

JEWISH ANIMAL ETHICS:

A Community Study Guide



ABOUT THE JEWISH INITIATIVE FOR ANIMALS

The Jewish Initiative for Animals (JIFA) provides new ways for the Jewish community to bring its values of compassion for animals into practice and strengthen Jewish communities in the process.

We pursue this work through:

Education:

We collaborate with Jewish nonprofit organizations—camps, synagogues, youth groups, community centers, schools, college programs, and more—to produce educational resources that spark inquiry into how Jewish values should interact with how we treat animals.

Ethical Food Policies:

We empower Jewish institutions to create ethical food policies that allow them to live their values and lay the groundwork for future national campaigns.

Expert Consultation:

We provide expert consultation to Jewish institutions that serve animal products to assist them in lowering meat consumption and finding higher-welfare sources. We'll even help your Jewish institution set up new supply chains so that any animal products you serve truly represent your community's values.

JIFA is a project of Farm Forward.

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I. Why Animals Matter

The way humans treat animals is an important religious and ethical issue that is discussed in every comprehensive collection of Jewish law. Though diverse Jewish perspectives agree that animals matter, there is a huge diversity of views about how much and why they matter. The texts below show that Jewish traditions provide at least two broad motivations for why our treatment of animals matters: for the sake of humanity (1A) and because of the inherent value of animals themselves (1B).

A. Why Animals Matter: To Benefit Humans

(1) Sensitivity to animals promotes sensitivity to other humans

Deuteronomy 22:6-7 (shiluah ha'ken, sending away the mother bird)

If, along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young. Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.

כִּי יִקְרָא קוֹן-צִפּוֹר לְפָנָיִךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּכַל-עֵץ
אוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ, אֶפְרָחִים אוֹ בִּיציִם, וְהָאִם
רֹבֶצֶת עַל-הָאֶפְרָחִים, אוֹ עַל-הַבִּיצִים —
לֹא-תִקַּח הָאִם, עַל-הַבָּנִים. שְׁלַח תְּשַׁלַּח
אֶת-הָאִם, וְאֶת-הַבָּנִים תִּקַּח-לָךְ, לְמַעַן
יֵיטֵב לָךְ, וְהָאֶרֶץ יִמִּים.

Leviticus 22:27-28 (oto v'et b'no, not slaughtering a bird with their young)

When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall stay seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as an offering by fire to YHVH. However, no animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young.

שׁוֹר אוֹ-כֶשֶׁב אוֹ-עֹז כִּי יוֹלַד וְהָיָה שִׁבְעַת
יָמִים תַּחַת אִמּוֹ וּמִיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי וְהִלָּאָה
יִרְצָה לְקַרְבָּן אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה: וְשׁוֹר אוֹ-שֶׂה
אֹתוֹ וְאֶת-בָּנָיו לֹא תִשְׁחַטוּ בַּיּוֹם אֶחָד:

Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, III:48

The Sephardic philosopher and Torah scholar Maimonides, also known as Rambam (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 1135/8-1204), is among the most influential figures in all of Jewish tradition. He argued that compassion is owed animals both for the sake of humanity and for the sake of the animals themselves.

It is also prohibited to kill an animal with its young on the same day (Leviticus 22:28), in order that people should be restrained and prevented from killing the two together in such a manner that the young is slain in the sight of the mother; for the pain of the animals under such circumstances is very great. There is no difference in this case between the pain of man and the pain of other living beings, since the love and tenderness of the mother for her young ones is not produced by reasoning, but by imagination, and this faculty exists not only in man but in most living beings. This law applies only to ox and lamb, because of the domestic animals used as food these alone are permitted to us, and in these cases the mother recognizes her young. The same reason applies to the law which enjoins that we should let the mother fly away when we take the young. The eggs over which the bird sits, and the young that are in need of their mother, are generally unfit for food, and when the mother is sent away she does not see the taking of her young ones, and does not feel any pain. In most cases, however, this commandment will cause man to leave the whole nest untouched, because [the young or the eggs], which he is allowed to take, are, as a rule, unfit for food. If the Torah provides that such grief should not be caused to cattle or birds, how much more careful must we be that we should not cause grief to our fellow human beings.

וכן אסר לשחוט אותו ואת בנו ביום אחד (ויקרא כב:כח), להשמר ולהרחיק לשחוט משניהם הבן לעיני האם, כי צער בעלי חיים בזה גדול מאד, אין הפרש בין צער האדם עליו וצער שאר בעלי חיים, כי אהבת האם ורחמיה על הולד אינו נמשך אחר השכל רק אחר פעל הכח המדמה הנמצא ברוב בעלי חיים כמו שנמצא באדם, והיה זה הדין מיוחד בשור ושה, מפני שהם מותר לנו אכילתם מן הבייתות הנהוג לאכלם, והם אשר תכיר מהם האם את הולד, וזהו הטעם גם כן בשלוח הקן, כי הביצים אשר שכבה האם עליהם והאפרוחים הצריכים לאמם על הרוב אינם ראויים לאכילה, וכשישלח האם ותלך לה לא תצטער בראות לקיחת הבנים, ועל הרוב יהיה סבה להניח הכל, כי מה שהיה לוקח ברוב הפעמים אינו ראוי לאכילה, ואם אלו הצערים הנפשיים חסה תורה עליהם בבהמות ובעופות כל שכן בבני אדם.

Nahmanides commenting on Leviticus 22:27-28 & Deuteronomy 22:6-7

Maimonides younger contemporary, the Sephardic philosopher and Torah scholar Nahmanides, also known as Ramban (Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, 1194-1270) in his commentary on both the Deuteronomic law that one must drive away a mother bird before taking her eggs (22:7) and the prohibition on killing a mother and its young on the same day (Leviticus 22:28) goes out of his way to argue that the reason for the law of the mother bird is not—despite the suggestion of some Jewish sources (including Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed* III:48, above)—the suffering of the mother bird, but to teach humans compassion.

This mitzvah is explained also from [the verse] “him and his child / oto v’et b’no you will not slaughter in one day”, for the reason for both is not to let our heart become cruel, so we would not show mercy; or it is that Scripture will not permit doing any slaughter that would uproot a species, even though it permits slaughter of a particular species; and behold, one who kills/hahoreg mother and children in one day or takes them...is like cutting off the very species.

