
THE JEWISH VIEW OF ECOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Mankind's relationship with his environment, an oft-neglected issue throughout much of human history, has developed into one of the major concerns of the day. Science has highlighted the fragility of the world's ecosystems and has raised concern for the environment that we live in. This concern is not merely a remote, theoretical worry, but one that can have an impact on the way we currently live our lives. It is difficult to remain aloof amidst the many threats, such as air pollution, natural resource depletion and overpopulation, that ecologists and environmentalists assert are facing the planet we live on.

This topic differs from others treated in the Morasha syllabus project. Environmentalism is not in its core a Jewish movement, and we make no attempt to steal its thunder or appropriate its successes as our own. In presenting a class on the Jewish view of environmentalism, we have a much more modest agenda.

First, this class comes to debunk the myth that Judaism is against environmentalism. Second, we will see that Jewish teachings and Jewish law have promoted a certain kind of environmental awareness, an antipathy for the wasting of natural resources, a sensitivity to the treatment of animals, and concern for the wellbeing of public space. Overall, the Jewish sources articulate a philosophically well-grounded environmental ethic.

The Torah teaches that God created the world for the benefit of mankind, and yet this right is also a responsibility. The world belongs to God and we are its stewards, charged with the exalted task of working and guarding it. This basic point is borne out by the mitzvot of the Torah and the teachings of Judaism's greatest sages. Through the prism of the Torah's moral and legal guidelines, we will discover an environmental ethic that can guide our thinking on today's major ecological issues.

But let us be clear, Judaism does not demand that we become environmentalists, and there certainly is no direct line from the Torah to the kind of aggressive activism so prevalent in the environmental movement today. Nevertheless, for those for whom environmentalism is already a value and a virtue, they will find within the sources presented below solace, support, and hopefully further inspiration in their quest to protect our planet.

Therefore, this class will seek answers to the following questions:

- ❧ Do we have the right to utilize this world in whatever way we please? On what basis should people curtail their consumption of natural resources?
- ❧ What does the Torah say about population control?
- ❧ What perspective on nature can we learn from the classical Jewish sources?
- ❧ How does Judaism promote concern for biodiversity?
- ❧ Is it ever permissible to make use of natural resources without regard for their destruction?

Class Outline:

- Section I. Man's Place in the World
 - Part A. Rights and Responsibilities
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- Section II. Torah and Nature
 - Part A. Significance of the Agricultural Cycle
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- Section III. Conservation and Biodiversity
 - Part A. Everything Has Its Purpose
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- Section IV. Proper Use of Natural Resources & Treatment of Animals
 - Part A. Thou Shalt Not Waste – The Mitzvah of *Bal Tashchit*
 - Part B. *Tzar Baalei Chayim* – Causing Unnecessary Pain to Living Creatures
 - Part C. When Is It Permitted to Destroy Natural Resources or Cause Pain to Animals?

SECTION I. MAN'S PLACE IN THE WORLD

Some environmentalists claim that the industrial pollution of the environment and the recklessly extravagant consumption of nature's irreplaceable treasures could all be traced to one cause: the rise of monotheism. The doctrine that placed one God above nature removed the restraints placed on primitive man by his belief that the environment itself was divine. Monotheistic man's impulses were no longer restrained by a worship of nature.

These environmentalists base this argument, that the Bible gave man dominion over nature – and along with it, license to destroy it at will – on the story of creation. Specifically, they point to God's placing all of creation in Adam's hands with the directive to “rule over it” (Genesis 1:28-30). A closer reading of the same narrative, however, clearly indicates that man was not given license to destroy at will, but rather was granted permission to make use of nature in a responsible fashion.

PART A. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

While the Torah grants Adam dominion over the world that God created for his use, he is nevertheless commanded to act in a manner that is harmonious with the welfare of that world. After he was placed in the Garden of Eden, Adam was assigned a dual role: to work it and to guard it.

The role entrusted to Adam in the Garden of Eden encapsulates the Torah's view of man in this world. While there is certainly a profound spiritual dimension to the events in the Garden of Eden, here we will focus on man's role vis-a-vis the natural world. We are charged with populating it, building it up, always conquering new frontiers, but at the same time, we are commanded to guard the world, to protect it and nurture it.

1. Bereishit (Genesis) 1:28-29 – Man is given dominion over the world's plants and animals.

And God blessed them (Adam and Chava/Eve) and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and populate the world and subdue it. And you will rule over the fish of the sea and fowl of the sky and all wild creatures roaming the Earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given to you all seed-bearing plants on the face of the Earth and all fruit trees for eating."

ויברך אתם א-להים ויאמר להם א-להים פרו ורבו
ומלאו את הארץ וכבשה ורדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמים
ובכל חיה הרמשת על הארץ. ויאמר א-להים הנה נתתי
לכם את כל עשב זרע זרע אשר על פני כל הארץ ואת
כל העץ אשר בו פרי עץ זרע זרע לכם יהיה לאכלה.

2. Bereishit 2:15 – Man is placed in the Garden of Eden and charged with working it and guarding it.

And the Lord, God took Adam and placed him in Gan Eden to work it and protect it.

ויקח ה' א-להים את האדם וינחהו בגן עדן לעבדה
ולשמרה.

3. Kohelet Rabbah 7:13 – God displayed the beauty of the world to Adam and commanded him to protect it.

At the time that God created Adam, He led him past every tree in Gan Eden and said to him, "See how beautiful and praiseworthy are My creations. Everything that I created, I created for you. Be careful not to damage or destroy My world, for if you damage it, there will be no one to fix it up after you."

בשעה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אדם הראשון,
נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו, ראה מעשי
כמה נאים ומשבחין הן, וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך
בראתי, תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי,
שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחריך.

Adam's right is also a responsibility; his mandate is not unconditional. Since the world actually belongs to God, man only has the right to use it in accord with God's desire.

4. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 35a – Recognizing that the world belongs to God is a precondition to having the right to use it.

Rabbi Levi pointed out a contradiction: one verse says, "The Earth, and all that is contained therein, belongs to God" [Tehilim/Psalms 24:1], and another verse says, "The heavens belong to God, but the Earth was given to man" [Tehillim 115:16]. Really, there is no difficulty. The first verse refers to food before the recitation of a blessing; the second verse refers to food after the recitation of a blessing.

ר' לוי רמי כתיב לה' הארץ ומלואה וכתיב השמים
שמים לה' והארץ נתן לבני אדם לא קשיא כאן קודם
ברכה כאן לאחר ברכה...

5. Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 8:1 – If man abuses his privileges, he is degraded.

If man is worthy, they say to him: You preceded the ministering angels. And if not, they say to him: a fly preceded you, a mosquito preceded you, this worm preceded you.

אם זכה אדם אומרים לו אתה קדמת למלאכי השרת
ואם לאו אומרים זבוב קדמך יתוש קדמך שלשול זה
קדמך.

The general theme of these sources is best summarized by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch:

6. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb, Chapter 56 – To be human is to make use of this world only with respect, dignity, and a sense of responsibility.

“Do not destroy anything” is the first and most general call of God, which comes to you, Man, when you realize yourself as master of the earth ... If you should now raise your hand to play a childish game, to indulge in senseless rage, wishing to destroy that which you should only use, wishing to exterminate that which you should only exploit, if you should regard the beings beneath you as objects without rights, not perceiving God Who created them, and therefore desire that they feel the might of your presumptuous mood, instead of using them only as the means of wise human activity – then God’s call proclaims to you, “Do not destroy anything! Be a *mentsh*! Only if you use the things around you for wise human purposes, sanctified by the word of My teaching, only then are you a *mentsh* and have the right over them which I have given you as a human.

