



# Animals as Part of Creation

## Introduction

*B'reishit, "in the beginning," humans were created alongside many other living, breathing, feeling beings. Perhaps the most fascinating discussion and set of Torah commentaries are the ones that surround our origin story—for many years, these discussions and debates have tried to define our relationship to animals. Science and religion function differently in our lives today, so even if you don't take the text literally, the creation story is an important, multi-faceted perspective on how humans share the world with and relate to nonhuman animals.*

*The two activities below explore the topic of animals as part of creation. Regardless of the focus of your service project, an activity from this section would be a good one to include at some point.*

## Vocabulary

HEBREW	TRANSLITERATED HEBREW	ENGLISH
רֶמֶשׁ	<i>remes</i>	<b>creeping</b>
מַעֲשֵׂה	<i>ma'asecha</i>	<b>our works/creation</b>
חַיָּה	<i>chayah</i>	<b>wild animal</b>

# Activity 1: Living Talmud

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*Jewish tradition has a lot to say about animals and their role as part of creation. The “Living Talmud” on the next page provides a few of those perspectives for you to explore. The Talmud is a recording of the Oral Law created by the ancient rabbis, based on the Torah.*

**Once you have explored some of the texts on the Living Talmud page, discuss them with a family member or mentor using the questions below or use the space below to answer the questions on your own.**

## Questions

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*What similarities do you see between the various texts? Do any themes emerge?*

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*How are these texts different? How might they contradict one another?*

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*Share one text you particularly connected with or like. What speaks to you about it?*

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*What does it mean for us today that animals can be seen as having an equal part in creation to humans? How might this affect our behavior?*

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אָבֵל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא,  
בְּשֵׁם שְׂרַחֲמֵיּוֹ עַל הָאָדָם,  
כִּדְ רַחֲמֵיּוֹ עַל הַבְּהֵמָה,  
שְׂנֵאָמֵר: (תהילים פרק קמה ט)  
”וְרַחֲמֵיּוֹ, עַל-כָּל-מַעֲשָׂיו.”  
—מדרש תנחומא נח ו'

*Just as the Holy Blessed One's compassion is on human beings, is the Holy Blessed One's compassion on animals, as it is written, "God's mercies are upon all God's works." (Psalm 145:9)*

—Midrash Tanchuma  
Noach 6

*Praise YHVH (Hashem), wildlife and all animals, creeping things, and birds of wing... Let them praise the name YHVH.*

—Psalms 148

הִלְלוּ אֶת-ה' מִיָּה וְכָל-  
בְּהֵמָה; רֶמֶשׂ, וְצִפּוֹר כָּנָף  
יִהְלְלוּ, אֶת-שֵׁם ה'.

## Living Talmud: Animals as Part of Creation

*So many are Your works, YHVH (Hashem); You have made them all with wisdom; The land is full of your riches.*

—Psalm 104:24

מְהֵרָבּוֹ מַעֲשָׂיָךְ, ה'—  
כָּלֶם, בְּחִכְמָה עָשִׂיתָ;  
מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ, קִנְיָנֶךָ.

*It should not be believed that all beings exist for the sake of humanity's existence ... [rather,] all the other beings, too, have been intended for their own sakes...*

—Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* III:13;  
12th Century, Egypt

אֶפְלוּ דְבָרִים שְׂאֵתָהּ רוֹאֶה אוֹתָן  
 שֶׁהֵן יִתְיָרָה בְּעוֹלָם כְּגוֹן זְבוּבֵין  
 וּפְרָעוֹשִׁין וְיִתּוֹשִׁין אִף הֵם בְּכָל  
 בְּרִיתוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם הֵן, וּבְכָל הַקְּדוּשָׁה  
 בְּרַךְ הוּא עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלִיחוֹתוֹ:  
 אֶפְלוּ עַל יְדֵי נֶחֱשׁ,  
 אֶפְלוּ עַל יְדֵי יִתּוֹשׁ,  
 אֶפְלוּ עַל יְדֵי צְפַרְדֵּעַ.  
 –מדרש בראשית רבה יז:

*Even things that you may regard as superfluous to the world, such as fleas, gnats and flies, even they are included in the creation of the world and the Holy Blessed One carries out the Divine purpose through everything – even a snake, a scorpion, a gnat, or a frog.*

—Midrash, Genesis Rabbah 10:7

*What makes you superior to a worm? The worm serves the Creator with all its mind and strength! Human, too, is a worm and maggot, as it is written “I am a worm and no man.” (Psalms 22:7) If God had not given you intelligence you would not be able to worship God but like a worm. Thus you are no better than a worm, and certainly [no better] than [other] people. Bear in mind that you, the worm and all other small creatures are considered as equals in the world. For all were created and have but the ability given to them by the blessed Creator. Always keep this matter in mind.*

—Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Yisroel (Israel) ben Eliezer, Tzava’as HaRiVaSH #12, 18th century Jewish mystic, Poland

*Furthermore, one’s compassion should extend to all creatures, and he should neither despise nor destroy them, for the chochmah Above (Supernal Wisdom) extends to all of creation—inanimate objects, plants, animals, and speaking (humans).*

—Rabbi Moshe Cordovero in Tomer Devorah (p. 74-75, translated by R. Moshe Miller) 16<sup>th</sup> Century Mystical Thinker, Safed, Israel

## Activity 2:

# Journaling

In *Genesis Rabbah*, a collection of midrashim (interpretations of text done by the ancient rabbis to “fill in the gaps”), it says:

*Even things that you may regard as superfluous to the world, such as fleas, gnats and flies, even they are included in the creation of the world and the Holy Blessed One carries out the Divine purpose through everything - even a snake, a scorpion, a gnat, or a frog.*  
—Midrash Rabbah Genesis 10:7

אֶפְלוּ דְבָרִים שְׂאֵתָהּ רוּאָה אוֹתָן  
שֶׁהֵן יִתְיָרָה בְּעוֹלָם כְּגוֹן זְבוּבִין  
וּפְרָעוֹשִׁין וַיִּתְּוֹשִׁין אֲף הֵם בְּכֻלָּל  
בְּרִייתוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם הֵן, וּבְכֹל הַקְּדוֹשׁ  
בְּרַךְ הוּא עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלִיחוֹתוֹ:  
אֶפְלוּ עַל יְדֵי נְחָשׁ,  
אֶפְלוּ עַל יְדֵי יִתוּשׁ,  
אֶפְלוּ עַל יְדֵי צְפַרְדֵּעַ.

**Take some time to journal about what this passage might mean for you. Use the following questions as prompts:**

- *If God carries out the Divine purpose through all living things, what does that mean about how we should treat all living things?*
- *Do you believe that a mosquito should be treated with the same compassion as a dog? Should a dog be treated with the same compassion as a human? Why or why not?*
- *What does this passage mean about how we should treat living things—animals and humans—who we dislike, disagree with or find uncomfortable to be around?*
- *What else do you notice about this text? How else might it impact your relationship with animals and all living things?*

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