

## Ecology In The Divine Image Class 4 **Treatment of Animals**

Jewish law prohibits cruelty to animals, and has a care for things like not muzzling them while they work to prevent them eating, not taking the life of a mother and child together (or cooking a child animal in its mother's milk). Kosher slaughter laws have long been regarded as being formulated to avoid causing pain during slaughter as much as possible. Wild animals have the right to enter fields to eat during the Shemittah year, and when wild animals are caught and slaughtered, their blood is given a burial, which implies respect for the animal's soul, as does the prohibition against eating blood. The blood was believed to house the animal's soul.

Although the laws of animal sacrifice may strike us today as violent and murderous towards animals, it should be noted that they massively reduced the amount of animal sacrifices done each year compared to Israel's neighbours, and also reduced meat eating by stipulating that many animals to be eaten must be brought to the Temple first.

A famous story from the Talmud tells R' Yehuda HaNassi being approached by a mournful calf seeking refuge from slaughter, and saying to it, "Go, for you were made for this purpose." Listening angels are unimpressed and say, "Since he shows no mercy let afflictions come upon him" and they do.

There is an argument to be made that much of Kosher law originally existed to protect the ecological integrity of ancient Israel: in other words, eating those particular animals would destabilize the ecology, for example, pigs tend to eat the underbrush and in an arid climate that can lead to soil instability. If this is true, then the correct application of kashrut today would in fact lie in not eating things that destabilize the local or global ecologies.

As Jewish philosophy developed, it may surprise as to know, the sense of the moral significance of animals actually decreased, and the mitzvot about cruelty to animals came to be seen as existing to train human character, not to protect animals. The Rambam, however, the arch-philosopher of Judaism, wrote otherwise: "It is forbidden to slaughter an animal and its young on the same day, this being a precautionary measure to avoid slaughtering the young animal in front of its mother. For in these cases animals feel very great pain, there bring no difference regarding this pain between humankind and other animals."

R' Seidenberg brings a fascinating analysis to the famous statement in Bereishit that humans should "guard and keep the garden" but "dominate" all creatures. Since the Tanakh at this point assumes vegetarianism, this cannot mean to kill and eat. Even more problematically, it cannot even mean to use them as farm animals since humans are still in Eden and do not engage in agriculture. Rashi says that Adam would "call them and they would come, for they were in his

r'shut/domain." Seidenberg explains that Adam thus had the power to "name and tame" the animals. The picture we get was that humans were to be the benevolent namers and tamers of animals, leaders above them all, but not, originally, to use them or to kill them for food. Tomorrow we will look at the creation beyond the animal.