“However, if you destroy, if you ruin, at that moment you are not a human but an animal and have no right to the things around you. I lent them to you for wise use only; never forget that I lent them to you. As soon as you use them unwisely, be it the greatest or the smallest, you commit treachery against My world, you commit murder and robbery against My property, you transgress against Me!” This is what God calls unto you, and with this call does God represent the greatest and the smallest (creations) against you and grants the smallest and also the greatest (creations) a right against your presumptuousness ...

In truth, there is no one nearer to idolatry than one who can disregard the fact that things are the creatures and property of God, and who presumes also to have the right, having the might, to destroy them according to a presumptuous act of will. Yes, that one is already serving the most powerful idols – anger, pride, and above all ego, which in its passion regards itself as the master of things.

PART B. PARTNERS WITH GOD IN CREATION

Promotion of concern for the environment does not take away from mankind’s responsibility to develop the world and improve the quality of life. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein explains that God, in fact, created the world *unfinished*, so that man could become His partner. The world was created for man’s development, and part of that development is to complete the world; that effort is known as “תיקון הכללי” – overall rectification. (See further Daat Tevunot, Sefer Haklalim, pp. 172-173.)

The following Midrash illustrates this idea most strikingly.

1. Midrash Tanchuma, Parshat Tazria 5 – The raw materials of God’s world are utilized by man, who acts as a partner with God in completing creation.

The wicked Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva, “Whose actions are more beautiful, those of God or of man?” He replied, “Those of man are more

מעשה ששאל טורנוסרופוס את רבי עקיבא
איזו מעשים נאים של הקב"ה או של בשר ודם, אמר
לו של בשר ודם נאים... הביא לו רבי עקיבא שבלים

beautiful"... Rabbi Akiva brought him raw wheat and cake. He said, "This (wheat) is the work of God, and this (cake) is the work of man."

וגלוסקאות, אמר לו אלו מעשה הקב"ה ואלו מעשה ידי אדם.

The above conversation was in the context of a debate about brit milah, circumcision. Turnus Rufus maintained that if God really wanted us circumcised, then He would have created us that way. Rabbi Akiva's response was to prove to Turnus Rufus by analogy that God created the world incomplete, and man's role in this world is to be a partner with Him in the completion of creation.

Like brit milah, the mitzvah of attaching *tzitzit* strings to a garment can be seen as a metaphor for man's partnership with God in completing the work of creation.

2. **Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 8:1 – If man abuses his privileges, he is degraded.**

And therefore, through the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, the Creator implied to us the message that the universe is akin to a garment that has threads on both sides that are yet unwoven...

And you, O man, prepare your heart so as not to follow your eyes and your heart, and to restrain your physical desires and cling to God, and in all parts of the creation perform a mitzvah that binds you to God ...

And you, O man, if you weave the world, you will become a partner with God in the creation of the world.

ולכן העיר הבורא אותנו במצות ציצית ולהורות כי המציאות היא בגד שמשני צדדיו יש עדיין חוטין שעדיין לא נארגו...

ואתה בן אדם הכן לבבך לבלי לכת אחרי העין והלב ולתת רסן בעד התאוות החומריות ודבק בה' יתברך ובכל דבר מחלקי הבריאה יעשה מצוה מקשרת אותך לה' יתברך...

ואתה בן אדם אם תארוג את הבריאה תעשה שותף לה' יתברך במעשה בראשית.

PART C. POPULATING THE WORLD

As part of the command to build the world, man is ordered to populate it as well. In contrast to the alarmist projections of the dangers of "the population explosion" that came into vogue in the 1960's, the Torah commands us to have children. This mitzvah is especially important to the Jewish people, who have always remained small in number due to persecution and assimilation.

1. **Bereishit 1:28 – It is a mitzvah to have children.**

God blessed them [Adam and Eve]. God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply."

ויברך אותם אלהים ויאמר להם אלהים פרו ורבו.

While the Sages understand that the commandment here to "be fruitful and multiply" only pertains to Jews, the following verse is a directive for all of mankind to populate the world.

2. **Yeshayah (Isaiah) 45:18- The world was created to be settled and built up.**

God created the Earth and firmly established it; He did not create it to be a wasteland. He formed it to be inhabited.

האלהים יצר הארץ ועשה הוא כוננה לא תהו בראה לשבת יצרה.

3. **Rabbi Aaron of Barcelona, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah No. 1 – The world must be populated for God's will to be performed.**

The reason for this mitzvah [of having children] is so that the world will be settled, for God desires it to be developed, as it is written, "He did not create it to be a wasteland. He formed it to be inhabited" (Yeshayahu 45:18). This is a great mitzvah, as it is the basis for the fulfillment of the rest of the mitzvot, for [the Torah] was given to man and not to the ministering angels.

משרשי מצוה זו, כדי שיהיה העולם מיושב, שהשם ברוך הוא חפץ ביישובו, כדכתיב [ישעי' מ"ה, י"ח] לא תהו בראה לשבת יצרה. והיא מצוה גדולה שבסיבתה מתקיימות כל המצוות בעולם, כי לבני אדם ניתנו ולא למלאכי השרת.

How many children should a person have? The Talmud sets a minimum standard:

4. **Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 61b – A couple must at least maintain the population of the world.**

A person may not refrain from the mitzvah of procreation unless he has children. Beit Shammai says, "This is two sons." Beit Hillel says, "This is one son and one daughter, as it is stated, 'Male and female they were created'" [Bereishit 1:27].

What is Beit Shammai's reasoning? It is derived from Moshe Rabbeinu, as it says, "The sons of Moshe are Gershon and Eliezer." [Divrei Hayamim (Chronicles) 1:23]. And Beit Hillel derived the law from the creation of the world.

לא יבטל אדם מפריה ורביה אלא א"כ יש לו בנים, ב"ש אומרים שני זכרים, וב"ה אומרים זכר ונקבה, שנאמר זכר ונקבה בראם.

מאי טעמייהו דבית שמאי ילפינן ממושה דכתיב בני משה גרשום ואליעזר ובית הלל ילפינן מברייתו של עולם.

Even if a person has satisfied the minimum requirement of bringing children into this world, the Talmud encourages us not to stop there:

5. **Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 62b – We are instructed to continue to have children even after we have met the basic requirements set out by Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel.**

Rabbi Yehoshua says, "A man should marry a woman in his youth, and (God forbid should she die) he should marry a woman in his old age, so he may father children in his youth and he may father children in old age, as it is stated, 'In the morning plant your seeds, and in the evening do not rest your hand'" [Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 11:6].

רבי יהושע אומר נשא אדם אשה בילדותו ישא אשה בזקנותו היו לו בנים בילדותו יהיו לו בנים בזקנותו שנא' בבקר זרע את זרעך ולערב אל תנח ירך.

There is also a mystical reason for having more children: it will hasten the arrival of the Messianic era!

6. **Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 63b – The Mashiach (Messiah) will come only after everyone who must be born has been born.**

Rav Assi said, "The Son of David (Mashiach) will only come after all the souls in a body have been born."

אמר רבי אסי אין בן דוד בא עד שיכלו כל הנשמות שבגוף.

It is clear from these sources that Judaism is not concerned with overpopulation. God wants the world to be populated, and He does not lack the means to provide for it. If anything, the problem of overpopulation is a man-made one, and the solution to it is, therefore, also in our hands – but not at the self-defeating price of going against God's desire for a populated world.

In addition, the Jewish people need not be concerned about running out of space for all the Jews to inhabit. The Land of Israel will always make room.

6. Talmud Bavli, Gittin 57a – The Land of Israel “expands” like deer skin to hold as many inhabitants as necessary.

Israel is referred to as the “Land of the Deer” [Yermiyahu (Jeremiah) 3:19]: Just as the deer's skin cannot contain its flesh (after it is skinned), so too the Land of Israel. When the land is inhabited, the land expands to accommodate its inhabitants (analogous to the live deer with skin), when the land is not inhabited, it contracts (compared to the dead skinned deer).