גם זו מצווה מבוארת מן אותו ואת בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד (ויקרא כב:כח). כי הטעם בשניהם לבלתי היות לנו לב אכזרי ולא נרחם, או שלא יתיר הכתוב לעשות השחתה לעקור המין אף על פי שהתיר השחיטה במין ההוא, והנה ההורג האם והבנים ביום אחד או לוקח אותם בהיות להם דרור לעוף כאלו יכרית המין ההוא:

Sefer ha-Hinnukh, Mitzvah 545

The 13th century text *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*, which enumerates and explains each of the 613 commandments identified by rabbinic tradition, comments on the Nahmanides’s interpretation of Deuteronomy 22:6-7.

And so that which they said (Berakhot 33a), “[It is because] he makes the traits of the blessed Holy One into mercy and they are only decrees,” is to say that God did not worry about the nest of the bird and His ‘mercy did not reach’ it and its child; as His mercy does not extend to creatures with an animal soul, to prevent us from doing what we need to them. As were it so, slaughtering would be forbidden. But [rather], the reason for the proscription is to teach us the trait of mercy and that we not become cruel. Since cruelty spreads in the soul of a man, as it is known with butchers that slaughter large oxen and donkeys, that they are ‘people of blood,’ ‘slaughterers of men’ [and] very cruel. And because of this they said (Kiddushin 82a), “The best of butchers are the partners of Amalek.” And behold, these commandments with animals and birds are not mercy upon them, but [rather] decrees upon us, to guide us and to teach us the good character traits. To here are the interpretations of Ramban [Nahmanides], may his memory be blessed.

וכן מה שאמרו (ברכות לג"א) לפי שעושה גזירותיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא רחמים ואינן אלא גזירות, לומר שלא חס האל על קן צפור ולא הגיעו רחמיו על אותו ואת בנו, שאין רחמיו מגיעות בבעלי נפש הבהמות למנע אותנו מלעשות בהם צרכינו, שאם כן, היה אוסר השחיטה, אבל טעם המניעה ללמד אותנו מדת הרחמנות ושלא נתאכזר, כי האכזריות תתפשט בנפש האדם, כידוע בטבחים שוחטי השורים הגדולים והחמורים, שהם אנשי דמים, זובחי אדם, אכזריים מאד, ומפני זה אמרו (קדושין פב"א) טוב שבטבחים שתפו של עמלק, והנה המצות האלה בבהמה ובעוף אינן רחמים עליהן, אבל גזירות בנו להדריכנו וללמד אותנו המדות הטובות, עד כאן בפרושי הרמב"ן זכרונו לברכה.

Deuteronomy 25:4 (not muzzling a domestic animal while working)

You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing.

לֹא-תִחָסֵם שׁוֹר, בְּדִישׁוֹ.

Sefer ha-Hinnukh Mitzvah 596

Not to muzzle an animal at the time of its work:
To not prevent an animal from eating that which it is working on, at the time of its work - for example, when it threshes grain or carries straw from place to place on its back - as we do not have permission to prevent it from eating from it. And about this is it stated (Deuteronomy 25:4), "You shall not muzzle an ox in its threshing."

About the roots of the commandment are to teach ourselves that our souls should be a good soul that chooses what is right and clings to it and pursues kindness and mercy. And in our accustoming it to this - even with animals that were only created to serve us, to be concerned for them to distribute to them a portion of the toil of their flesh - the soul will take for itself the way of this habit; to do good to people and to guard from taking access away from them for anything that is appropriate for them, and to repay their reward according to all the good that they do and to satiate them with that upon which they toiled. And it is fitting for the holy chosen nation to follow this way.

שלא לחסום בהמה בשעת מלאכתה - שלא נמנע הבהמה מלאכול ממה שתעבד בו בשעת עבודה, כגון שתדוש תבואה או תשא תבן, ממקום למקום על גבה, שאין רשות לנו למנעה מלאכול ממנה, ועל זה נאמר (דברים כה:ד) לֹא-תִחָסֵם שׁוֹר, בְּדִישׁוֹ.

משרשי המצוה. ללמד עצמנו להיות נפשנו נפש יפה בוחרת הישר ומדבקת בו ורודפת אחר החסד והחמלה, ובהרגילנו אותה על זה אף על הבהמות שלא נבראו רק לשמשנו, לחוס עליהן לחלק להן חלק מיגיעת בשרן תקח לה הנפש דרכה בהרגל זה, להטיב אל בני אדם ולשמור אותם מהעביר עליהם הדרך בשום דבר שראוי להם, ולשלם שכרם ככל אשר יעשו טוב, ולהשביעם מאשר יגעו בו, וזה הדרך ראוי ילכו בה עם הקדש הנבחר.

(2) Compassion to animals is rewarded

The commandment of *shiluaḥ ha'ken* (Deuteronomy 22:6-7), sending away the mother bird, discussed above, ends with the phrase “in order that it may go well for you” (22:7). Here are other texts suggesting compassion to animals is rewarded.

Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzi'a' 85a

A calf being lead to sheḥitah [Jewish religious slaughter] broke away, hid its head in the folds of Rabbi [Yehudah]'s garment, and wept. He said to it: “Go. For this you were created.” [The heavenly court] said [in response]: “Since he had no compassion, let him face sufferings.” One day Rabbi [Yehudah]'s female servant was sweeping the house. Some infant rodents were scattered [from their nest], and she swept them up. He said to her: “Let them go. As it is written: ‘His compassion is over all His works’” (Psalms 145:9). They said: “Because he was compassionate, let us be compassionate to him.”

דההוא עגלא דהוו קא ממטו ליה
לשחיטה אזל תליא לרישיה בכנפיה
דרבי וקא בכי אמר ליה
זיל לכך נוצרת אמרי הואיל ולא קא
מרחם ליתו עליה יסורין ועיי מעשה
הלכו יומא חד הוה קא כנשא אמתיה
דרבי ביתא הוה שדיא בני כרכושתא
וקא כנשא להו אמר לה שבקינהו
כתיב (תהלים קמה:ט) ורחמיו על כל
מעשיו.

Midrash, Exodus Rabbah 2:2

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.”

כשהיה משה רבינו עליו השלום רועה
צאנו של יתרו במדבר, ברח ממנו גדי
ורץ אחריו, עד שהגיע לחסית, כיון
שהגיע לחסית, נזדמנה 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, חייך!
אתה תרעה צאני ישראל.

