

Beyond the Text Part 2

#1 Animals

Animal Teachers

“When King David completed the Book of Psalms, he had a feeling of self-satisfaction. He said before The Holy Blessed One, “Is there any creation in Your world that says songs and praises more than I do?” That same hour, a frog appeared to him, and said to him: “David! Don't be complacent, for I say songs and praises more than you do...” (end of Yalkut Shimoni on Tehillim)

“Rabbi Ḥiyya said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “Who teaches us by the beasts of the earth, and makes us wiser by the birds of the sky” (Job 35:11)? He explains: “Who teaches us by the beasts of the earth”; this is the female mule, which crouches and urinates [and from which we learn modesty.] “And makes us wiser by the birds of the sky”; this is the rooster, which first cajoles the hen and then mates with it., Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Even if the Torah had not been given, we would have learned modesty from the cat., and that stealing is objectionable from the ant., and forbidden relations from the dove, and proper relations from the rooster, which first appeases the hen and then mates with it.” (Eruvin 100b)

וכן הפירדה שכורעת ומשתנת לאו משום צניעות היא עושה כך שהרי אין לה דעת אלא הוא יתברך נתן לה טבע זו דרך צניעות כדי שילמדו ממנה בני אדם לעשות כן וזהו שאמר הכתוב מלפינו מבהמות הארץ וגו' שהוא יתברך מלמד אותנו מוסר מן הבהמות והעופות שלכך בראם בטבעם הללו כדי ללמד אותנו וכן הרחקת גזל דנמלה ועריות דיונה לאו משום איסור עושות כן אלא הקב"ה נתן להו טבע זו ללמד אותנו בהן וכו'". (תורת חיים)

Animal Imagery

Rav Huna says: The verse states: “You abide here with [*im*] the donkey” (Genesis 22:5), a nation [*am*] similar to a donkey (Kiddushin 68a)

Judah ben Tema said: Be brazen (רע) as a leopard, and swift as an eagle, and fleet as a gazelle, and brave as a lion, to do the will of your Father who is in heaven. (Pirkei Avot 5:20)

And he began with ‘brazen (רע) as a leopard’ because it is an important general principle in the service of the Creator, may He be blessed, since sometimes a person desires to perform a mitzvah but is prevented from performing it because of people who mock him. Therefore, he cautioned that you should have fortitude

against the mockers and not refrain from performing the mitzvah. (Tur, Orach Chaim 1)

Camel

אֶת־הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַפָּרְסִי וְהַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הָאֲרָבִי, שֶׁהַצַּוּר הַזֶּה עָסִיף וְהַצַּוּר הַהוּא רָעִיף, (Bava Kamma 55a)

perhaps he went by a flying camel, (Yevamot 116a)

yet did not Gamala accede to them, but relied upon the difficulty of the place, which was greater than that of Jotapata, for it was situated upon a rough ridge of a high mountain, with a kind of neck in the middle: where it begins to ascend, it lengthens itself, and declines as much downward before as behind, insomuch that it is like a camel in figure, from whence it is so named, (Josephus The Jewish War, Book 4 1:1)

Donkeys

“If so, why are all of the above *halakhot* stated in the Torah only in reference to an ox or a donkey? Rather, the reason is that the verse speaks of a common scenario,” (Mishnah Bava Kama 5:7)

“When you see the donkey of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless help raise it”. (Shmot 23:5)

“Lo, your king is coming to you. He is victorious, triumphant, Yet humble עני, riding on a donkey,” (Zechariah 9:9)

חֲזַק וּנְתַחֲזַק הַסּוֹפֵר לֹא יוֹזֵק לֹא הַיּוֹם וְלֹא לַעֲוֹלָם עַד שִׁיעֵלָה חֲמוֹר בְּסוּלָם שִׁיעֵקֵב אֲבִינוּ חֵלָם

Horses

“Moreover, he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses,” (Devarim 17:16)

“And Rabbi Yitzhak says: For what reason were the rationales of Torah commandments not revealed? It was because the rationales of two verses were revealed, and the greatest in the world, [King Solomon], failed in those matters. . . . And it is also written: “Only he shall not accumulate many horses for himself nor return the people to Egypt for the sake of accumulating horses” (Deuteronomy 17:16), and Solomon said: I will accumulate many, but I will not return.” (Sanhedrin 21b)

“They [call] on chariots, they [call] on horses, but we call on the name of the Lord our God.” (Psalms 20:8)

“Elisha saw it, and he cried out, ‘Oh, father, father! Israel’s chariots and riders!’ ” (Kings II 2: 12)