[ירמיהו ג:יט] ארץ צבי כתיב בה, מה צבי זה אין עורו
מחזיק את בשרו, אף ארץ ישראל, בזמן שיושבין עליה
רווחא, ובזמן שאין יושבין עליה גמדה.

After a deer is killed and its skin is removed, the skin shrinks and can no longer contain or cover the carcass of the deer. The skin fit the deer only as long as it was on the deer. So too, the land of Israel is considered to be the skin of the Jewish people. As long as Jews are settled in it, the land grows with them and can supply them with all of their needs, but as soon as the Jews leave their skin, the land “shrinks” and can no longer meet the needs of those living in it.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I.

- ⌘ The Jewish view of nature is that it is a creation of God for the sake of mankind. Mankind is given a central role as the pinnacle of creation to make use of all that God has made.
- ⌘ But while God has made the world for man's use, it is man's responsibility to use it wisely and responsibly; we must protect the world and not waste its resources.
- ⌘ Furthermore, man is expected to improve upon the raw materials that God has provided, starting with his own body (brit milah) and extending outward to his clothes (tzitzit), food, and the world at large.
- ⌘ Man is also instructed to populate and develop the world. Since man is the only being in creation with the ability to do mitzvot, God desires that the world be populated by man.
- ⌘ In summary, man's place in the world is to responsibly make use of the natural world in the service of performing mitzvot. In doing so, man fulfills his purpose as a partner with God in creation.

SECTION II. TORAH AND NATURE

Not only does the Torah put us in charge of nature; it expects us to be in touch with the natural world as well. The structure of Jewish living as laid out in the Torah is designed to keep us attuned with our natural surroundings. The order of daily prayer revolves around changes in times of day, and the annual festival cycle revolves around agricultural milestones. Furthermore, our Sages have devised an elaborate system of blessings designed to heighten our appreciation of nature as a work of God, and they have instructed us to learn from the behavior of other creatures. Living a full Jewish life requires us to be aware of the world around us and to arrange our lives accordingly.

PART A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AGRICULTURAL CYCLE

The Jewish calendar is based on the lunar cycle. But the Torah tells us to observe our festivals in particular seasons: Passover in the spring and Sukkot in the early fall harvest time. If we would base our calendar solely on the moon, these holidays would gradually move to different seasons of the year. In order to make sure that Jewish festivals land in the correct seasons, the calendar is adjusted by adding an extra month from time to time.

1. **Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashanah 21a – The Torah tells us to make sure that the Jewish months fall out in their appropriate seasons.**

“Guard the Spring month...” [Deuteronomy (Devarim 16:1)], i.e. guard the Spring season by making sure that it falls out in the month of Nissan.

שמור את חדש האביב (דברים טז, א) - שמור אביב של תקופה שיהא בחדש ניסן.

The reason why the months must occur in their proper season is that the Jewish festivals celebrate the spiritual energy prevalent in those seasons.

2. **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb, pg. 87 – The Jewish festivals relate to the seasons of the year.**

Passover, by which God reveals Himself as He Who arouses Israel from the wintery sleep of Egypt, is connected with the spring equinox. This is the season in which God reveals Himself in Nature, with the vital dew giving new life to that which died in the bonds of winter.

Shavuot, commemorating the spiritual completion of what was newly created on Passover, is connected with the first summer ripening of that which was newly aroused in spring.

Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret, commemorating the preservation by God of Israel's body and spirit, are connected with the end of the harvest and the autumn equinox. This is the time when God has already given man, through nature, the means for his physical sustenance during the winter; and now He begins to carry nature protectively through the storms and sluggishness of autumn and winter. On the other hand, He also revitalizes the living power of fertility implanted in nature by means of storm, rain, and frost, keeping nature ever young.

PART B. APPRECIATING NATURE

Aside from our obligation to be in touch with the cycles of nature, Torah sages throughout the ages have adjured us to learn to appreciate nature.

1. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 57b – The pleasures of this world give a person peace of mind.

Three things are capable of relaxing a person; they are a voice, a view, and a scent.

שלשה משיבין דעתו של אדם אלו הן קול ומראה וריח.

Before embarking on a trip to Switzerland in the 1880s, the great rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch is reported to have said, "When I shall stand before God, the Eternal One will ask me with pride: Did you see my Alps?"

But more than just peace of mind, viewing wondrous sights such as the Alps has the power to inspire us with awe and love for the Creator.

2. Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah 2:2 – Appreciating the beauty of the world leads to greater awe and love for God.

And what is the [suggested] way to [achieve] love and fear of Him? When a person contemplates His great and wondrous actions and creations, and he sees His immeasurable and infinite wisdom, he will immediately love, praise, extol, and long to know the great God.

והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו ויראתו בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואיו הנפלאים הגדולים ויראה מהם חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול.

We must also show our appreciation for nature in the way that we treat it. Even though nature is inanimate, we must still show it gratitude for all that it offers us. This principle was taught to us by Moshe (Moses) by the fact that he did not take part in bringing the plagues of blood or frogs, which concerned water. Since the Nile had carried Moshe to safety as a baby, God directed his brother Aaron to perform those plagues instead.

3. Shemot (Exodus) 7:19 – Out of a sense of gratitude toward the Nile, Moshe did not personally strike it.

God said to Moshe, "Tell Aaron to take his staff and extend his hand over the waters of Egypt – over their rivers, their canals, their reservoirs, and every place where water collects – and [the water] shall turn into blood. There will be blood throughout all Egypt, even in wooden [barrels] and stone [jars]."

Rashi: [Why did God tell Aaron to do this?] Because the river had protected Moshe when he had been put into it. Therefore, it was not struck by his hand, neither during the plague of blood nor during the plague of frogs. Rather, it was struck by Aaron.

ויאמר יקוק אל משה אמר אל אהרן קח מטף ונטה ידך על מימי מצרים על נהרתם על יאריהם ועל אגמיהם ועל כל מקוה מימיהם ויהיו דם והיה דם בכל ארץ מצרים ובעצים ובאבנים:

רש"י: לפי שהגין היאור על משה כשנשלך לתוכו, לפיכך לא לקה על ידו לא בדם ולא בצפרדעים, ולקה על ידי אהרן:

PART C. BLESSINGS

Appreciation of nature as a creation of God can be expressed through reciting blessings over natural phenomena. The sages of the Talmud enacted various blessings to thank God, not only for every type of food, but also for the scents of fragrant trees, fruits, and herbs. For instance, the blessing over smelling a fragrant tree is: "Blessed are you, O God our Lord, king of the Universe, Who creates fragrant trees" (Talmud

Bavli, Berachot 43b). The blessing upon seeing fruit trees in bloom is: "Blessed are you, O God our Lord, King of the universe, Who has made His world lacking in nothing, and He created in it good creatures and good trees, to provide pleasure to humankind" (ibid.). There are also blessings to recite if one sees towering mountains, seas, colossal rivers, and deserts (ibid, 54a).

1. **Rabbi Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 228:1 – We praise God when we see something that still exists from the time of His creation of the world.**

When a person sees oceans, rivers, mountains, and deserts, one recites "Blessed are You ... King of the Universe, Who crafts the work of creation..."

על הימים ונהרות, הרים, וגבעות, ומדברות אומר ברוך אתה... מלך העולם עושה מעשה בראשית.

(Refer to the Mishnah Brurah for the discussion of the qualifications of the oceans, rivers, mountains and deserts being blessed.)

PART D. LEARNING FROM NATURE

We must also appreciate nature for what it can teach us.

1. **Mishlei (Proverbs) 6:6 – One can gain wisdom through observing nature.**

Go to the ant, you sluggard; see its ways and be wise.