(3) Compassion for animals is a quality inherent in the righteous person

Proverbs 12:10

The righteous person knows the needs
[nefesh, literally “soul”] of their animal.

יודע צדיק, נפש בהמתו.

Genesis 24:43-46 (Rebekah watering camels)

In Genesis (24:44), Abraham’s servant Eliezer determines that Rebekah—a paradigm of the good wife—is a suitable spouse for Isaac when she provides water not only for him, but also, without prompting, for his camels.

As I stand by the spring of water, let the young woman who comes out to draw and to whom I say, ‘Please, let me drink a little water from your jar,’ and who answers, ‘You may drink, and I will also draw for your camels’—let her be the wife whom YHVH has decreed for my master’s son.’ I had scarcely finished praying in my heart, when Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew. And I said to her, ‘Please give me a drink.’ She quickly lowered her jar and said, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels.’ So I drank, and she also watered the camels.

הנה אנכי נצב על-עין המים והיה
העלמה היצאת לשאב ואמרתי
אליה השקיני-נא מעט-מים מכדך:
ואמרה אלי גם-אתה שתה וגם
לגמליך אשאב הוא האשה אשר-
הכיר ה' לבן-אדני: אני טרם אכלה
לדבר אל-לבי והנה רבקה יצאת
וכדה על-שכמה ותרד העינה
ותשאב ואמר אליה השקיני נא:
ותמהר ותורד כדה מעליה ותאמר
שתה וגם-גמליך אשקה ואשת וגם
הגמלים השקתה:

Genesis 6:9 (Noah was righteous)

This passage forms the basis for many later commentaries that explain Noah’s righteous character as aligned with his treatment of animals.

This is the line of Noah. Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with Elohim.

אלה תולדת נח נח איש צדיק
תמים היה בדורתו את-האלקים
התהלך-נח:

Midrash, Exodus Rabbah 2:2

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."

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, חייך! אתה
תרעה צאני ישראל.

Midrash Tanḥuma (Buber) Noah 4

Why is Noah called righteous? Because he fed the creatures of the blessed Holy One, and became like his Creator /na'aseh k'bor'o. Thus it says: 'For YHVH is righteous, loving righteous deeds (Psalms 11:7)'.

למה נקרא שמו צדיק, הואיל וזן
את בריותיו של הקב"ה נעשה
כבוראו, כענין שנאמר צדיק ה'
צדקות אהב.

Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*

The Algerian-born contemporary French-Jewish philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) wrote extensively on compassion for animals and argued for a critical approach to conventional animal ethics. In the quotation below he answers the question why we need to think critically about our obligations to animals. Translation by David Wills (Fordham University Press, 2008, p28).

Morality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of this nonpower, the possibility of an impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability, and the vulnerability of this anguish.

B. Why Animals Matter: The Inherent Value of Animals

(4) Animals' praise of God

The theme of animals praising God occurs frequently in Talmudic and Midrashic literature, for example the Talmudic interpretation of 1 Samuel 6:12 in which two cows pulling the Ark of the Covenant “turned their faces towards the Ark and sang a song [praising God]” (Bavli, Avodah Zarah 14b). The Rabbis go on to debate precisely what song the cows sang! Another prominent example of this theme is Perek Shirah—an ancient text of uncertain origin that consists of six chapters containing verses beginning with the formula “The such-and-such says...” and then putting a quotation from the Bible, most frequently Psalms, in the mouth of an animal, plant, or other part of the natural world. For example, “The hen is saying, ‘He gives food to all flesh [basar], for his covenant-love [Hesed] is eternal’ [Psalm 136:25].” For study of Perek Shirah, see <http://opensiddur.org/perek-shira-chapter-of-song/>. Here are several biblical examples of this theme.

Psalms 104:24

The tradition of animals (and other parts of the natural world) praising God, are frequent in Psalms, such as the examples given here.

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

מְה־רְבוּ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ, ה' — בְּלִם,
בְּחִכְמָה עָשִׂיתָ;
מִלְאָה הָאָרֶץ, קִנְיֶיךָ.

Psalms 148:7-13

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

הִלְלוּ אֶת־ה'... חִזָּה וְכָל־בְּהֵמָה;
רָמֵשׂ, וְצִפּוֹר כָּנָף
יְהַלְלוּ, אֶת־שֵׁם ה'.

Psalms 150:6

Let all that breathes praise Yah. Hallelu-Yah.

כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל קָה הִלְלוּ־קָה:

(5) Animals are imbued with and reflect the Divine

This ability to reflect a part of the divine wisdom hovers in the background of the numerous classical rabbinic stories of animal sagacity.

Midrash Tanhuma Noah 6

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

אֲבָל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, כְּשֵׁם שְׂרַחֲמֵי
עַל הָאָדָם, כִּדְ רַחֲמֵי עַל הַבְּהֵמָה,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תהלים קמה:ט) וְרַחֲמֵי, עַל-
כָּל-מַעֲשָׂיו.

Moses Cordovero in Tomer Devorah, chapter 3

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, also known as Ramak (1522-1570), was an important kabbalist from Safed (Tsfat, Israel). The English is based on the translation of Rabbi Moshe Miller.

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

צְרִיךְ לְהִיּוֹת רַחֲמֵי פְּרוּסִים עַל כָּל
הַנְּבְרָאִים, לֹא יְבוֹס וְלֹא יִאַבְדֵם. שְׁהֲרִי
הַחֲכֵמָה הָעֲלִיוֹנָה הִיא פְּרוּסָה עַל כָּל
הַנְּבְרָאִים, דּוֹמֵם וְצוֹמֵחַ וְחַי וּמְדַבֵּר.

Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Yisroel (Israel) ben Eliezer

The Baal Shem Tov, or Besht, was an 18th century Jewish mystic from Poland. This passage is from Tzavaat HaRivash (No.12), a compilation of the Besht's writing by his disciple Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezhirech.

What makes you superior to a worm? The worm serves the Creator with all its mind and strength! The human being, too, is a worm and maggot, as it is written "I am a worm and no man" (Psalms 22:7). If Blessed Hashem 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 friends 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.

