as others are such. My freedom is limitless because that of others is also such; our liberties mirror one another - so long as there is one slave, I am not free, not human, have no dignity and no rights.

So, where to begin? Which causes should we prioritize in a world that's riddled with so many problems? Passover presents us with an evening of questions without complete answers. Rabbi Leo Baeck wrote:

It is an old saying: 'Ask a Jew a question, and the Jew answers with a question. Every answer arouses new questions. The progress of knowledge is matched by an increase in the hidden and mysterious.' This approach to questioning and struggling in Judaism is quite different from the stances of other religions. Consider the words of Martin Luther, for example: “A theology student

once asked Martin Luther, ‘What did God do before He created the world?’ And his answer was, ‘God was making hell, for those who are inquisitive.’

In Judaism, we embrace questions, and the Seder is the pinnacle of that experience. As we consume the meal on this evening, we must ask existential questions about our food, such as:

- How were the workers treated who prepared this food? How can I find out?
- How were animals treated who may have been connected to this food production? How might I find out?
- How has the land been affected by this food production? Is there a way I can find out?
- How can I eat in a more healthy and sustainable way? Who are my partners on this journey?
- How might I think of my daily meals more like a Passover Seder, where I am so attentive to the ethical and spiritual dynamics of the meal?

These are big questions to ask ourselves – and the answers are often painful. This is why we embrace a night of big questions without expecting to discover complete answers. We are left in spiritual suspension as we contemplate our interconnected world and our moral responsibility. Thankfully, we are free today to ask such questions and to work to make our broken world a more just, holy, and redeemed place to live in.

Passover and Vegetarianism

Dr. Richard H. Schwartz

President Emeritus of Jewish Vegetarians of North America

Passover and vegetarianism – are they contradictory or complimentary? Doesn't Jewish law mandate that Jews eat meat to rejoice during Jewish festivals such as Passover? After all, what is a Seder without gefilte fish, chicken soup, and chopped liver? And what about the shank bone to commemorate the paschal sacrifice? As it turns out, both religious and secular Jews can, in fact, celebrate a meat-free Passover – without the Jewish guilt.

One of the most well known relics on the Seder plate is the shank bone. It's use on Passover dates back to Talmudic times, when it became symbolic of the lamb whose blood was sprinkled on Jewish doorposts to signal the Angel of Death to “pass over” their houses. Thus, the shank bone's purpose is a figurative one. Since Talmudic scholar Rabbi Huna stated that a beet may also be used to memorialize the lamb (*Pesachim*), many Jewish vegetarians substitute a beet in place of a bone. But the shank bone is not the only animal product that may be replaced at the Seder.

Contrary to common perception, Jews are not required to eat meat at Passover – or any other time. The Talmud (*Pesachim 109a*) states that since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, there is no obligation for Jews to celebrate Jewish festivals by consuming animal flesh. This notion is reinforced in scholarly articles by Rabbi Albert Cohen in the *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, as well as by Rabbi J. David Bleich in *Tradition* magazine. Moreover, former Israeli chief Rabbis Shlomo Goren and Sha'ar Yashuv Cohen have maintained strict vegetarian diets – and they're not alone. In fact, an increasing

number of Jews around the world are turning vegetarian – and vegan – and are finding ways to celebrate meat-free Passovers while being consistent with Jewish teachings. Hence, the values of Jewish vegetarians and vegans are reinforced by several Passover themes:

1. At the Seder, Jews say, "let all who are hungry come and eat." Similar to other occasions, *bircat hamazon* is recited at the conclusion of the meal to thank God for providing food to the world's people. However, this seems inconsistent with the consumption of animal-centered diets, since more than 70% of the grain grown in the United States is fed to animals destined for slaughter (it takes about nine pounds of grain to produce one pound of edible beef), while an estimated 20 million people –mostly children – worldwide die of starvation.

Many Jewish vegetarians see connections between the oppression that their ancestors suffered and the current plight of the billions of people who presently lack sufficient food and other essential resources. Vegetarian diets require far less land, water, gasoline, pesticides, fertilizer, and other resources – and thus enable a more effective way of conserving *and* sharing resources, which in turn, may help reduce global hunger and poverty.

2. The main theme of Passover is freedom. While relating the story of our ancestors' enslavement in Egypt, many Jewish vegetarians also consider the captivity and treatment of animals on modern factory farms. Contrary to Jewish teachings of *tsa'ar ba'alei chayim* (the Torah mandate not to cause unnecessary "pain to a living

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creature"), many animals are raised for food today under cruel conditions in crowded, confined spaces, where they are denied fresh air, sunlight, and even the chance to exercise – which are all rights that are even granted to inmates in jails and prisons. The Book of Proverbs (12:10) indicates that, “the righteous individual considers the life of his or her animal.” It is also important to consider that according to the Torah (*Exodus Rabbah 2:2*), Moses – Judaism's greatest leader, teacher, and prophet – was chosen to lead the Israelites out of Egypt because as a shepherd, he showed great compassion to a lamb.

3. Passover is the holiday of springtime – the season when Nature renews itself. In contrast, modern, intensive livestock agriculture and animal-centered diets have several negative effects on the environment, including air and water pollution, soil erosion and depletion, the destruction of tropical rain forests and other habitats, and contributions to global warming.

Perhaps by changing our diet, we can shift our precious, but imperiled, planet to a more sustainable path. Since Passover is the holiday of freedom, it is the ideal time to “free” ourselves from eating habits that are so harmful to people, animals, and the planet.

The Afikoman: A Call to Action

Yossi Quint

Shamayim V'Aretz Institute Board Member and Princeton Student

On Passover in 1877, the *Sefat Emet*, Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, gave a sermon in which he argued that the Afikoman serves as a call to action. Alter explained that the word Afikoman can be split into two words: *afik* (bring out) and *mann* (the special food Jews ate in the desert). While the Afikoman reminds us of our journey out of Egypt, it also reminds us that this journey was just the beginning. The Exodus was a means to a greater redemption – not an end in itself. On Passover, only a partial *hallel* (a collection of Psalms) is said – only a part of the great song – because we have not reached redemption just yet. Tonight, we recognize that there is always more to do. Even when the Jews went to Mount Sinai, which could have been the climax, it was just a step towards entering Israel and building the Temple. Passover prompts us to imagine that we are still in a metaphoric Egypt – still on a journey. Throughout the Seder, there is a tension between freedom and servitude. We drink wine while leaning on pillows like kings, yet we eat matzah and chant “we were slaves.” At the end of the Seder, we reveal the Afikoman in all its brokenness to remind us that we too are broken. We remind ourselves that even though we have finished retelling the story and have returned to the present, a place that for many of us is comfortable and filled with freedom, there is still much work to be done. There are still those in actual and metaphoric servitude. There are still those subsisting on old bread and meager rations. As Michael Walzer, a member of Princeton's Institute for Advanced Studies, explained, “first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt; second that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land; and third, that ‘the way to the land is through the wilderness.’ There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching” (*Exodus and Revolution*, 149). On this night, we remind ourselves that though we may feel free, there is still so much work to be done. And just like our ancestors who were able to leave their Egypt and enter a better land, so can we.