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Man's Natural Dominion

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1.

THEY WILL ALL BE HERBIVORES

The Torah recounts the narrative of the creation of the animals, Adam, and his wife, on the sixth day of the creation, including Hashem's message to Adam and Chava: "Hashem blessed them... be fruitful and multiply... and rule over the fish of the sea..."¹ Next, the Torah records two verses about the food for Adam and the animals.:

Hashem said, 'Behold, I have given you every seed-bearing plant...; they will be yours for food. And for every creature of the earth, for every bird of the sky... all plant vegetation will also {serve} for food.

In his commentary, Rashi quotes the conclusion of the first verse and the opening of the second verse — "they will be yours for food. And for every creature of the earth" — and explains:³

He made animals and beasts equal to Adam and Chava as far as food was concerned, and He did not permit Adam and his wife to kill a creature to eat its meat. But any plant vegetation, all of them will eat in common.

On a basic level, the clause, "He made animals and beasts equal to them as far as food was concerned," seems to teach us that Adam and his wife were not allowed to eat meat. As *Gur Aryeh* explains, "Just as animals and beasts only consumed vegetation, so too, Adam ate plants and vegetation, but nothing else."

But (as the *Levush* asks), it is seemingly awkward to explain Rashi's words this way:

a) How can we infer that Adam could not eat meat from the words, "He made animals and beasts equal to them as far as food was concerned," when we see clearly that a vast range of wildlife is carnivorous?

[Perhaps we can answer that Rashi agrees with the opinions⁴ who maintain that no creatures were predatory before the sin {of the Tree of Knowledge}. (The nature of some animals **changed** only **after** the sin.) But this answer is very strained because surely Rashi would have mentioned this unusually novel idea somewhere in his Torah commentary or at least he would have alluded to it.]

¹ *Bereishis* 1:28.

² *Bereishis* 1:29,30.

³ {Rashi on *Bereishis* 1:29,30.}

⁴ See *Ramban* on *Vayikra* 26:6 and on *Shemos* 9:5, et al.

Re'em understands the “equivalence” (of Adam and animals) to mean that just as “He did not allow the beasts to eat... **humans**, so too, he did not allow Adam... to kill any creature and eat its meat.” However, it is difficult to suggest that this is Rashi’s intent because “the main point is missing” — Rashi should have mentioned the prohibition against beasts eating **humans**.

b) On the other hand (as *Gur Aryeh* asks), why do we need the juxtaposition (“He made... equal to them as far as food was concerned”) to teach us that Adam and his wife were forbidden from eating meat? We know this from the **simple** meaning of the verse. The verse says, “Behold, I have given you every plant... they will be yours for food.” Hashem **permitted** eating plants and vegetation [as Rashi writes at the end of his remarks, “like plant vegetation **which I allowed** Adam, the first man”]. In other words, Hashem allowed the consumption of plant vegetation and nothing else, such as meat.

c) Notwithstanding all the above, and most importantly, Rashi, in his Torah commentary, aims primarily to clarify *pshat*.⁵ What difficulty did Rashi see in *pshat* that he tried to resolve by explaining, “He made animals and beasts equal to them as far as food was concerned”?

2.

NUANCES IN RASHI

Also, there are a few nuances in Rashi’s diction that call for a closer look:

a) Why does Rashi use an unusual expression, “He did not permit...,” as if telling a story, rather than saying, following his usual style, “but meat was forbidden”?

b) Rashi adds explicitly that Adam and his wife were prohibited “**to kill a creature and eat its meat**” (as opposed to saying more simply and more concisely, “He did not permit Adam and his wife to eat meat.”) This suggests that eating meat of an animal that died on its own would be permitted.⁶ What necessitates this interpretation in the **straightforward** understanding of Scripture?

c) Why does Rashi need to repeat, and **at such length**, “But any plant vegetation **all of them will eat in common**,” after discussing the prohibition of eating meat? Moreover, Scripture explicitly states that the plant vegetation was “for food” for people and animals. What does the aforementioned lengthy addition contribute?

⁵ {The plain meaning of Scripture. Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of Scripture.”}

⁶ As explicitly stated by *Re'em* and other commentaries; see also Rashi on *Sanhedrin* 57a, s.v. “*limshrei basar*.”

3.

