

New American Reform Responsa

83. Are Dinosaurs Kosher?

QUESTION: Are dinosaurs kosher? (Vigdor Kavalier, Pittsburgh PA)

ANSWER: There are several elements involved in this question. All of them eventually lead to the same negative conclusion, however, let us look at the possibilities?

We must begin by dividing dinosaurs between carnivorous and vegetarian animals as all kosher cattle whether tame (*behemot*) or wild (*hayat*) consume plants (Lev 11:2). The rabbinic tradition makes that distinction specific in the case of birds as the Bible does not provide ways of identifying kosher birds (Hil 63b). Carnivorous dinosaurs would definitely not be kosher, furthermore we must make a division between warm-blooded and cold-blooded dinosaurs as the latter would be considered as reptiles and be forbidden. As there is currently some difference of opinion among scientists about this fact we must reserve judgement on this issue.

Finally, we must ask whether dinosaurs have cloven hoofs and are ruminants which chew the cud. Some dinosaurs may actually fall into that category and so theoretically it should be possible to eat their meat. However, this is not possible on two grounds: (a) The animals were not known to the ancient Jews and only those animals clearly identifiable from the Biblical sources are considered kosher (Lev 11:21; Deut 14.4); Maimonides considered this list as complete and final (*Yad Hil Maakhalot Asurot* 1.8) though Rashi at least in the case of birds felt that a folk tradition of *kashrut* was sufficient to declare a specific bird kosher even if some questioned it (Rashi to Hil 62b). We, however, possess no such folk tradition or *bobo meise*. (b) It would not be possible to slaughter them in the traditional pattern of *kashrut* as the *shohet* would have to stand on a very tall ladder and the animal would need to stand quite still. It is not permissible to stun an animal before slaughtering it.

Even if that requirement were met, (dinosaurs had unusually small brains) the *shohet* would place himself in grave personal danger as the collapsing dinosaur would propel him from his ladder. So because of *pikuah nefesh* the *shohet* would not be able to slaughter the dinosaur even if it were kosher.

We may approach the entire problem in a different fashion. Dinosaurs existed only before days of Noah and the Flood. In that early period of human history, according to the *Torah*, animals were not consumed as food and people simply lived from fruit and vegetables. The killing of animals was not permitted until after the Flood (Gen 9.3). If we follow this line of reasoning the question would not have been asked in the appropriate time. Furthermore if

none of these reasons sound convincing we would have to follow the *Talmud* dictum, "this is a question which can only be settled by Elijah in the days of the Messiah" (Men 45b; *Midrash Rabbah*, Numbers 3).

Should you, therefore, find a dinosaur steak listed on your menu you should refuse it on the grounds of *kashrut* and due to the age of the meat.

April 1989

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