ובמה הוא חשוב יותר מהתולעת,
שהתולעת עובד להבורא יתברך בכל
שכלו וכחו. והאדם ג"כ רמה ותולעה, כמו
שאמר ואנכי תולעת ולא איש (תהלים
כב:ז), ואם לא נתן לו השם יתברך שכל
לא היה יכול לעבדו רק כמו תולעת, ואם
כן אפילו מתולעת אינו חשוב במעלה כל
שכן מבני אדם. ויחשוב שהוא לתולעת
ושארי בריות קטנות הם חשובים כמו
חבירים בעולם, שכולם נבראים ואין להם
יכולת רק מה שנתן להם הבורא יתברך,
ודבר זה יהיה תמיד במחשבתו:

(6) Divine concern for animals is independent of human beings

Several texts go out of their way to emphasize that God's concern for animals is independent of concern for human beings. Some even present the idea that God cares so much for animals that unethical humans are saved for their sake. Thus in Genesis Rabbah we read that God grants the wicked kingdom of Alexander rain only for the sake of animals: the verse "Human and animal You save, Adonai" (Psalms 37:7) is reinterpreted by the text to mean, "Human for the sake of animal You save, Adonai" (Psalms 33:1).

Psalms 147:7-9

Sing to YHVH a song of praise, chant a hymn with a lyre to our God, who covers the heavens with clouds, provides rain for the earth, makes mountains put forth grass; who gives the beasts their food, to the raven's brood what they cry for.

עָנוּ לֵה' בְּתוֹדָה וְזָמְרוּ לֵאלֹהֵינוּ בְּכִנּוֹר:
הַמְכַסֶּה שָׁמַיִם בְּעָבִים הַמְכִּיֵן לָאָרֶץ
מָטָר הַמְצַמֵּחַ הָרִים חֲצִיר: נוֹתֵן
לְבֵהֱמָה לַחֲמָה לְבִנֵי עֹרֵב אֲשֶׁר יִקְרְאוּ:

Midrash, Genesis Rabbah 10:7

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 blessed Holy One carries out the Divine purpose through everything – even a snake, a scorpion, a gnat or a frog.

אֶפְלוּ דְבָרִים שְׂאֵתָה רוּאָה אוֹתָן שֶׁהֵן
יִתִירָה בְּעוֹלָם כְּגוֹן זְבוּבִין וּפְרָעוֹשִׁין
וְיִתוּשִׁין אֵף הֵם בְּכֻלָּל בְּרִייתוֹ שֶׁל
עוֹלָם הֵן, וּבְכָל הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרִדָּה הוּא עוֹשֶׂה
שְׁלִיחוֹתָו: אֶפְלוּ עַל יְדֵי נָחָשׁ, אֶפְלוּ עַל
יְדֵי יִתוּשׁ, אֶפְלוּ עַל יְדֵי צְפַרְדֵּעַ.

Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed III:13

[A]ll the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes and not for the sake of humanity....

If you consider the Torah, the notion that we have in view will become manifest.... For with reference to none of the things created is the statement made in any way that it exists for the sake of some other things. It only says that the One brought

ואמרו יצרתיו אף עשיתיו - הוא מה שביארתי לך שיש שם נמצאים לא תהיה מציאותם אלא אחר מציאות דבר אחר, לכך אמר אני יצרתיו אותו הדבר הראשון אשר קדימותו הכרחית, כמו החומר דרך משל לכל דבר שהוא בעל חומר, ואחר כך עשיתי באותו הדבר שקדם או אחריו

every part of the world into existence and that it conformed to its purpose. This is the meaning of the saying: “And Elohim saw that it was good.” About the whole, it says: “And Elohim saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

מה שהייתה כוונתי להמציא, ואין שם זולת הרצון המוחלט.

וכאשר תתבונן באותו הספר המכשיר לכל מוכשר אל האמת, ולפיכך נקרא תורה יתבאר לך עניין זה אשר אנו חגים סביבו מתחילת מעשה בראשית עד סופו, והוא שלא ביאר כלל בשום דבר מהן שהוא בגלל דבר אחר, אלא כל פרט ופרט מפרטי העולם אמר שהוא המציאו ושהייתה מציאותו בהתאם למטרה. וזהו עניין אמרו וירא אלקים כי טוב, לפי שכבר ידעת מה שביארנו באומרים דיברה תורה כלשון בני אדם, והנה טוב' אצלנו ביטוי למה שתואם את מטרתנו. ועל הכללות אמר (בראשית א:לא) וירא אלקים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאוד.

The Maharal, Be'er Ha-Golah, well 2

The Maharal (Yehudah ben Betzalel Löw, ca. 1520–1609), an influential Ashkenazi philosopher, mystic, and Talmud scholar, provides one of the most explicit articulations of animals having an inherent value rooted in divine concern.

Everything, like grasses and fruits, were created for the sake of animals, which are flesh, for He gave them everything to eat, as the verse states, ‘I give you...’ (Genesis 1:29). From this you see that everything else was created for the animals, while the animals were created in the world for their own sake.

וזוהו נקרא יגיעת בשר שהוא גוף הדבר, כי כל הדברים כמו העשבים והפירות נבראו בשביל הבעל חיים שהוא בשר כי נתן להם הכל לאכול כדכתיב בקרא (בראשית א:כט) הנה נתתי לכם וגו', ומזה תראה כי שאר נמצאים הם נבראו בשביל הבעל חיים והבעל חיים הם נבראו בעולם שיהיו בעצם.

II: Eating and Raising Farmed Animals

Jewish texts suggest that eating animals is a serious and ethically fraught activity that must be done with great care. This raises important ethical questions about today's systems of industrial animal agriculture, where animals do not have their basic physical and mental needs met on factory farms.

A. Meat as an Ethical Problem

The following sources provide examples of how Jewish tradition tends to view the act of killing and eating animals as acceptable but morally fraught.

Genesis 1:29-30 (God tells all humans and animals to eat plants)

This passage is interpreted with near unanimity by classic Jewish and Christian biblical commentators as indicating that God originally commanded humans to be vegetarian.

Elohim said: "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food." And it was so.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת-
כָּל-עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-
הָאָרֶץ, וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ פְרִי-עֵץ,
זֶרַע זֶרַע: לָכֶם יְהִי, לְאֹכְלָהּ. וְלִכְל-
חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלִכְל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכְל
רוֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה,
אֶת-כָּל-יֶרֶק עֵשֶׂב, לְאֹכְלָהּ; וַיְהִי-כֵן.

