Please look after this book, especially because it contains Hebrew names for God which are traditionally considered holy.
Learning Food

How does our relationship with food define us as human beings and as Jews? How does it connect us to God, to nature, and to one another? What is the purpose of the spiritual and ritual practices that surround eating and drinking? What does our tradition have to say about the problem of hunger and the paradigm of sustainability? What does God have for breakfast? Is there such a thing as a free lunch? What is food justice? And what does tikkun olam have to do with it?

These questions, and many more, led us to choose a topic for this year’s Limmud Chavruta book which has obsessed the Jewish people since time immemorial – Food. Over the four sections of this book, you will have the chance to explore the role food plays, both in the history of Jewish thought and in your own daily life, on a personal, communal and global level.

There is a vast body of Jewish source material about food, and the Chavruta Project team has been working hard for the past year to cut it down to bite-sized portions. The bulk of this book is made up of traditional Jewish sources (on the right hand pages) and other, non-traditional and sometimes non-Jewish sources (on the left hand pages). We have also included Connections, which we hope you will find useful. However, there are myriad ways to study with this book, and if our questions or connections aren’t your cup of tea, feel free to ignore them!

We have been lucky again this year to have collaborated with four incredible teams, comprised of volunteers from around the Limmud globe. All of them, but particularly the team leaders, deserve the lion’s share of the credit for producing this book. You will notice that each section has its own particular style and its own distinctive message, as designed by each team. We are proud that this project is truly international, and hope that everyone studying it will benefit from this cosmopolitan authorship.

Section One, ‘Food and Spirituality’, led by David Biton with Hertzl Havosha and Merav Arbel, reflects upon the deeper value of eating and feeding.

Section Two, ‘Food and Ritual’, Réka Bodo with Rena Bannett, Yuval Katz and Jeremy Tabick, explores the function of food customs, practices and prohibitions.

Section Three, ‘Food and Hunger’, led by Ellen Flax with Jordan Helfman, Karen Radkowsky and Mark Clamen, considers the role of hunger and the obligation to feed the hungry.

Section Four, ‘Food and Sustainability’, led by Adam Frankenber with Tikva Bialoukof, investigates models for achieving food sustainability.

In addition to the team members listed above, we would like to thank Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz for proofreading the English text; Yuval Keren for setting and proofreading the Hebrew text; Robin Moss for detailed feedback; and Uri Berkowitz of Maven Design for the graphic design of this book. Last but not least, we would like to thank all of the wonderful people who agreed to present and facilitate Chavruta sessions at Limmud Conference 2014, as well as all of you who came along to learn. Limmud exists because of all you amazing participants and volunteers!

The aim of the Limmud Chavruta project is to present Jewish perspectives on a topic that will capture the imagination of all Jews. We hope that the theme of food will both inspire and enthuse people to learn, and provide the space and energy for discussions that are truly l’shem shamayim (for the sake of heaven), but also give people the tools to consider and reflect upon their own relationship with food.

Robin Cooke and Sam Grant Chairs, Chavruta Project 2014

What is Limmud?

Based in the UK and founded over 30 years ago, Limmud (the Hebrew word for ‘learning’) is a global leader in innovative, inclusive Jewish education.

The widely acclaimed winter Limmud Conference is one of the largest international gatherings of Jewish people. Over two and a half thousand people take part in over a thousand sessions over five intense, fun-filled, intellectually-challenging and unforgettable days. As at every Limmud event, presenters give their time and share their knowledge freely.

Limmud events and programmes also include Regional day Limmuds and the largest international gatherings of Jewish people. Over two and a half thousand people take part in over a thousand sessions over five intense, fun-filled, intellectually-challenging and unforgettable days. As at every Limmud event, presenters give their time and share their knowledge freely.

Limmud International

Limmud is now very much an international movement with volunteer teams planning and running events in over 70 communities around the world.

Limmud set up Limmud International as a body to develop and provide training, mentoring and support for groups around the world. Its vision is that every Jew, wherever they are, will be taken one step further on their Jewish journey.

With shared principles and values, Limmud International encourages and creates common spaces between the different Limmud groups around the world. We are proud that this year’s Chavruta Project is again an international collaboration by volunteers from so many Limmud communities. It shows what we can all achieve by working together.

www.limmudinternational.org

The Chavruta Project and Limmud’s core values

Chavruta is something that all Limmud events are encouraged to include because it is such a clear example of Limmud’s values:

• Chavruta is a model of learning which changes people, inspires action and opens new worlds. It is the only model where every participant can be a teacher and a student at the same time. This creates a learning environment in which people are able to reflect and grow.

• Chavruta is part of the Limmud community of learning, and embraces its commitment to community and mutual responsibility. Chavruta is also a collective experience, through which participants strengthen and develop their Jewish identity, and is therefore a prime example of how Limmud is expanding Jewish horizons.

• Chavruta relies on empowerment, giving every participant a forum to teach as well as to learn, and participation, encouraging participants to play an exceptionally active role in the session. Chavruta is the ultimate form of participatory learning.

• Chavruta is a cross-communal and cross-generational experience, which aims to be accessible to all who want to learn. Chavruta embraces diversity and harnesses its power to create profound experiences. In this way, Chavruta is enabling connections to be made between individuals from all streams of our community. Chavruta provides a space where participants connect spiritually, emotionally and intellectually.

The real power of Chavruta is that participants can not only take their experiences home but also use the resources and learning model in their own lives and introduce it to the lives of others.

Chavruta at Limmud Conference in the UK

The starting point for many learners is the morning Chavruta sessions on Limmud Conference. In recent years, two additional study modes were added to cater for participants who wanted more or less structured learning. There are therefore three study modes available:

• Guided: a hands-on facilitator guides participants through a selection of sources by means of group discussion punctuated by opportunities to explore a new text with your chavruta partner;

• Independent: an open space for unstructured learning with facilitators available to help out as needed;

• Traditional: the original Limmud Chavruta experience – beginning and concluding with a facilitated group discussion and plenty of time in between to learn with your partner, creating your own journey through the texts.

For the full text of Limmud’s mission, values and principles, visit: limmud.org/home/mission
What is Chavruta?

Chavruta means ‘friendship’ or ‘partnership’ and is a deeply traditional form of Jewish learning where two people explore Jewish texts together. Still used by every Talmud student to this day, this method is a dialogue between the participants, which encourages friendly debate and crafts meaning and ownership of the texts. Chavruta is not only an opportunity to increase one’s knowledge but should be a transformative experience. It is truly the quintessential Jewish learning technique – as we find one rabbi saying in the Talmud, ‘Either chavruta or death!’ (Ta’anit 23a).

What is the Limmud Chavruta Project?

The Limmud Chavruta Project is an international collaboration of Limmud volunteers who are committed to bringing chavruta into more Jewish homes and events. The goal of the project is to engage as many people as possible in chavruta learning, as part of Limmud’s commitment to taking every participant one step further along their Jewish journey. To make the vast body of Jewish text more accessible, the Limmud Chavruta Project has created a series of books for chavruta study, each presenting sources on a different theme. The texts range from ancient materials to modern scholarship, song lyrics and everything in between! Everyone is welcome to learn with Limmud Chavruta books, whether or not you have studied texts before, and knowledge of Hebrew is not required.

Each year the latest book is presented at Limmud Conference in the UK over the course of four sessions, each exploring a different section of the book. Limmud Chavruta sessions have seen hundreds of participants filling a room with discussion – some pairs engaged in quiet consideration, others bursting with energy as they battle with the ideas. This makes for learning which is more empowering than most standard teaching methods. Many people have met in Chavruta sessions, started learning together and have developed strong connections that last for a lifetime. The books are now used at Limmud events throughout the year and around the world.

As much as we can explain and describe Chavruta, the best way to understand it is to come along and experience it for yourselves.

The history of Chavruta at Limmud

Food is the nineteenth book produced by the Limmud Chavruta Project. The project has been a central feature of Limmud events in the UK since its launch with the theme of Tzedaka, Charity, in 1996. Each book explores a different aspect of Jewish life, with the sources divided into four sections, each collected by a team of Limmud volunteers and then edited together by the project chairs. Until recently the project involved teams of volunteers based in the UK, but as Limmud spreads around the world, the idea of Limmud Chavruta was enthusiastically adopted by other communities. After a while collaborative projects between groups started to emerge, in particular between Limmud NY and Limmud Galil.

In 2009 an international Chavruta Project team was assembled for the first time with teams on four continents using Skype, phone calls and emails to create a bold publication on the theme of One. Since then, the preparation of each project has attracted even more countries and communities. People in Australia, Canada, Israel, Austria, Hungary, the Netherlands, South Africa, the UK and the US have contributed to the finished books, learning together, working together and creating an amazing connection between different Limmud groups.

For those taking part it is not just about producing a wonderful book for us all to use. It is also about the process of finding new ways to collaborate and share experiences. People have learned from each other, and through it strangers have become friends. It means that by learning in a small one-to-one partnership, you are part of something very big indeed.

Organising your own Chavruta programme

With these books you can organise a Chavruta programme in your own Limmud, community, classroom or home. The material is flexible enough to work in a variety of settings within adult education and can also be appropriate for younger learners.

Limmud Chavruta material is available to Limmud groups and other education projects to incorporate into your programmes. You may photocopy single sections for local use, but you must let everyone know the origins of this work.

Food could be run as four sessions over the course of a month, a week or a Shabbat. You could run one of the sections as a stand alone session or produce your own selection from across the four, bringing your own editorial talents to the study. You could even study one source daily for 40 days. Each Chavruta session might last for 40 minutes or for hours on end... The decisions are all yours!

A model programme

To run this programme you will need a copy of the book for each participant and at least one facilitator for every ten participants. Facilitators should be experienced Jewish educators who have seen the sources in advance and had time to consider the key issues arising from the texts. You will also need one respected speaker who will close the programme by delivering a short summary of the big ideas of the session and adding their own thoughts or anecdote.

For example, suppose that you wanted to run a one-time session for fifty adults on the theme of ‘Food and Hunger’, which is Section Three of this book. You will need at least five facilitators and a guest speaker, with whom you should meet some time before the programme to study the sources together and note down any issues that arise from the texts. The facilitators will be running most of the learning, so ensure that they all understand how the sources lead into one another and know the essential points and ideas of each source.

On the day of the programme, you will need a room big enough to contain five separate study groups. The groups could sit around tables or just sit in circles of chairs. As participants enter, encourage them to sit with people they don’t already know and assign a facilitator to each group. Here’s a suggested timetable for the programme based on the Traditional mode of study at Limmud Conference, where participants study one section of the book during each 80-minute session.

Welcome to the programme (5 min) Introduce the session and theme, then explain the basic structure of the session – study group with a facilitator, learning with a partner.

Facilitated group discussion (15 mins) In their study groups, the facilitator should present the Key Source, in our case Source 3.1, and analyse the meaning of this text. The facilitator should lead a discussion about the key ideas of the text, encouraging people to get involved.

Chavruta learning (40 min) Now the facilitator should split participants into pairs and let them work through the texts themselves. See Using this book (page 6) for more information about how to do this. The facilitator should be on hand to help out in case a pair become stuck or to throw in a question or idea which might propel the pair into new territory.

Together again in group discussion (15 min) Reconvene as a study group. The facilitator should ask each pair to share with the others some of the ideas they have encountered. They should all have had different experiences, so the conversation could be quite lively! The facilitator should continue by presenting the final source, in our case Source 3.6, and encouraging a discussion that brings together a variety of ideas and issues.

Guest summary (5 min) Getting everybody quiet can be difficult so give them a five-minute warning. When everyone is ready, introduce the guest speaker for the big finale. When the speaker has finished, be sure to thank them and all the participants and facilitators for taking part.

Other books in the Limmud Chavruta series

Prayer (2013)
Money (2012)
The Four Elements (2011)
Time (2010)
One (2009)
Life (2008)
Creativity (2007)
Responsibility (2006)
Chavruta Collection (2005)
Limmudim (2004)
Avodah (2003)
Guf (2002)
K’dusha (2001)
Ahava (2000)
Zachor (1998)
Lashon (1998)
Dorot (1997)
Tzedaka (1996)

Copies of this book and previous books in the Limmud Chavruta series are available to buy. Visit limmud.org/publications/chavruta or email chavruta@limmud.org for more information.
A sample page

Using this book

What is in the book?
This book is divided into four sections. The texts in each one are from a range of sources, some ancient, others modern. Each source has a double-page spread devoted to it. The main source text itself is on the right-hand page, usually in Hebrew with English translation. It could be law, poetry, narrative, discussion or a passage from a longer essay.

On the facing left-hand page are ideas to assist you in Other voices. These are quotations from other Jewish or non-Jewish sources which act as a complement or contrast to the main right-hand texts. Below it are Points to consider. These include questions on the text which highlight some of the issues involved. The Connections box will refer you to other sources in the section, to help you create your journey through the texts.

How to approach a text
For inexperienced learners, the following guide may be helpful:
• First step, read the text – English translations are available for each, but if you can, try and read the Hebrew. Even if you don’t understand every word, reading the text in its original language can often give you a valuable sense of its rhythm and tone.
• Now go back and work through the text a second time. This time, ask your questions. Don’t be afraid – no question is too big or too small, and no question is a stupid question. If you are stuck on a question about the meaning of the text, you can ask your facilitator for help.

6. Does this text contribute to the wide range of sources? Does it support my ideas or challenge them?
• Share your questions and your ideas with your partner. Bounce ideas off one another and don’t be afraid to disagree. All ideas should be discussed, and all interpretations are worthy of consideration.

How does each section work?
The cover page for each section includes a short introduction to the ideas that you will come across when studying these sources. The first source is the Key Source which contains ideas that run through the section. There are quite a few sources and no-one is expected to get through all of them in one sitting. Each source has Points to consider to get your discussion flowing. Starting with the Key Source, you will find that you are at the hub of a wheel, with ideas radiating out in several directions. To follow these conceptual spokes, find a direction in the Connections that you want to follow, and move onto the sources suggested. In this way, you create your own route through the sources, following your own ideas.

How were the texts chosen?
The texts were selected because they fulfilled a variety of criteria. The vast majority are from commonly used sources, be they classic works of rabbinic literature, or essays by more recent Jewish thinkers. Some less familiar or less popular sources were also chosen because they best illustrated a specific point. We have attempted to include a range of literary styles to ensure that there are texts which can be tackled in the original by people at a range of ability levels. We have used standard translations as well as preparing our own translations of some of the texts, to allow the reader maximum access to the many deep ideas that can spring from a traditional text. We have also tried to select texts which explore a common set of key questions and present a tangible journey from the Key Source through to the final source of each section, allowing participants to study all ten sources in order should they so choose.