PERMISSION TO EAT MEAT

Rashi then continues:

When the sons of Noach came, He allowed them meat, as it says,⁷ “Every moving thing that lives, etc., like plant vegetation,” which I allowed Adam, the first man, “I give you everything.”

The reason why Rashi feels the need **immediately, in our *parshah***, to mention that the descendants of Noach were allowed to eat meat is logical: As discussed on numerous occasions, Rashi, in his commentary, does not answer questions that will only arise after learning **later** verses (in Scripture), and certainly not questions that arise after learning a matter in the Oral Law. [Moreover, since Rashi’s Torah commentary accords with *pshat*, his comments do not need to align perfectly with the final halachic law.] Nevertheless, when Rashi explains the verse to a novice student of the Torah,⁸ Rashi must consider the **realities of life** that the novice student sees.

Therefore, Rashi must **immediately** address this issue and explain that Hashem permitted meat eating in later generations. This is because Rashi’s explanation (“He did not permit...”) is at odds with **the reality of the life** of a novice student: We slaughter animals and consume their meat.

But we still need to clarify:

a) To address this detail, Rashi could have merely written the **law**: “When the sons of Noach came along, He allowed them to eat meat, as we will discuss” (or something to that effect). Why is it relevant **here** to know the specific source of the law in the verse?

b) Furthermore, if Rashi deemed it necessary (for whatever reason) to quote the verse, he should have quoted (only) the beginning of the verse: “Every moving thing that lives will be yours for food.” This part of the verse itself clearly indicates that Hashem permitted humanity to eat **meat**. Why does Rashi (a) omit (the most important part), “will be yours for food” (he merely alludes to this segment of the verse by writing, “etc.”)? Additionally, (b) on the flip side, why does Rashi add at length, “‘like plant vegetation,’ which I allowed Adam, the first man, ‘I give you everything’”?

⁷ Bereishis 9:3.

⁸ {In the Hebrew original, “*ben chamesh lemikra*”; lit., “a five-year-old {beginning to study} Scripture.” This term borrowed from *Pirkei Avos* teaches that the appropriate age for a child to begin studying Chumash is at the age of five. Rashi wrote his commentary on Chumash to solve problems that a 5-year-old student would encounter in understanding the simple meaning of a verse.}

4.

NOT RELEVANT TO THE NARRATIVE OF CREATION

The explanation for all the above is as follows:

In his commentary, Rashi seeks to answer some questions arising from **these** verses:

a) Why does the Torah deem it at all relevant – in the context of the narrative of the **world's creation** – to inform us **what** people and animals may **eat**? Seemingly, the Torah discusses (only) the general matter of the **Creation** and not the creatures' needs:

The blessings “be fruitful and multiply... “ are part of the Creation **narrative** because Hashem's blessings explain how creation continues to flourish. This means that created beings were given the ability to reproduce.

Also, we can understand why the command, “and rule over the fish of the sea,” is placed among other items discussed in the Creation **narrative**. After all, it describes the nature of Adam's creation.⁹ Adam is set apart from all other creatures, as the verse says,¹⁰ “Let us make Adam **in Our image, as Our likeness**, and let him rule over the fish of the sea....” (In continuation, the verse recounts: “Hashem made Adam in His image... Hashem said..., rule”)

However, this is difficult to understand regarding the passages about food for people and animals: How are these passages relevant to the Creation **narrative**?

b) Even if we find some reason why this command is germane, we still need to clarify: Why did Hashem have to inform **Adam and his wife** what the animals and birds would eat?

[Also, did the birds, created on the fifth day, not eat until Hashem gave this instruction?]

Perhaps we can answer that this instruction follows in continuation of the command, “and rule over the fish of the sea....” This means that since Hashem appointed Adam as master of the animal kingdom, He needed to inform Adam what the animals could eat. However, this answer does not stand up to scrutiny because this is not the gist of the phrase “and rule over.”

⁹ See *Abarbanel* on our verse; *Guide for the Perplexed*, vol. 3, ch. 13; et al.

¹⁰ {*Bereishis* 1:26.}

5.

THE EMPHASIS ON EQUIVALENCE

To answer these questions, Rashi quotes the words, “they will be yours for food. **And** for every {וְלִכְלֵל} creature of the earth,” from the passage. This **connects** the two verses (by using the conjunctive *vav* {ו}). Rashi then explains the verse: “He made animals and beasts equal to them for food.” Scripture’s intent in linking the first verse’s end with the second verse’s beginning was not to create prohibitions. Scripture’s intent was not to inform us what a person may eat and what animals must eat. Rather, the verse aims (to do only one thing): To emphasize the **similarity** (the commonality) between humanity and animals concerning their food — “for food.”

