



Caring for Your Animals

Introduction

This section explores what Jewish tradition has to say about how we can most compassionately care for our animals. Even though this isn't a comprehensive list of rules, stories, or opinions, see what you can gather from the messages they send about human-animal relationships. How might we apply these lessons today? 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
בְּהֵמָה	<i>behemah</i>	domesticated animal
צָמָא	<i>tzamei</i>	thirsty
רַחֲמִים	<i>rachamim</i>	compassion, mercy
רוֹעֵה	<i>ro'eh</i>	shepherd



Activity 1:

Creating Your Own Talmud

The Talmud (a recording of the Oral Law created by the ancient rabbis, based on the Torah) is structured such that the middle of each page has a small section of an earlier text, the Mishnah, in the middle with commentary about that text, written by different rabbis, all around it. In this activity, you're going to create your own page of Talmud.

On the next page, you'll find a worksheet with a text in the middle of it which focuses on how we should care for animals. Read through the text a few times. Following the worksheet, write an opinion of that main text above the text in the box labeled "Opinion 1." You can imagine viewing the text from different perspectives, like from that of the human caregiver, or the non-human animal. What would an opposing opinion say? Include an additional opinion to the left of the main text in the box labeled "Opinion 2," and then write a conclusion that reflects your agreement with one opinion or another in the box labeled "Conclusion." Finally, write out an example of how you might apply your understanding of this text today in the box labeled "Modern Application."

Some questions you might want to address in your opinion sections are:

- *Whose needs are seen as being more important in the text—the human or animal? Do you agree or disagree with their prioritization?*
- *What questions does this text raise for you?*
- *What piece of this text requires explanation, in your opinion? How would you explain it?*
- *What is missing from this perspective on how to care for animals?*

Opinion 1:

Opinion 2:

מאכל לבהמתו שנא
(דברים יא, טו) "וְנָתַתִּי עֵשָׂב
בְּשָׂדֶךָ לְבִהֶמְתֶּךָ וְאָכְלָתָּ
וְשָׂבַעְתָּ:"

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: A person should not eat or drink before first providing for his animals since it says, "And I will give grass in thy fields for thy cattle, and then, thou shalt eat and be satisfied." (Deuteronomy 11:15)

*—Babylonian Talmud,
Tractate Berachot 40a*

Conclusion

Modern Application:

Activity 2:

Animal Care Guides

Jewish texts provide us with a variety of suggestions of how we should best nurture the animals in our care.

Using the texts below, create a set of A) written instructions and/or B) visual instructions for an ancient farmer on how they should care for their animals using the worksheets on the next pages.

The seventh day is a Shabbat for YHVH (Hashem) your god: You shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your animal (behemah), or the foreigner within your domain.

—Exodus 20:10

וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא-
תַעֲשֶׂה כָל-מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ-וּבִתֶּךָ
עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתֶּךָ וּבְהֵמָתְךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר
בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: A person should not eat or drink before first providing for his animals since it says, “And I will give grass in your fields for your animal (behemah), and then you shall eat and be satiated” (Deuteronomy 11:15).

—Babylonian Talmud,
Tractate Berachot 40a

דָּאמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב אֲסוּר לְאָדָם
שִׂיאֲכַל קוּדֵם שִׂיתֵן מֵאֲכַל לְבֵהֵמָתוֹ שְׂנָא
(דְּבָרִים י"א, טו) וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשַׂדֶּךָ לְבֵהֵמָתְךָ
וְאָכְלָתָ וְשִׂבַּעְתָּ:

The holy Arizal (Rabbi Yitschak Luria of blessed memory) once mentioned to one of his students that he had a "mark" on his face as a result of the sin of causing pain to animals. Upon investigating, this Torah scholar found out that instead of feeding their chickens in the morning, his wife would let them forage for their own food. When he corrected this, the Arizal remarked that the mark on his forehead was gone.

—Rabbi Elazar ben Moshe Azikri,
Sefer Chareidim 14:1

ומעשה היה בדורנו שהרב המקובל הגדול כמהר"ר יצחק אשכנזי ז"ל שנסתכל בפני תלמיד חכם א' ואמר לו נרשם בפניך עון צער בעלי חיים והיה אותו ת"ח מצטער ומפשפש בדבר עד שמצא שאשתו לא היתה נותנת מאכל לתרנגולים בבקר אלא מנחת אותן הולכות בחצר וברחוב לנקר ואז צוה עליה וזרזה לעשות להן גיבול הסובין והמים בבקר בבקר ואחרי שנתקן הדבר והרב לא ידע נסתכל בפניו

Rabbi Levi said: The whole twelve months that Noah was in the ark, neither he nor his family tasted sleep because they were responsible for feeding the domesticated, wild, and winged animals. Rabbi Eliezer said: He brought branches for the elephants... Now some ate in the second hour of the night and some in the third hour of the day, hence you know that Noah did not taste a bit of sleep. Rabbi Yochanan said... One time, when Noah was late in feeding the lion, the lion bit him, and he went away limping.

—Midrash Tanchuma Noach 9

א"ר לוי כל אותן י"ב חדש לא טעם טעם שינה לא נח ולא בניו שהיו זקוקין לזון את הבהמה ואת החיה ואת העופות
ר"ע אומר אפי' שבישתין לפילין...
יש בהמה שאוכלת לב' שעות בלילה ויש אוכלת לשלשה, תדע לך שלא טעמו טעם שינה דא"ר יוחנן בשם ר"א ברבי יוסי הגלילי פעם אחד שהה נח לזון את הארי הכישו הארי ויצא צולע

When Moshe our teacher was tending the flocks of Yitro in the wilderness, a lamb scampered off, and Moshe ran after it, until it approached a shelter under a rock. As the lamb reached the shelter, it came upon a pool of water and stopped to drink. When Moshe caught up with it, he said, "I did not know that you ran away because you were thirsty. Now you must be tired." So, he hoisted the lamb on his shoulder and started walking back with it. The blessed Holy One then said, "Because you showed such compassion in tending the flock of a mortal, as you live, you shall become shepherd of Israel, the flock that is mine."

—Midrash Rabbah Exodus 2:2

כשהיה משה רבינו עליו השלום רועה צאנו של יתרו במדבר, ברח ממנו גדי ורץ אחריו, עד שהגיע לחסית, כיון שהגיע לחסית, נודמנה לו בריכה של מים ועמד הגדי לשתות, כיון שהגיע משה אצלו, אמר: "אני לא הייתי יודע שרץ היית מפני צמא, עיף אתה," הרכיבו על כתיפו והיה מהלך. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: "יש לך רחמים לנהוג צאנו של בשר ודם, כך, חיידך! אתה תרעה צאני ישראל."

A person may not buy a domesticated animal, a wild animal, or a chicken before buying food for them to eat.

—Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Ketubot 4:8

אין אדם רשאי ליקח בהמה חיה ועוף אלא אם כן התקין להן מזונות

The Ancient Farmer's Guide to Animal Care

To care for your animals in a way that shows compassion for them and follows Jewish tradition, you should...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. Create Your Own: _____

The Ancient Farmer's Guide to Animal Care

To care for your animals in a way that shows compassion for them and follows Jewish tradition, you should...

	Create Your Own:

Conclusion

The animals in our care look to us for sustenance and compassion. Increasingly, animals have come into our care for reasons beyond helping us work the land. How might these texts and guidelines for care apply to animals in your life, whether at home, in the natural spaces around you, at school, or elsewhere? How do you think they should apply to animals being taken care of and used by businesses? Jewish tradition can provide us with important insights into how we can best provide for the physical, mental, and emotional needs of animals.

