

Judaism and animals

The way Jews should treat animals is encapsulated in Proverbs 12:10:

The righteous person regards the life of his beast.



Judaism accepts that animals have feelings and relationships

Judaism teaches that animals are part of God's creation and should be treated with compassion. Human beings must avoid *tzar baalei chayim* - causing pain to any living creature. God himself makes a covenant with the animals, just as he does with humanity.

The Talmud specifically instructs Jews not to cause pain to animals, and there are also several Bible stories which use kindness to animals as a demonstration of the virtues of leading Jewish figures.

Judaism also teaches that it is acceptable to harm or kill animals if that is the only way to fulfil an essential human need.

This is because people take priority over animals, something stated very early in the Bible, where God gives human beings the right to control all non-human animals.

Human beings are therefore allowed to use animals for food and clothing - and to provide parchment on which to write the Bible.

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, states that God has given human beings dominion over all living things. Dominion is interpreted as stewardship - living

things are to serve humanity but human beings, as part of their dominion, are required to look after all living creatures.

His tender mercies are over all His creatures

The Bible gives several instructions on animal welfare:

- A person must feed his animals before himself (Deuteronomy 11:15)
- Animals must be allowed to rest on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10, and Deut 5:14)
- An animal's suffering must be relieved (Deuteronomy 12:4)

Jews are instructed to avoid:

- Severing a limb from a live animal and eating it (Genesis 9:4)
- Killing a cow and her calf on the same day (Leviticus 22:28)
 - This demonstrates that Judaism accepts that animals have powerful family relationships
- Muzzling an animal threshing corn (Deuteronomy 25:4)
- Harnessing an ox and donkey together (Deuteronomy 22:10)

Hunting

Hunting for sport is forbidden, and has been strongly denounced by a number of important rabbis, as has staging animal fights for sport.

The Bible teaches that hunting animals is something shameful. Leviticus (17:13) instructs Jews to pour out the blood of hunted prey and cover it with earth. This teaches that hunters should be ashamed and should hide the evidence of their killing.

Experiments on animals

Jewish teaching allows animal experiments as long both of these conditions are satisfied:

- There is a real possibility of a benefit to human beings
- There is no unnecessary pain involved

Killing animals for food

Jewish slaughter rules

Observant Jews should only eat meat or poultry that has been killed in the approved way, called *shechita*.

This method of killing is often attacked by animal rights activists as barbaric blood-thirsty ritual slaughter.

Jews disagree. They say that Jewish law on killing animals is designed to reduce the pain and distress that the animal suffers.

Shechita is unequivocally humane and it cannot be compromised

These are the rules for Jewish slaughter:

- The slaughterer must be a specially trained Jew called a *shochet*
 - A shochet is trained in the laws of shechita, animal anatomy and pathology, and serves an apprenticeship with an experienced shochet
 - In the UK, a shochet has to have both a religious and a civil licence
- The animal must be killed by cutting the throat with a single stroke from a very sharp instrument called a *chalaf*
 - The cut must sever the trachea, oesophagus, carotid arteries and jugular veins
 - The chalaf must be perfectly sharp and smooth, with no notches or blemishes
- The neck structures must not be torn
- The animal must be allowed to bleed out
- The shochet must inspect the animal afterwards to confirm that the killing was correctly carried out and that the animal did not suffer from any abnormality that would render it unkosher

Is this a cruel way to kill an animal?

Some experts say that the animal killed in this way does not suffer if the cut is made quickly and cleanly enough, because it loses consciousness before the brain can perceive any pain.

Other experts disagree and say that the animal remains conscious long enough to feel severe pain.

Pre-stunning to prevent pain

Secular animal slaughter involves pre-stunning animals so that they are unconscious before they are killed.

Jewish law does not permit pre-stunning because it requires the animal to be uninjured at the time of shechita, and all pre-stunning methods involve an injury to the animal. There is also concern that the pre-stunning might kill the animal, and so render it unfit to eat.

However Jewish experts say that as shechita produces instant loss of consciousness, it incorporates pre-stunning.