The source of the prohibition to eat meat placed upon Adam and his wife (“He did not permit...”) is actually from (the implication of) the **first** verse. The verse only permits plant vegetation. This automatically proves that meat was not permitted.

The Torah, however, immediately adds that plants would also be food for animals and birds to emphasize the **equivalence** between Adam and the animals.

[Animals did, in fact, eat (not only plant vegetation but) meat. The similarity lies only in one direction regarding Adam’s food — **his** food (plants) was the same as animals’ food. Therefore, Rashi writes at length and repeats the equivalence: “But any **plant vegetation, all of them** will eat **in common.**”]

6.

NOT ENTIRELY BOSS

Why, in the context of the narrative of the **creation** of Adam, is it relevant to emphasize the equivalence between humanity and animals regarding their food?

Its relevance is:

Previously, the verse described Adam’s superiority over all other creations — he was created in the image of Hashem. As a result, Adam would rule and serve as master over all other creatures — “and rule over....”

Continuing this point, Scripture preemptively teaches us that “He made animals and beasts **equal** to them for food.” Notwithstanding man’s superiority over other creatures, at the end of the day, man, too, is a **created being**. Hashem created man in a manner by which

— concerning his food, which keeps a living being alive — he would be **equal** to the earth's animals, etc. This reminds a person¹¹ that he is in the **same** category as the animals and beasts.¹²

But we are still left with the following question: The verse says, “and rule over...”! Thus, Rashi continues, “He did not **permit** Adam and his wife to put a creature to death and to eat its meat.” Hashem removed Adam’s power and dominion over the animals and beasts when it came to killing a creature and eating its meat.

For this reason, Rashi writes specifically, “He did not **permit**” — as opposed to saying, “He forbade” (or the like). This is because the emphasis here is (**not** on the **prohibition** of eating meat but) on the explanation (meaning) of the phrase “and rule over.” This phrase does not imply permission to kill animals and consume their meat.

On this basis, we can also appreciate why Rashi maintains that the prohibition regarding meat was explicitly “to put a creature to death and to eat its meat.” The foundation of the prohibition was to exclude humanity from rulership over animals, etc., regarding **food**. Thus, the prohibition was only “to put a creature to death and to eat its meat.” Eating meat in this manner would demonstrate that Adam ruled over the animals, etc., to the extent that he was allowed to kill them to eat their meat. However, if an animal died by itself, there was no reason to forbid its meat.

7.

PERMISSION TO REMAIN HEALTHY

On this basis, we can also appreciate Rashi’s lengthy wording at the end of his remarks:

When Rashi addresses the question as to how the sons of Noach were allowed to eat meat, the following question arises: The prohibition not “to put a creature to death and to eat its meat” was to ensure that man would not forget that he is no more than a created being, as discussed above. Did the sons of Noach not need this reminder?

To address this question, Rashi (explains at length) quotes the verse where permission to eat meat is recorded. In doing so, Rashi (a) quotes the **end** of the verse, “like plant vegetation, etc.,” and (b) explains these words of the verse, adding, “(like plant vegetation) **which I allowed Adam, the first man.**”

¹¹ See **Rashi** on *Bereishis* 2:18.

¹² See *Abarbanel* on our verse, quoting *Rabbeinu Nissim*; et al.

In doing so, Rashi indicates that meat was permitted to the sons of Noach, not because the limitation concerning “and rule over” (concerning food) was irrelevant to them. Instead, the allowance to eat meat was a special **dispensation** for the same reason. This means it was for the same reason that Hashem permitted plant vegetation to Adam, the first man — so that he could eat and be healthy.

Therefore, Rashi does not quote, “will be yours for food.” This is because the actual dispensation to eat meat is not relevant there. Instead, the **reason** for this dispensation is relevant, “like plant vegetation, which I allowed Adam, the first man, etc.”

8.

