



# Learning from Animals

## Introduction

*Just like all of creation, animals have much to teach us. This section will explore what Jewish texts have to say about this teaching and how you might apply this idea during your service project. 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
צְנִיעוּת	<i>tzniut</i>	<b>modesty</b>
חֲתוּל	<i>chatul</i>	<b>cat</b>
נִמְלָה	<i>nemala</i>	<b>ant</b>
תַּרְנֵגוֹל	<i>tarnegol</i>	<b>chicken</b>
דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ	<i>derech erez</i>	<b>“The way of the world” (also refers to ‘manners’ generally)</b>

## Activity 1:

# What We Can Learn from Animals

Read the following Talmud text, as well as the commentary on it.

*If we had not received the Torah we would have learned modesty from watching a cat, honesty (refraining from theft) from the ant, and fidelity from the dove... and derech erez from the chicken.*

—Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Eruvin 100b

אילמלא לא ניתנה תורה היינו למידין צניעות מחתול וגזל מנמלה ועריות מיונה... דרך ארץ מתרנגול.

*Modesty from the cat: because it does not relieve itself in front of people and covers its excrement; Honesty from the ant: As is written, “[Go to the ant, you sluggard; see its ways, and be wise, which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provides] her food in the summer...” (Proverbs 6:8): One ant does not steal the food of another ant; And fidelity from the dove: Doves are faithful to a single partner.*

—Rashi’s commentary on Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Eruvin 100b

רש"י: צניעות מחתול - שאינו מטיל רעי בפני אדם ומכסה צואתו: וגזל מנמלה - דכתיב (משלי ו:ח) (אגרה) “[תִּכְיֶינָה] בְּקִיץ לְחֶמֶה” ואין אחת גוזלת מאכל חברתה: ועריות מיונה - שאינו נזקק אלא לבת זוגו:

Following the example set by this text, write your own list of things that we learn from other animals below.

1. We learn \_\_\_\_\_ from the \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_.

2. We learn \_\_\_\_\_ from the \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_.

3. We learn \_\_\_\_\_ from the \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_.

4. We learn \_\_\_\_\_ from the \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_.



## Activity 2:

# Animal Tales: Lessons from Stories

Read the following Talmud text, as well as the commentary on it.

*If we had not received the Torah we would have learned modesty from watching a cat, honesty (refraining from theft) from the ant, and fidelity from the dove... and derech erez from the chicken.*

—Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Eruvin 100b

אילמלא לא ניתנה תורה היינו למידין צניעות מחתול וגזל מנמלה ועריות מיונה... דרך ארץ מתרנגול.

*Modesty from the cat: because it does not relieve itself in front of people and covers its excrement;  
Honesty from the ant: As is written, “[Go to the ant, you sluggard; see its ways, and be wise, which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provides] her food in the summer...” (Proverbs 6:8): One ant does not steal the food of another ant;  
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Now, pick a story to read from the appendix section “Animal Stories.” This section includes stories about animals ranging from Talmud to midrash on the Torah to real accounts about animals in our time.

**Once you’ve read your story, answer the following questions:**

*What did you learn about the animal(s) in the story you read?*

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*What attributes (e.g. modesty, honesty, fidelity, loyalty, friendship, etc) did the animals exemplify? How did they show these?*

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*What lesson or message does their story convey to you? To all humans?*

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# Conclusion

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*This idea of learning from animals can be applied during your service project. Today, when you volunteer, pay special attention to what you might be learning about yourself, those around you, your environment, and/or life in general from the animals you are working with. When you're done with your service for the day, share with a parent or mentor what you noticed and learned from the animals.*