3. What do we know about this context of this text? For information about when this text was written and by whom, see the Guide to main sources section at the back of this book. How does this information affect your reading of the text?

4. Is this text relevant to us today? Does its message still apply to us? Does it contain specific teachings that can inform our behaviour or our religious practice?

5. What can I learn from this text? How does my understanding of this text contribute to my wider understanding of its key themes and ideas?

6. Does this text contribute to the discussions we have had about previous sources? Does it support my ideas or challenge them?

• Share your questions and your ideas with your partner. Bounce ideas off one another and don’t be afraid to disagree. All ideas should be discussed, and all interpretations are worthy of consideration.
Prayer on entering a place of study to learn

May it be Your will

God, my God, and the God of my ancestors,

that you guide my eyes with the light of Your Torah

and save me from stumbling and making mistakes …

For God gives wisdom and from God’s mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Food and Spirituality

In which we reflect on the deeper value of eating and feeding.
“That buzzing-noise means something. You don’t get a buzzing-noise like that, just buzzing and buzzing, without its meaning something. If there’s a buzzing-noise, somebody’s making a buzzing-noise, and the only reason for making a buzzing-noise that I know of is because you’re a bee.”

Then he thought another long time, and said: “And the only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey.”

And then he got up, and said: “And the only reason for making honey is so as I can eat it.”

A. A. Milne, Winnie the Pooh (1926)

“Then he thought another long time, and said: “And the only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey.”

And then he got up, and said: “And the only reason for making honey is so as I can eat it.”

A. A. Milne, Winnie the Pooh (1926)

Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed. And from the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17

The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.”

Translation: JPS, 1999

Points to consider

In what way were the first people free to eat?
In what way was the food free to eat?
God created a tree of life and a tree that might cause death.
In what ways does our mortality shape our relationship with food?
What is God’s relationship with food?
Who will deliver us from hunger?
Who will feed us ample bread?
And who will give us a cup of milk to drink?
To whom thanks? To whom blessing?
To work and to labour!
Who will give us shelter from cold?
Who in darkness gives light?
Who will draw water from the well?
To whom thanks? To whom blessing?
To work and to labour!
And who planted trees in the garden –
For fruit and shade, every type and species?
And who prepared for us a cornered roof,
To work and to labour!
Who prepared for us a cornered roof,
A fence for the garden, a hedge for the vineyard?
Who will draw water from the well?
Who in darkness gives light?
To whom thanks? To whom blessing?
To work and to labour!
Therefore we work, therefore we labour,
Always, every weekday.
Heavy is the burden, pleasant is the burden,
And in leisure time we will sing with full voice:
Songs of thanks, songs of blessing
For work and for labour!

He [Ben Zoma] used to say: “The first man had to work so hard just to eat bread! He ploughed, he sowed, he reaped, he bound, he threshed and winnowed and selected and ground, he sifted, he kneaded and baked, and only then ate.

“But I get up, and find all these things done for me.”

Genesis 3:17-19, 22-23

“...And the Lord God said, “Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!” 23 So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken.

But I get up, and find all these things done for me.”

Points to consider
Do you find the idea of tilling the soil more or less natural than the idea of picking fruit from trees?

The ground sprouts thorns and thistles but also provides food.

Do you find the idea of tilling the soil more or less natural than the idea of picking fruit from trees?

The ground sprouts thorns and thistles but also provides food.

The idea of picking fruit from trees?

Why is toiling for food a curse? Might it also be a blessing?

The idea of picking fruit from trees?

What are the dangers of finding food ready prepared for us every day?
Section one: Food and Spirituality

Limmud Chavruta Project Food
Section one: Food and Spirituality

Other voices

Rob Eshman: The blessing of the wine does not use the word for wine. It simply refers to it as “the fruit of the vine”. But wine is so much more than that – the result of technique, fermentation, yeasts, sugars and other ingredients. Do you find a spiritual lesson in referring to it simply as “the fruit of the vine”?

Jeff Morgan: Wine is naturally blessed, or holy. Kiddush helps us experience or recognise the holy nature of special moments such as Shabbat in the same way, we don’t bless just “the bread”, we bless “the bread brought forth from the earth”. Our prayers always make the connection between God, man and earth.

Maybe the wording of our blessing has to do with the fact that grapes are purely a creation of God, but wine requires human intervention. As a winemaker, I can tell you I pray a lot during the harvest. Sure, we humans make the wine. But we are not totally in control. I set things up as best as I can for success, but someone else is driving the wine train.

‘People of the Vine: Rob Eshman talks Jews, wine and history with Jeff Morgan’, jewisjournal.com

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough, A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread – and Thou Beside me singing in the Wilderness – Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

Quatrain 12, Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam (1048–1131), translated by Edward FitzGerald (1889)

Source 1.3
Hamotzi lechem

Mishnah, Berakhot 6:1

How do we bless over fruit? Over fruit of the tree (peirot ha’ilan) one says, “Who creates the fruit of the tree (peri ha’etz)”, except for wine, over which one says, “Who creates the fruit of the vine”. And over the fruit of the land (peirot ha’aretz) one says: “Who creates the fruit of the ground (peri ha’adamah)” except for bread, for over bread one says, “Who brings forth bread from the earth”.

Psalm 104:13–15

He waters the mountains from his high abode; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your works.
He makes the grass grow for the cattle, and plants for the labour of man, that he may bring forth bread from the earth; And wine that gladdens the heart of man, and oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man’s heart.

Points to consider

Why are there special blessings for bread and wine? In which ways is each of them special?
Why do you think the rabbis of the Mishnah use language from Genesis (and the story of Eden) in the blessings for food?
Who brings forth bread from the earth?

CONNECTIONS

The labour of man Source 1.2
A taste of heaven Source 1.4
More special foods Source 1.9

ממשה דברות: Who brings forth bread from the earth? בברכה מברכים על פרות? על פרות ת 얼마?: בברכה קמא על יין, שנאמר על יין.hot מברכים על פירות עץ, למעט יין, שבברכה יילי מברכים: בברכה יילי מברכים: Who creates the fruit of the ground (peri ha’adamah)” except for bread, for over bread one says, “Who brings forth bread from the earth”.

_masheha berachot oam: Who brings forth bread from the earth? בברכה מברכים על פרות? על פרות ת 얼마?: בברכה קמא על יין, שנאמר על יין hot מברכים על פירות עץ, למעט יין, שבברכה יילי מברכים: בברכה יילי מברכים: Who creates the fruit of the ground (peri ha’adamah)” except for bread, for over bread one says, “Who brings forth bread from the earth”.

תהלים קד יג טו

13: He waters the mountains from his high abode;
14: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your works.
15: He makes the grass grow for the cattle, and plants for the labour of man, that he may bring forth bread from the earth;
16: And wine that gladdens the heart of man, and oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man’s heart.
“Well,” said Pooh, “what I like best,” and then he had to stop and think. Because although Eating Honey was a very good thing to do, there was a moment just before you began to eat it which was better than when you were, but he didn’t know what it was called.

A. A. Milne, Winnie the Pooh (1926)

My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind.

Albert Einstein (1879–1955)

Psalm 34:9
Taste and see how good the Lord is ...
Translation: JPS, 1999

Eliyahu de Vidas,
Reishit Chokhmah, vol. 2, p. 839

Through making a blessing and mentioning the Name we awaken divine abundance upon that bread or upon that fruit as it was at the beginning of its creation by God. Thereby when one has intention in eating that the soul should take pleasure from the divine Great Name that is clothed in that fruit, then one receives a portion of life through the secret ‘And You sustain all’... One who eats in this way is called a living tzadik [righteous person], clinging to divine life and purifying the act of eating.

Points to consider
How does the process of eating connect us to God and to nature?
How does the process of blessing food connect us to God and to nature?
Can we find spirituality in all food? Are some foods more spiritual than others?

CONNECTIONS
Holiness through food
Source 1.5
Happiness through food
Source 1.8
Peace through food
Source 1.10
The Kuzari: Now I should like an explanation of what I read about the sacrifices. Reason cannot accept such expressions as: “My offering, My food for My fire, My pleasing odour” (Numbers 28:2), employed in connection with the sacrifices, describing them as being God’s offering, bread, and incense.

The Rabbi: The expression: “By My fire” removes all difficulty. It states that offering, bread and sweet savour, which are ascribed to Me, in reality belong to My fires, i.e. to the fire which was kindled at God’s behest, and fed by the offerings. The remaining pieces were food for the priests. The deeper significance of this was to create a well arranged system, upon which the King should rest in an exalted, but not local sense. As a symbol of the Divine Influence, consider the reasoning soul which dwells in the perishable body. If its physical and nobler faculties are properly distributed and arranged, raising it high above the animal world, then it is a worthy dwelling for King Reason, who will guide and direct it, and remain with it as long as the harmony is undisturbed. As soon, however, as this is impaired, he departs from it. A fool may imagine that Reason requires food, drink, and scents, because he sees himself preserved as long as these are forthcoming, but would perish if deprived of them. This is not the case. The Divine Influence is beneficent, and desirous of doing good to all. Wherever something is arranged and prepared to receive His guidance, He does not refuse it, nor withhold it, nor hesitate to shed light, wisdom, and inspiration on it. If, however, the order is disturbed, it cannot receive this light, which is, then, lost. The Divine Influence is above change or damage. All that is contained in the ‘order of sacrificial service,’ its proceedings, offerings, burning of incense, singing, eating, drinking, is to be done in the utmost purity and holiness. It is called “Service of the Lord”, “the bread of thy God” (Numbers 8:11; Leviticus 21:8), and similar terms which relate to his pleasure in the beautiful harmony prevailing among the people and priesthood. He, so to say, accepts their hospitality and dwells among them in order to show them honour. He, however, is most Holy, and far too exalted to find pleasure in their meat and drink.

Yehuda Halevi, The Kuzari, Book Two, 25–26; based on translation by Hartwig Hirschfeld (1905)

Numbers 28:1–6

Israel, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Command the people of Israel and say to them, ‘My offering, My food by My fire, My pleasing odour, you shall be careful to offer to me at its appointed time.’ And you shall say to them, ‘This is the food offering that you shall offer to the Lord: two male lambs a year old without blemish, day by day, as a regular offering. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; also a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with a quarter of a hin of beaten oil. It is a regular burnt offering, which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord.’”

Translation: Based on English Standard Version

Points to consider

What is challenging about the image of God eating food?

Why might “God’s food” need a strict recipe?

What else might be on God’s menu?

Why would we offer our food to God, if God does not eat it?
**Food GLORIOUS FOOD**

**Is it worth the waiting for?**
If we live 'til eighty four
All we ever get is gruel!

Ev'ry day we say our prayer –
Will they change the bill of fare?

Still we get the same old gruel...
Food, glorious food!

*Food GLoRIOus Food*

Is it worth the waiting for?
If we live 'til eighty four
All we ever get is gruel!

Ev'ry day we say our prayer –
Will they change the bill of fare?

Still we get the same old gruel...
Food, glorious food!

Food, glorious food!
Don’t care what it looks like –
Burned!
Underdone!
Crude!
Don’t care what the cook’s like.
Just thinking of growing fat –
Our senses go reeling
One moment of knowing that
Full-up feeling!
Food, glorious food!

Source 1.6

**Free food**

Exodus 16:4, 13–18

‘And the Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day’s portion – that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not.”’

1 And the Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day’s portion – that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not.”

13… in the morning there was a fall of dew about the camp. 14When the fall of dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness, lay a fine and flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” – for they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “That is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. 16This is what the Lord has commanded: Gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an **omer** to a person for as many of you as there are; each of you shall fetch for those in his tent.” 17The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little. 18But when they measured it by the **omer**, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no deficiency: they had gathered as much as they needed to eat.

Translation: JPS, 1999

**Points to consider**

In what ways does this arrangement leave the Israelites nourished?
Is there any way in which they are malnourished?

What might be the advantages of eating what we are given rather than what we choose?

What is the value of free food? Is there such a thing as a free lunch?

**Lionel Bart, Oliver! (1960)**
**Point to consider**

**What different types of provision does a person need?**

**Can a person live on bread alone? Can a person live on God’s word alone?**

**Why might God choose to make us fully dependent on God for food? Can we ever be fully independent?**

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**Deuteronomy 8:3**

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by all that comes from the mouth of God.

Translation: Based on English Standard Version

**Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 76a**

Rabbi Simon bar Yohai was asked by his disciples: “Why did the manna not come down unto Israel once a year?”

He replied: “I shall give a parable: This thing may be compared to a king of flesh and blood who had one son, to whom he allotted his provisions once a year, so that he would visit his father once a year only. Thereupon he allotted his provisions every day, so that he called on him every day. The same with Israel. One who had four or five children would worry, saying: ‘Perhaps no manna will come down tomorrow, and all will die of hunger.’ Thus they directed their hearts towards their Father in Heaven.”

Another interpretation: They ate it whilst it was hot. Another interpretation: Because of the burden of the journey.

Translation: Based on Soncino

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**Not by bread alone**

**Source 1.4**

**Source 1.6**

**Source 1.8**

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**ALL INFANTS IN ENGLAND TO GET FREE SCHOOL LUNCHES**

Free primary school meals for all pupils was one of the recommendations of a recent review of school food by two founders of the Leon restaurant chain for the Department for Education.

It concluded that packed lunches were nearly always less nutritious than a cooked meal, and that giving all children free lunches would raise academic standards.

The new policy does not ban packed lunches, but the aim is that having the hot, free option will boost the numbers of pupils having school dinners.

BBC News, 17 September 2013

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**Morpheus:** The Matrix is everywhere, it is all around us, even here in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window, or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, or you go to church, or you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.

**Neo:** What truth?

**Morpheus:** That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell, or taste, or touch. A prison for your mind. Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself. This is your last chance. After this, there is no going back. You take the blue pill: the story ends. You wake in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill: you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes. Remember that all I am offering is the truth. Nothing more.

_The Matrix_ (1999)
To understand the midrash we have to clarify, first of all, what is the analogy? Who is it that “eats” the Torah and good deeds?

In its simplest form, the meaning is of an individual who learns Torah and does good deeds, which accompany him in his world.

A person is composed of the body and the spiritual elements: mind, spirit and soul. Just as the body needs sustenance, so too do the spiritual elements. The sustenance of the spiritual elements is composed of Torah and good deeds, which are the source of energy for the mind, spirit and soul.

