

Humanity. Humility. Harambe.



For thousands of years Jews have been studying in pairs or in groups, respectfully debating each other, learning the stories and legal texts of Judaism, and investigating their past as a means for enriching their present. Tonight, we continue to engage in the millennia-old practice of exploring the written word as a means to connect with our tradition, open ourselves up to our inner selves, make sense of the world around us, and inspire us to action. Thank you for joining us on this journey.

*This evening's event is part of The Well's **CSI: Coffee. Study. Interpret.** series, and is made possible in part by funds granted by The Covenant Foundation. The statements made and the views expressed, however, are solely the responsibility of The Well.*

It's hard sometimes to not wish we had the ability to truly communicate with animals...

Talk to the Animals (a selection)

by Bobby Darin

If I could talk to the animals, just imagine it
Chattin' with a chimp in chimpanzee
Imagine talking to a tiger, chatting with a cheetah
What a neat achievement it would be



If we could talk to the animals, learn all their languages
I could take an animal degree
I'd study elephant and eagle, buffalo and beagle
Alligator, guinea pig, and flea

I would converse in polar bear and python
And I would curse in fluent kangaroo
If people ask me, "Can you speak rhinoceros?"
I'd say, "Of course, can't you?"



If I conferred with our furry friends, man to animal
Think of the amazing repartee
If I could walk with the animals, talk with the animals
Grunt and squeak and squawk with the animals
And they could talk to me



Genesis 1:28

כח וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם, אֱלֹהִים, וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-
הָאָרֶץ, וּכְבֹּשְׁהָ; וּרְדוּ בְּדֹגַת הַיָּם, וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, וּבְכָל-חַיָּה, הָרֹמֶשֶׂת
עַל-הָאָרֶץ.

28 And God blessed the male and female; and God said to them: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creeps on the earth.

Genesis 9:1-4

א וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים, אֶת-נֹחַ וְאֶת-בָּנָיו; וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ, וּמְלֵאוּ
אֶת-הָאָרֶץ.

1 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth.

ב וּמִוֹרְאֵכֶם וּחַתְכֶּם, יִהְיֶה, עַל כָּל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ, וְעַל כָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם;
בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תִּרְמַשׁ הָאָדָמָה וּבְכָל-דְּגֵי הַיָּם, בְּיָדְכֶם נִתְּנוּ.

2 And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird in the sky, and upon all where the ground teems, and upon all the fishes of the sea: into your hand they are delivered.

ג כָּל-רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הוּא-חַי, לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאָכְלָהּ: כַּיֶּרֶק עֵשָׂב, נִתַּתִּי לָכֶם
אֶת-כָּל.

Every moving thing that lives shall be for food for you; just like the green herbs, I have given you everything [to eat].

Discussion Questions:

*How does the biblical notion of having “dominion” over all of the animals on earth sit with you?

*As it relates to diet (as seen in the second selection) – if you happen to eat meat, poultry, and/or fish, does that align with your perceptions of humanity’s fundamental relationship with / dominion over animals?

The Jewish tradition makes clear that we must prevent animals from suffering.

Exodus 23:5

ה כִּי-תִרְאֶה חֲמֹר שֶׁנָּאֵךְ, רִבֵּץ תַּחַת מִשְׁאוֹ, וְחִדַּלְתָּ, מֵעֲזֹב לוֹ--עֲזֹב
תֵּעָזֵב, עִמּוֹ.

5. When you see the donkey of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must surely help raise it with him.

Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 32a-b

“[Based on the interpretation of Exodus 23:5] we have learned that preventing *tza’ar ba’alei chayim* [the suffering of living creatures] is a biblical obligation.”

Discussion Questions:

In the Exodus verse above we’re taught that even if an animal belongs to your enemy, if it’s suffering, you must act to alleviate its suffering – even if it means working together with your enemy in the process. The ancient rabbis then use the Exodus verse to construct a broad rule: that it’s our obligation as human beings to prevent the suffering of all living creatures.

