

Animals V. People

Dear Parents,

Statistics indicate that there are approximately 100 million domestically-owned dogs and cats in the United States. Nearly one in every two households owns a pet. Humans and animals have an intriguing relationship. We consume animals in great volume, thereby promoting the slaughter of untold numbers of animals, while at the same time, many people are very attached to their pets and care very deeply about the welfare of animals.

Animals were clearly integral to everyday life for everyone until the rise of urban living. For example, animals are central to the *Avodah* in the *Beis HaMikdash*. Also, animals were the primary means of transportation and commerce worldwide until a little more than 100 years ago.

What is the Torah's attitude about animals and pets, and what messages should we be sharing with our children?

We can learn a lesson from a mitzvah in this week's *Parsha*. The *Pasuk* says (*Vayikra 22:28*): וְשׂוֹר אֹר שֶׁה אֹתוֹ וְאֵת בְּנוֹ לֹא תִשְׁחָטוּ בַיּוֹם אֶחָד. *An ox or sheep, do not shecht (slaughter) the mother and child on the same day.* The *Sefer HaChinuch* (*Mitzvah 294*) explains the rationale for this negative commandment: A person is to take to heart the realization that **Hashem's Hashgacha (Divine Providence, Divine Supervision) is over all species** of living things, which is the reason why species continue to exist. Therefore, we are commanded to do our part to preserve animal species to implant that lesson in our heart. (Killing two generations of animals in one day is equated to causing the destruction of the species.)

The *Sefer HaChinuch* then goes on to explain that there is a fundamental difference in *Hashem's* relationship with mankind on the one hand, and animals on the other. *Hashem* runs the world with *Hashgacha*, supervising the course of history. Animals are related to with a generalized *Hashgacha*, without *Hashem's* individualized attention. Each animal's fate is

left up to the vagaries of nature, while the species as a whole is protected and preserved by Divine intervention. We see from this approach of the *Sefer HaChinuch* that animals play an important part of this world and are to be treated in a manner that will ensure their preservation. That still leaves much leeway to allow people to use animals for their own purposes and to take measures to protect themselves from particular harmful and annoying animals.

People, however, are treated with *Hashgacha Pratis*, meaning that what happens to every individual is not happenstance but a direct manifestation of *Hashem's* will. People are individually unique and attended to by *Hashem* himself. Therefore we are required to treat each other with kindness, respect and care, to emulate how *Hashem* looks after each and every human being.

It is important to share this understanding with our children. Animals are to be treated with care, never abused or destroyed for no reason. Acting cruelly to animals for one's enjoyment is strictly forbidden by the Torah. Many times, pets can provide important therapeutic support for children and adults. However, to lavish excessive attention, expense and emotion on a pet is not in line with the *Torah Hashkafa*. We should never elevate the relationship to a pet to that which we should be cultivating with our family, friends and neighbors. Animals' "rights" do not supersede people's right to use animals for our needs.

Let us keep in mind and impart to our children our obligation to partner with *Hashem* in preserving the innumerable species in our wondrous world, while directing the focus of our love, care and compassion to our fellow human beings.

Best wishes for a wonderful *Shabbos*,



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