We can go deeper into the proverb and, through it, into the analogy.

For what purpose does a person eat? The simple answer is that eating is intended to maintain the body. However, we can go deeper into this question too. For what purpose did the Holy One blessed be He create people such that they eat? What is the meaning of this creation?

The answer presented in the sacred books is that eating connects people to the world around them. If it were not for eating, people would be disconnected from the whole world, and eating forces a person to internalise the world – creating a link between them and the world.

Through eating, the world becomes part of a person’s being. Plants and animals rise to the level of human, thus uniting all of reality under the control of humankind. The completion of this process is the unification of the world by humankind under the governance of God.

In light of this understanding the analogy attains a deeper meaning. The soul too needs sustenance – a connection to the world. The spiritual elements of a person are not disconnected from the world either. The connection with the world comes through Torah and good deeds. Torah study is the study of spiritual values, which are connected to world affairs. Laws of money, damages, family and blessings are the study of spiritual values which descend and clothe this world. The soul of one who learns Torah connects with the world through the study.

Even good deeds – those between people and those between a person and God – create a connection between a person and the world. The person’s soul connects with the world through performing actions which express the will of God.

Ecclesiastes 2:24

There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God.

Translation: English Standard Version

Midrash Rabbah on Ecclesiastes 2:24

“There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink”: … All the references to eating and drinking in this book signify Torah and good deeds.

Translation: Soncino

Points to consider

“There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink …”. Do you agree? Why or why not?

In what ways might Torah and good deeds sustain and nourish us?

What other spiritual foods might there be?
HONEY & CO. MENU

Food from the Middle East

STARTERS
Black Bursa figs, whipped feta, raw eucalyptus honey, pistachios and mint
Roasted violet aubergines, season’s best tomatoes, tahini, chilli and herbs
Green falafel with sumac and spice served with zaatar yogurt
Sardines cured in olive oil, roasted red peppers, legbar egg and sour cream

MAINs
Pomegranate molasses chicken skewer on cracked wheat, currants, herb and pistachio salad
Beef sirloin roasted and marinated in Turkish pepper paste, burnt potatoes, yogurt, zaatar and herbs
Slow cooked lamb shoulder in plums and roses, served with bulgar pilaf
Roasted sardines stuffed with orange and thyme, with dattarino tomatoes, pine nuts and grapes
Chreime – Fresh hake in fragrant tomato sauce served with milk bun
Sweet corn cake with pickled corn, chilli, lambs lettuce and roasted seeds
Mishmishiya – lamb meatballs cooked in apricot and tomato sauce

www.honeyand.co.uk

Source 1.9

Deuteronomy 8:7–10
7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; 8a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; 9a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. 10When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

Translation: JPS, 1999

Points to consider
Why do you think that the Promised Land is a land with these seven species?
Why is each of the seven species special? Is each of them equally special?
Is there such a thing as mundane food? Why or why not?
Blessed is God
Who created
Porridge with milk
By the bowlful
And for dessert
An apple too
With what, with what
Will we thank Him?
Blessed is He
Blessed is His name
Hayim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934), ‘Birkat Hamazon’

A crust eaten in peace is better than a banquet partaken in anxiety.
Aesop, ‘The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse’

Birkat Hamazon, Eastern Communities’ tradition
Blessed are you Lord our God, sovereign of the universe; God who sustains us and the whole world with goodness, grace, love, relief and great mercy; who gives food to every living thing, for God’s love is forever. Through God’s great goodness we have never lacked; may we never lack sustenance forever and ever; for God sustains and provides for all, God’s table is set for all, prepared with nourishment and sustenance for all of God’s creatures, created in mercy and great love, as it is said: “You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing”. Blessed are you God who sustains all.

The One who makes peace in God’s high places, God in mercy shall make peace upon us, and upon all God’s people Israel. And let us say, Amen.

Points to consider
What are the different ways in which God might nourish and sustain us?
Do you understand the idea that God feeds the whole world literally or figuratively? Do you think it is true?
Birkat Hamazon concludes with Oseh Shalom. What is the connection between the blessing of food and the expectation of peace?
SECTION TWO

Food and Ritual

In which we explore the function of food customs, practices and prohibitions
Sacrifice in Ancient Israel

The English word “sacrifice” comes from the Latin, sacrificare, “to make sacred,” that is, to permanently transfer something from the human (common) realm to the divine/supernatural (sacred) realm. This basic meaning is quite appropriate for the sacrifices in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), since they involve the transfer of offerings from the common to the sacred, from human beings to God. In the Hebrew Bible, the primary Hebrew term for a sacrifice is qorban (something brought forward, offering), which indicates the basic ancient Israelite understanding of this activity.

In the Hebrew Bible, Israel’s God, Yahweh, is always the recipient of legitimate Israelite sacrifice. One of the most helpful ways to think about sacrifices is as “gifts” given over to God. We can understand this type of gift-giving by thinking about gift-giving in our own lives, especially that of young children to parents. Parents really don’t need the gifts their children give them (a tie given to a father, a bottle of perfume to a mother) and often enough the money a young child uses to purchase a gift comes from the parents themselves. However, the giving and receiving of such gifts is important, because it expresses a relationship of commitment, care, and love. When they performed sacrifices, ancient Israelites gave over to God some of the fruit of their close relationship with God, and seeking to reinforce the relationship between God and human beings.

Sacrifice was “mainstream” religion in the ancient world. It may be difficult for modern people to understand the religious significance of killing and cutting up animals and burning them in an altar fire. However, we can bridge this cultural gap if we understand the religious significance of killing and cutting up animals and burning them in an altar fire.

In the Hebrew Bible, sacrifice always involves transformation. One of the most common ways to transform something as a “sacrifice” is to destroy it. Destruction removes the animal from the ordinary realm to a transcendent one. Biblical texts tell us that what God received from a sacrifice was the smoke of the burning, as a “pleasing aroma” (see, for example, Lev 1:13). By receiving the smoke, the transformed sacrifice, God enjoyed a fellowship meal with human beings. This meal took place at God’s dwelling—the temple.

Sacrifice was an integral part of every Israelite community. It is as “gifts” given over to God. We can understand this type of gift-giving by thinking about gift-giving in our own lives, especially that of young children to parents. Parents really don’t need the gifts their children give them (a tie given to a father, a bottle of perfume to a mother) and often enough the money a young child uses to purchase a gift comes from the parents themselves. However, the giving and receiving of such gifts is important, because it expresses a relationship of commitment, care, and love. When they performed sacrifices, ancient Israelites gave over to God some of the fruit of their close relationship with God, and seeking to reinforce the relationship between God and human beings.

William K. Gilders, sbl-site.org

Points to consider

Why do Cain and Abel bring offerings to God?
Why do they offer food?
Why does Noah offer only “clean” animals and birds?
Are animals clean and unclean only for humans or also for God?
“Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Summer and winter, Day and night…” How do these patterns shape our relationship with food?

KEY SOURCE 2.1
Burnt offerings

Genesis 4:2–4
1... Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil. In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil; and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock ... Translation: JS, 1999

Genesis 8:18–22
18So Noah came out, together with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives. 19Every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that stirs on earth came out of the ark by families. 20Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking of every clean animal and every bird, everything that stirs on earth came out of the ark by families. 21The Lord smelled the pleasing odour, and the Lord said to Himself: “Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the devisings of man’s mind are evil from his youth; nor will I ever destroy every living being as I have done. 22So long as the earth endures, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Summer and winter, Day and night Shall not cease.” Translation: JS, 1999

Connections

Clean and unclean
Source 2.2
Slaughtering animals
Source 2.3
Seasonal eating
Source 2.6
The Zaparo Indians of Ecuador “will, unless from necessity, in most cases not eat any heavy meats, such as tapir and peccary, but confine themselves to birds, monkeys, deer, fish, etc., principally because they argue that the heavier meats make them unwieldy, like the animals who supply the flesh, impeding their agility, and unfitting them for the chase.”

Similarly some of the Brazilian Indians would eat no beast, bird, or fish that ran, flew, or swam slowly, lest by partaking of its flesh they should lose their ability and be unable to escape from their enemies.

The Caribs abstained from the flesh of pigs lest it should cause them to have small eyes like pigs; and they refused to partake of tortoises from a fear that if they did so they would become heavy and stupid like the animal.

Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941), The Golden Bough (1922), 51: ‘Homeopathic Magic of a Flesh Diet’

‘About noon the next day, while they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing the meal, a trance came over him. 11 He saw heaven opened and an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and wild birds. 13 Then a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!” 14 But Peter said, “Certainly not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything defiled and ritually unclean!” 15 The voice spoke to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!”


Sifra, ‘Kedoshim’, Parashah 10, Perek 11, Halakhah 22

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah says: “How do we know that a person should not say, ‘I cannot bear to wear a wool-linen mixture, I cannot bear to eat swine flesh, I cannot bear to be intimate with this forbidden partner,’ but rather should say, ‘I would love to! But what can I do? My heavenly parent has decreed this upon me?’ Scripture says: ‘I have separated you from the nations to be mine’ (Leviticus 20:26). Thus, one separates from a transgression and accepts divine sovereignty.”

Midrash Rabbah on Leviticus 13:3

Rabbi Beredkhay said in the name of Rabbi Yitzhak: “The Holy and Blessed One will make a great banquet for the faithful in the future, and all who did not eat forbidden meats in this world will merit to eat from them in the next.”

Points to consider

Should we desire forbidden foods or be repulsed by them?

Are the laws of Kashrut logical? Are they arbitrary?

What might be the benefits of keeping kosher?
MEAT FROM CATTLE SLAUGHTERED IN ‘CRUEL’ KOSHER METHOD IS IN YOUR HIGH STREET BURGER

Beef and lamb from animals killed in ‘cruel’ ritual ceremonies are being sold in mainstream butchers, restaurants and supermarkets across Britain, The Mail on Sunday has found.

Our investigation has discovered that kosher meat – which is slaughtered in accordance with strict Jewish food preparation rules – is being sold as ordinary fresh beef and lamb, or ending up in ready-made meals and burgers.

The Jewish ‘shechita’ method of slaughter – the practice of sitting an animal’s throat and allowing it to bleed to death – has been slammed as ‘inhumane’ by vets and animal rights groups because the creature is conscious when it happens.

Jewish law governing shechita strictly forbids pre-stunning, as do some Islamic groups for the production of halal meat. However, recent research suggests that unstunned animals can feel pain for up to two minutes.

In conventional methods of slaughter, animals are rendered unconscious with an electric shock before their throats are slit or they are shot.

Daily Mail, 16 March 2014

WHAT HAPPENS IN KOSHER SLAUGHTER?

All slaughter is terrifying for the animals and involves pain and suffering, but kosher slaughter, when performed according to Halacha (Jewish law), is intended to minimize animals’ suffering.

Kosher slaughter, or shechita, is performed by a person known as a shochet, who has received special education and instruction in the requirements of shechita. The shochet kills the animal with a quick, deep stroke across the throat with a sharp knife. When performed properly, shechita appears all but painless and quickly renders the animal unconscious.

PETA Reveals Extreme Cruelty at Kosher Slaughterhouses, peta.org

‘PRE-SLAUGHTER STUN LESS HUMANE THAN SHECHITA’

An Israeli study on electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) for severely depressed or psychotic patients has apparently disproved the claim that the similar process of stunning animals before slaughter is humane and minimizes their suffering.

Prof. Rael Strous, a psychiatrist at Tel Aviv University’s Sackler Faculty of Medicine and the Be’er Ya’acov Mental Health Center, has just published an article on the subject in the journal Meat Science, together with Bar-Ilan University researcher Dr. Ari Zivotofsky.

The researchers reached the conclusion that electric stunning of animals, often advocated as kinder than kosher slaughter, “is in fact cruel and barbaric”, as if one administered ECT without first giving patients sedation and/or general anaesthesia.

The Jerusalem Post, 25 January 2012

Deuteronomy 22:6–7

‘If, along the road, you chance upon a bird’s nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or eggs, do not take the mother together with her young.’ Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.

Translation: IPS, 1999

Nachmanides on Deuteronomy 22:6

This commandment can be explained like that of “not slaughtering an animal and its offspring” (Leviticus 22:28) on the same day. The rationale for both of them is that we should not have a cruel heart and be pitiless, or that the Torah does not permit destruction that uproots a species, even though that species is permitted to be slaughtered.

It does not make sense to say that slaughter fulfills some kind of purpose or honour for the Blessed Creator when performed at the neck more than the nape, or by stabbing, but it is for us, to guide us on paths of compassion even at the time of slaughter.

The reason for the restraint is to teach us the attribute of compassion, so that we not be cruel. For cruelty spreads through a person’s soul, as is known that butchers who slaughter large cows and donkeys are men of blood, violent and very cruel. For this reason the sages said “the best of butchers are accomplices of Amalek” (Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 82a). Behold, these commandments regarding animals and birds are not about being merciful towards them but are decrees for us to guide us and teach us good behaviour.

Points to consider

‘... that you may fare well and have a long life’: Is the promised reward for releasing the mother bird appropriate? What would be an appropriate reward for performing kosher slaughter?

Who benefits from the practice of kosher slaughter?

Is kosher slaughter always unethical? Is kosher slaughter always ethical?

CONNECTIONS

Transgression?

Source 2.4

For God?

Source 2.5

Meat and bread

Source 2.7

Source 2.3

A merciful practice?
DAIRY BREAD, DAIRY BOUREKAS: THE RABANUT GETS INVOLVED

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel is not the most innovative institution in the country. In fact, it often avoids new ideas out of fear it might be accused of “reformism,” but on Tuesday it implemented a radical change – or in the words of the Rabbinate’s press release, “A bourekas revolution.”

The new rules are actually an expansion of existing kashrut regulations on shape, designed to ensure that those who follow Jewish dietary laws don’t become confused and inadvertently mix milk and meat, something prohibited for those who keep kosher. Already, bakeries with kashrut certifications are required to bake parve bourekas in square shapes and dairy ones in triangles. Under the new rules, however, bakers will need to bake parve bourekas made with filo pastry in rectangle shapes, while the dairy ones will be crescent-shaped. Parve croissants and the sweet rugelach filo pastry in triangle or spiral shapes. Meanwhile, filo pastry in square shapes will be required for parve bourekas made with pastry favored in Israeli bakeries.