לך אל נמלה עצל ראה דרכיה וחכם:

2. **Iyov (Job) 35:11 – God teaches us through the actions of the animal world.**

He teaches us from the animals of the land; and from the birds in the heavens He makes us wise.

מלפנו מבהמות ארץ ומעוף השמים יחכמנו:

3. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Eruvin 100b – We can learn moral lessons from the behavior of creatures found in nature.**

Rabbi Yochanan said: If the Torah had not been given, we would have learned modesty from the cat, refraining from stealing from the ant, sexual chastity from the dove, and conjugal manners from a rooster.

אמר רבי יוחנן: אילמלא לא ניתנה תורה היינו למדין צניעות מחתול, וגזל מנמלה, ועריות מיונה. דרך ארץ מתרנגול.

4. **Pirkei Avot 5:20 – One should incorporate the traits of certain animals into his mode of practicing Judaism.**

Yehudah the son of Teima would say: Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer and mighty as a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven.

יהודה בן תימא אומר הוי עז כנמר וקל כנשר ורץ כצבי וגבור כארי לעשות רצון אביך שבשמים.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II.

- ⌘ While in the previous section we saw the Jewish philosophy of man's role in nature, in this section we explored how the practice of Judaism sensitizes us to our natural surroundings through prayers, festivals, and blessings.
- ⌘ Classical Jewish sources implore us to appreciate nature, to take note of its detail, and to learn from its example.

SECTION III. CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY

The fact that God is Creator endows all of creation with an intrinsic significance and importance. Nothing in creation is useless or expendable; everything manifests some Divine purpose. It follows, therefore, that there is a Divine interest in maintaining the natural order of the universe. We can see this principle in effect in the prohibitions against hybridization and the destruction of species.

PART A. EVERYTHING HAS ITS PURPOSE

1. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 77b – God created everything with a purpose.

Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Rav: Of all that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, He did not create a single thing without purpose.

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: כל מה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא בעולמו לא ברא דבר אחד לבטלה.

It is evident from the first chapter of Bereishit and other scriptural texts (Tehillim 104, 148, and Job 38-41) that God takes care of, and takes pleasure in, the variety of life that makes up Creation. And although we might regard certain species as unimportant or bothersome to human beings, God does not regard them so. Our Sages understood that we do not know God's purpose for every creature and that we should not regard any of them as superfluous.

2. Bereishit Rabbah 10:7 – Every creature has its purpose.

Our Rabbis said: Even those things that you may regard as completely superfluous to Creation – such as flies, fleas and mosquitoes – even they were included in Creation; and God's purpose is carried through everything, even through a snake, a mosquito, a frog.

רבנן אמרי אפי' דברים שאתה רואה אותן שהן יתירה בעולם כגון זבובין ופרעושין ויתושין אף הן בכלל ברייתו של עולם הן, ובכל הקב"ה עושה שליחותו, אפי' ע"י נחש, אפי' ע"י יתוש, אפי' ע"י צפרדע.

(See Perek Shirah, a collection of songs "sung" by the eighty-five components of nature – the heavenly bodies, mountains, oceans, animals, birds, fish and insects – teaching that each part of the universe has its role in creation).

3. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Daat Tevunot (The Knowing Heart) 128 – Whether or not we can appreciate it, everything in the world is connected by a joint purpose.**

One who delves into wisdom will find that everything that exists is intimately connected with everything else that exists, for everything is needed in order to complete the Supernal Wisdom's intention for creation. They all converge on the same purpose, the conditions of which are many and the order of which is deeply profound, since it includes all the many parts of creation. As such, they are all related to each other in the manner determined by the Supernal Wisdom. From each comes the positive contribution that is necessary for the world. As I said, this matter is very deep ... but for us it is sufficient to know the following principle: everything in creation is interconnected and directed toward a single purpose.

מי שיעמיק בחכמה, ימצא היות כל הנמצאות כולם מתקשרים קשר גמור זה בזה, שכולם צריכים להשלים הענין שאליו כיוונה החכמה העליונה בבריאה, וכולם מתקבצים לתכלית אחת, שתנאיו רבים וסדרם עמוק מאוד, והם כל חלקי הבריאה הרבים האלה. הנה על כן יתיחסו כולם אלה לאלה בסדר שרצתה המחשבה העליונה, ומכולם יצא הפרי הטוב הראוי לצאת מן הבריאה. ודבר זה כבר אמרתי עמוק הוא ... ועתה די לנו לדעת רק בכלל אחד ההקדמה הזאת - שודאי כל דברי הבריאה מתקשרים הם, ומתקבצים אל תכלית האחד.

I recall the early days from 1905 onward, when it was granted me by the Grace of God, the Blessed One, to go up to the Holy Land, and I came to Jaffa. There I first went to visit our great master Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who received me with good cheer, as it was his hallowed custom to receive everyone. We chatted together on themes of Torah study. After an early Minchah (afternoon prayer service) he went out, as his hallowed custom was, to stroll a bit in the fields and gather his thoughts; and I went along. On the way I plucked some branch or flower. Our great master was taken aback, and he told me gently, "Believe me: In all my days I have taken care never to pluck a blade of grass or flower needlessly when it had the ability to grow or blossom. You know the teaching of our Sages that there is not a single blade of grass below here on earth which does not have a heavenly force above telling it, 'Grow!' Every sprout and leaf of grass says something, conveys some meaning. Every stone whispers some hidden message in the silence. Every creation utters its song." Those words, spoken from a pure and holy heart, engraved themselves deeply upon my heart. From that time on I began to feel a strong sense of compassion for everything. (From Simcha Raz, A Tzaddik in our Time, Feldheim Publishers)

PART B. HYBRIDIZATION

In line with the God-created view of nature espoused by Judaism, we find that the Torah explicitly forbids certain types of hybrids and intermingling of different species. There is a reason why God created things the way they are, and we must learn to respect the order we find in nature.

1. **Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:19 – The Torah prohibits certain types of hybridization in mating animals, planting fields and donning garments.**

My statutes you shall keep; you shall not let your cattle mate with a different kind, you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, you shall not wear a garment of wool and linen.

את חקתי תשמרו בהמתך לא תרביע כלאים שדך לא תזרע כלאים ובגד כלאים שעטמנו לא יעלה עליך:

The context within which this law is recorded is of special significance; it is poised between the command to love one's neighbor and laws about forbidden conjugal relations. The surrounding text deals with the laws of social order while the inner text (regarding crossbreeding) discusses laws of the natural order. From their

juxtaposition we learn that both are part of a broader concern of the Torah – to maintain the order of both the natural and social world, as created and envisioned by God.

2. **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary to Vayikra 19:19 – The rationale of the prohibition of *kilayim* (hybridization) is to help us realize that the natural world is also within the realm of the Torah.**

The Torah now makes us look into the sphere of the whole organic world lying deep beneath us, to show us that the (natural) world too is a world of God's Laws.

3. **Talmud Yerushalmi, Kilayim 1:7 – Obey the laws of nature!**

“My statutes you shall keep ...” because they are laws that I legislated in My world. From here we learn that they were forbidden even to Adam, the first man.

את חקותי תשמורו... משום חוקים שחקקתי בעולמי
מעתה אסור לאדם הראשון.

It is interesting to note how universal these laws are. While the Torah mainly concerns itself with mitzvot that apply specifically to the Jewish people, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 56b, 60a) states that some of the laws of hybridization apply to all of humanity.

The Ramban explains the reasoning for the prohibition of kilayim.

