

## THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

# Dietary Laws

*And God said to Adam: ‘Behold My works! See how beautiful and commendable they are. All that I created, for your sake I created it. Pay heed that you do not corrupt and desolate My world, for there is no one to repair it after you.’*

— Midrash, Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:28

**E**very living creature eats. This Commandment requires man to treat the animals he eats — and also, ultimately, every creature subject to human control — with some self-control, self-respect, and at least the semblance of a decent regard for other life.

The Revolutionary Law sweeps away the taboos of paganism.<sup>1</sup> God has given men and women complete dominion over His earth.<sup>2</sup> “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; even as the green herb, I have given you everything.”<sup>3</sup> But this awesome gift is no license for depravity or piggishness: freedom imposes

responsibilities. The Eternal King who elevates us above the animals forbids us from acting like animals.



God created human beings in His image and as His elect.<sup>4</sup> Men and women are obviously totally unlike God in having absolutely undeniable animal needs,<sup>5</sup> but He requires us to behave better than mere animals. People must serve God, rather than use His world as though it exists solely for one's own engorgement. Man's divine right of dominion entails special obligations: human beings are God's planetary stewards.

This Seventh Commandment connects vile gastronomy to idolatry, and to the moral pathologies associated with idolatry, including the pollution and defilement of God's good Earth. It applies equally to men and women, and to their children, in all respects.

Mystics associate the laws connected to this commandment with the rainbow's green.<sup>6</sup>

### HISTORICAL ORIGINS

Scripturally, the Seventh Commandment doesn't emerge with Adam, but only as part of a later Revelation: God's Rainbow Covenant with Noah and his children.<sup>7</sup> This gave rise to the Hebrew custom of referring to all the Universal laws as Noah's laws or, more precisely, as the "Laws of the Sons [Descendants] of Noah."<sup>8</sup>

Latest and last of the Rainbow Commandments, this Seventh Commandment, often called "the Law of the Torn Limb," is certainly very old. It is so old, as various wits have joked, that God gave it to man in an age when it was still necessary to tell people to kill their food before they ate it! Yet, quaint as the law here may sound to modern ears, this ancient Rule, focusing on nothing less than humanity's relationship to the natural environment, has earth-shaking current — and eternal — implications. While it can be fully understood only in the context of God's more detailed Revelation to Israel, it exemplifies the whole thrust and spirit of the Rainbow Law.