The Rabbinate explained in a statement that bourekas are a special case when it comes to kashrut, because they are usually sold unpackaged and in bulk, and bear no exterior sign indicating whether their filling is parve or dairy. Regulating pastry shape is the only way to make sure people know what’s in parve or dairy. Under the new rules, however, bourekas will be baked in a straight rectangle, while the dairy ones will be crescent-shaped. The Rabbinate explained in a statement that bourekas are a special case when it comes to kashrut, because they are usually sold unpackaged and in bulk, and bear no exterior sign indicating whether their filling is parve or dairy. Regulating pastry shape is the only way to make sure people know what’s in parve or dairy. Under the new rules, however, bourekas will be baked in a straight rectangle, while the dairy ones will be crescent-shaped.

Traditional joke

Moses is up on Mount Sinai and the Almighty is conveying the text of the Torah to him. They come to ‘Do not cook a kid in its mother’s milk,’ and Moses looks up and says, ‘By this I assume you mean we should not eat meat and milk dishes at the same time.’ ‘No,’ replies the Almighty, ‘I simply said, ‘Do not cook a kid in its mother’s milk’.

‘OK,’ says Moses, ‘So you mean we should have separate dishes for meat and milk.

‘No,’ says the Master of the Universe, ‘I simply said, ‘Do not cook a kid in its mother’s milk’.

‘Fine,’ says Moses, ‘So you mean we should wait six hours after meat before we can eat milk?’ ‘No,’ replies the Almighty, ‘I simply said, “Do not cook a kid in its mother’s milk”.

‘Alright, Moses,’ says the Holy One, ‘you do whatever you want.’

Traditional joke

Yair Ettinger, haaretz.com, 11 June 2013

Deuteronomy 14:21

“You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk.

Translation: JPS, 1999

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 130a

In the locality of Rabbi Jose the Galilean they used to eat flesh of fowl with milk. Levi visited the house of Joseph the baker and was offered the head of a peacock in milk, which he did not eat. When he came before Rabbi [Judah the Prince] he asked him, ‘Why did you not place them under the ban?’ ‘It was the locality of Rabbi Judah ben Bathyra’, replied he, ‘and I thought, Perhaps he has lectured to them in accordance with Rabbi Jose the Galilean. … It is stated, ‘You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk’, hence a fowl is excluded, since it has no mother’s milk”.

Translation: Based on Soncino

Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah, Introduction

... The Torah only prohibits (milk with flesh of cattle and beasts, whereas the Sages (decreed the additional prohibition of flesh of fowl (with milk) to keep one far from (transgressing) an interdiction. There are some who did not ordain this decree, like Rabbi Jose the Galilean who permitted (the consumption of flesh of fowl with milk, and all the inhabitants of his town ate this (combination) … Where complete agreement prevails regarding one of the decrees, no one argues thereon in any respect. If a prohibition has spread throughout Israel, then no one should dispute such a decree. Even the prophets themselves were not permitted to void it.

Translation: Based on Fred Rosen

Points to consider

What problems arise when individuals or groups understand laws of kashrut differently?

Why should we accept prohibitions that have become popular and widespread? Is this progress?

Is there a fact of the matter or just a difference in opinion?

Connections

Prohibited meat? Source 2.2

Another difference of opinion Source 2.5

Going too far Source 2.10
Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.

William Arthur Ward (1921–94)

When we make a blessing over food, we exercise a uniquely human capacity. All creatures eat, but only humans are able to acknowledge the gift of food that nourishes our bodies. When we raise our voices in blessing, we are celebrating our place in a complex food chain that may involve many, many individuals, who had a hand in bringing this food to our table. We are also acknowledging the mystery of life that enables food to grow in soil and in sand, in water, in forests, and in fields. We need not believe in God in any traditional way in order to pronounce a blessing. We need only recognize that none of us, alone, can make food appear before us.


Master of the world: I ask of You – please help me, such that when my Levi Yitzhak recites the blessing over these loaves on Shabbat, he should have in his heart the same meditations that I have at this time, as I knead and bake.


If you don’t believe in God, what does gratitude mean? I don’t mean specific gratitude towards specific people for specific benevolent acts. I mean that more broad, general, sweeping sense of gratitude: gratitude for things like good health, having food to eat, having friends and family, the mere fact of being alive at all.

[...]

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 sensing the formula of blessing

Mishnah, Berakhot 6.2

If one recited [the blessing] “Who creates the fruit of the soil” over fruits of the tree: he has fulfilled his obligation. If over fruits of the soil, he recited “Who created the fruit of the tree”, he has not fulfilled his obligation. If over all of these one said: “by Whose word all things exist” – he has fulfilled his obligation.

Translation: Based on Nahman Kahana (Jerusalem, 1994)

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 40b

“If over all of these one said: ‘by Whose word all things exist’ etc. It has been stated. Rabbi Huna said: ‘Except over bread and wine’. Rabbi Johanan, however, said: ‘Even over bread and wine’. May we say that the same difference of opinion is found between tanna’im (rabbits of the Mishnah)? For it was taught: ‘If a man sees a loaf of bread and says, ‘What a fine loaf this is! Blessed be the Omnipresent that has created it!’ he has performed his obligation.’ So says Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Jose says: ‘If one alters the formula laid down by the Sages in benedictions, he has not performed his obligation.’

Translation: Based on Soncino

Points to consider

Why does fruit of the tree have its own blessing if we can fulfil our obligation through the blessing for fruit of the ground?

Why does any food have its own blessing if we can fulfil our obligation for all food through the blessing ‘... by Whose word all things exist’?

How might formulaic blessings help us to express gratitude?

How might they hinder?

CONNECTIONS

The formula of eating Source 2.6
A special blessing Source 2.8
Just another blessing Source 2.9
Amos 9:13-15

Three times a year you shall hold a festival for Me: 15You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread – eating unleavened bread for seven days as I have commanded you – at the set time in the month of Abib, for in it you went forth from Egypt; and none shall appear before Me empty-handed; 16and the Feast of the Harvest, of the first fruits of your work, of what you sow in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in the results of your work from the fields, three times a year all your males shall appear before the Sovereign, the Lord.

Translation: JPS, 1999

Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 24a

Once Rabbi Jose had day-labourers [working] in the field; night set in and no food was brought to them and they said to his son, “We are hungry.” Now they were resting under a fig tree and he exclaimed: “Fig tree, fig tree, bring forth thy fruit that my father’s labourers may eat.” It brought forth fruit and they ate. Meanwhile the father came and said to them, “Do not bear a grievance against me; the reason for my delay is because I have been occupied up till now on an errand of charity.” The labourers replied, “May God satisfy you even as your son has satisfied us.” Whereupon he asked: “Whence?” And they told him what had happened. Thereupon he said to his son: “My son, you have troubled your father. You have wronged him in the presence of his workmen. He has not said to them, ‘You are hungry;’ but, ‘We are hungry.’”

Translation: Soncino

Exodus 23:14–17

Three times a year you shall hold a festival for Me: 14You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread – eating unleavened bread for seven days as I have commanded you – at the set time in the month of Abib, for in it you went forth from Egypt; and none shall appear before Me empty-handed: 15and the Feast of the Harvest, of the first fruits of your work, of what you sow in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in the results of your work from the fields.

Translation: Soncino

Points to consider

Why are we commanded to feast during festivals?

Why are many Jewish festivals associated with special foods?

What is the relevance of having an agricultural calendar in a society where most people are not farmers?

Is it important to eat foods in their season? Why or why not?
18 When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 19 for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

19 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”


Helen, 45, says her mum, who used to love baking, missed out on simple pleasures like the smell of fresh bread or her favourite perfume, Cinnabar by Estée Lauder, because of the illness. She thinks it’s important that research is being done into the connection between smell and Alzheimer’s as previously more focus has been on senses such as sight and sound.

“There is a link,” she says. “Now I can’t smell things as well as I used to and I think it’s because there is a link between smell and memory.”

She believes that when Alzheimer’s sufferers lose their sense of smell they struggle to remember specific events or people. Helen believes that research into smell and memory will help in the fight against Alzheimer’s disease.

What must you break apart in order to bring a family close together?

Bread, of course.


Deuteronomy 16:1–3

1 Observe the month of Abib and offer a passover sacrifice to the Lord your God, for it was in the month of Abib, at night, that the Lord your God freed you from Egypt. 2 You shall slaughter the passover sacrifice for the Lord your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the Lord will choose to establish His name. 3 You shall not eat anything leavened with it; for seven days thereafter you shall eat unleavened bread, bread of distress – for you departed from the land of Egypt hurriedly – so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt as long as you live.

Translation: JPS, 1999

Israel Meir Hakohen, Mishnah Berurah, 271:41, 274:1

“To cover it”: ... Another reason [for covering the bread whilst reciting kiddush], given by the Tur [Jacob ben Asher], is that one should cover the loaves of bread as a remembrance of the manna in the desert, which was covered by dew from above and from below, so one should cover the loaves ever when one is reciting kiddush over them [rather than over the wine].

“Two loaves”: as a remembrance of the manna in the desert, as it is written, “they gathered double the amount” (Exodus 16:22), and also on yom tov one needs to say the blessing over two loaves. And women are also obligated in the two loaves, as they were also part of the miracle of the manna.

Points to consider

What is the connection between bread and memory?

Matzah and challah are both variations on our daily bread. Is our daily bread special or mundane?

Do we remember because we eat or do we eat because we remember?

CONNECTIONS

Blessing bread
Source 2.5

Kiddush
Source 2.8

Daily basics
Source 2.9
Beer is made by men, wine by God.

Rob Eshman: Why is wine so critical to Jewish life and celebration?

Jeff Morgan: In every ancient Mediterranean grape-growing community, wine was an integral part of the dietary regimen as well as religious practice. The Greeks and Romans ultimately lost faith in Dionysus and Bacchus, but they kept their vineyards. And their modern-day progeny continue to grow grapes and drink wine daily.

History led the Jews down a different path. In ancient Israel, viticulture was also an essential part of Jewish life. This is reflected in the Torah, where wine is regularly alluded to, beginning with Noah. We lost our land after the Roman destruction of the Temple 2,000 years ago. Still, our ancestors managed to maintain their customs and religion throughout the ensuing millennia. For much of this time, Jews could not plant vineyards, and wine production was problematic.

Rob Eshman: Is wine seen as a gateway to God in the way some tribes use hallucinogenics? Or was it simply a common beverage elevated by religious authorities?

Jeff Morgan: There's some truth to both. You don't need to be a Talmudic scholar or have a Ph.D. in anthropology to understand that the mind-altering effects of alcohol might have caused early Jews to suspect that wine could open the door to an alternative reality.

You refer to wine as a “common” beverage. I would counter that it is a thoroughly “uncommon” one. The early rabbis recognised wine’s unique qualities and so incorporated wine into Jewish religious life. But I would hardly say they elevated it. It was a natural development.

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 35a

Rabbi Samuel bar Nahmani said in the name of Rabbi Jonathan: “Whence do we know that a song of praise is sung only over wine? Because it says, ‘And the vine said unto them: Should I leave my wine which cheers God and man?’ (Judges 9:13).” If it cheers man, how does it cheer God? From this we learn that a song of praise is sung only over wine.

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 51b

Our Rabbis taught: The points of difference between Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel in relation to a meal are as follows: Beth Shammai say that the blessing is first said over the sanctity of the day and then over the wine, because it is on account of the day that the wine is used, and [moreover] the day has already become holy before the wine has been brought. Beth Hillel say that the blessing is first said over the wine, because it is on account of the day that the wine is used, and [moreover] the day has already become holy before the wine has been brought. Both Hillel say that a blessing is said over the wine first and then over the day, because the wine provides the occasion for saying a benediction.

Translation: Based on Soncino

Points to consider

What is the connection between wine and holiness?

What do you think is the connection between physiological effects and the ritual function of wine?

How does wine cheer God?
WATER: APPRECIATING A LIMITED RESOURCE

The Biblical experiences with water in the desert can be understood as a spiritual training to cultivate appreciation for God’s goodness. Through the process of taking water for granted, losing it and then receiving it directly from God, the desert wanderers certainly appreciated water and the One Who provided it …

Jewish prayers and texts reinforce this message and remind us of what our ancestors knew about water. Our prayers and texts are replete with appreciation for rain, profound recognition of the importance of water, prayers imploring God to provide us with water, and gratitude for the rains when they come. For example, Dr. Jeremy Benstein notes that Biblical Hebrew contains at least six different words to describe liquid precipitation (geshem, matar, yoreh, malkosh, revivim, se’irim), which denote different times and intensities of rainfall.

Today, the industrialization of water distribution has increased the availability of water yet reduced our appreciation of its importance …

These innovations have relieved us from the burden of transporting water from streams and cisterns to our homes. However, they have blinded us to where our water comes from – both physically and spiritually. With this, we have lost the deep-seated experience of the preciousness of water …

The world increasingly faces a water crisis, experienced most by those in Africa, South Asia, and China. A lack of sufficient drinking water is recognized to be a leading cause of death in the world … And in the Land of Israel, Israel’s main aquifers and Lake Kinneret have dipped below their red lines in recent years, endangering water quality …

For modern use of water to continue in the long-term, we will have to develop a deeper water awareness. That is where the teachings of our 3000-year old tradition come in. These teachings on rain and water can help us cultivate an appreciation for water, and inspire us every day to value and protect our resources – and everything we use.

THE RANGE OF ANOMALOUS PROPERTIES OF WATER

As liquid water is so common-place in our everyday lives, it is often regarded as a ‘typical’ liquid. In reality, water is most atypical as a liquid, behaving as a quite different material at low temperatures to that when it is hot. It has often been stated that life depends on these anomalous properties of water. In particular, the high cohesion between molecules gives it a high freezing and melting point, such that we and our planet are bathed in liquid water. The large heat capacity, high thermal conductivity and high water content in organisms contribute to thermal regulation and prevent local temperature fluctuations, thus allowing us to more easily control our body temperature. The high latent heat of evaporation gives resistance to dehydration and considerable evaporative cooling. Water is an excellent solvent due to its polarity, high dielectric constant and small size, particularly for polar and ionic compounds and salts. It has unique hydration properties towards biological macromolecules (particularly proteins and nucleic acids) that determine their three-dimensional structures, and hence their functions, in solution. This hydration forms gels that can reversibly undergo the gel-sol phase transitions that underlie many cellular mechanisms. Water ionizes and allows easy proton exchange between molecules, so contributing to the richness of the ionic interactions in biology.

“The anomalous properties of water”, lsbu.ac.uk

The anomalous properties of water...
Most devout Indians fast regularly or on special occasions like festivals and Ekadashis. On such days they do not eat at all, eat once or make do with fruits or a special diet of simple food.

