



Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim צער בעלי חיים



Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim - literally "the suffering of living creatures" - represents the Jewish value of concern for the proper treatment of animals. Welfare of animals is a continuous theme throughout the Hebrew scriptures, from the story of Creation, through the obligation of letting animals rest on the Sabbath, and as part of the laws that govern the general well-being of all *nefesh chaya* - living souls - created by God. Animals are considered to have feelings and possess the same life force as humans. In fact, at the time of creation, humans were only given permission to consume vegetation. It was only after the flood that God gave humans permission to eat flesh, but only when properly slaughtered and with the blood, symbol of life, thoroughly drained.

Blessing for the Study of Torah:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסּוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, vitzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are You, our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, Who makes us holy through mitzvot, and commands us to engage in the study of Torah.

פרשנות Commentary

Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon (1135-1204), otherwise known as Maimonides or the Rambam, was one of the most respected of all Jewish philosophers. In his great philosophic work, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, he writes:

It is prohibited to kill an animal with its young on the same day, 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 animals under such circumstances is very great. There is no difference in this case between the pain of people and the pain of other living beings, since the love and the tenderness of the mother for her young ones is not produced by reasoning but by feeling, and this faculty exists not only in people but in most living things. (The Guide for the Perplexed 3:48)

Rabbi Joseph Caro (1488 to 1575), the leading Sephardic mystic and scholar, compiled what has come to be regarded as the definitive code of Jewish law to this day, the *Shulhan Arukh*. In it he writes:

It is forbidden, according to the law of the Torah, to inflict pain upon any living creature. On the contrary, it is our religious duty to relieve the pain of any creature, even if it is ownerless or belongs to a non-Jew.

מקורות From our Sources

From Scripture:

Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these. (Genesis 9:3)

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. (Deuteronomy 22:6-7)

You shall not plow with an ox and an ass together. (Deuteronomy 22:10)

From the Teachings of the Sages:

Rabbi Judah the Prince was sitting and studying the Torah in front of the Babylonian Synagogue in Sepphoris. A calf being taken to the slaughterhouse came to him as if pleasing. "Save me!" Rabbi Judah said to it, "What can I do for you? For this you were created." As a punishment for his heartlessness, he suffered from a toothache for thirteen years. One day, a creeping thing ran past Rabbi Judah's daughter who was about to kill it. He said to her, "My daughter, let it be, for it is written, and his tender mercies are over all his works (Psalm 145:9)." Because Rabbi Judah prevented and act of cruelty and unkindness to an animal, his health was restored. (BT Baba Metzia 85a)

שיחה Questions for Discussion:

Our own concern for the wellbeing of animals is to reflect God's, who is presented as satisfying the desire of every living creature (Psalm 145:16) and preserving both humans and beasts (Psalm 36:7). By caring for animals, we care for all creation, an act of *Tikkun Olam* - "repairing the world" - and an act that, through emulation of God, draws us closer to God. Some have argued (such as HaRav Kook, the first chief Rabbi of the State of Israel) that the laws of *Kashrut*, while limiting our consumption of meat, and sensitizing us to the issue of animal slaughter, itself may be a compromise measure- and the true ideal would be a vegetarian diet.

- 1) Outside of our own household pets, how can we demonstrate concern for animals in our everyday life?
- 2) How does Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim help human beings?
- 3) Given that we were all created by God, how are animals different than humans?

