

*Mouth of the Donkey:  
Reimagining Biblical Animals*

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Zusia Bet Midrash Series  
Or Shalom Synagogue

Based on, but going beyond the book of the same name.

WEEK ONE



Noah's Ark by  
Edward Hicks

נְשִׁמַת כָּל חַי תְּבָרֵךְ אֶת שְׁמִיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

*Nishmat kol chai tevarekh et shimcha, Adonai Eloheinu*

The soul of every living thing shall bless your name

**Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 38a**

[Compilation of teachings of 3-6<sup>th</sup> century scholars in Babylonia (*Amora'im*); final redaction in the 6-7<sup>th</sup> centuries]

Our Rabbis taught: Adam was created [last of all beings] on the eve of *Shabbat*. Why?...So that if a man becomes too proud we can remind him that even gnats preceded him in the order of Creation...Alternatively, it was so that he could immediately partake of the banquet. This can be compared to a mortal king who first builds a palace and decorates it and prepares a banquet, and only then invites guests to come in...

# Torah Interpretation

A few ancient & medieval principles...

- פשט **Peshat**: Plain meaning
- Revealed when we know facts about the animal in the story
- דרש **Derash**: Core values & teachings
- Revealed when we notice words & motifs across stories
- Torah (Tanakh) as Divine speech; thus “no early or late in Torah”



## Midrash Genesis Rabbah 33:5

*He set out, to and fro (v'shov) (Gen 5:7).*

Rabbi Yudan quoting Rabbi Judah ben Rabbi Simon: He replied to him (*mishivo*) with answers (*teshuvot*). He said to him, “Of all the cattle, animals, and birds that are here, you’re sending no one but me.” He said, “What does the world need you for? Not for eating. Not for an offering.”

Rabbi Berechia quoting Rabbi Aba bar Kahana: The Holy One of Blessing said to him, “Accept him, because in the future the world will need him.”

He said, “When?”

He said, “Until the water dries upon the land. In the future, there will be one righteous person to arise and dry out the world, and I need him.”

As it is written, *The ravens (Orevim) brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening (1 Kings 17:6)*

Rabbi Yehuda: There’s a city in the region of Beit She’an named **Aravi**.

Rabbi Nechemia: They were actually **ravens (orevim)**. From where did they bring? From Jehoshaphat’s table!