

## Class Two

Some of us amateur theologians may have decided that all things are equally created in the divine image, and others may be more convinced by the view that different creatures reflect the divine image in different ways. If we agree that humans have a special creative and priestly role on the earth, this still leaves some related questions to ponder, some of which have already come up.

Traditionally some Jews have asserted that humans are the *end goal* of creation: the pinnacle and purpose of everything that exists. This view is ecologically concerning because it may make everything else expendable. At best it is an argument for preserving ecologies for our own sake. There are ancient streams of Jewish thought that argue against this view, however. In Midrash Rabbah it says "Every single blade of grass has a corresponding '*mazal*' [angel] in the sky which taps it and says, "Grow, grow." (Midrash Rabba, Bereshit 10:6).

Does this mean, though, that the blade of grass is valued by God for its own sake, and not for its service to human beings? The Rambam (Maimonides, 1138-1204) thought so. The Rambam wrote that "the purpose of creation consists in bringing into existence the way you see everything whose existence is possible" (Moreh Nevuchim 3:25). It follows from this that YHVH delights in the creation of all that has been created *for its own sake*.

The Tzava'at Harivash, the first collection of teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov, says:

"Do not think that by worshiping with *deveikut* [clinging to YHVH] you are greater than another. You are like any other creature, created for the sake of His worship, blessed be He. God gave a mind to the other just as He gave a mind to you. What makes you superior to a worm? The worm serves the Creator with all its mind and strength! Man, too, is a worm and maggot, as it is written "I am a worm and no man." (Psalms 22:7) If God had not given you intelligence you would not be able to worship Him 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 equals 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.”

We see here a tension, then between the view that humans have a special creative, contemplative, and/or priestly role, and the assertions that all creations have their own value, and play a role in divine service which is equal to the human, or even greater. Maybe it is not that image-bearing humans are superior to non-image bearing creatures, but, like we suggested last class, that different creatures bear the image or serve God in different ways. Humans are called to a certain kind of responsibility and gifted with the potential for a certain understanding, but that doesn't mean we should assume that we serve God better than an earthworm does.

How does it affect your divine service to consider all animals as divine servants? How can we rise to the level of serving YHVH shown by a flower or a fox?