4. **Ramban (Nachmanides), Commentary to Vayikra 19:19 – Interbreeding of different species indicates man's sense of imperfection in God's creation.**

The reason for the mitzvah of kilayim (the prohibition to mix different species) is that God created specific species in the world in both the vegetable and animal kingdoms and instilled in them the ability to self-perpetuate and preserve their respective species forever, as long as God wants the continuation of the world. He commanded the propagation of each species and that they should never be altered, as it is stated, “And the Earth will bring forth self-perpetuating grasses according to their species ...” [Bereishit 1-12]. One who mixes two species changes and denies the initial creation and shows that he believes that the Holy One Blessed be He did not make this world perfect.

הטעם בכלאים כי השם ברא המינים בעולם בכל בעלי
הנפשות בצמחים ובבעלי נפש התנועה ונתן בהם כח
התולדה שיתקיימו המינים בהם לעד כל זמן שירצה
הוא יתברך בקיום העולם וצוה בכחם שיוציאו למיניהם
ולא ישתנו לעד לעולם שנאמר בכלם למיניהם...
והמרכיב שני מינין משנה ומכחיש במעשה בראשית
כאלו יחשוב שלא השלים הקב"ה בעולמו...

As discussed in Section I. Part B., man contributes to the completion of creation by making the world serve its purpose. Hybridization, however, is an attempt to create new entities not deemed necessary by God and, therefore, of no purpose in the world. Engaging in such activity implicitly denies God's omniscience, as if to say that He did not think of making such-and-such a hybrid.

PART C. PERPETUATION OF SPECIES

The Torah sensitizes us to the issue of conservation by prohibiting even the potential extinction of entire species of animals. This attitude is shown in the explanation of two mitzvot found in the Torah: *shiluach haken* (sending away the mother bird) and *otoh v'et bno* (killing a specific mother animal and her offspring on the same day).

1. Devarim 22:6-7 – The Torah instructs us to send the mother bird away before taking the eggs.

If you come across a bird's nest on any tree or on the ground, and it contains baby birds or eggs, then, if the mother is sitting on the chicks or eggs, you must not take the mother along with her young. You must first chase away the mother, and only then may you take the young. [If you do this] you will have it good and will live long.

כי יקרא קן צפור לפניך בדרך בכל עץ או על הארץ
אפרחים או ביצים והאם רבצת על האפרחים או על
הביצים לא תקח האם על הבנים:
שלח תשלח את האם ואת הבנים תקח לך למען ייטב
לך והארכת ימים:

2. Vayikra 22:28 – One must not kill two generations in one day.

Whether it is a bull, a sheep or a goat, do not slaughter [a female animal] and its child on the same day.

ושור או שה אתו ואת בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד:

Note that taking the eggs or killing the cows for human consumption is completely permissible; it simply must be done in a humane fashion. Again, we see the Torah's attitude of responsible use of the natural world. Ramban sees in these two mitzvot another common denominator:

3. Ramban to Devarim 22:6 – One must not even theoretically destroy an entire species.

This mitzvah (of sending the mother bird away) has a similar explanation as the prohibition of, "You shall not kill it [the mother] and its young both in one day" (Vayikra 22:28). The reason for both is so that we should not have a cruel heart and be uncompassionate. Or it may be that the Torah does not permit us to destroy a species altogether, even though it does permit slaughter [for food] within that group. Now the person who kills the mother animal and the young in one day or takes birds when they are free to fly, is as if they have destroyed that species.

גם זו מצוה 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 השחיתה לעקור המין אע"פ שהתיר השחיטה במין ההוא, והנה ההורג האם והבנים ביום אחד או לוקח אותם בהיות להם דרור לעוף כאלו יכרית המין ההוא:

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III

- ≈ Everything was created by God and, therefore, has a reason for existing. We may have not yet discovered to what extent we can benefit from some natural resources, but the Torah assures us that everything has a use.
- ≈ The ultimate purpose of creation connects all of nature together, and we should, therefore, respect the entire ecosystem.

- ⌘ Since everything has its own function, the Torah warns us against creating certain mixtures that undermine the value of their integral parts. As such, the Torah prohibits grafting and hybridization of animals.
- ⌘ The Torah also seeks to protect biodiversity and the perpetuation of the individual species that God created. Everything has its purpose, whether we recognize it or not.

SECTION IV. PROPER USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

One of the main concerns of the environmentalist today is the preservation of our natural resources, such as forests and arable land. The Torah addresses these concerns in a broad sense. Actions that are destructive and wasteful are prohibited by the Torah. This is the prohibition called *bal tashchit*, “Do not waste.” Jewish law has applied this biblical injunction to form a protective legal umbrella encompassing an entire realm of ecological concerns.

PART A. THOU SHALT NOT WASTE – THE MITZVAH OF BAL TASHCHIT

The Torah forbids the destruction of fruit trees by an army besieging an enemy city. While literally the Torah applies *bal tashchit* only to military tactics, the commentaries observe that this situation was not chosen to limit its applicability; the Torah simply stated the most likely situation in which such destruction might occur. As we shall see, trees are just the example of this prohibition, which extends to all manner of wasteful destruction or misuse of resources. Again, we can discern here the Torah’s attitude: while we have the right to make use of natural resources, we must nevertheless do so in a responsible fashion.

1. Devarim 20:19-20 – The prohibition to be wasteful is stated in the context of military conduct.

When you lay siege on a city for many days in order to capture it, do not destroy its trees by an ax, for you shall eat from them, and you shall not cut down, for is a tree in a field a man that it should be besieged by you? Only those trees which you know are not for eating can you destroy and cut down ...

כי תצור אל עיר ימים רבים להלחם עליה לתפשה לא תשחית את עצה לנדה עליו גרון כי ממנו תאכל ואתו לא תכרת כי האדם עץ השדה לבא מפניך במצור. רק עץ אשר תדע כי לא עץ מאכל הוא אתו תשחית.

2. Shemot Rabbah 35:2 – God teaches us by example not to be wasteful.

“And you shall make the boards for the *Mishkan* (the tabernacle) of acacia-wood” (Shemot 26:15).

Why specifically acacia-wood? God taught us a lesson for subsequent generations. If a person seeks to build his home of lumber from a fruit tree, say to him the following: If the King of kings, the Lord blessed be He, Who owns everything, nevertheless commanded that His

ועשית את הקרשים למשכן עצי שטים עומדים:

ועשית את הקרשים למשכן עצי שטים עומדים, למה עצי שטים למד הקב"ה דרך ארץ לדורות שאם יבקש אדם לבנות ביתו מאילן עושה פירות אומר לו ומה ממה"מ שהכל שלו כשאמר לעשות משכן אמר לא תביא אלא מאילן שאינו עושה פירות אתם עאכ"ו.

Mishkan be built of wood from a non-fruit-bearing tree, you certainly should do the same!

The Torah's prohibition against being wasteful is not limited to trees alone; it applies to other natural resources.

3. **Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 67b – The prohibition of bal tashchit for fuel.**

Rav Zutra said: Someone who makes a covering for an oil lamp and uncovers a kerosene lamp transgresses the prohibition to act in a wasteful manner (these actions cause the fuels to burn too quickly – see Rashi).

אמר רב זוטרא האי מאן דמיכסי שרגא דמשחא ומגלי נפטא קעבר משום בל תשחית. (רש"י: ממהר לידלק).

4. **Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 6:10- Bal tashchit applies to many forms of wasteful and destructive behavior.**

The prohibition against being wasteful] pertains not only to trees, but also to anyone who breaks vessels, rends garments, destroys buildings, plugs up springs or wastes food.

ולא האילונות בלבד אלא כל המשבר כלים וקורע בגדים והורס בנין וסותם מעין ומאבד מאכלות.

5. **Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Choshen Mishpat, Hilchot Shmirat HaGuf V'Nefesh 14 – The prohibition against wasting extends to many things.**

Just as a person must be careful not to damage or destroy his body, so must he be careful not to damage or destroy his possessions. Anyone who breaks vessels, rips clothes, demolishes a building, plugs a spring, throws away food or drink or makes them inedible (or throws away his money), or destroys anything from which it is possible to derive some form of benefit for mankind has transgressed bal tashchit.