Fasting in Sanskrit is called upavasa. Upa means “near” + vaasa means “to stay”. Upavasa therefore means staying near (the Lord), meaning the attainment of close mental proximity with the Lord.

“Why do we fast?” kids.baps.org

The Church considered gluttony one of the sins that lower a human being from the spiritual to the corporeal. The need to relieve hunger is not a sin in itself of course – even though, as we shall see, the Church has high regard for stomachs that growl for themselves.

Aviad Kleinberg, 7 Deadly Sins: A Very Partial List (2008)

In Judaism, family, friends, and the greater community take on the responsibility of comforting and providing for those that are mourning by tending to their basic needs while a family is sitting shiva.

During the shiva, mourners are required to abstain from participating in some of the most basic functions of everyday life, including cooking and preparing meals. Emotional and physical support, most importantly nourishment is provided by the community.

“Food and Condolesence Baskets”, shiva.com

Abstinence and fasting are by far the most common of all ascetic practices. Among the primitive peoples, it originated, in part, because of a belief that taking food is dangerous, for demonic forces may enter the body while one is eating. Further, some foods regarded as especially dangerous were to be avoided.

[...] Judaism, because of its view that God created the world and that the world (including man) is good, it is nonascetic in character and includes only certain ascetic features, such as fasting for strengthening the efficacy of prayer and for gaining merit. Though some saw a proof of the holiness of life in some ascetic practices, a fully developed ascetical system of life has remained foreign to Jewish thought, and ascetic trends could, therefore, appear only on the periphery of Judaism.

“Asceticism”, Encyclopaedia Britannica

Gil Marks: There is no way you can practice Judaism religiously or culturally without food. Food has been intrinsic to Jewish ritual, life and culture from the outset. What is the very first act that the Israelites in Egypt are commanded to do? It’s to have a communal meal – roast lamb and herbs, some nice shwarma.

And with that, the beginning of the Jewish people is through a meal. The famous joke – “They tried to kill us, we won, now let’s eat” – is really not that far from the truth.

Mimi Sheraton: I think there’s a special relationship between all human beings and food. The relationships may be different and the foods may be different but I think just about every group is related to certain foods and certain attitudes and customs and so on.

“Is There a Secret Ingredient in the Jewish Relationship with Food?”, momentmag.com

Translation: Soncino

Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:1

Rabbi Dimi in the name of Rabbi Yitzhak said: “Is what the Torah forbade not enough such that you are seeking to make more things forbidden for yourself by taking on more restrictions?”

Source 2.10

A step too far

Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 60b

Our Rabbis taught: When the Temple was destroyed for the second time, large numbers in Israel became ascetics, binding themselves neither to eat meat nor to drink wine. Rabbi Joshua got into conversation with them and said to them: “My sons, why do you not eat meat nor drink wine?”

They replied: “Shall we eat flesh which used to be poured as a libation on the altar, now that this altar is in abeyance? Shall we drink wine which used to be a libation on the altar, but now no longer?” He said to them: “If that is so, we should not eat bread either, because the meal offerings have ceased.” They said: “[That is so, and] we can manage with other fruits.” “Then we can manage with other fruits” [they said].

“Then we can manage with other fruits” [they said].

“Then we can manage with other fruits” [they said].

“Then we can manage with other fruits” [they said].

“Then we can manage with other fruits” [they said].

A step too far

Source 2.4

Always remember

Consequences:

First offerings

Source 2.1

Community politics

Source 2.4

Source 2.7

Points to consider

Who determines which food rituals are Jewish? Each individual? The community? God?

Should ritual be restrictive? Should it always be enhancing?

Should our relationship with food be preserved or updated?
SECTION THREE

In which we consider the role of hunger and the obligation to feed the hungry
### WHO ARE THE HUNGRY?

Most of the world’s hungry live in developing countries. According to the latest Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) statistics from 2013, there are 842 million hungry people in the world and 98 percent of them are in developing countries. They are distributed like this:

#### ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

- **553 million**

#### AFRICA

- **227 million**

#### LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

- **47 million**

#### DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

- **16 million**

### RURAL RISK

Three-quarters of all hungry people live in rural areas, mainly in the villages of Asia and Africa. Overwhelmingly dependent on agriculture for their food, these populations have no alternative source of income or employment. As a result, they are vulnerable to crises. Many migrate to cities in their search for employment, swelling the ever-expanding populations of shanty towns in developing countries.

### HUNGRY FARMERS

FAO calculates that around half of the world’s hungry people are from smallholder farming communities, surviving off marginal lands prone to natural disasters like drought or flood. Another 20 percent belong to landless families dependent on farming and about 10 percent live in communities whose livelihoods depend on herding, fishing or forest resources.

The remaining 20 percent live in shanty towns on the periphery of the biggest cities in developing countries. The numbers of poor and hungry city dwellers are rising rapidly along with the world’s total urban population.

### CHILDREN

An estimated 146 million children in developing countries are underweight - the result of acute or chronic hunger (source: The State of the World’s Children, UNICEF, 2009). All too often, child hunger is inherited: up to 17 million children are born underweight annually, the result of inadequate nutrition before and during pregnancy.

### WOMEN

Women are the world’s primary food producers, yet cultural traditions and social structures often mean women are much more affected by hunger and poverty than men. A mother who is stunted or underweight due to an inadequate diet often gives birth to low birthweight children.

Around 50 per cent of pregnant women in developing countries are iron deficient (source: UNICEF). Lack of iron means 315,000 women die annually from haemorrhage at childbirth. As a result, women, and in particular expectant and nursing mothers, often need special or increased intake of food.

### Points to consider

**How do we determine whether a fast is good or bad?**

**Is there more to fasting than being hungry?**

**Who are “the hungry”? Who are our “own kin”?**

### KEY SOURCE 3.1

The fast I desire?

Isaiah 58:3–7

四五“Why, when we fasted, did You not see? When we starved our bodies, did You pay no heed?”

Because on your fast day
You see to your business
And oppress all your labourers!
Because you fast in strife and contention, And you strike with a wicked fist! Your fasting today is not such As to make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast I desire, A day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush And lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, A day when the Lord is favourable? No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock fetters of wickedness, And untie the cords of the yoke To let the oppressed go free; To break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry, And take the wretched poor into your home; When you see the naked, to clothe him, And not to ignore your own kin.

Translation: JPS, 1999

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**CONNECTIONS**

- A good fast? Source 3.2
- Whom shall we feed? Source 3.6
- Charity or murder Source 3.8
### Making a Difference: Fasting for Peace

The man who grew up in a village, decided to make a difference in the world through fasting. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of India, used fasting as a tool for social and political change. He believed that fasting could bring about ethical and moral changes in both individuals and societies.

#### Fast Days

- **1913 (Nov 10-16)**: 7 days in Phoenix, South Africa. First Penitential Fast for communal peace.
- **1914 (Apr)**: 14 days in Poona. Second Penitential Fast.
- **1918**: 3 days in Ahmedabad. In the interest of striking mill workers in Ahmedabad. First fast in India.
- **1919**: 3 days in Ahmedabad. First Anti-Violence Fast: Against the attempted derail of a train at Nadiad.
- **1922 (Nov 19-22)**: 4 days in Poona. Second Anti-Violence Fast: Against the anarchists' activities on the occasion of the Prince of Wales' arrival.
- **1923 (Sep 20-26)**: 1 day in Poona. First Anti-Violence Fast: Against a violent young Congressman.
- **1924 (Sep 18-Oct 8)**: 21 days in DeNi. First Hindu-Muslim Unity Fast.
- **1925 (Nov 24-Dec 1)**: 7 days in Poona. First Anti-Uncouthability Fast: Communal Award of separate electorates and separate reservation of seats for depressed classes.
- **1926**: 4 days in Poona. Second Anti-Violence Fast: Against the anarchists' activities for the improvement of Harijans' condition.
- **1927 (Sep 8-10)**: 3 days in Poona. Second Anti-Uncouthability Fast: For the improvement of Harijans' condition.
- **1928**: 6 days in Poona. Fourth Anti-Uncouthability Fast: To obtain privileges (while in prison) that would enable him to carry on his fight in behalf of the Harijans.
- **1930 (Mar)**: 3 days in Poona. Fourth Anti-Violence Fast: Against a violent young Congressmen.
- **1932 (Feb 2-7)**: 4 days in Poona. Second Anti-Violence Fast: Against the anarchists' activities for the improvement of Harijans' condition.
- **1933 (Nov 24-30)**: 7 days in Poona. Third Hindu-Muslim Unity Fast: Restoration of communal peace.

#### Reasons and Demands

- **1913**: First Penitential Fast for communal peace.
- **1914**: Second Penitential Fast.
- **1918**: In the interest of striking mill workers in Ahmedabad. First fast in India.
- **1919**: First Anti-Violence Fast: Against the attempted derail of a train at Nadiad.
- **1922**: Second Anti-Violence Fast: Against the anarchists' activities for the improvement of Harijans' condition.
- **1923**: First Anti-Violence Fast: Against a violent young Congressman.
- **1924**: First Hindu-Muslim Unity Fast. Interest of Hindu-Muslim unity.
- **1925**: First Anti-Uncouthability Fast: Communal Award of separate electorates and separate reservation of seats for depressed classes.
- **1926**: Second Anti-Violence Fast: Against the anarchists' activities for the improvement of Harijans' condition.
- **1927**: Fourth Anti-Uncouthability Fast: To obtain privileges (while in prison) that would enable him to carry on his fight in behalf of the Harijans.
- **1928**: Fourth Anti-Violence Fast: Against a violent young Congressmen.
- **1930**: Second Anti-Uncouthability Fast: For the improvement of Harijans' condition.
- **1932**: Second Anti-Violence Fast: Against the anarchists' activities for the improvement of Harijans' condition.
- **1933**: Third Hindu-Muslim Unity Fast: Restoration of communal peace.

### Why Do They Fast?

- **Source 3.2**: The prophet calls these days [the fast days of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months] both “days of fasting” and “days of joy,” signifying that when there is peace they shall be for joy and gladness, but if there is no peace they shall be for fasting.

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**Source 3.2**: Worldly Work

**Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 18b**

The man who grew up in a village, decided to make a difference in the world through fasting. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of India, used fasting as a tool for social and political change. He believed that fasting could bring about ethical and moral changes in both individuals and societies.

### Points to Consider

In what ways might choosing to fast have an effect on the world? What is the connection between fasting and peace? Why do you think they did not fast on Sunday?
I fast for greater physical and mental efficiency.

Plato (428-348 BCE)

Increased vitality is almost the universal experience of those that have fasted. For real rest of body and mind is possible only during fasting. Suspension of daily work is hardly rest without the rest that the over-taxed and overworked digestive apparatus needs in a multitude of cases. The moral effect of fasting, while it is considerable, is not so easily demonstrable. For moral results there has to be perfect co-operation from the mind. And there is danger of self-deception. I know of many instances in which fasting undertaken for moral results has been overdone.

Mahatma Gandhi, Young India, 29 March 1928

Fasting cleanses the soul, raises the mind, subjects one’s flesh to the spirit, renders the heart contrite and humble, scatters the clouds of concupiscence, quenches the fire of lust, and kindles the true light of chastity. Enter again into yourself.


One fasts to pray, to purify one’s heart and strengthen the will – or to arouse the silent awareness and compassion of the population.

Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926, Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk and teacher)

Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit 11b

Rabbi Jeremiah bar Abba further said in the name of Resh Lakish: ‘A Torah scholar may not afflict himself by fasting because he lessens thereby his heavenly work.’

Translation: Soncino

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, ‘Laws of Character Traits’ 3:3

[A person] should have the intent that his body be whole and strong, in order for his inner soul to be upright so that it will be able to know God. For it is impossible to understand and become knowledgeable in the wisdoms when one is starving or sick...

Translation: Eliyahu Touger

POINTS TO CONSIDER

Do you find either of these arguments convincing?
Why or why not?

In what ways might a person benefit from fasting?
Could fasting increase one’s heavenly work?
How might fasting itself be heavenly work?
Before Consuming Chametz [on Pesach]

Recite with Proper Intent:

Heavenly Father, it is apparent to You that our will is to do Your will and to celebrate Passover by eating matzah and by refraining from chametz. But on this our hearts are distressed, because the oppression prevents us [from fulfilling these commandments] and we find our lives in danger. We are ready and willing to fulfill Your mandate that we “live by the commandments and not die by them”. And we are observing Your warning: “Protect yourself and sustain your soul greatly.” We therefore beseech You to keep us alive, sustain us and redeem us speedily, so that we may observe Your statutes, carry out Your will and serve You wholeheartedly. Amen.

Prayer compiled by Yissachar-Bernard Davids at Bergen-Belsen

Leviiticus 18:5

You shall therefore keep my statutes, and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them. I am God.

Translation: Based on English Standard Version

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 85b

“He shall live by them”: but he shall not die because of them.

Translation: Soncino

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 83a-b

If one is seized by a ravenous hunger, he may be given to eat even unclean things until his eyes are enlightened.

[..]

Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Jose were walking together when a ravenous hunger seized Rabbi Judah. He seized a shepherd and devoured his bread. Rabbi Jose said to him: “You have robbed the shepherd!” As they entered the city, a ravenous hunger seized Rabbi Jose. They brought him all sorts of foods and dishes. Whereupon Rabbi Judah said to him: “I may have deprived the shepherd, but you have deprived a whole town.”

Translation: Soncino

Points to consider

What does it mean to “live by them”?
What does it mean to “die because of them”?

What is a ravenous hunger? Do you think either Rabbi Jose or Rabbi Judah’s behaviour was appropriate?

How important is it to keep kosher? If you had a ravenous hunger, would you rather eat non-kosher food or steal kosher food?
The crops are all in and the peaches are rot’t’ning,
The oranges piled in their creosote dumps;
They’re flying ‘em back to the Mexican border
To pay all their money to wade back again.

Goodbye to my Juan, goodbye, Rosalita,
Adios mis amigos, Jesus y Maria;
You won’t have your names when you ride
the big airplane,
All they will call you will be “deportees”.

My father’s own father, he waded that river,
They took all the money he made in his life;
My brothers and sisters come working the fruit trees,
And they rode the truck till they took down and died.

Some of us are illegal, and some are not wanted,
Our work contract’s out and we have to move on;
Six hundred miles to that Mexican border,
They chase us like outlaws, like rustlers, like thieves.

We died in your hills, we died in your deserts,
We died in your valleys and died on your plains.
We died ‘neath your trees and we died in your bushes,
The radio says, “They are just deportees”.