“Rabbi Zeira said: Until midnight, David would doze like a horse,” (Berachot 3b)

Dogs

“And the Philistine called out to David, ‘Am I a dog that you come against me with sticks?’ ” (Samuel I 17:43)

“a dog or a goat that jumped from a rooftop and broke vessels, their owners must pay the full cost of the damage because these animals are deemed forewarned.” (Bava Kamma 21b)

“A person may not raise a dog unless it is tied with a chain. But he may raise a dog in a city that is close to the border and he should tie it during the day but may release it at night.” (Bava Kamma 83a)

“If the dogs are crying the Angel of Death has come to the city. If the dogs are playing, Elijah the prophet has come to the city.” (Bava Kamma 60b)

Cats

One who sees a cat in a dream in a place where in Aramaic they call it *shunra*, a nice song [*shira na'a*] will be composed for him. If he sees a cat in a place where they call cats *shinra*, it is a sign that he will undergo a change for the worse [*shinui ra*]. (Berachot 56b)

Rabbi Akiva was walking along the road and came to a certain city, he inquired about lodging and they did not give him any. He said: Everything that God does, He does for the best. He went and slept in a field, and he had with him a rooster, a donkey and a candle. A gust of wind came and extinguished the candle; a cat came and ate the rooster; and a lion came and ate the donkey. He said: Everything that God does, He does for the best. (Berachot 60b)

Just as the Sages said that one may not raise small domesticated animals, i.e., sheep and goats, so too they said that one may not raise small undomesticated animals. Rabbi Yishmael says: One may raise village dogs, cats, monkeys, and genets, because they serve to clean the house (Bava Kamma 80a)

Mice

“. . . eating the flesh of the swine, the reptile, and the mouse, shall one and all come to an end—declares God” (Isaiah 66:17)

“A certain man borrowed a cat from another [to hunt and kill mice for him.] The mice banded together against it and killed it.” (Bava Metzia 97a)

“these evil rats, if they see plenty of produce, they call their friends and eat with them;” (Yerushalmi Bava Metzia 3:5)

“Rabbi Yehuda said: It is found that this debtor must now guard his receipt against mice,” (Bava Batra 170b)

“It is not the mouse that steals, but the hole that steals.” (Kiddushin 56b)

“The students of Rabbi Elazar asked: For what reason does a dog recognize its master, while a cat does not recognize its master? Rabbi Elazar said to them: If one who eats from that which a mouse eats, causes him to forget, who eats the mouse itself, all the more so” (Horayot 13a)

Snakes

I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your offspring and hers;
They shall strike at your head,
And you shall strike at their heel.” (Bereshit 3:15)

“The wolf; the lion; the bear; the leopard; the *bardelas*, and the snake. These are always forewarned (מועד). Rabbi Elazar says: When these animals are domesticated they are not considered forewarned. But the snake is always forewarned.” (Bava Kamma 15b)

“Three kinds of liquids are forbidden if they were left uncovered: water, wine and milk, but all other drinks are permitted. How long do they remain uncovered for them to become prohibited? The time it takes the snake to creep out from a place near by and drink.” (Mishnah Terumot 8:4)

“ ‘When the Eternal likes the conduct of a person, even his enemy will make peace with him.’ (Prov. 16:6): Rabbi Meir says, that is the dog. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi says, that is the snake. . . A person made ground garlic in his house. There came a mountain snake and ate from it but the house snake observed it. When the people from the house came to eat from it, it [the house snake] started to throw dust down on them. When they did not pay attention, it threw itself on it.” (Yerushalmi Terumot 8:3)

Fish

“We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.” (Bamidbar 11:5)

“Tyrians who lived there brought fish and all sorts of wares and sold them on the Sabbath to the Judahites in Jerusalem.” (Nehemiah 13:16)

“One may not trap fish from their ponds on a festival. . .” (Betzah 3:1)

The Sages taught: Joshua stipulated ten conditions . . . they shall have the right to fish in the Sea of Tiberias, (Bava Kamma 81a-b)

Yalta said to Rav Nahman: Now, for any item that the Merciful One prohibited to us, He permitted to us a similar item. . . pork, but one may eat the brain of a *shibuta* fish, (Hullin 109b)

Locusts

“MISHNA: one who receives a field from another and grasshoppers consumed it or it was wind blasted, if it is a regional disaster, the cultivator subtracts from the produce he owes as part of his tenancy.” (Bava Metzia 105b)

⋄ יִתֵּר הַגְּזֵם אֲכַל הָאֲרֵבָה וְיִתֵּר הָאֲרֵבָה אֲכַל הַיִּלֵּק וְיִתֵּר הַיִּלֵּק אֲכַל הַחֲסִיל :

