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Concern for Helping Animals in Israel

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What kind of treatment does Judaism require toward animals, given the fact that they feel physical pain?

Theme:

Judaism recognizes that animals feel physical pain, and we are forbidden to inflict it.

Sources:

- A. Story of Balaam beating his donkey and the donkey protesting.
- B. Rabbi Yehuda the Hassid vs. spurring of horses in the Middle Ages and today.
- C. Story of Hassidic Rabbi Velvel stopping the whipping of the horses.
- D. Shulhan Aruch forbids tying animals' legs in a painful manner.
- E. Refer to the Responsa of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein concerning veal calves raised in crates, in which he states that "...it is definitely forbidden to raise calves in such a manner because of the pain that is inflicted on them....it is forbidden to cause them pain for no reason, even if someone may profit from this."

Balaam

When the Jews who had wandered 40 years in the desert after the Exodus prepared to cross into the Promised Land, they camped in the plains of Moab. The Moabites, considering the Jews enemies, sent their "prophet" Balaam to curse the Jews.

Balaam set out one morning on his donkey for the camp of the Jews, but God put an angel in his path. Balaam didn't see him, but the donkey saw the angel with his sword and turned off the road into the field.

Balaam beat the donkey three times with his stick to try to force her back onto the road, but in vain. After the third beating, the donkey said to Balaam, "What have I done to cause you to beat me three times?" Balaam replied, "Because you made a fool of me. If I had my sword on hand I would kill you now."

The donkey said, "Aren't I your donkey that you've ridden ever since you owned me? Did I ever mock you?" And Balaam had to confess that the donkey had not.

Then God opened Balaam's eyes and he saw the angel with his sword. The angel said, "Why did you beat your donkey three times? Do you realize that had she not turned off the road when she saw me, I would have killed you and saved her?"

Balaam then understood he had done wrong. When he came to the camp of the Jews, instead of cursing them, he blessed them.

Numbers, Chapter 22:21-34

Rabbi Yehuda the Hassid

In Germany in the Middle Ages, nobles fought battles and also took part in mock battles called "jousts" — all on horseback. To make the horses gallop faster they used spurs — sharp wheels on their boots that dug into the animals' flesh. Many cowboys still use them today. Rabbi Yehuda the Hassid ("the Pious") who lived in the 12th Century, warned Jews who rode horses — the only means of transportation then — against using spurs because they were cruel to animals.

Rabbi Velvel

One day Rabbi Velvel, a Hassidic leader who lived in the Polish town of Zabriz, was riding in a wagon. The driver started to whip the horses to make them run faster.

Rabbi Velvel pitied the unfortunate animals. He said to the driver, "Don't hit the horses! It causes them pain!" The driver replied that he was only using the whip to chase away the flies who were bothering the horses.

Rabbi Velvel told him, "So take my handkerchief and use it to chase away the flies, but don't use the whip." The driver, outsmarted by the rabbi, had no choice but to stop hitting the horses.

Questions for Students:

1. What does the Jewish tradition tell us about whether animals can feel physical pain?
2. What does the Jewish tradition tell us about causing pain to an animal?
3. Is putting out poison that causes a slow, painful death to animals in accordance with the Jewish tradition (poison is put out to kill coyotes and other wild animals in the western United States)?
4. Is raising veal calves in crates so tiny that they cannot move in accordance with Jewish tradition?
5. What are some ways people abuse animals? (Hitting, teasing, leaving them outside in hot/cold/wet weather without protection, leaving them alone for long periods of time, confining them to small spaces, breeding them in puppy mills for profit.)