Is this the best way we can grow our big orchards?
Is this the best way we can grow our good fruit?
To fall like dry leaves to rot on my topsoil
And be called by no name except “deportees”?

Genesis 41:56-42:5
41 Accordingly, when the famine became severe in the land of Egypt, Joseph laid open all that was within, and rationed out grain to the Egyptians. The famine, however, spread over the whole world. 42 When Jacob saw that there were food rations to be had in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you keep looking at one another? 43 Now I hear,” he went on, “that there are rations to be had in Egypt. Go down and procure rations for us there, that we may live and not die.” So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to get grain rations in Egypt; 44 “for Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, since he feared that he might meet with disaster. 45 Thus the sons of Israel were among those who came to procure rations, for the famine extended to the land of Canaan.

Translation: JPS, 1999

Source 3.5
Go get it!

Hunger and wisdom
Source 3.3
Reap the harvest
Source 3.6
Rations
Source 3.8

Points to consider
Why does Jacob say to his sons “that we may live and not die”?
Are there any risks not worth taking to attain food security?
Can world history be told through the story of human migrations?
Can Jewish history? Can your family history?

CONNECTIONS
Our century is the first in which it has been possible to speak of global responsibility and a global community. For most of human history we could affect the people in our village, or perhaps in a large city, but even a powerful king could not conquer far beyond the borders of his kingdom. When Hadrian ruled the Roman Empire, his realm covered most of the ‘known’ world, but today when I board a jet in London leaving what used to be one of the far-flung outposts of the Roman Empire, I pass over its opposite boundary before I am even halfway to Singapore, let alone to my home in Australia. Moreover no matter what the extent of the empire, the time required for communications and transport meant that there was simply no way in which people could make any difference to the victims of floods, wars, or massacres taking place on the other side of the globe. By the time anyone had heard of the events and responded, the victims were dead or had survived without assistance. “Charity begins at home” made sense, because it was only “at home” – or at least in your own town – that you could be confident that your charity would make any difference.

Instant communications and jet transport have changed all that. A television audience of two billion people can now watch hungry children beg for food in an area struck by famine, or they can see refugees streaming across the border in search of a safe place away from those they fear will kill them. Most of that huge audience also have the means to help people they are seeing on their screens. Each one of us can pull out a credit card and phone in a donation to an aid organization which can, in a few days, fly in people who can begin distributing food and medical supplies.

Source 3.6
First come, first served

Leviticus 19:9–10
9 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God.

Translation: JPS, 1999

Mishnah, Pe’ah 4:9
If someone has collected [the grain from] the corner of the field and has said, “This is for a particular person”, Rabbi Eliezer says, “He has acquired it for that person.” But the Sages say that he must give it to the first poor person whom he meets.

Points to consider
Do you prefer the ruling of Rabbi Eliezer or the ruling of the Sages? What other options might there be?
How can we fulfill these commandments if we do not own fields or vineyards?
Which do you feel is more Jewish: local charity or global charity? Why?

A LITTLE PRINCESS

"Do you want to buy something?" she added, as she saw Sara glance at the buns.

"Four buns, if you please," said Sara. "Those at a penny each."

The woman went to the window and put some in a paper bag.

Sara noticed that she put in six.

"I said four, if you please," she explained. "I have only fourpence."

"I'll throw in two for makeweight," said the woman with her good-natured look. "I dare say you can eat them sometime. Aren't you hungry?"

A mist rose before Sara's eyes.

"Yes," she answered. "I am very hungry, and I am much obliged to you for your kindness; and" – she was going to add – "there is a child outside who is hungrier than I am." But just at that moment two or three customers came in at once, and each one seemed in a hurry, so she could only thank the woman again and go out.

The beggar girl was still huddled up in the corner of the step. She looked frightful in her wet and dirty rags. She was staring straight before her with a stupid look of suffering, and Sara saw her suddenly draw the back of her roughened black hand across her eyes to rub away the tears which seemed to have surprised her by forcing their way from under her lids. She was muttering to herself.

Sara opened the paper bag and took out one of the hot buns, which had already warmed her own cold hands a little.

"See," she said, putting the bun in the ragged lap, "this is nice and hot. Eat it, and you will not feel so hungry."

The child started and stared up at her, as if such sudden, amazing good luck almost frightened her; then she snatched up the bun and began to cram it into her mouth with great wolfish bites.

"Oh, my! Oh, my!" Sara heard her say hoarsely, in wild delight. "Oh my!"

Sara took out three more buns and put them down. The sound in the hoarse, ravenous voice was awful. "She is hungrier than I am," she said to herself. "She's starving." But her hand trembled when she put down the fourth bun. "I'm not starving," she said – and she put down the fifth.

"For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, "You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land."

Translation: English Standard Version

To one who needs bread, give bread; to one who needs dough, give dough; to one who needs money, give money; and to one who needs to be fed, place the food in his mouth.
THE RESTAURANT WITH NO CASH REGISTER: A NEW EXPERIMENT IN FEEDING THE HUNGRY


The phrase “soup kitchen” doesn’t exactly ooze comfort. Getting meals to the homeless or hungry is usually a bare-bones affair, involving the most inexpensive food and all the ambience of a basement cafeteria.

But walking into a soup kitchen run by Masbia, a group founded in 2005 and now operating three storefronts across Brooklyn and Queens, feels different.

The food is fresh, cooked by chef Ruben Diaz and volunteers, and meals incorporate donations from city farmers’ markets and local CSAs. There’s art on the walls. The chairs don’t fold. It looks like a restaurant, and it is – one where nobody has to pick up the check.

Masbia is on track to serve one million meals this year alone.

The food is kosher – the founders are Hasidic Jews, and the first store front opened in Boro Park, a primarily Orthodox Jewish neighbourhood – but people of all creeds are welcome. Many of the volunteers preparing the food are patrons, who work a few hours and then take their meals with employees.

But while volunteers help, private donations are what keep the doors open, making up much of the year’s $2 million operating budget.

During a recent visit to Masbia, most seated patrons confirmed that this was the first and only soup kitchen they had sought out. And perhaps it’s not so surprising: They said dignified surroundings and healthy, comforting meals raise Masbia above the standard, a welcome reminder that seeking help with food doesn’t have to be a gloomy affair.

Veronique Greenwood and Jacob Templin/Nationswell, People Magazine, 17 March 2014

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, ‘Laws of Gifts to the Poor’ 9:1, 2 & 4

1. In every city where Jews live, they are obligated to appoint faithful men of renown as trustees of a charitable fund. They should circulate among the people from Friday to Friday and take from each person what is appropriate for him to give and the assessment made upon him. Then they allocate the money from Friday to Friday, giving each poor person sufficient food for seven days. This is called the kupah.

2. Similarly, we appoint trustees who take bread, different types of food, fruit, or money from every courtyard and give each poor person sustenance for that day. This is called the tamchui.

4. On fast days, we distribute food to the poor. Whenever there is a fast day on which the people eat [after the fast and go] to bed without distributing charity to the poor, they are considered as murderers. Concerning them, the Oral Tradition says (Isaiah 1:21): “Charity is held overnight and now [you are] murderers.”

When does this apply? When they did not give them bread and fruit which is [usually] eaten together with bread, e.g. dates and grapes. If, however, they delayed the delivery of money or wheat, they are not considered as murderers.

Translation: Eliyahu Touger

Points to consider

What are the key differences between the kupah and the tamchui?

Which is more effective?

Does appointing trustees benefit the benefactor?

Does it benefit the recipient? Why or why not?

Do you think that failing to feed the hungry on a fast day is worse than on other days?

Source 3.8

Appoint trustees

Source 3.10

Full-time job?

Source 3.7

What’s in it for me?

Source 3.9

CoNNeCtIoNS

Feeding the individual

HEAVEN OR HELL: A CORPORATE PARABLE

Rabbi Haim of Romshishok was an itinerant preacher. He travelled from town to town delivering religious sermons that stressed the importance of respect for one’s fellow man. He often began his talks with the following story:

“I once ascended to the firmaments. I first went to see Hell and the sight was horrifying. Row after row of tables were laden with platters of sumptuous food, yet the people seated around the tables were pale and emaciated, moaning in hunger. As I came closer, I understood their predicament.

“Every person held a full spoon, but both arms were splinted with wooden slats so he could not bend either elbow to bring the food to his mouth. It broke my heart to see the tortured groans of these poor people as they held their food so near but could not consume it.

“Next I went to visit Heaven. I was surprised to see the same setting I had witnessed in Hell – row after row of long tables laden with food. But in contrast to Hell, the people there were pale and emaciated, obviously sated from their sumptuous meal.

“As I watched, a man picked up his spoon and dug it into the dish before him. Then he stretched across the table and fed the person across from him. I suddenly understood Heaven and Hell offer the same circumstances and conditions. The critical difference is in the way the people treat each other.

“I ran back to Hell to share this solution with the poor souls trapped there. I whispered in the ear of one starving man, ‘You do not have to go hungry. Use your spoon to feed your neighbour, and he will surely return the favour and feed you.’

“You expect me to feed the detestable man sitting across the table?’ said the man angrily. ‘I would rather starve than give him the pleasure of eating!’

“I then understood God’s wisdom in choosing who is worthy to go to Heaven and who deserves to go to Hell.”

Moshe Kranc, hodu.com

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Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 10a

This question was actually put by Turnus Rufus to Rabbi Akiva: “If your God loves the poor, why does He not support them?” He replied, “So that we may be saved from the punishment of Gehinnom [hell].” “On the contrary,” said the other, “it is this which condemns you to Gehinnom. I will illustrate by a parable. Suppose an earthly king was angry with his servant and put him in prison and ordered that he should be given no food or drink, and a man went and gave him food and drink. If the king heard of it, would he not send him a present? As I watched, a man picked up his spoon and dug it into the dish before him. Then he stretched across the table and fed the person across from him! The recipient of this kindness thanked him and returned the favour by leaning across the table to feed his benefactor.

“On the contrary,” said the other, “it is this which condemns you to Gehinnom. I will illustrate by another parable. Suppose an earthly king was angry with his son and put him in prison and ordered that no food or drink should be given to him, and someone went and gave him food and drink. If the king heard of it, would he not send him a present? And we are called ‘sons’, as it is written, ‘Sons are ye to the Lord your God’ (Deuteronomy 14:1).”

Translation: Soncino

Points to consider

Turnus Rufus and Rabbi Akiva both compare the poor to a king’s prisoner. What are the implications of thinking of hunger as a punishment from God?

What crimes, if any, warrant the punishment of hunger? What is food justice?

To what extent is the continued presence of hunger in the world a failing of God? To what extent is it a failing of humankind?

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CONNECTIONS

Divine hunger Source 3.3
Ravenous hunger Source 3.4
The world to come Source 3.10
We have eaten and been satisfied. Help us to be responsive to the needs of others and to listen to their cry for food. Open our eyes and our hearts, so that we may share Your gifts, and help to remove hunger and want from our world.

Hugo Gryn (1930–96), Birkat Hamaazon (Grace after Meals)

Thank God, we are not about to preach suspect crusades in order to “close ranks among believers”, in order to unite “among spiritualists” against rising materialism! As if any position should be opposed to this Third World ravaged by hunger; as if all the spirituality in the world did not reside in the gesture of feeding, and as if, from a world in ruins, we had any other treasure to save than the gift – that it received nonetheless – of suffering through the hunger of the other person. “Great is eating” says Rabbi Yochanan in the name of Rabbi Jose ben Kisma (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 103b). The other’s hunger – be it of the flesh or of bread – is sacred; only the hunger of the third party limits its rights; there is no bad materialism other than our own.

Emmanuel Levinas, Difficult Freedom, ‘Foreword’, p. xiv

Points to consider

How is giving sustenance to the poor comparable to giving sustenance to God?

Does feeding the hungry benefit us spiritually in this life?

Does being hungry?

What limits might there be to our duty to feed the hungry?

Might we ever complete the task entirely? If so, how?
Food and Sustainability

In which we investigate models for achieving food sustainability
The assigning of every green plant for food to all creatures must not be pressed to mean that all were once herbivorous, any more than to mean that all plants were equally edible to all. It is a generalisation, that directly or indirectly all life depends on vegetation, and the concern of the verse is to show that all are fed from God’s hand.

Derek Kidner, Genesis (1967), on Genesis 1:29–30 (p. 52)

**SPECIES EXTINCTION AND HUMAN POPULATION**


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Genesis 1:27-31

27 And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.” 29 God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. 30 And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is a breath of life, I give all the green plants for food.” And it was so. 31 And God saw all that He had made and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Translation: JPS, 1999

Points to consider

How does the commandment to be fertile and increase impact on our relationship with food?

What does it mean to master the earth? Is there a conflict between the commandments to fill the earth and to rule over the other animals?

What might be the reasons for creating a world in which people and animals are all vegetarian? Are these still relevant today?
Agent Smith: I’d like to share a revelation that I’ve had during my time here. It came to me when I tried to classify your species and I realised that you’re not actually mammals. Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment but you humans do not. You move to an area and you multiply and multiply until every natural resource is consumed and the only way you can survive is to spread to another area. There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus. Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet. You’re a plague and we are the cure.

Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree.

Joyce Kilmer, “trees” (1913)

Civilisation rests on people’s ability to modify plants to make them more suitable as food, feed and fiber plants and all of these modifications are genetic.

American Association for the Advancement of Science, 25 October 2012, aaas.org

Ecclesiastes 7:13

Consider the work of God who can make straight what he has made crooked?

Translation: English Standard Version

Midrash Rabbah on Ecclesiastes 7:13

When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first man, He took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to him, “Behold My works, how beautiful and commendable they are! All that I have created, for your sake I created it. Pay heed that you do not corrupt and destroy My universe; for if you corrupt it there is no one to repair it after you.”

Points to consider

What is the significance of God introducing the first man to the trees? Are trees God’s most beautiful works?

How might we understand the instruction to preserve God’s creation in relation to food?

Are human beings custodians over nature or are we a part of nature?