HUMILITY

The lesson from all the above in our Divine service:

As discussed, a person must know and feel that while the Divine intent was for humanity to “rule,” he is still no more than a created being. This realization is essential not only to prevent him from becoming arrogant or developing other negative traits resulting from misunderstanding the directive to “rule,” but moreover (and equally importantly), a person’s dominion depends on him appreciating his common origin.

The moment a person imagines that his ability to rule over other creatures means that **he** is the ruler — by his strength and the might of his arm¹³ — then he cannot rule over the other creatures since he is **on par** with them, a created being like all the other creatures. Specifically, when a person realizes the truth that he is on the same footing as all other creations and that his authority to rule comes from Hashem, then, and only then, can he serve as a true ruler.

This is not inherently the dominion of **man**. Instead, “Hashem, your L-rd, is the one who gives you the power to acquire wealth.”¹⁴ Consequently, Hashem is the true Ruler and Authority, the Creator of humanity and its Governor.

As **Rashi** explains in the verse,¹⁵ “*And they shall rule* {וַיִּרְדּוּ} *over the fish of the sea* — this word means ‘ruling’ {רָדוּ} and it also means ‘decline’ {וַיִּרְדּוּ}. If he merits {he rules, וַיִּרְדּוּ, over the beasts and animals}; if he does not merit, he becomes inferior to them, and the beast rules over him.” The deeper meaning of this is as follows:

¹³ {Cf. *Devarim* 8:17.}

¹⁴ *Devarim* 8:18.

¹⁵ *Bereishis* 1:26.

“זָכָה, if he merits” is etymologically related to the word “זִכּוּךְ, refinement.” When a person refines himself, when he rids himself of ego and arrogance and operates using Hashem’s strength, then “he rules, רוֹדֵה, over them.” However, if he is not זָכָה, that is, if he does not sufficiently refine himself, if he is a “somebody” filled with ego and he feels that his power to dominate others is his own, “he becomes **inferior**, יָרִיד, to them.” Not only is he {merely} on par with all other creations, but moreover, he becomes subordinate.

Perhaps this is also the (deeper) reason why, in continuation of the command “and rule, וַיִּרְדּוּ,” Hashem let us know, however, that “He made animals and beasts equal to [Adam and Chava] as far as food was concerned.” By informing of this, we can better appreciate how man must “rule, וַיִּרְדּוּ,” as discussed above.

9.

YOU ARE CALLED ADAM, RULER OVER THE NATIONS

This also teaches us a lesson for our times:

Our Sages say,¹⁶ “You are called Adam.” The title *Adam* (primarily) refers to the Jewish people.

Hashem tells the Jewish people to “rule...,” as the verse says,¹⁷ “Strangers shall stand and pasture your flocks.” This means the Jewish people will supervise the labor of others, etc. In fact, even during our exile, when there are kings and ministers among the world’s nations, Scripture promises,¹⁸ “Kings will be your nurturers and their princesses your wetnurses.”

This is the takeaway: Should a person rely on his strength and might, even if he does so with the understanding that these qualities are rooted in his existence as “Adam {אָדָם} — similar to the One above {אֱלֹהֵינוּ},”¹⁹ that is, he **possesses** superior virtues, but they are **his** virtues, his strength and the might of his hand — then, “he will not be זָכָה,” and “the beast will prevail over him.” Not only will the world's nations not treat him honorably, etc. (as they would someone who governs them), but just the opposite, this attitude will worsen to the extent that the person **himself** begins to feel subordinate to the world’s nations and the gentile lifestyle in general.

¹⁶ *Yevamos* 61a.

¹⁷ *Yeshayahu* 61:5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49:23; see *Zevachim* 19a, *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 24, p. 175.

¹⁹ *Shelah* 20b; et al. {wording is from *Yeshayahu* 14:14}.

Specifically, when he is “הִזְכִּיר,” when the Jew refines himself, he realizes that “Hashem, your L-rd, is the one who gives you the power to acquire wealth.” As a result, he does not operate based on his wisdom and understanding. Instead, he conducts himself based on Hashem’s wisdom, the Torah (*Shulchan Aruch*). Hashem’s instructions guide the Jew.

When we proceed, relying upon the power of the One who sent him, we will prevail and openly see the verse’s realization, “Kings will be your nurturers...,” even during exile. This will be the case until we reach {the fulfillment of the prophecy that} “strangers shall stand and pasture your flocks” with the arrival of our righteous Mashiach.

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Bereishis*, 5742 (1981)