Midrash Aggadah on Genesis 1:29

How do we know that man was not permitted to eat meat? Since the blessed Holy One did not create His creatures to die.

מיכן אתה למד שלא הותר לאדם
לאכול בשר? לפי שלא ברא הקב"ה
את בריותיו על מנת שימותו.

Ibn Ezra on Genesis 1:29

And Elohim said, “Behold, I have give to you” – He permitted humans and to all which have a living soul [i.e., animals] to eat all grasses; all fruit is permitted to humans, and grasses to all beasts and creeping things. To this point, meat has not been permitted...

ויאמר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נֹתַתִּי לָכֶם. הַתִּיר לִכְנִי אָדָם וְלִכֹּל שֵׁשׁ בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לֵאכֹל כָּל עֵשֶׂב. וְכֹל פְּרִי עֵץ מִוֶּתֶר לָאָדָם. וְהָעֵשֶׂב הַיָּרֵק לַחַיּוֹת וְלִכֹּל רוֹמֵשׁ. וְעַד כֹּה לֹא הַתִּיר הַבָּשָׂר עַד אַחֵר הַמְּבֹל...

Genesis 9:3-4 (concession to Noah and humans to eat meat)

In the following passage from the Noah story, God tells Noah that people can now eat animals. Some understand this passage as a “concession” to humans who desire meat (meaning, we can eat meat but not blood); others interpret it as an evolution of our relationship with animals.

Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these. You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it.

כָּל-רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הוּא-חַי, לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ: כִּי־רֵק עֵשֶׂב, נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל. אֲדָם-בָּשָׂר, בְּנִפְשׁוֹ דָּמוֹ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ.

Rashi on Genesis 9:3-4

The following comment by Rashi explains the prohibition of eating the “life-flesh” which refers to killing the animals before consuming it.

For I did not permit Adam Harishon to eat meat, but green herbs alone; but to you — even as the green herbs that I gave the full use of to Adam Harishon — do I give everything (Sanhedrin 59b). He (God) here prohibited to them (humans) *נִמְרָא רַבָּא יְחָה* (ever min haḥai) the eating of a limb cut from a living animal, that is to say that *רַשָּׁב וּשְׁפִנְב* (literally, flesh together with its life) means so long as its life is in it you shall not eat the flesh.

לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לֵאכֹלָהּ שְׁלֵא הַרְשִׁיתִי לְאָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן בָּשָׂר אֶלָּא יֵרֵק עֵשֶׂב; וְלָכֶם-כִּי־רֵק עֵשֶׂב שֶׁהִפְקַדְתִּי לְאָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן, נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת כָּל (סְנֵהדְרִין נ"ט): בָּשָׂר בְּנִפְשׁוֹ אֶסֶר לָהֶם אֶבֶר מִן הַחַי, כְּלוֹמֵר כָּל זְמַן שֶׁנִּפְשׁוֹ בּוֹ, לֹא תֹאכְלוּ הַבָּשָׂר.

Leviticus 22:28 (oto v'et beno, do not kill a mother and its young together)

However, no animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young.

וְיִשׁוּר, אוֹ-שָׂה — אֶתוֹ וְאֶת-בְּנוֹ, לֹא תִשְׁחָטוּ בְּיוֹם אֶחָד.

Deuteronomy 12:21 (concession to slaughter animals apart the temple service)

If the place where YHVH has chosen to establish His name is too far from you, you may slaughter any of the cattle or sheep that YHVH gives you, as I have instructed you; and you may eat to your heart's content in your settlements.

כִּי־יִרְחַק מִמֶּךָ הַמָּקוֹם, אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹם שְׁמוֹ שָׁם, וְזָבַחְתָּ מִבְּקָרְךָ וּמִצֹּאֲנֶךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן ה' לְךָ, בְּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתֶךָ — וְאָכַלְתָּ, בְּשִׂעְרֶיךָ, בְּכֹל, אֹתוֹת נִפְשֶׁךָ.

B. Differing Talmudic Responses to Meat

The Rabbis of the Talmud presented differing responses to the problematic nature of meat. Some Jews today believe they are obligated by Jewish law to eat meat as part of the joy of a particular holiday observance and commonly cite Babylonian Talmud Pesahim 109a. Other Jews believe meat consumption should be rare or advocate vegetarianism citing Babylonian Talmud, *Hullin* 84a and Pesahim 49b and its suggestions that one should not eat meat unless one: 1. craves it and kills the animal on one's own, 2. has wealth, and 3. is educated.

Babylonian Talmud Pesahim 109a

It was taught: Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira says: "While the Temple is standing, there is no joy unless there is meat, as it says (Deuteronomy 27:7) 'And you shall sacrifice peace-offerings and eat them there, and you will be joyful before YHVH, your God'. And now since the Temple is no longer standing, there is no joy except with wine that gladdens the heart, as it says (Psalms 104:15) 'wine gladdens the heart of man'.

תניא, רבי יהודה בן בתירא אומר: בזמן שבית המקדש קיים - אין שמחה אלא בבשר, שנאמר (דברים כז:ז) וזבחת שלמים ואכלת שם ושמחת לפני ה' אלקיך. ועכשיו שאין בית המקדש קיים - אין שמחה אלא ביין, שנאמר (תהלים קד:טו) ויין ישמח לבב אנוש.

Babylonian Talmud, Hullin 84a

The Torah here teaches a rule of conduct, that a person should not eat meat unless he has a special appetite for it. I might think that this means that a person should buy [meat] in the market and eat it, the text therefore states (Deuteronomy 12:21) 'Then you shall kill of your herd and of your flock.'

למדה תורה דרך ארץ שלא יאכל אדם בשר אלא לתאבון יכול יקח אדם מן השוק ויאכל תלמוד לומר (דברים יב:כא) וזבחת מבקרך ומצאנך.

Babylonian Talmud, Hullin 84a

If [a man] has fifty maneh he may buy for his stew a litra of meat...

Mar Zutra the son of R. Nahman said:
Discipline your maidens in the way of life;
hence the Torah teaches a rule of conduct
that a parent should not accustom his son to
flesh and wine.

