



Preventing Cruelty to Animals

Introduction

Part of caring for animals is caring for their needs and another aspect of it is making sure they do not come to harm. This section explores what Jewish tradition has to say about how we can prevent cruelty towards animals. Notice that the rules we are given about preventing cruelty apply to working domesticated animals, but these are animals that we rarely keep as part of our homes or use for working purposes today. How can we apply this message to all animals we encounter or use for our benefit, even those we do not see? Regardless of the focus of your service project, an activity from this section would be a good one to include at some point.

Vocabulary

HEBREW	TRANSLITERATED HEBREW	ENGLISH
שׁוֹר	<i>shor</i>	ox
חֲמוֹר	<i>chamor</i>	donkey

Activity 1:

Preventing Cruelty in Jewish Text

Below you will find several different Jewish texts related to preventing cruelty to animals.

Choose the one that you connect the most with and write a paragraph about why it speaks to you and how you might apply it in your own life.

When you see the donkey of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from releasing it, you must nevertheless release it.

—Exodus 23:5

כִּי־תִרְאֶה חֲמֹר שֶׁנֶּאֱדָר רֵבִץ תַּחַת
מִשָּׂאוֹ וְחָדַלְתָּ מֵעֲזֹב לוֹ עֹזֵב תֵּעֹזֵב
עֲמוֹ:

You shall not plow with an ox and an ass [animals of different sizes and strengths] together

—Deuteronomy 22:10

לֹא־תִחְרֹשׁ בְּשׂוֹר־וּבְחֹמֶר יִחְדָּו:

You shall not muzzle an ox [whose natural behavior is to eat while working] while it is threshing

—Deuteronomy 25:4

לֹא־תִחְסַם שׂוֹר בְּדִישׁוֹ:

Rav Yehuda said that Rav said:

If an animal (behemah) fell into a water canal [on Shabbat, when it is forbidden to move animals], you should bring pillows and blankets and place them underneath the animal, and if it climbs up, it climbs up.

They posed a contradictory source: If an animal fell into a water canal [on Shabbat, when it is forbidden to move animals], one should place provisions in its place, so that it doesn't die.

[Infer from this:] provisions, yes; but pillows and blankets, no!

This is not difficult: the second case refers to where it is possible [to help the animal] only with provisions; the first case refers to where it is impossible only with provisions. If it is possible with provisions, do that, but if not, then bring it pillows and blankets and put them under it.

But, by so doing, one is using items for a different purpose than they were intended for, [which is forbidden on Shabbat]!

He reasoned like this: the prohibition against using an item on Shabbat for a different purpose than it was intended for is only of Rabbinic authority, but preventing the pain of animals is of Torah authority, so a Torah commandment comes and bumps off a Rabbinic commandment.

—Babylonian Talmud,
Tractate Shabbat 128b

בְּהֵמָה שֶׁנִּפְלָה לְאֶמֶת הַמַּיִם - מְבִיא
כְּרִים וּכְסוּתוֹת וּמְנִיחַ תַּחְתֶּיהָ, וְאִם עָלְתָה
- עָלְתָה. מִיָּבֵי:

בְּהֵמָה שֶׁנִּפְלָה לְאֶמֶת הַמַּיִם - עוֹשֶׂה לָּהּ
פְּרֻנְסָה בְּמְקוֹמָהּ בְּשִׁבִיל שְׂלֵא תָמוּת.

פְּרֻנְסָה - אֵין, כְּרִים וּכְסוּתוֹת - לֹא!
לֹא קָשִׁי; הֵא - דַּאֲפֻשֵׁר בְּפְרֻנְסָה, הֵא
- דַּאִי אֲפֻשֵׁר בְּפְרֻנְסָה. אֲפֻשֵׁר בְּפְרֻנְסָה -
אֵין, וְאִי לֹא - מְבִיא כְּרִים וּכְסוּתוֹת וּמְנִיחַ
תַּחְתֶּיהָ.

וְהֵא קָא מְבַטֵּל כְּלִי מֵהִיכְנוּ!
סָבַר, מְבַטֵּל כְּלִי מֵהִיכְנוּ - דְּרַבְנָן, צַעַר
בְּעֵלֵי חַיִּים - דַּאֲוֹרֵייתָא, וְאֵתִי דַּאֲוֹרֵייתָא
וְדַחֵי דְרַבְנָן.





Activity 2:

Modern vs Ancient Views on Preventing Cruelty

Many of the modern beliefs about how to prevent cruelty to animals were present hundreds and thousands of years ago in the texts of Jewish tradition. Look at the poster below about the 5 Freedoms that animals must experience to not be treated with cruelty. Then look back up at the texts in the activity above and answer the questions that are included after the poster image.

Five Freedoms



- 1** *Freedom from hunger and thirst*
by ready access to fresh water and diet to maintain health and vigor
- 2** *Freedom from discomfort*
by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
- 3** *Freedom from pain, injury or disease*
by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment
- 4** *Freedom to express normal behavior*
by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment
- 5** *Freedom from fear and distress*
by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering

Questions

1. *Which of the 5 Freedoms do you see represented in the Jewish texts included in the earlier activity?*

2. *Are there any of the 5 Freedoms that you don't see represented?*

3. *Are there any considerations for animal care that you see included in the Jewish texts that are not present in the 5 Freedoms?*



Conclusion

Cruelty and suffering can take many forms for nonhuman animals, just as it can for humans. Past Jewish authorities put in place rules intending to prevent abuse where it might be most likely—a family cannot muzzle their ox while it is working because it is cruel, even if the family will benefit from more grain to sell. Today, we use animals in diverse ways, many of which we do not personally witness. What forms does cruelty take, and what part can we play to prevent them? Jewish tradition can provide us with a framework to look deeply at the way we use animals and insights on how to prevent people and systems from treating them without compassion.