כשם שצריך להזהר בגופו שלא לאבדו ולא לקלקלו ולא להזיקו כך צריך להזהר במאודו שלא לאבדו ולא לקלקלו ולא להזיקו וכל המשבר כלים או קורע בגדים או הורס בנין או סותם מעין או מאבד מאכלות או משקין או ממאסם (או זורק מעות לאיבוד) וכן המקלקל שאר כל דבר הראוי ליהנות בו בני אדם עובר בלא תעשה שנאמר לא תשחית את עצה וגו'

We can understand the rationale of this prohibition based on the sources cited in the previous section regarding God's concern for the natural world. Since everything was created for a purpose, it stands to reason that wastefulness denies that purpose. Similarly, Judaism would support a responsible approach to addressing the destructive consequences of air and water pollution. It is a sign of wisdom to recognize the usefulness of all things and to respect all of God's creations.

6. **Rabbi Aaron of Barcelona, Sefer HaChinuch, Parshat Shoftim, Mitzvah 529 – Being careful not to waste is a worthwhile character trait to emulate.**

The root of the mitzvah (of bal tashchit) is well known – it is to educate our souls to love goodness and meaning and to cling to it. In doing so we will attach ourselves to the good and distance ourselves from anything that is bad

שורש המצוה ידוע, שהוא כדי ללמד נפשנו לאהוב הטוב והתועלת ולהדבק בו, ומתוך כך תדבק בנו הטובה ונרחיק מכל דבר רע ומכל דבר השחתה, וזהו דרך החסידים ואנשי מעשה אוהבים שלום ושמחים בטוב הבריות ומקרבים אותן לתורה, ולא יאבדו אפילו

and any type of destruction. This is the way of Hasidim (particularly pious people) and those with good deeds, those who love peace and seek the welfare of others, drawing them close to the Torah. They never waste anything, even a kernel of mustard and are pained by any destruction that they see. If they are able to prevent it, they will put all their effort into saving something from being destroyed.

גרגר של חרדל בעולם, ויצר עליהם בכל אבדון
והשחתה שיראו, ואם יוכלו להציל יצילו כל דבר
מהשחית בכל כחם.

PART B. TZAR BAALEY CHAYIM – CAUSING UNNECESSARY PAIN TO LIVING CREATURES

Although we are entrusted to use animals for our needs (See Bereishit 1:28-29 above, and Bereishit 9:2-3), we cannot abuse the privilege. Causing unnecessary pain to animals is a prohibition known as *tzar baaley chayim* (causing unnecessary pain to living creatures).

There are many mitzvot in the Torah and verses throughout Scripture that direct us toward sensitivity to animals.

1. Devarim 25:4 – It is prohibited to muzzle your laboring animal while working to prevent it from eating.

Do not muzzle your ox when it is treading ...”

לא תחסום חמור בדישו.

2. Rabbi Aaron of Barcelona, Sefer Hachinuch 596 – The prohibition of muzzling a working animal is founded on the principle of kindness to animals.

One may not prevent an animal from eating that upon which he is working at the time of his work ... The root of this precept is to teach ourselves to develop beautiful souls, to choose fairness and adhere to it, and to pursue loving-kindness and mercy. By accustoming ourselves to being compassionate even to animals which are really only created for our usage... our soul becomes habituated to treat human beings well, and to protect them ... to compensate them for any good that they do and to satisfy them with whatever they desire.

שלא נמנע הבהמה מלאכול ממה שתעבוד בו בשעת
עבודה ... משרשי המצוה ללמד עצמינו להיות
נפשינו נפש יפה בוחרת היושר ומדבקת בו ורודפת
אחר החסד והחמלה. ובהרגילנו אותה על זה אף על
הבהמות שלא נבראו רק לשמשנו לחוס עליהן... תקח
לה הנפש דרכה בהרגל זה להטיב אל בני אדם ולשמור
אותם ... ולשלם שכרם ככל אשר יעשו טוב ולהשביעם
מאשר יגעו בו ...

According to the some authorities (Rashi to Shabbat 128b), the basis for the prohibition of *tzar baaley chayim* comes from the following commandment in the Torah:

3. Shemot 23:5 – There is a mitzvah to unload a burden off of an animal.

When you see your enemy's donkey overburdened with a heavy load, and you might hesitate to help, but instead, you shall certainly help him unload.

כי תראה חמור שנאך רבץ תחת משאו וחדלת מעזב לו
עזב תעזב עמו.

Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim [Guide for the Perplexed], Vol. III, Ch. 17) cites a different source for the general prohibition of *tzar baaley chayim* – the story of Balaam and his donkey.

4. Bamidbar (Numbers) 22:21-32 – The angel chastises Balaam for hitting his donkey.

When Balaam got up in the morning, he saddled his female donkey, and went with the Moabite dignitaries ... When the donkey saw God's angel standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, the donkey went off the road into the field. Balaam beat the donkey to get it back on the road ... God then gave the donkey the power of speech, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you that you beat me these three times?" ...

God then gave Balaam the ability to see, and he perceived the angel standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand. [Balaam] knelt and prostrated himself on his face. God's angel said to him, "Why did you beat your donkey these three times? I have come out to oppose you, because your mission is abhorrent to me."

ויקם בלעם בבקר ויחבש את אתנו וילך עם שרי מואב ... ותרם האתון את מלאך יקוק נצב בדרך וחרבו שלופה בידו ותט האתון מן הדרך ותלך בשדה ויד בלעם את האתון להטתה הדרך ... ויפתח יקוק את פי האתון ותאמר לבלעם מה עשיתי לך כי הכיתני זה שלש רגלים:

ויגל יקוק את עיני בלעם וירא את מלאך יקוק נצב בדרך וחרבו שלופה בידו ויקד וישתחו לאפיו: ויאמר אליו מלאך יקוק על מה הכית את אתנך זה שלוש רגלים הנה אנכי יצאתי לשטן כי ירט הדרך לנגדי:

As a practical illustration of *tzar baaley chayim* that should be avoided, the Piskei Teshuva discusses the following case in *shechita*, the ritual slaughter required by the Torah for the purpose of eating animals.

5. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 36:14 – Causing animals to see others undergoing shechitah is frightening to the animals.

If the animal has become scared by a person to the point that its lungs have completely constricted, for example it witnessed another animal being slaughtered or something similar, the animal is a *treifah* (not kosher) ...

צמקה כולה אם מחמת בני אדם שהפחידוה כגון ששחטו אחרת לפניו וכיוצא בזה טריפה ...

6. Piskei Teshuvah, Ibid. – The *shechita* should be done in a way that prevents *tzar baaley chayim*.

...The practice of people with chickens in hand, standing around the butcher while he is slaughtering, so that they can be the next in line, is not correct. This is especially true *Erev* (the eve of) Yom Kippur, when the butcher is slaughtering the chickens of *kapparat* (an atonement ritual with mystical significance). This [holding the chickens in a way that they can see the others being slaughtered] is not right, since it is *tzar baaley chayim* ...

...שלא נכון מה שהרבה בני אדם באים אל השוחט ואוחזים עופות בידיהם ועומדים סביב בכדי שמיד שיגמור שחיטת עופות של זה יתחיל בשלו ובפרט בערב יום כיפור בשחיטת הכפרות ואין זה נכון כי יש בזה משום צער בעלי חיים...

A universal application of sensitivity to animals relates to feeding them.

7. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 40a – Feed your animals before you eat.

... Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav, "It is forbidden for a man to eat before he gives food to his animals. This is learned from the order of the verse found in the Shema – 'And I will give grass in your fields for your animals,' and the verse then goes on to say, 'and you will eat and be satisfied.'"

...דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב אסור לאדם שיאכל קודם
שיתן מאכל לבהמתו שנאמר ונתתי עשב בשדך
לבהמתך והדר ואכלת ושבעת.

An animal does not need to be fed every time its owner wants to eat. This mitzvah is only applicable when the animal's feeding time coincides with the owner's meal time. However, one is allowed to drink before his animals; this is derived from Rivka (Rebecca) pouring water for Eliezer before his camels (Bereishit 24:17-20).

We see from all these sources that Judaism expresses a concern for the wellbeing of animals and prohibits us from causing needless pain to them. There are two reasons for this. The first is that people are duty-bound to act ethically for their own sake, and cruelty to animals is antithetical to Judaism's goal of the perfection of man.

8. Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim, Vol. III, Ch. 17 – Tzar baaley chayim reinforces positive character traits.

This law comes to perfect us in that we should not behave cruelly and that we should not cause unjustified senseless pain ... slaughtering should not be done cruelly, nor is hunting permitted.

הנה זה על דרך הבאת השלמות לנו כדי שלא נתנהג
במידת האכזריות ולא נכאיב לבטלה ללא תועלת ... לא
שנשחט על דרך האכזריות או השחוק.

The moral imperative demands ethical treatment of everyone and everything. But specifically with regard to the treatment of animals, Judaism demands sensitivity to the feelings of the animals for their own sake as well. In that sense, animals do have a right to ethical treatment.

This point is learned from a sensitive reading of Bereishit, in the story of mankind's origin. Adam and Chava (Eve) were not allowed to eat meat. Not until Noah (Noah) had saved the animal world from the Great Flood were he and his descendents after him allowed to kill animals for food.

9. Ramban, Commentary on Torah, Bereishit 1:29 – We are duty-bound to respect the souls of living creatures.

Meat was not permitted for human consumption until the children of Noah, as our Sages have explained. And this goes according to the plain meaning of the Torah's text. The reason for it is that mobile creatures have a certain spiritual attribute which in this respect makes them similar to those who possess intellect (i.e. people); they are capable of looking after their welfare and their food – and they flee from pain and death. And the verse says, "Who knows that the spirit of the children of men is that which ascends on high and the spirit of the beast is that

הבשר לא הורשו בו עד בני נח כדעת רבותינו. והוא
פשוטו של מקרא: והיה זה, מפני שבעלי נפש התנועה
יש להם קצת מעלה בנפשם, נדמו בה לבעלי הנפש
המשכלת, ויש להם בחירה בטובתם ומוזוניהם, ויברחו
מן הצער והמיתה. והכתוב אומר מי יודע רוח בני
האדם העולה היא למעלה ורוח הבהמה היורדת היא
למטה לארץ (קהלת ג כא).

which descends below to the earth?” (Kohelet/ Ecclesiastes 3:21).

Yet when the animals sinned and “all flesh had perverted its way on the earth” (Bereishit 6:12), it was decreed upon them that they die in the Flood. But when, on account of Noach they were saved in order to maintain their species, mankind was given permission to slaughter and consume animals – since, after all, the animal kingdom owed their existence to them.

Nevertheless, mankind was not given reign over the [animals’] soul, for it was still forbidden to eat a limb off of a live animal. At this point it also became forbidden to consume blood, for it is blood that maintains life, as the verse states, “the blood of every living creature is associated with its life-force; tell the Jews not to eat any blood, since the life-force of all flesh is in its blood.” (Vayikra/Leviticus 17:14). All that was permitted was the flesh of the animal after it has died, but not the animal soul itself. This is the reason that *shechitah* (ritual slaughter) must be a commandment; even though it is otherwise prohibited by the Torah to cause pain to animals (Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 32b), we nevertheless make a blessing “who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding the shechitah.”

וכאשר חטאו, והשחית כל בשר את דרכו על הארץ, ונגזר שימותו במבול, ובעבור נח הציל מהם לקיום המין, נתן להם רשות לשחוט ולאכול, כי קיומם בעבורו:

ועם כל זה לא נתן להם הרשות בנפש ואסר להם אבר מן החי. והוסיף לנו במצות לאסור כל דם, מפני שהוא מעמד לנפש, כדכתיב (ויקרא יז יד) כי נפש כל בשר דמו בנפשו הוא ואמר לבני ישראל דם כל בשר לא תאכלו כי נפש כל בשר דמו הוא, כי התיר הגוף בחי שאינו מדבר אחר המיתה, לא הנפש עצמה. וזה טעם השחיטה, ומה שאמרו (ב"מ לב ב) צער בעלי חיים דאורייתא. וזו ברכתנו שמברך "אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על השחיטה."

10. Rabbi Reuven Leuchter – The prohibition to cause pain to animals is also rooted in sensitivity to the feelings of the animal.

The explanation of Ramban’s comment (above) is that the prohibition of *tzar baalei chaim* is rooted in the composition of the animal’s soul, in that it really does feel. So we see that the reason for *tzar baalei chaim* is not just so that people develop good character. Rather, it is because the animal itself has feelings.

הפירוש הוא, שצער בעלי חיים מושרש לפי הרמב"ן בזה, שהבעל חי באמת יש לו מעלה בנפש, שהוא באמת מרגיש. רואים מזה, שיסודו של צער בעלי חיים אינו רק מפני זה, שהאדם יהיה לו מדות טובות, אלא מפני שהבעל-חי באמת מרגיש.

PART C. WHEN IS IT PERMITTED TO DESTROY NATURAL RESOURCES OR CAUSE PAIN TO ANIMALS?

In the Rambam above, we find the words “unjustified cruelty.” These words beg explanation. When are we allowed to make use of the natural and animal worlds? What is considered wasteful, and what is considered utilizing nature for our own needs? To answer these questions, we will need to look at the big picture. According to Torah thought, an action is deemed worthy if its outcome is productive, even if it seems destructive at face value.

1. **Rabbi Baruch Epstein, Torah Temimah, Devarim 20:19 – Destruction is permitted when its purpose is of benefit to people, since the world was created for them.**

It is permitted to destroy, whether trees or other things, whenever there is a personal need ... And the explanation is straightforward: since the central prohibition of *bal tashchit* is to protect objects needed by mankind, therefore, whenever the destruction of these objects fulfills a need of mankind, their destruction is their very actualization.

ואמנם בין אילנות בין שארי דברים מותר להשחית היכי שיש בזה צורך הגוף ... וטעם הדבר פשוט, דאחרי דעיקר איסור השחתה הוא מפני שיש בו צורך האדם, וא"כ היכי שבהשחתה יש צורך להאדם הוי השחתתו קיומו.

The above source states the principle that if an object is destroyed by way of providing a benefit for mankind, then it has not been wasted. On the contrary, it has fulfilled the purpose of its existence. But how far can we take this concept? Jewish law concerning animal rights, a topic too broad to be fully covered here, can provide us with some parameters.

2. **Rabbi Yisroel Isserlein, Terumat HaDeshen, Psakim U'Ktavim 105 – The animal world was created to service mankind's needs.**

There is no prohibition against causing pain to animals if he is doing so in the course of using them for his own needs or services. All the animals were created to serve mankind.

אין אסור משום צער בעלי חיים אם הוא עושה לצורכיו ולתשמישיו. דלא נבראו כל הבריות רק לשמש את האדם.

