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Concern for Helping Animals in Israel

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**What are some of the other responsibilities we have toward the animals in our care besides feeding them well?**

**Theme:**

Given that animals feel physical and emotional pain (review Lessons II and III) and that we have responsibilities toward them (review Lesson V) — how should we take care of our companion animals and the animals who help us in our work, according to Jewish tradition?

**Note:** This lesson is lengthy and may need to be broken up into two lessons, depending on available time.

**Sources:**

- A. "A righteous person understands the soul of his animals."
- B. "A human's animals are his life."
- C. Story of Rabbi Hiya bar Abba who worried about his donkey.
- D. Story of Rabbi Shlomo and Rabbi Ytzhak Elchana, who kept cats and dogs.
- E. Early pioneers in the Galil — rules about treatment of animals in an agricultural society.

**Talmud and Feeding Animals**

The Talmud says that before people eat a meal, they have to feed the animals in their care. (Gitten 64) The Talmud also says that before people decide to take a work or companion animal into their home, they must first make sure they can feed the animal properly.

(Yevanot 15)

**Rabbi Naftali Zvi Berlin**

It was Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, and Rabbi Naftali Zvi Berlin, head of the famous Yeshiva (Talmudic Academy) of Volozhin came home from the synagogue. His household was waiting for him so they could all sit down to the festival dinner.

Before he said the Kiddish (blessing on the wine starting the meal), Rabbi Berlin asked if the chickens had been fed. When he found out they hadn't, he insisted it be done immediately. The key to the barn was missing, however.

After the members of the household searched in vain for the key, Rabbi Berlin instructed them to call in a non-Jewish neighbor to break the lock. Only after the barn door was opened and the fowl fed did the Rabbi sit down with his family to the holiday meal.

**Rabbi Shlomo the Admor**

In Jerusalem several centuries ago there lived a man as great in learning as in piety. His name was Rabbi Shlomo the Admor, from Zuhil. Every day Rabbi Shlomo would walk on foot to the

Western Wall to pray for the handicapped and the oppressed.

Rabbi Shlomo lived in great poverty. His small hut had only a bed, a table, and a chair, but he managed to care for many cats in his home. The cats would lie on his bed, waiting for him to return from the Western Wall. Rabbi Shlomo took great care to feed all his cats properly.

### **Rabbi Yitzhak Elchana**

Rabbi Yitzhak Elchana, the rabbi of Dovno and Lithuania, was very fond of animals. His cat always sat on the back of the couch, behind his head. A neighborhood dog would regularly come to his house during meals.

### **Rabbi Hiya bar Abba**

Rabbi Hiya bar Abba was a scholar during the period when great academies were holding the discussions on Jewish law that later became the Talmud. One day at a lecture given by Rav, the great scholar, Rabbi Hiya could not concentrate. Rav noticed that the Rabbi's mind was wandering and asked him why. Rabbi Hiya replied, "I'm worried about my donkey. She's about to give birth and I'm afraid she might catch cold and die."

Midrash Rabba

### **Pioneers in Israel**

In the early years of the rebuilding of the Land of Israel, pioneers founded an agricultural society in the lower Galilee. One of the laws of the society was "It is forbidden to leave work animals outside in the afternoon without shelter from the burning rays of the sun. Care must also be taken that the animals are kept healthy and given food and water on time."

### **Questions for Students:**

1. What do the stories about the Talmudic sage Rabbi Hiya and the Hassidic rabbis tell us about the history of Jews keeping and caring about companion animals?
2. What responsibilities do we have toward animals in our care that could come under the heading of "knowing an animal's soul"?
3. Do animals need fresh air, exercise and companionship just like humans?
4. What special precautions should be taken in hot/cold weather (for example, what precautions to take when leaving an animal in a parked car; the need for protection from sun/snow/rain). Is keeping a dog tied or chained up all day in a hot yard or locked up alone in a small apartment day and night in keeping with the Jewish tradition?
5. Animals have certain special needs. Is it necessary to learn what the specific needs of your animal are (e.g. straw for rabbits)? Is not taking care of these special needs a violation of the Jewish tradition? Is it a form of neglect? What constitutes animal neglect? Why is neglect another form of abuse?
6. Is it necessary to take your dog or cat to the vet for rabies and distemper vaccinations or when they are sick? Is it our responsibility to learn the warning signs that an animal is sick?  
Is it our responsibility to have our cats and dogs spayed and neutered to prevent the suffering that results from their overpopulation? Are spaying and neutering a positive act of kindness toward animals?
7. Whose responsibility is it to make sure pets are well behaved? What can people do to make sure their dogs learn to walk with a leash, become house trained and obey basic safety commands? Why is it important to attend obedience class with your dog? Will both you and your dog be happier if you do this? Should we keep our dogs leashed when we walk them so they won't hurt smaller animals or get hit by a car? Is keeping dogs on leashes a positive act of kindness toward animals?
8. Should people who can no longer keep their companion animals or who have newborn litters put the animals out on the street? What are some of the things that could happen

- to the animals on the street (poisoning, starvation, hurt by dogs, hit by cars)? What should you do instead to prevent this problem?
9. Millions of animals are killed in animal shelters because homes cannot be found for them. If we spayed and neutered our animals, could we eliminate the problems of pet overpopulation such as abandoned, homeless, sick animals, needless death by extreme heat, cold, cars?

**For Teenagers:**

A discussion on experimentation on animals: Millions of animals are sacrificed in laboratories every year. Several different types of experiments are performed on these animals — cosmetics testing, psychological experiments, and medical experiments. Since animals feel physical pain (Lesson II) and emotional pain (Lesson III), what should be our attitude toward experimentation on animals? In light of the fact that animals feel pain, can we justify using them for medical experiments or product testing (cosmetics, cleaners)? Are there laws that protect animals used in laboratories? What do the laws cover? Are they comprehensive enough? What are some alternatives to using animals available now? Should we be putting our efforts into using the many alternatives that already exist and into finding additional ones? Is it our responsibility to protest when we learn that these things are going on?