Eating Meat

In 2007, I read a series of articles in Haaretz on how livestock are treated, I came close to regurgitating the hamburger I was eating. As my shock deepened as I found out more and more about this industry: about the feedalots polluting our oceans, about the antibiotics injected into cows to keep them alive long enough for me to eat them, about the rain forests being cut down for grazing land, about the way slaughterhouse workers were treated.

It is quite clear to anybody even somewhat informed of environmental issues that eating meat at the rate we are eating it is unsustainable, the world simply can't support it indefinitely. As humanists we have a responsibility to ensure that the world our progeny will inherit is as livable as possible. For these reasons, I resolved then and there to change my eating habits. Though it has been hard, I now consume about a fifth of the meat I used to and most of it is organic and grass-fed.

I am not a preachy kind of guy and this is not my clarion call to change your eating habits. Quite frankly, I believe that there will come a time when we will be forced to change our eating habits whether we like it or not.

Jewish tradition can function as a guide here. A Jewish value - preventing cruelty against animals is first legislated in the Bible, and elaborated upon by the Rabbis. Farm animals are accorded a day of rest just like their human counterparts, and the sharpness of a knife is a factor in kosher slaughter to insure a quick clean death. In the priestly sections of the Bible, any blood, whether it be animal blood or human blood is treated with reverence.

When I eat meat I utter a special blessing. While my taste buds dance and sing, I dedicate a moment to remembering where it came from:

Your thighs glisten with golden beads of sweat teasing my tongue
I try imagining the pain you went through
And for a moment I taste ashes

בְּאֶגְלֵי שׁוּמָן שׁוֹקַיִךְ מְסַלְאִים, כְּאֵבֵךְ יְמַלֵּא כְּרָסִים, עֵינַי יוֹרְדָה מָיִם אַךְ חִיקִי יַבִּיעַ רְנָנִים