How might this affect our attitude towards eating?
But those trees! Those trees!
Those Truffula Trees!
All my life I'd been searching
for trees such as these.
The touch of their tufts
was much softer than silk.
And they had the sweet smell
of fresh butterfly milk.
I felt a great leaping
of joy in my heart.
I knew just what I'd do!
I unloaded my cart.
In no time at all, I had built a small shop.
Then I chopped down a Truffula Tree with one chop.
And with great skillful skill and with great
speedy speed,
I took the soft tuft, and I knitted a Thneed!
The instant I'd finished, I heard a ga-Zump!
I looked.
I saw something pop out of the stump
of the tree I'd chopped down. It was sort of a man.
Describe him? ... That's hard. I don't know if I can.
He was shortish. And alditish.
And brownish. And mossy.
And he spoke with a voice
that was sharpish and bossy.
"Mister!" he said with a savoutusty sneeze,
"I am the Lorax. I speak for the trees.
I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues.
And I'm asking you, sir, at the top of my lungs --
he was very upset as he shouted and puffed –
And I'm asking you, sir, at the top of my lungs --
"What's that THING you've made out of my
Truffula tuft?"
I chopped just one tree. I am doing no harm.
I'm being quite useful. This thing is a Thneed.
A Thneed's a Fine-Something-That-All-People-Need!
It's a shirt. It's a sock. It's a glove, It's a hat.
And I'm asking you, sir, at the top of my lungs --
"What's that THING you've made out of my
Truffula tuft?"
I chopped just one tree. I am doing no harm.
I'm being quite useful. This thing is a Thneed.
A Thneed's a Fine-Something-That-All-People-Need!
It's a shirt. It's a sock. It's a glove, It's a hat.
But it has other uses. Yes, far beyond that.
You can use it for carpets. For pillows! For sheets!
Or curtains! Or covers for bicycle seats!"
The Lorax said,
"Sir! You are crazy with greed.
There is no one on earth
who would buy that fool Thneed!"

Dr. Seuss, The Lorax (1971)
As tikkun olam has increasingly become the “in” Jewish thing, I have heard the term from the mouths of Bill Clinton and Cornel West, and have seen tikkun olam used to describe efforts as diverse as teaching Torah, volunteering for social service agencies, raising money for Israel, and supporting the creation of a Palestinian state. I have come across puzzling references to the “prophetic value of tikkun olam” or “the commandment of tikkun olam.” As a post-biblical term, tikkun olam neither appears in a prophetic book nor constitutes one of the mitzvot. However, as this concept has come to be equated both with a general call to justice, and with specific philanthropic and volunteer activities, the definition of tikkun olam has been merged with those of tzedakah (financial support of the poor), g’milut hasadim (acts of loving kindness), and tzedek (justice).

As the meaning of the term tikkun olam has expanded to apply to virtually any action or belief that the user thinks is beneficial to the world, some Jewish social justice activists and thinkers have moved away from using the term at all. Complaining about the equation of Judaism with liberal politics in an essay titled “Repairing Tikkun Olam” [Judaism 50:4], Arnold Jacob Wolf comments, “All this begins, I believe, with distorting tikkun olam. A teaching about compromise, sharpening, trimming and humanising rabbinic law, a mystical doctrine about putting God’s world back together again, this strange and half-understood notion becomes a huge umbrella under which our petty moral concerns and political panaceas can come in out of the rain.”

Rather than throw out the term tikkun olam altogether, or putting it on a twenty-year hiatus as others have suggested, I propose weaving together the four primary definitions of tikkun olam present in Jewish history: the anticipation of the divine kingdom in the Aleyhu prayer: the midrashic call to preserve the physical world; the rabbinic desire to sustain the social order; and the Lurianic belief in our power to restore divine perfection.

Jill Jacobs, “The History of Tikkun Olam”, zeek.net

Water and wind erode exposed [agricultural] soil relentlessly. Soil is as much a non-renewable resource as fossil fuel, but has no substitute. When people, land and community are as one, all three members prosper; when they relate not as members but as competing interests, all three are exploited. By consulting nature as the source and measure of that membership, The Land Institute seeks to develop an agriculture that will save soil from being lost or poisoned, while promoting a community life at once prosperous and enduring.

From the Mission Statement of The Land Institute, Salina, Kansas

That presumably worked fine in a primitive economy before decent fertilizer, but Shmita presented problems for the new Jewish state. Zionism was founded on the notion of a return to the land, but a modern country cannot live on what falls to the ground.


Agronomists describe the benefits to yield in rotated crops as “The Rotation Effect”. There are many found benefits of rotation systems: however, there is no specific scientific basis for the sometimes 10-25% yield increase in a crop grown in rotation versus monoculture. The factors related to the increase are simply described as alleviation of the negative factors of monoculture cropping systems. Explanations due to improved nutrition; pest, pathogen, and weed stress reduction; and improved soil structure have been found in some cases to be correlated, but causation has not been determined for the majority of cropping systems.

“Crop rotation”, Wikipedia

As six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield. But in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves.

Exodus 23:10–11

Mekhila deRabbi Yishmael, Mishpatim, Kaspa, 20

Another reading: “but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow!” (Exodus 23:11): Why did the Torah say this? Was it not so that the poor should eat it? So [even better] I will gather it in and distribute it to the poor! (Therefore) Scripture states “but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow” to teach that one makes openings, but the Sages fenced in for the sake of tikkun ha’olam (repair of the world).

Source 4.7

Feeding the destitute

Source 4.2

Natural equilibrium

Source 4.5

Source 4.4

Connections

Irreparable?

Source 4.2

Natural equilibrium

Source 4.5

Feeding the destitute

Source 4.7

Points to consider

Is letting the land rest and lie fallow an effective way of feeding the poor? If not, who benefits?

Openings in the fences around our fields allow needy people and wild beasts to enter and eat. Why did the sages decree against this?

Why is it important to let the land rest? Is it more important not to waste food? What is tikkun ha’olam?
You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs.

English proverb

“The mismanagement of the south-eastern forests of Australia over the last 30 or 40 years by excluding prescribed burning and fuel management has led to the highest fuel concentrations we have ever had in human occupation,” said David Packham, a bushfire researcher at Monash University, Australia. “The state has never been as dangerous as what it is now and this has been quite obvious for some time.”

He said Australia’s modern inhabitants needed to learn from the way the Aborigines had deliberately allowed some areas to burn in order to protect others. “There has been a total lack of willingness to instigate a proper fuel reduction management programme based on the skills and understanding of indigenous people who, after all for tens of thousands of years, were the stewards of our environment. We have thumbed our noses at what these people did and knew and we just can’t keep on doing it.”

David Adam, “Australian firestorms prompt call to return to Aboriginal bush control”, The Guardian, 9 February 2009

Lord Brahma is considered the greatest of all demigods, because he can create, whereas Lord Siva can annihilate the creations of Brahma. But both Lord Brahma and Lord Siva act only in one capacity. Lord Brahma can create, and Lord Siva can annihilate, but neither of them can maintain. Lord Visnu, however, not only maintains, but he creates, and annihilates also.

Bhaktivedanta VedaBase: Srimad Bhagavatam, Chapter 63: “Lord Krishna Fights with Banasura”

Points to consider
What are the benefits of living on fruit and water? What are the benefits of ploughing and sowing to produce your food? Which is more sustainable?

In what ways does our relationship with food involve destruction and repairing?

In what ways does our relationship with nature involve destruction and repairing?

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 33b

[Rabbi Simeon and his son] went and hid in a cave [because of the decree of the emperor]. A miracle occurred and a carob-tree and a water well were created for them. They would strip their garments and sit up to their necks in sand. The whole day they studied; when it was time for prayers they robed, covered themselves, prayed, and then put off their garments again, so that they should not wear out. Thus they dwelt twelve years in the cave. Then Elijah came and stood at the entrance to the cave and exclaimed, “Who will inform [Rabbi Simeon] that the emperor is dead and his decree annulled?”. So they emerged. Seeing a man ploughing and sowing, they exclaimed, “These people forsake eternal life and engage in worldly life!” Whatever they cast their eyes upon was immediately burnt up. Thereupon a Heavenly Voice came forth and cried out, “Have you emerged to destroy My world? Return to your cave!” So they returned and dwelt there twelve months, saying, “The punishment of the wicked in gehinnom [hell] is limited to twelve months.” A Heavenly Voice then came forth and said, “Go forth from your cave!” So they left the cave. Wherever Rabbi Eleazar looked and destroyed, Rabbi Simeon repaired it. Said Rabbi Simeon to Rabbi Eleazar, “My son! You and I are sufficient for the world.”

Translation: Based on Soncino

CONNECTIONS
Miracle of the tree
Source 4.3
Sufficient for the world?
Source 4.6
Eternal life
Source 4.10
In May 1933 the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) was passed [in the USA]. This act encouraged those who were still left in farming to grow fewer crops. Therefore, there would be less produce on the market and crop prices would rise thus benefiting the farmers – though not the consumers.

The AAA paid farmers to destroy some of their crops and farm animals. In 1933 alone, $100 million was paid out to cotton farmers to plough their crop back into the ground! Six million piglets were slaughtered by the government after it had bought them from the farmers. The meat was canned and given away for free to the unemployed. Though this all made perfect sense in terms of economically stabilising the farming market, many Americans could not accept this policy of destruction.

Source 4.6

What a waste!

Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 24b

Once Rav Judah saw two men using bread wastefully and he exclaimed: “It seems that there is plenty in the world.” He gave an angry look and a famine arose.

Translation: Soncino

Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit 20b

Every Friday afternoon, [Rav Huna] would send an agent to the market and any vegetables that remained in the hands of the [market] gardeners, he would buy them and have them thrown into the river. Should he not rather have had these distributed among the poor? [He was afraid] lest they would then at times be led to rely upon him and would not trouble to buy any for themselves. Why did he not give the vegetables to the domestic animals? He was of the opinion that food fit for human consumption may not be given to animals. Then why did he purchase them at all? [If he did not,] this would lead [the gardeners] to do wrong in the future [by not providing an adequate supply]. Whenever he discovered some [new] medicine he would fill a water jug with it and suspend it above the doorstep and proclaim, “Whosoever desires it let him come and take of it.” ... When he had a meal, he would open the door wide and declare, “Whosoever is in need let him come and eat.”

Translation: Based on Soncino

Points to consider

Is waste the primary reason that famine exists?
Do you approve of Rav Huna’s methods?
Do you find them controversial?
What legitimate uses for food might there be other than feeding people? Is it ever legitimate to destroy food?

CONNECTIONS

Waste or rest?
Source 4.4
Waste or indulgence?
Source 4.7
The ultimate waste
Source 4.9
Anything worth doing is worth overdoing.

Mick Jagger (1943–)

Too much of a good thing can be wonderful!

Mae West (1893–1980)

“… there is only joy in meat and wine.” Why?

What is the value of preparing special food for Shabbat and festivals?

When it comes to food, is gluttony always waste?

We are so fortunate to enjoy this marvellous food and drink. Not all among us are so lucky. To thank the gods for bringing the recent war to a just end, King Joffrey has decreed that the leftovers from our feast be given to the poorest in his city.

Lady Margaery Tyrell at the feast of her wedding to King Joffrey Baratheon, Game of Thrones (2014)

Everything in moderation, including moderation.

Attributed variously to Oscar Wilde, Horace Porter, and Petronius

Eat and drink: but waste not by excess, for Allah does not love those who waste.

Qur’an 7:21

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, ‘Laws of Festivals’ 6:17–18

On all holidays a person is obligated to be joyful, along with the entire household, as it says, “You shall rejoice on your holiday” (Deuteronomy 16:14). … people should eat meat and drink wine, for there is only joy in meat and wine. And when one eats he must also feed the stranger, orphan and widow along with all other people who are destitute, but if one locks his door and only eats and drinks with his family, it is not the joy of a mitzvah but just joy of his own belly …

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, ‘Laws of Shabbat’ 30:7

What is the delight (of Shabbat, oneg shabbat)? It is what the Sages said – that a person must prepare a very rich stew and spiced drink for Shabbat, all according to one’s means. The more one spends on Shabbat and preparing many good foods, the more praiseworthy, but if one does not have the means, then even making a cooked vegetable or something like that in honour of Shabbat is considered oneg shabbat.

Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 4:12

In the future a person will have to offer an accounting for all that he saw and did not eat.

Points to consider

“… there is only joy in meat and wine.” Why?

What is the value of preparing special food for Shabbat and festivals?

When it comes to food, is gluttony always waste?

Rejoice in food

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, ‘Laws of Festivals’ 6:17–18

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Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 4:12

In the future a person will have to offer an accounting for all that he saw and did not eat.
Then an old man, a keeper of an inn, said, “Speak to us of Eating and Drinking.”

And he said:

Would that you could live on the fragrance of the earth, and like an air plant be sustained by the light. But since you must kill to eat, and rob the young of its mother’s milk to quench your thirst, let it then be an act of worship.

And let your board stand an altar on which the pure and the innocent of forest and plain are sacrificed for that which is purer and still more innocent in many.

When you kill a beast to him in your heart, “By the same power that slays you, I too am slain; when you crush an apple with your teeth, your blood and my blood is naught but the sap that feeds the tree of heaven.”

And when you crush an apple with your teeth, say to it in your heart, “Your seeds shall live in my body, and when you kill a beast say to him in your heart, when you kill a beast say to him in your heart, when you crush an apple with your teeth, your blood and my blood is naught but the sap that feeds the tree of heaven.”

“By the same power that slays you, I too am slain; when you crush an apple with your teeth, your blood and my blood is naught but the sap that feeds the tree of heaven.”

And let your board stand an altar on which the pure and the innocent of forest and plain are sacrificed for that which is purer and still more innocent in many.

When you kill a beast say to him in your heart, “By the same power that slays you, I too am slain; and I too shall be consumed.

For the law that delivered you into my hand shall extend to the animal kingdom as well, and the injustice done to them will be rectified.

… In the latter days when man’s compassion will be an act of worship, and his board stand an altar on which the flesh of man is sacrificed for that which is purer and still more innocent in many.

The late Rav Kook explained … After the Deluge the descendants of Noah, that is, all mankind was in principle opposed to the eating of meat. When Noah and his descendants were permitted to eat meat this was a concession conditional on the prohibition of the blood. This prohibition implied respect for the principle of life (“for the blood is the life”) and an allusion to the fact that in reality all meat should have been prohibited. The partial prohibition was designed to call to mind the previously total one.

Genesis 9:1–7

‘God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, “Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth. The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky – everything with which the earth is astir – and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hand.

Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give your hand.

But when you crush an apple with your teeth, say to it in your heart, “Your seeds shall live in my body, and when you crush an apple with your teeth, your blood and my blood is naught but the sap that feeds the tree of heaven.”

And let your board stand an altar on which the pure and the innocent of forest and plain are sacrificed for that which is purer and still more innocent in many.

When you kill a beast say to him in your heart, “By the same power that slays you, I too am slain; when you crush an apple with your teeth, your blood and my blood is naught but the sap that feeds the tree of heaven.”