חמשים מנה יקח לפסו ליטרא בשר...
אמר מר זוטרא בריה דרב נחמן תן
חיים לנערותיך מיכן למדה תורה דרך
ארץ שלא ילמד אדם את בנו בשר
ויין.

Babylonian Talmud, Hullin 84a

An am ha'aretz (average person) should not
eat meat, as it is written (Leviticus 11:46)
“This is the law [Torah] of the beast, and of
the fowl”; whoever engages in [the study
of] the Torah may eat the flesh of beast and
fowl, but he who does not engage in [the
study of] the Torah may not eat the flesh of
beast and fowl.

עם הארץ אסור לאכול בשר (בהמה)
שנאמר (ויקרא יא:מו) זאת תורת
הבהמה, והעוף; כל העוסק בתורה
מותר לאכול בשר בהמה ועוף וכל
שאינו עוסק בתורה אסור לאכול בשר
בהמה ועוף:



C. The Obligation to Provide Food to Animals

Exodus 23:11 (sharing food with wild animals)

But in the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild animals eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves

והשביעת תשמטנה ונטשתה, ואכלו
אביני עמך, ויתרם, תאכל חית
השדה; כן תעשה לכרמך, לזיתך.

Leviticus 25:4 (partial), 6-7 (all plants are food for animals during sabbatical year)

The seventh year there will be a year of Shabbat for the land.
[...]
And all the shabbat [produce] of the land will be for you to eat—for you, you male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, and for your domestic animal and for the wild animal which is in your land, will all of her produce be for food.

ובשנה השביעת שבת שבתון יהיה
לארץ [...] וְהִיְתָה שַׁבַּת הָאָרֶץ לְכֶם לֶאֱכֹלָהּ לָךְ
וְלַעֲבָדְךָ וְלַאֲמִתְךָ וְלַשְׂכִּירְךָ וְלַתּוֹשָׁבְךָ
הַגֵּרִים עִמָּךְ: וְלִבְהֵמָתְךָ וְלַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר
בְּאֶרֶץךָ תִּהְיֶה כָּל־תְּבוּאָתָהּ לֶאֱכֹל:

Deuteronomy 11:15 (sharing food with grazing animals)

And I will give grass in your fields for your grazing animals, and you shall eat and be satisfied.

וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדְךָ, לְבְהֵמָתְךָ;
וְאָכַלְתָּ, וְשָׂבַעְתָּ.

Midrash Tanhuma Noah 9

Rebbi Levy 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. Rebbi 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. Rebbi Yoḥanan said... One time, when Noah was late in feeding the lion, the lion bit him, and he went away limping.

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 לבי 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.

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 40a

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 grazing animals, and you shall eat and be satisfied." (Deuteronomy 11:15).

דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב אסור
לאדם שיאכל קודם שיתן מאכל
לבהמתו שנא (דברים יא:טו) וְנָתַתִּי
עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדֶךָ, לְבִהֶמְתֶּךָ וְהָדָר וְאָכְלָתָּ,
וְשָׂבַעְתָּ.

Rabbi Elazar ben Moshe Azikri (1533-1600, Safed) Sefer Hareidim 4:1

The holy Rabbi Yitshak (Luria) Ashkenazi z"l 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 Rabbi Yitshak remarked that the mark on his forehead was gone.

כבוד מורנו הרבה רבי יצחק אשכנזי
ז"ל שנסתכל בפני תלמיד חכם א'
ואמר לו נרשם בפניך עון צער בעלי
חיים והיה אותו תלמיד חכם 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.

III: Preventing Animal Cruelty

Tzaar Baalei Chayyim

The law known as tzaar baalei ḥayyim prohibits cruelty to animals. Jewish tradition teaches that there should be no tzaar - literally “suffering” and understood to mean suffering that does not advance some legitimate human good - to “baalei ḥayyim” - to “living beings.” The core biblical sources that the Rishonim (leading rabbinic authorities of the 11th-15th century) refer back to when defining the commandment of preventing animal suffering are Exodus 23:5 and Deuteronomy 22:10 and 25:4. Rabbinic texts are especially likely to mention this prohibition in cases where economic advantages make abuse of animals likely. How might we use the framework of laws that comprise tzaar baalei ḥayyim to respond to industrial farming issues today?

Exodus 23:5 (helping your enemy’s donkey)

If you see your enemy’s donkey collapsed under its burden, would you refrain from helping it?! Help, really help it!

כִּי־תִרְאֶה חֲמוֹר שְׂנֵאָדָּךְ, רֹבֵץ תַּחַת
מִשְׂאוֹ, וְחָדְלָתָּ, מֵעֲזֹב לוֹ — עֲזֹב תֵּעֲזֹב,
עִמּוֹ.

Deuteronomy 22:10 (not plowing ox with ass)

You shall not plow with an ox and an ass together.

לֹא־תִחְרֹשׁ בְּשׂוֹר־וּבְחֹמֶר, יַחְדָּו.

Deuteronomy 25:4 (not muzzling an ox while working)

You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing.

לֹא־תִחַסֵּם שׂוֹר, בְּדִישׁוֹ.

Exodus 20:9 (sabbath rest for humans and animals alike)

The commandment that domesticated animals should rest on Shabbat has led both ancient and contemporary rabbis to be lenient in permitting activities that are otherwise prohibited on Shabbat if they relieve an animal’s pain.

The seventh day is a Shabbat of YHVH your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your domesticated animals.

וְיוֹם, הַשְּׁבִיעִי — שַׁבָּת, לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:
לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה כָל-מְלָאכָה אֶתָּה וּבְנֶךָ
וּבִתֶּךָ, עֲבָדֶךָ וְאִמָּתֶךָ וּבְהֵמָתֶךָ, וְגֵרְךָ,
אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ.

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 128b

This source explains whether or not and to what degree we can violate Shabbat in order to save the life of an animal.

Rav Yehuda said that Rav said:

If an animal fell into a water canal [on Shabbat, when it is forbidden to move animals], you should bring pillows and blankets and place them underneath the animal, and if it climbs up, it climbs up.

They posed a contradictory source: If an animal fell into a water canal [on Shabbat, when it is forbidden to move animals], one should place provisions in its place, so that it doesn't die. [Infer from this:] provisions, yes; but pillows and blankets, no!