*Are the rabbis justified in their extension of the verse in Exodus? Do you agree with the rule they set? Why or why not?

*What is it about animals that has the ability to bring people – even enemies – together?



In the Torah, Eliezer, Abraham's servant, is sent on a journey to find a suitable bride for his son Isaac (this was before JDate). He prays that God will make known to him the right woman for Isaac by having her not only offer him water to drink, but by drawing water for his (10) camels as well...

Genesis 24:17-20

יז וַיָּרֶץ הָעֶבֶד, לִקְרֹאתָהּ; וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲגִמְיאיֵנִי נָא מֵעַט-מִים מִבְּדֶךָ.

17 And the servant (Eliezer) ran to meet her (Rebekah), and said: 'Give me to drink, please, a little water from your pitcher.'

יח וַתֹּאמֶר, שְׁתֵּה אֲדֹנָי; וַתְּמַהֵר, וַתִּרְדּוּ בָדָה עַל-יָדָהּ—וַתִּשְׁקֶהוּ.

18 And she said: Drink, sir; and she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink.

יט וַתִּכַּל, לְהַשְׁקֶתוֹ; וַתֹּאמֶר, גַּם לְגִמְלֶיךָ אֶשָּׂאב, עַד אִם-כָּלוּ, לִשְׁתֵּת.

19 And when she had finished giving him drink, she said: 'I will draw for your camels too, until they have finished drinking.'

כ וַתְּמַהֵר, וַתַּעַר בָּדָה אֶל-הַשֶּׁקֶת, וַתָּרֶץ עוֹד אֶל-הַבְּאֵר, לִשְׂאֹב; וַתִּשְׂאֹב, לְכָל-גִּמְלֵיו.

20 And she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again to the well to draw, and drew for all his camels.

Discussion Questions:

*One of the reasons Rebekah was deemed worthy of being Isaac's wife was due to her willingness to not only provide water for Eliezer but for his ten (10!) camels. Is kindness to animals something you look(ed) for in a partner? Why or why not?



REBEKAH WATERS ELIEZER'S CAMELS.—GENESIS 24:1-27.

*The following selection is from the **Midrash**, a collection of interpretations by which the ancient rabbis filled in "gaps" found in the Torah. It is designed to help ask (and answer) the questions that inevitably arise from reading our skeletal Torah text.*

Exodus Rabbah 2:2

While our teacher Moses was tending the flock of Jethro (his father-in-law) in the wilderness, a lamb ran away from him. He ran after the lamb until it reached a small, shaded place. There, the lamb came across a body of water and began to drink. When Moses reached him he said, "I did not know that you were running because [you were] thirsty. You must be exhausted." He placed the lamb on his shoulder and began to walk. In response, God said: "Since you tend the sheep of human beings with such overwhelming love - by your life, I swear you shall be the shepherd of My sheep, Israel."

Discussion Questions:

- *Why did God feel that Moses was fit to lead the Israelites based on his treatment of a lamb?
- *Would it surprise you to learn that many of the Jewish peoples' most revered leaders were initially shepherds? (e.g. Jacob, Moses, King David, etc.) What is it about shepherding that transfers to leadership of human beings?
- *What are the characteristics / skill sets you look for in a contemporary leader?



Maimonides (1135-1204), the highly-regarded rabbi, physician and philosopher, spoke freely about the care we're meant to take to avoid causing pain to animals – including emotional pain!

Guide for the Perplexed 3:48

It is prohibited (in the Torah) to kill an animal with its young on the same day, in order that people should be restrained and prevented from killing the two together in such a manner that the young is slain in the sight of the mother; for the pain of the animals under such circumstances is very great. There is no difference in this case between the pain of man and the pain of other living beings, since the love and tenderness of the mother for her young ones is not produced by reasoning, but by imagination, and this faculty exists not only in man but in most living beings.

