

# Four Questions: Aaron Potek, Yeshiva Chovevei Torah Rabbinic student and founder of MOOSHY

My dear, sweet co-author, Jeremy, has been trying to get me on board with going vegan. The fact that he dared to ask me to give up my beloved cheese and I didn't immediately rip his face off means that I must really really like him ☐ The fact that I'm considering it means my new job at a school has driven me to loose my mind. The truth of the matter is that I feel like I haven't been taking care of myself since school started and it's not just in diet but in the whole-mind, body and soul. Working for a school, well, it can suck the life outta ya. Luckily for me, I really love working with youth and for however chaotic the school environment is, being able to connect with the students bring me incredible joy.

However, the chaotic school environment also connects me to massive sugar intake (thanks be to every administrator who has candy on their desk and my compulsion to eat said candy when stressed) and what I am heretofore referring to as "passion-handles" ("love" is too light of a word for what's happening to my mid-section). So, I made a declaration to my husband that after Labor Day I will be going wheat free and ease on the sugar. And, like the supportive partner he is, he smiled, nodded and replied, "Whatever you say honey". I'll admit it, I tend to get really pumped on an idea and then get bored with it within a week or so (what did ever happen to my knitting? The daily smoothies I was going to make in the Vitamix? Cooking classes? Guitar lessons?). But then, in the wee hours of the morning, when I'm desperately trying to convince my brain to shut off so I can sleep, it hit me-MOOSHY. Meat Only On Shabbat and Yontiv (holidays, for the non-Yiddish

sect). Now there's a realistic diet I think I can get behind. What's better? MOOSHY is the brain child of a dear friend, the wonderful Aaron Potek, and has its foundation in spirituality and connectedness, which are always a good way to maintain a new eating habit.

So who is this Aaron Potek? A native of St. Louis Park, Minnesota, I met Potek when he was a senior at the University of Michigan and I was a Program Director for the Hillel: Center for Jewish Student Life. Luckily for me, Potek decided to spend a year studying at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem during the exact year I had chosen to study there as well. It was during our year at Pardes that Potek created MOOSHY. Having attended public high school and the University of Michigan as an observant Jew, Potek was accustomed to making connections with Jews of all denominations as well as with non-Jews. Despite having received his undergraduate degree in engineering, Aaron decided to become a Rabbi. He has dedicated his life and study to making connections and Judaism accessible to all and MOOSHY is a prime example of this.



Aaron Potek: MOOSHY Founder and all around awesome person

**1. JH: How was the idea for MOOSHY born?**

AP: The idea for MOOSHY was a fusion of different values of mine. From the Jewish calendar perspective, I felt that I wanted to do something tangibly different on holidays to add to the “specialness” of certain days during the year. From an ethical perspective, I discovered that America’s high meat consumption was significantly contributing to a variety of problems, including global warming, mistreatment of animals, and inefficient use of food. The more I thought about developing a spiritual meat-eating practice, the more I realized how rooted this idea is in Jewish sources and tradition. It’s clear to me that meat was never given to us to be eaten multiple times a day, and historically most Jews have only eaten meat on shabbat. Judaism for me is about living a life of example, and given the state of the meat industry today, I believe we have an opportunity to model a lifestyle of restraint and holiness.

**2. JH: What are the tenants of MOOSHY?**

AP: The tenants of MOOSHY are simple. Reduce your meat consumption, and elevate the meat you do eat. There is a concept in Judaism called a “Seudat Mitzvah,” which is a meal on certain special occasions like shabbat or weddings that is meant to contribute to the joy of that day. By limiting our meat consumption to those meals, we can connect more to the meat and appreciate its unique status while at the same time adding to our celebration of the day.

**3. JH: How have you been able to maintain MOOSHY in your life?**

AP: I have been practicing MOOSHY for about four years, so by now it’s pretty easy. In the beginning it was hard to turn down meat when going to a friend’s house or visiting an area with kosher meat restaurants. But I really do feel myself much more excited for the days when I do eat meat, and keeping that in mind helps me push through the hard times. Still, I’m not proud to admit that I’ve turned down a fair number of steak dinners. But the struggle has been almost entirely mental. I’m not convinced our bodies need a lot of meat, and I make sure to get the protein I need from other foods. Obviously certain

people need meat more regularly for health reasons, but in general I think it might even be a healthier diet to reduce meat consumption. There clearly are enough vegetarians and vegans out there to show that meat isn't a necessity.



Potek and I at the shuk in Jerusalem, summer 2008

**4. JH: *What's your favorite week day MOOSHY recipe?***

AP: The unique thing about MOOSHY is that we're vegetarians during the week and meat-eaters on shabbat. Describing that now I almost feel like some sort of weird shabbos werewolf. During the week I eat what most vegetarians eat: tofu, veggie stir fry, pasta, etc. I don't really use recipes – not because I'm an amazing and spontaneous chef, but because the stuff I make is pretty easy. If you need the recipe for a toasted PB&J, I guess I'm willing to give it to you.