This is not difficult: the second case refers to where it is possible [to help the animal] only with provisions; the first case refers to where it is impossible only with provisions. If it is possible with provisions, do that, but if not, then bring it pillows and blankets and put them under it. But, by so doing, one is using items for a different purpose than they were intended for, [which is forbidden on Shabbat]! He reasoned like this: the prohibition against using an item on Shabbat for a different purpose than it was intended for is only of Rabbinic authority, but preventing the pain of animals is of Torah authority, so a Torah commandment comes and bumps off a Rabbinic commandment.

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב:
בְּהֵמָה שֶׁנִּפְלָה לְאֶמֶת הַמַּיִם - מִבֵּיא
כְּרִים וּכְסֻתוֹת וּמְנִיחַ תַּחְתֶּיהָ, וְאִם
עָלְתָה - עָלְתָה.
מִיִּתְיָבִי: בְּהֵמָה שֶׁנִּפְלָה לְאֶמֶת הַמַּיִם
- עוֹשֶׂה לָּהּ פְּרֻנְסָה בְּמִקוּמָהּ בְּשָׁבִיל
שְׁלֵא תָמוּת.
פְּרֻנְסָה - אֵין, כְּרִים וּכְסֻתוֹת - לֹא! לֹא
קָשִׁיא; הֵיא - דַּאֲפֻשֶׁר בְּפְרֻנְסָה, הֵיא -
דַּאי אֲפֻשֶׁר בְּפְרֻנְסָה. אֲפֻשֶׁר בְּפְרֻנְסָה
- אֵין, וְאֵי לֹא - מִבֵּיא כְּרִים וּכְסֻתוֹת
וּמְנִיחַ תַּחְתֶּיהָ. וְהֵיא קָא מְבַטֵּל כְּלִי
מִדֵּיכֵנוּ! סַבְרַ, מְבַטֵּל כְּלִי מִדֵּיכֵנוּ -
דְּרַבְנָן, צַעַר בְּעַלֵּי חַיִּים - דַּאֲוֵרִיתָא,
וְאֵתִי דַּאֲוֵרִיתָא וְדַחֵי דְרַבְנָן.

Shulhan Arukh, Even Ha'Ezer 5:14, Gloss of the ReMA

The Shulhan Arukh, literally “The Set Table” was written by Yosef Karo in 1563 and is arguably the most widely consulted code of Jewish law. In the passage below, ReMA, the acronym given to the Polish Rabbi Moses ben Israel Isserles (1525-1572), distills the the 15th century text Terumat HaDeshen, an early commentary on the Shulhan Arukh by Israel Isserlein ben Petaḥia (1390-1460).

For anything that is needed for health or other purposes, there is no concern for animal pain. Therefore, it is permissible to pluck feathers from live geese and there is no concern for animal pain. Nevertheless, many people refrain because that is cruelty.

כָּל דְּבַר הַצָּרִיךְ לְרְפוּאָה אוֹ לְשֵׂאֵר
דְּבָרִים, לִית בִּיה מְשׁוּם אֶסוּר צֵעַר
בְּעָלֵי חַיִּים. וְלִכְּן מִתֵּר לְמַרְט נּוֹצוֹת
מֵאַנְזוֹת חַיּוֹת, וְלִיכָא לְמִיחַשׁ מְשׁוּם
צֵעַר בְּעָלֵי חַיִּים. וּמִ"מ הָעוֹלָם נִמְנָעִים
דְּהוּי אֶכְזְרִיּוֹת.

IV: The Ethics of Killing: *Shechitah*

Jewish tradition shows special concern with providing an animal a good death without undue suffering and dictates a special method of slaughter known as sheḥitah that must be performed by a trained individual known as a shoḥet. Manuals used to train shoḥtim have historically cited Maimonides' position that sheḥitah functions to prohibit cruelty. Jewish texts also show great concern with the moral damage potentially done to the slaughterer's ability to cultivate compassion. For this reason diverse Jewish traditions argue that only men of high ethical caliber should be shoḥtim (slaughterers)—men who can resist the callousness that killing animals may engender.

A. Foundational Texts on *Sheḥitah*

Leviticus 17:13-14 (covering blood of the slaughtered animal with dirt)

Any person from Israel and from the stranger living in their midst who hunts prey [wild], animal or bird, which may be eaten—he will spill its blood and cover it with dirt...For the nefesh of all flesh is its blood, and all who eat from it will be cut off.

וְאִישׁ אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִן־הַגֵּר הַגֵּר
בְּתוֹכָם אֲשֶׁר יֵצוּד צִיד חַיָּה אוֹ־עוֹף
אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל וְשִׁפַּךְ אֶת־דָּמּוֹ וְכִסְהוּ
בְּעָפָר: כִּי־נֶפֶשׁ כָּל־בְּשָׂר דָּמוֹ בְּנֶפֶשׁוֹ
הוּא וְאָמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דָּם כָּל־בְּשָׂר
לֹא תֹאכְלוּ כִּי נֶפֶשׁ כָּל־בְּשָׂר דָּמוֹ הוּא
כָּל־אֹכְלֵיו יִכָּרֵת:

Leviticus 22:8 (prohibition of eating animals who die on their own)

That which dies of itself, or is torn by predators, he shall not eat to defile himself therewith: I am YHVH.

נְבֵלָה וְטֶרֶף לֹא יֵאָכַל לְטִמְאַה־בָּהּ
אֲנִי ה':

Rambam, Guide for the Perplexed, III:48, verse 9

Since, therefore, the desire of procuring good food necessitates the slaying of animals, the Torah enjoins that the death of the animal should be the easiest. It is not allowed to torment the animal by cutting the throat in a clumsy manner, by pole-axing, or by cutting off a limb while the animal is alive.

וכאשר הביא הכרח טוב המזון
להריגת בעלי חיים כונה התורה
לקלה שבמיתות ואסרה שיענה אותם
בשחיטה רעה ולא בנחירה ולא יחתך
מהם אבר כמו שבארנו.

Prayer for the Shochet Before a Shehitah

This prayer is taken from the Siddur of Rabbi Yeshayahu HaLevi Horowitz (1564-1630), also known as the *Siddur ha-Shelah*.