Discussion Questions:

- *Are you surprised to learn that the Torah – composed over 2,000 years ago – was concerned with the emotional well-being of animals?
- *What does Maimonides seem to suggest is the primary difference between the abilities of humans and other animals?
- *Do we often enough as a society take into account the emotional needs of animals? Of humans?



What was it about Harambe that so moved people? An answer might be found in Kabbalah – the Jewish mystical tradition.

Arizal in Eitz Chaim, Heichal Abiya 1 [42:1]

Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572; considered the father of contemporary Kabbalah; AKA the “Arizal”) teaches that between every two levels of reality there is always an intermediate level. He explicitly states that the intermediate level between man and animal is ape. He goes on the state that there are two sides to every intermediate. In the case of the ape as intermediary, one side relates to the "man" aspect, and the other side relates to the "animal" aspect. It is as if the two arms of the ape are actually holding on to the man and animal. An intermediate is meant to unite. The ape has the inner power to unite mankind and the animal kingdom.

Discussion Questions

- *How did you feel when you heard about Harambe?
- *Do you think your personal reaction to Harambe’s killing would have been different had Harambe been an alligator? Why or why not?
- *Does R’ Luria’s placement of apes at a different “level” than other animals surprise you? Does it speak to you?
- *How does R’ Luria’s concept of the role of apes as potential unite-ers sit with you? Is there a different animal you would have chosen?



Detroit Zoo to Send Elephants to Refuge

Selections from Detroit Free Press Article, 5/20/2004

ROYAL OAK, Mich. (AP) — After spending a combined 22 years in captivity at the Detroit Zoo, Winky and Wanda will live out their days in freedom... The Detroit Zoo will become the nation's first major animal facility to give away its elephants solely on ethical grounds, according to the Humane Society of the United States. "People's traditional expectation of zoos is that they see lions and tigers and elephants," zoo director Ron Kagan told the *Detroit Free Press* for a story published Thursday. "But it's also their expectation that an animal has a good life." The Detroit Zoo is widely recognized for its superior animal care. But Kagan said life in captivity nevertheless has caused physical and psychological problems for Winky, 51, and Wanda, who is in her mid-40s.

"This is precedent-setting," [Wayne] Pacelle, [chief executive officer of the Humane Society of the United States] said. "It will reverberate throughout the zoo community and, by extension, be an indictment of what goes on in circuses where elephants are chained 22 hours a day."

Kagan said he believes the zoo adequately addresses the needs of its other animals, although future research might prove otherwise.

Elephants "are the only animals at the zoo for which there is a great disparity between what they need and what we can provide," he said. "In the future, there may very well be more species that we'll look back and say, 'We just didn't understand.'"

Discussion Questions:

- *What is your general impression of zoos?
- *In your mind, is there a difference between zoos, farms and keeping pets at home? Why or why not?
- *What would you most like to know about how contemporary zoos operate?



End note

Some wisdom about humanity's relationship with animals:

“Our task must be to free ourselves... by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty.” - *Albert Einstein*

“An animal's eyes have the power to speak a great language.” - *Martin Buber*

“Life is as dear to a mute creature as it is to man. Just as one wants happiness and fears pain, just as one wants to live and not die, so do other creatures.” – *The Dalai Lama*

“Mankind's true moral test, its fundamental test (which lies deeply buried from view), consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animals. And in this respect mankind has suffered a fundamental debacle, a debacle so fundamental that all others stem from it.” - *Milan Kundera*

“The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them. That's the essence of inhumanity.” - *George Bernard Shaw*

“I don't believe in the concept of hell, but if I did I would think of it as filled with people who were cruel to animals.” - *Gary Larson*

“I am in favor of animal rights as well as human rights. That is the way of a whole human being.” - *Abraham Lincoln*

“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.” – *Gandhi*

“The righteous person regards the life of his animals.” - *Proverbs*