The above statement should not be taken as a blank check to do with the world what one wishes. As noted above, we are still obligated to make use of this world in a responsible fashion. The source below, taken from a legal ruling regarding the production of veal, spells out an important distinction that should guide our consumption of natural resources:

3. **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Even HaEzer 4:92 – Mere profitability does not grant people the right to make unlimited use of the natural world; we only have the right to use things in "the usual manner" by which they are generally employed or consumed.**

Even though [the prohibition against causing pain to animals] is relaxed in the course of servicing a person's needs, nevertheless there still must be a bona fide need, such as slaughtering them to eat, harnessing them to plough, or using them to transport objects, etc. But simply to cause pain to them, even if there is some sort of financial gain to be made from it, is forbidden. For example, if there would be a person who wants to kill or strike an animal that angered him and will pay you to do this despicable act, it is still forbidden. Even though it is permissible to cause such pain in order to eat the animal, but simply for the sake of fulfilling the whims of some wicked person, it is forbidden, despite the fact that it may be profitable since he'll pay you to let him do it. It is forbidden to profit from the

אף שהותר לצורך האדם הוא כשאיכא צורך, כהא דלשוחטם לאכילה ולעבוד בהם לחרישה ולהובלת משאות וכדומה. אבל לא לצערם בעלמא שזה אסור אף אם יהיה לאחד הרוחה בזה, כגון שנכרי אחד רוצה להרוג או לחבול באיזו בהמה שכעס עליה שודאי אסור אף שמשלם לו שכר בעד מעשה הרע הזה דלהרוחה שמותר הוא לאכילה אף של אחרים ואף של נכרים, אבל להרוג ולחבול בשביל הרצון דאיזה רשע אחד אסור אף שהוא עושה להרוחה דלילה, מחמת שמשלם לו בעד האכזריות שאמר לו לעשות, דבשביל מה שאירע לאחד שיש לו הרוחה מהריגת וחבלת בע"ח אסור אף שהוא להרוחה לצורך האדם אלא דוקא בדבר שדרך דאינשי בכך.

pain or death of an animal unless it is caused in the usual manner.

While it is beyond the scope of this class to delve into specific issues that illustrate where to draw the line between luxury and necessity, the above cited ruling of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein is a case in point. The leading halachic authorities of the day do have the ability to weigh in on this issue, as Rabbi Feinstein did in the question of the permissibility of veal consumption. The Torah offers us a framework within which to discuss where to draw the line between responsible consumption and reckless waste of natural resources.

Even when we are permitted to derive benefit from the natural world, we must retain sensitivity to the fact that the fulfillment of our needs can come with some collateral damage.

4. **Shulchan Aruch, Remah, Orach HaChaim 223:6 – Even while we are permitted to derive benefit from the animal world, we must be sensitive to the needless waste of animal life.**

There is a custom to wish someone who wears new clothes, “They should get worn out and be replaced.” Some write that this wish is not said to someone wearing shoes or a belt made out of animal hide for that would first necessitate the killing of another animal for the purpose of making new ones, whereas the verse says, “His mercies are upon all His works” (Tehillim 145:9).

המנהג לומר למי שלובש בגד חדש: תבלה ותתחדש.
ויש מי שכתב שאין לומר כן על מנעלים או בגדים
הנעשים מעורות של בהמה דאם כן היו צריכים להמית
בהמה אחרת תחלה שיחדש ממנה בגד אחר, וכתוב:
ורחמיו על כל מעשיו (תהילים קמה, ט)

The following Talmudic incident illustrates the necessity of showing sensitive to animals.

5. **Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 85a – One of our greatest Sages was punished for not having enough compassion on animals.**

There once was a cow being led to slaughter. It went and tugged on the Rebbe's shirt and cried. Rebbe said to it, “Go. For this you were created!” They say that because he did not have compassion, difficult travails fell upon him.

ההוא 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
יסורי.

While we have the right to make use of this world, we must act with responsibility and compassion to the world around us.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV.

- ≈ The Torah commands us not to destroy the fruit trees of our enemies in time of war. This prohibition has been expanded to cover any wanton destruction of items potentially beneficial for human consumption.
- ≈ This prohibition is based on the understanding that everything has a purpose. The wise do not waste.
- ≈ Judaism prohibits cruelty to animals. Ethical behavior toward all creatures is essential to the refinement of the human soul. Additionally, we must be sensitive to the fact that animals possess feelings of their own.

- ⌘ Destruction of natural resources is only permitted within the context of normal human consumption. Reckless or needless destruction is forbidden by the Torah, even when it is financially profitable for people to do so.
- ⌘ Even when using the world responsibly, people have a duty to act with compassion and sensitivity as well.

CLASS SUMMARY:

DO WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO UTILIZE THE WORLD IN WHATEVER WAY WE PLEASE? ON WHAT BASIS SHOULD PEOPLE CURTAIL THEIR CONSUMPTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES?

While Judaism maintains that God created the world to service mankind, the pinnacle of His creation, nevertheless God's gift was not a blank check; He still placed certain restraints on our consumption. He charged the first man, as He charges all mankind to this day, with the preservation and protection of His world. While we have the right to make use of this world, we may only do so in a responsible fashion, one that preserves the world for future generations and does not wantonly waste its resources.

WHAT DOES THE TORAH SAY ABOUT POPULATION CONTROL?

Judaism does not seem to be concerned about overpopulation. God desires that the world be settled by mankind.

Additionally, Jews have a mitzvah to have at least two children, and are encouraged to have even more. Since the Jewish population has suffered a high attrition rate throughout its history due to assimilation and persecution, Jews have rarely had the luxury of worrying about overpopulating the world.

Additionally, the Kabbalistic perspective is that every child born brings the world closer to the ultimate arrival of the Messiah, since he will only come once every soul has had the chance to reside in a body.

WHAT PERSPECTIVE ON NATURE CAN WE LEARN FROM THE CLASSICAL JEWISH SOURCES?

The Jewish view of nature is that it is a creation of God for the sake of mankind. As the pinnacle of creation, mankind is given a central role to make use of all that God has made.

Appreciating nature helps us acknowledge God as its Creator. Such appreciation has been institutionalized in Judaism in the form of blessings that serve to focus us on the fact that God is the source of existence, sustenance and beauty.

Judaism goes so far in its appreciation of nature that it even implores us to learn good character from the behavior of animals and to incorporate their positive traits into our service of God.

HOW DOES JUDAISM PROMOTE CONCERN FOR BIODIVERSITY?

Judaism starts with the belief that God created the world and that everything, therefore, has a reason for existing. Since God created the world to service mankind, it stands to reason that everything ultimately has a purpose for mankind as well, whether we realize it yet or not.

Judaism also fosters sensitivity for conservation by teaching that the entire world is interconnected. As the Daat Tevunot teaches, "One who delves into wisdom will find that everything that exists is intimately connected with everything else that exists, for everything is needed in order to complete the Supernal Wisdom's intention for creation."

Additionally, such mitzvot as *shiluach haken* (sending the mother bird away before taking the eggs) and *otoh v'et bno* (not killing a specific mother animal and its baby on the same day) aim to instill sensitivity toward the perpetuation of species.

IS IT EVER PERMISSIBLE TO MAKE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES WITHOUT REGARD FOR THEIR DESTRUCTION?

In general the Torah prohibits the wanton destruction of any item of utility to mankind.

If an item is destroyed through responsible human consumption, then the prohibition against *bal tashchit* has not been infringed. We are allowed to make productive use of this world, not to needlessly waste its resources.

That said, there are limits to our usage. Judaism does not recognize every use as legitimate. Such issues need to be weighed each on their own merit, but the wisdom of the Torah can help us draw the line between responsible consumption and needless waste of our natural resources.

As a final note, we point out that even when acting within the bounds of Jewish law and under the aegis of a sound theological outlook, we must still be sensitive to the environment for the collateral damage caused by our consumption.

RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL READING AND SOURCES

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, Chapter 9

צער בעלי חיים – See *Animal Experimentation* in Rabbi J. David Bleich, *Contemporary Halakhic Problems*, Ktav Publishing House.