May it be your will YHVH my God and God of my ancestors that you enlighten my eyes with the light of your Torah, and save me from any barrier or mistake, whether in kosher laws, whether in monetary laws, whether in teaching, whether in learning. And what I have already mistaken, please restore to truth. And don't withhold from me any truth, because YHVH gives wisdom from their mouth, knowledge and understanding.

יהי רצון מלפנך ה' אלוקי ואלוקי
אבותי שתאיר עיני במאור תורתך
והצילני מכל מכשול וטעות הן בדיני
איסור והיתר והן בדיני ממונות הן
בהוראה והן בלימוד ומה ששגיתי
כבר העמידני על האמת ואל תצל מפי
דבר אמת עד מאוד כי ה' יתן חכמה
מפיו דעת ותבונה.

B. On the Ethics of Killing

Moses Cordovero in Tomer Devorah, end of chapter 3

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, also known as Ramak (1522-1570), was an important kabbalist from Safed (Tsfat, Israel).

[A person should] not uproot a growing thing except for need, nor kill any animal / ba'al hayyim except for need. And one should choose a good death / mitah yafah for them, with a carefully examined knife, to show mercy however is possible. This is the principle: compassion/ emlah [should be] over all existences, to not hurt them... unless [it is] to raise them from level to level, from growing to living, from living to speaking, for then it is permitted to uproot the growing thing and to kill the animal, the debt [being outweighed] by the merit.

על דרך זה לא יבזה שום נמצא מן
הנמצאים, שבכלם בחכמה, ולא יעקר
הצומח אלא לצורך, ולא ימית הבעל
חי אלא לצורך, ויברר להם מיתה יפה
בסבין בדוקה לרחם כל מה שאפשר.
זה הכלל: החמלה על כל הנמצאים
שלא לחבלם תלויה בחכמה, וולתי
להעלותם ממעלה אל מעלה, מצומח
לחי, מחי למדבר שאז מתר לעקר
הצומח ולהמית החי - לחוב על מנת
לזכות:

Ba'al Shem Tov: Tears

This story is from a Hebrew collection of stories of the Ba'al Shem Tov by S.Y. Agnon, Ha'ish v'Etzim (The Man and the Trees, Schocken: 1962).

Rabbi Shmuel Aryeh, of blessed memory, told me a story. In his youth, he lived in Kishilivitz, the same famous city where the rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov lived before he became famous, and was a slaughterer and butcher. I knew an eighty-year-old shoḥet there. I said to him, "Is it possible you knew anyone who knew the Ba'al Shem Tov?" He said to me, "I don't know any Jews who knew him, but I know one Gentile who knew him. In my youth I lived near a Gentile, and every time I poured water over my sharpening stone to sharpen my knife, this Gentile, over 90 years old, would shake his head. I thought that it was because of his age that he did so. But one time I sensed it was his disapproval. I asked him, "Why are you shaking your head when I am working?"

סח לי הרב שמואל אריה עליו
השלום, בילדותי דרתי בכפר
קישיליביץ, הוא כפר קישיליביץ שיצא
לו שם בעולם, שרי ישראל בעל שם
טוב קודם שנתגלה היה שם שוחט
ובודק. מצאתי שם שוחט ובודק זקן
למעלה משמונים שנה. אמרתי לו,
אפשר שהכרת אדם שהכיר את הבעל
שם טוב? אמר לי, יהודי שראה את
הבעל שם טוב לא מצאתי, גוי שראה
את הבעל שם טוב מצאתי. בימי חרפי
דרתי אצל איכר אחד גוי, כל פעם
שהייתי יוצק מים על אבן המשחזת
להשחיו את סכיני היה זקיניו של

He said, “You’re not doing good work. Israel Ba’al Shem Tov, when he sharpened his knife, would wet his stone with tears.

האיכר, זקן כבן תשעים שנה או כבן מאה שנה, מנענע ראשו. סבור הייתי שמחמת זקנה הוא עושה כן. פעם אחת הרגשתי בו שעושה כן דרך גנאי. שאלתי אותו, מפני מה אתה מנענע ראשך בשעת עבודתי? אמר לי, אי אתה עושה את מלאכתך יפה. ישראלקי כשהיה משחזו את סכינו היה מלחלח את האבן בדמעות.

HaRav Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook

In the following passage, Rav Kook (1865–1935), the first Ashkenazic rabbi of pre-state Israel, comments on Leviticus 17:13-14. For original see, Ḥazon Hatsim’ḥonut v’Hashalom, ed. David Cohen (Jerusalem: Never David, 1983). Translation by Jonathan Rubenstein.

Covering the blood of beast and fowl is a kind of divine protest against the permission (to eat meat), which is fundamentally conditional upon the corrupt state of the human soul: “... for the inclination of the human heart is evil from its youth” (Genesis 8:21). This is the soul which says, “I will eat meat, because of the craving... to eat meat,” and even eats meat “as much as it pleases,” without any concept of inner opposition owing to an awareness of what is good and just. The Torah, however, declares, “Cover the blood;” hide your shame and your moral weakness, even though humanity has not yet reached the level which it is capable of reaching, nor given this elevated morality any real influence in (lit. “access to”) practical living...

כיסוי דם החיה והעוף היא כמו מחאה אלהית, לעומת ההיתר התלוי ביסודו במצב הנפש המקולקלת של (בראשית ח:כא) האדם כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעוריו, ונפשו זאת אומרת אוכלת בשר כי תאווה לאכל בשר, וגם אוכלת בשר בכל אוות נפשה, באין שום רעיון של התנגדות פנימית, מצד רגש הטוב והצדק, אמרה תורה: כסה הדם, הסתר בושתך ורפיון מוסריותך, אע”פ שלא הגיע האדם עדיין למדרגתו הראויה לו, לתן למוסר נשגב כזה מהלכים בחיים המעשיים בפועל...

Rabbi Irving “Yitz” Greenberg

The contemporary modern Orthodox rabbi Yitz Greenberg (1933-) is a highly regarded contemporary teacher. This passage is from chapter 1 of *The Triumph of Life* (forthcoming).

Kashrut has been interpreted as a restriction on killing living things by sharply reducing the number or types/species of living things one is allowed to eat. There are no direct restrictions on eating any mineral or vegetable. Sheḥitah has been interpreted as the most humane form of killing animals for food because by cutting off the flow of blood to the brain through the single permitted knife thrust, the animal loses consciousness, ending its suffering/pain.

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