And let your board stand an altar on which the pure and the innocent of forest and plain are sacrificed for that which is purer and still more innocent in many.

When you kill a beast say to him in your heart, “By the same power that slays you, I too am slain; and I too shall be consumed.

For the law that delivered you into my hand shall extend to the animal kingdom as well, and the injustice done to them will be rectified.

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The late Rav Kook explained … After the Deluge the descendants of Noah, that is, all mankind was in principle opposed to the eating of meat. When Noah and his descendants were permitted to eat meat this was a concession conditional on the prohibition of the blood. This prohibition implied respect for the principle of life (“for the blood is the life”) and an allusion to the fact that in reality all meat should have been prohibited. The partial prohibition was designed to call to mind the previously total one.

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Other voices

Does eating meat make us more like God or less like God?

Why is it relevant that man is made in God’s image?

What is the connection between the permitting of animal slaughter and the prohibition against slaughtering humans?

How has our relationship with animals changed?

Compare this source with Key Source 4.1. How has the tone changed?

Points to consider

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LAND
According to the United Nations, raising animals for food (including land used for grazing and land used to grow feed crops) now uses a staggering 30 percent of the Earth’s land mass. More than 260 million acres of U.S. forest have been cleared to create cropland to grow grain to feed farmed animals, and according to scientists at the Smithsonian Institution, the equivalent of seven football fields of land is bulldozed worldwide every minute to create more room for farmed animals.

Livestock grazing is the number one reason that plant species in the United States become threatened and go extinct, and it also leads to soil erosion and eventual desertification that renders once-fertile land barren. While factory farms are ruining our land, commercial fishing methods such as bottom trawling and long-lining have virtually emptied millions of square miles of ocean and pushed many marine species to the brink of extinction. Commercial fishing boats indiscriminately pull as many fish as they can out of the sea, leaving ecological devastation and the bodies of non-target animals in their wake.

FOOD
Raising animals for food is grossly inefficient, because while animals eat large quantities of grain, soybeans, oats, and corn, they only produce comparatively small amounts of meat, dairy products, or eggs in return. This is why more than 70 percent of the grain and cereals that we grow in this country [the USA] are fed to farmed animals.

It takes up to 13 pounds of grain to produce just 1 pound of meat, while growing 1 pound of wheat only requires 25 gallons. You save more water by not eating a pound of meat than you do by not showering for six months!

ENERGY
It takes more than 11 times as much fossil fuel to make one calorie from animal protein as it does to make one calorie from plant protein. Raising animals for food gobbles up precious energy. Simply add up the energy-intensive stages of raising animals for food: (1) grow massive amounts of corn, grain, and soybeans (with all the required tilling, irrigation, crop-dusters, etc.); (2) transport the grain and soybeans to feed manufacturers on gas-guzzling 18-wheelers; (3) operate the feed mills (requiring massive energy expenditures); (4) transport the feed to the factory farms (again, in gas-guzzling vehicles); (5) operate the factory farms; (6) truck the animals many miles to slaughter; (7) operate the slaughterhouse; (8) transport the meat to processing plants; (9) operate the meat-processing plants; (10) transport the meat to grocery stores; (11) keep the meat refrigerated or frozen in the stores until it’s sold.

WATER
Between watering the crops that farmed animals eat, providing drinking water for billions of animals each year, and cleaning away the filth in factory farms, transport trucks, and slaughterhouses, the farmed animal industry places a serious strain on our water supply. Nearly half of all the water used in the United States goes to raising animals for food. In 2008, John Anthony Allan, a professor at King’s College London and the winner of the prestigious Stockholm Water Prize, urged people worldwide to go vegetarian because of the tremendous waste of water involved with eating animals.

It takes more than 2,400 gallons of water to produce 1 pound of meat, while growing 1 pound of wheat only requires 25 gallons. You save more water by not eating a pound of meat than you do by not showering for six months!

If the place where the Lord has chosen to establish His name is too far from you, you may slaughter any of the cattle or sheep [lit. from your cattle or from your sheep] that the Lord gives you, as I have instructed you; and you may eat to your heart’s content in your settlements.

Translation: JPS, 1999

Deuteronomy 12:20-21
When the Lord enlarges your territory, as He has promised you, and you say, “I shall eat some meat,” for you have the urge to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish.

Rashi on Deuteronomy 12:20
“When the Lord enlarges your territory, as He has promised you, and you say, “I shall eat some meat,” for you have the urge to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish.”

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria says, Scripture comes here only to teach you proper behaviour: a person should not eat meat except out of craving. Could it be that one eats meat whenever he wishes?

Translation: JPS, 1999

Sifre Deuteronomy 75:20
It teaches us, saying, “When you slaughter from your cattle or from your sheep” – it follows that a person should not eat meat until he has cattle or sheep. Could it be that one buys from the market and eats meat except out of craving. Could it be that one eats meat whenever he wishes?

Rashi on Deuteronomy 12:20
“When the Lord enlarges your territory, as He has promised you, and you say, “I shall eat some meat,” for you have the urge to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish.”

When the Lord enlarges your territory, as He has promised you, and you say, “I shall eat some meat,” for you have the urge to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish.

Why might it be important to own an animal before you slaughter and eat it?

Is sustainability the primary moral consideration when deciding whether to eat meat?

Should meat be a luxury item? Should it be available to all people at all times?

POINTS TO CONSIDER

Debating "Animal Ownership?"

COntNeCtIoNS

Source 4.7
Yours to eat

Source 4.8
Animal ownership?

Source 4.10

Special occasions
In our response to science, Christians have to agree that the innocent sketches in biblical eschatology of a nature of the future that is peaceful and paradisical are neither science nor history written in advance. Nevertheless, they are truth claims about the character of God and God’s intention for the created order. They are announcements about the way the world ought to be, and as such, they are wake up calls to the human community that is part of that order but which, because it has amassed terrible powers of evil and woe over that order, must now act with redoubled responsibility … Biblical renditions of the future of nature come to us not as metaphysical claims but as moral ones. They render no moral judgment on nature itself, but they show that the manner in which we human beings relate to our environment is a matter of the highest moral significance. The value of these texts lies not in their capacity to predict cosmic or human history in advance – that they cannot do – but in their capacity to shape our behavior now toward each other and the other denizens of the earthly ecosystem.

Like magnets, the peaceable kingdom and the other idealistic biblical visions of a perfected nature pull us toward them, not because they have scientific or historical credibility, but because they have moral authority. They enable us to engage in proleptic action now. If peace is the hallmark of the new age (Isaiah 11:1–9), then our work in this time of tribulation is to abolish war and to effect reconciliation between people, as well as between people, wolves, and snakes … We will continue to use nature, of course, but no longer threaten to use it up … The biblical pictures of nature in the future function as incitements toward a style of ethical living in the present that is holistic, interdependent, non-hierarchical, and one that does not reject flesh and matter as corrupt because God does not reject them.


Points to consider

How would you describe the relationship between humans and animals in Isaiah’s vision of peace?

What is your vision of a fully sustainable world?

What do you think is the next step towards having a more sustainable relationship with food? Is total sustainability realistic?
Mari son of Rabbi Chuna said:

When saying goodbye to a friend, a person should always be in the middle of studying some aspect of Torah with them. In that way their friend will remember them for it.

Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 64a

The Talmud is teaching us that by associating a departing friend with a piece of Torah, we will never forget them. Why?

• Because Torah goes on forever and so, we hope, will the memories of all those we have known.
• Because if you were in the middle of studying Torah with a friend when they had to leave, the memory of the discussion will ensure that one day it will be continued when you meet again.
• Because friends should never be too far apart, just as Torah discussions should always continue.
A guide to main sources

These brief notes cover many of the authors and works quoted in this Chavruta book, including all works on the right-hand pages. Further information on most of these sources can be found in the Encyclopaedia Judaica and on the Internet.

Tanakh/Bible

The Bible consists of the Torah, Prophets and Writings; indeed the word “Tanakh” is an acronym of the Hebrew names of these three parts: Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim. It describes the story of the Jewish people from creation through to the rebuilding of the Temple in the 6th century BCE. It also contains many beautiful non-historical parts, such as the books of Psalms, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs.

The first part of the Tanakh – the Torah – is also known as the Chumash or the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), and records the early story of the Jewish people from the creation of the world to the death of Moses. It functions as a covenantal work between God and the Jewish people and contains many laws (mitzvot) specifying how Jews should behave.

Mishnah

In the second century CE, Judah the Prince (also known simply as ‘Rabbi’), the patriarch of the Jewish community in Israel, feared that the oral tradition of halakhah (Jewish law) would soon be forgotten in the historical turmoil of the time. He made the historic decision to canonise the core of the tradition to ensure its preservation, and the resulting work is known as the Mishnah, meaning ‘repetition’ or ‘teaching’. Rabbi arranged the material into subject area, and the vast majority is halakhic in nature.

Talmud

A few hundred years after the compilation of the Mishnah, the leaders of the Jewish communities in Jerusalem and Babylonia had the same fears as Judah the Prince and decided to commit many of their discussions about the Mishnah to writing. The resulting works are known either by the Hebrew name Talmud or the Aramaic Gemara (both meaning “learning”). The Bavli/Babylonian Talmud was compiled around 600 CE and the Yerushalmi/Jerusalem Talmud version around 400 CE. Both versions of the Talmud are written as a commentary on the Mishnah, although they frequently digress onto other issues. The Talmud is a record of the rabbinic discussions on legal matters and there are also a significant number of factual or fictional stories and explanations of biblical passages. The Talmud is divided into six major sections or “orders” and a number (varying according to whether it is Babylonian or Palestinian) of sub-sections known as “tractates”. The references in this collection are mostly from the Babylonian Talmud and indicate the tractate name and the standard page number. The Jerusalem Talmud has several referencing conventions; we have used a fairly standard one also using tractate name and page number.

Midrash

Midrash, meaning “seeking” or “investigation”, expands the biblical text. There are two primary categories of midrashic collections: halakhic (legal) and aggadic (non-legal). There are four main halakhic midrashim: the Mehilta discusses the book of Exodus; the Sifra discusses Leviticus; and the two Sifrei discuss Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Aggadic midrashim primarily contain story-like explanations of the text, explaining difficult passages and often fleshing out biblical accounts of various episodes. They also contain sermons that are either about the biblical passage under discussion or are loosely connected to it. There are two primary categories of aggadic midrashim: exegetical and homiletical. The exegetical midrashim, such as Genesis Rabbah and Deuteronomy Rabbah discuss the book in question chapter by chapter, verse by verse and sometimes even word by word. The Buber edition of Midrash Tehillim (Psalms) is also an exegetical work. The homiletical midrashim, such as Midrash Tanchuma, consist of a number of homilies or sermons based on the weekly Torah reading, and do not attempt to explain every individual verse.

Biblical commentators

Rashi, Shlomo ben Yitzchak (1040–1105) lived in Troyes, France, and is the best-known of all of the biblical and talmudic commentators. His commentary on the Talmud explains almost every difficult word and passage. His commentary on Tanakh is largely based on the whole of the talmudic and midrashic literature, which he frequently quotes.

Ramban, Moses ben Nahman (also known as Nahmanides, 1194–1270) grew up in Gerona, Spain. He was the leading scholar of his generation, and wrote original discussions on the majority of the Talmud, in addition to a commentary on the Torah and several other significant works. He was also a kabbalist, and makes frequent use of kabbalistic ideas in his Tanakh commentary.

Halakhah

Maimonides, Moses ben Maimon (also known as the Ramabam) (1135–1204) grew up in Spain; he ended up in Cairo, Egypt, working as a physician for the Egyptian ruler. He wrote several works on halakhah, philosophy, ethics and medicine. His Mishneh Torah is a comprehensive compendium of every aspect of Jewish law, based on the Talmud and later discussions. It is divided into sections such as ‘Laws of Torah Study’, ‘Laws of Repentance’ and ‘Laws of Prayer and Priestly Benediction’. The Guide of the Perplexed is his most influential philosophical treatise. Written in Arabic, it represents Rambam’s attempt to harmonise Jewish religion with contemporary thought.

The Shulchan Arukh, a codification of Jewish law according to Sephardi tradition, was compiled by the halakhist and mystic Joseph Karo (1488–1575). The Mishnah Berurah, written by Isaac Meir Hakohen (also known as the Chafetz Chaim, 1838–1933), is a commentary on the section “Orach Chaim” of the Shulchan Arukh, which deals with daily practices, including praying, food, Shabbat and the festivals.

Liturgical texts

The liturgy found in the siddur and machzor has been developed over time with limited variations between Ashkenazi and Sephardi tradition. The blessings pronounced on various occasions are attributed to the men of the Great Assembly who provided spiritual leadership for the Jewish people in the time of Ezra. Each festival has its own unique liturgy, including poems composed by gifted cantors to enrich the services in the period since the destruction of the Temple.

Other sources

Jacob ben Asher (1269–1340) was an influential medieval rabbinic authority. He is often referred to as the “Ba’al Hatturim” (Master of the Rules), after his main work in halakhah, the Arba’ah Turim (Four Rovs). The work was divided into four sections, each called a tur, alluding to the rows of jewels on the High Priest’s breastplate.

Yehuda Halevi (1080–1142) was a Spanish-Jewish poet, philosopher and doctor. His best-known work is his philosophic classic The Kuzari, which takes the form of a dialogue between himself and the king of the Khazars (who had summoned the leaders of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to explain their respective religions to him). He was forced to leave Spain after winning a public dispute with Christian clergy, and travelled to the land of Israel, where, according to legend, he was trampled to death by a horseman at the Kotel.

Hugo Gryn (1930–96) was a British Reform rabbi and a leading voice in interfaith dialogue. Gryn’s family were interned in Auschwitz in 1944. He served in one of the largest congregations in Europe, the West London Synagogue, initially as assistant rabbi and later as senior rabbi, for 32 years. Gryn became a regular radio broadcaster and appeared for many years on BBC Radio 4’s “Thought for the Day” and “The Moral Maze”.

Eliyahu de Vidas (1518–92) was a rabbi in Safed and Hebron. He was a disciple of Rabbis Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria. De Vidas was one of a group of prominent kabbalists. He wrote Reshit Chokhmah, “The Beginning of Wisdom”, a pietistic work still widely studied by Jews today. This magnum opus is largely based on the Zohar, but also reflects a wide range of traditional sources.

Other texts. A broad selection of modern figures has been included in this collection. Further information about them can be obtained from web sites such as http://en.wikipedia.org or http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/bios.html
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