“What the cutter has left, the locust has devoured;
What the locust has left, the grub has devoured;
And what the grub has left, the hopper has devoured.” (Yoel 1:4)

“From far away, from the farm and from the vineyards, arise sounds of banging. . . the growers have gone to battle. . .but what are hundreds of hands of farmers against thousands upon thousands of billions of them, as many as the sand on the beach. . .” (Moses Smilanski, Rehovot 1915)

And with regard to grasshoppers,: Any that has four legs, and four wings, and [two additional] jumping legs, and whose wings cover most of its body, [is kosher]. Rabbi Yosei says: And the name of its species is grasshopper [חגב]. (Mishnah Hullin 3:7)

Elephants

“They lie on ivory beds,
Lolling on their couches,” (Amos 6:4)

“Moreover they divided the beasts among the armies, and for every elephant they appointed a thousand men, armed with coats of mail, and with helmets of brass on their heads; and beside this, for every beast were ordained five hundred horsemen of the best. . . Wherefore all that heard the noise of their multitude, and the marching of the company, and the rattling of the harness, were moved: for the army was very great and mighty.” (Maccabees I 6: 37, 43)

“In the case where one established a wall with a tied elephant, everyone agrees that the *sukka* is fit, as even if it dies and falls, its carcass still has a height of ten handbreadths” (Sukkah 23a)

“The Sages taught: One who sees an elephant, a monkey, or a vulture (Rashi) recites: Blessed...Who makes creatures different.” (Berachot 58b)

“And the Rabbis say: Both are acquired by pulling. Rabbi Shimon says: Both are acquired by lifting. Rav Yosef objects to this: If that is so, how can an elephant be acquired, according to Rabbi Shimon?” (Kiddushin 25)

ומפרש הרב משולם דלהכי נקט חבילי זמורות לפי שהן מאכל פיל כדאמרינן פרק מפנין (שבת דף קכח.) מטלטלין חבילי זמורות בשבת מפני שהן מאכל לפילין ומגביהין לפיל חבילי זמורות למעלה והוא קופץ ומגביה את עצמו מן הארץ ואוכלן

Fantastic Fish Stories

And Rabba bar bar Ḥana said: I have seen a certain frog [*akrokta*] that was as large as the fort [*akra*] of Hagronya. And how large is the fort of Hagronya? It is as large as sixty houses. A snake came and swallowed the frog. A raven came and swallowed the snake, and flew up and sat in a tree. Come and see how great is the strength of the tree, which could bear the weight of that raven. Rav Pappa bar Shmuel said: If I had not been there and seen this, I would not believe it. § And Rabba bar bar Ḥana said: Once we were traveling in a ship and we saw a certain fish in whose nostril [*be'usyeh*] a mud eater [*akhla tina*], i.e., a type of insect, had sat and killed him. And the waters thrust the fish and threw it upon the shore. And sixty districts were destroyed by the fish, and sixty districts ate from it, and another sixty districts salted its meat to preserve it. And they filled from one of its eyeballs three hundred flasks of oil. And when we returned there after the twelve months of the year had passed, we saw that they were cutting beams from its bones, and they had set out to build those districts that had been destroyed. (Bava Batra 73b)

But doesn't Rabba bar bar Ḥana say: I have seen a day-old offspring of the *reima*, and it was as large as Mount Tabor. And how large is Mount Tabor? It is forty parasangs. And the length of the cub's neck was three parasangs, and the place where its head rests, i.e., its neck, was a parasang and a half. It cast feces, and thereby dammed up the Jordan (Zevachim 113b)

The Mysterious Tachash

עֲרֹת אֵילִם מְאֻדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תַּחֲשִׁים וְעֵצֵי שִׁטִּים:

tanned ram skins, tachash skins, and acacia wood; (Shmot 25:5)

Targum Onkelos: tachash: sasgonna (proud of its colors)

Rabbi Ela said that Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said that Rabbi Meir used to say: The *tachash* that existed in the days of Moses was a creature unto itself, and the Sages did not determine whether it was a type of undomesticated animal or a type of domesticated animal. And it had a single horn on its forehead, and this *tachash* happened to come to Moses for the moment (Shabbat 28b)

This is the offering ... and rams' skins dyed red, and sealskins (Exod. 25:3).

R. Judah and R. Nehemiah discussed this verse. R. Judah said: It was a large pure animal, with a single horn in its forehead and a skin of six different colors that roamed the desert. (Midrash Tanhuma, Terumah 6)