

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Emor
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פרשת אמור
י"ז באייר תשע"ז

Torah Reading: *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 21:1-24:23

In this *parasha*, Hashem gives Moshe a series of laws specific to the *cohanim* (priests); Hashem then instructs Moshe to tell the people about the festivals, in addition to the laws of blasphemy and murder.

An interesting *mitzvah* appears in chapter 22, verse 28: "וְשׂוֹר, אִו-שָׁה--אֶתּוֹ וְאֶת-בְּנֵי, לֹא תִשְׁחָטוּ בְּיוֹם אֶחָד. – Whether it be a cow or a ewe, you shall not kill it and its young both in one day."

Some modern commentators believe that this is an admonition against being cavalier about destroying species. If we leave the next generation alive despite the fact that we are slaughtering the previous generation, we will be sensitized to protecting various species and to realizing that even though this killing is allowed by the Torah, we are still taking a life. There is a remarkable *halacha* (Jewish law) that a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) must kill an animal while facing it and while it is facing him. One of the reasons given for this *halacha* is that the *shochet* needs to look in the eyes of the animal so as not to become inured to taking a life.

Maimonides (12th century Spain/Egypt), considered the ultimate rationalist in Jewish thought, gives an interesting explanation for the *mitzvah* of not killing two generations on the same day:

It is prohibited 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 the

human and the pain of other living beings, since the love and the tenderness of the mother for her young ones is not produced by reasoning but by feeling, and this faculty exists not only in humans but in most living things.

Nachmanides (13th century Spain/Palestine) elucidates further. He says that this *mitzvah*, like every other *mitzvah*, is actually for us rather than for God or for the animals. It is “to teach us good values” and “to prevent us from becoming cruel or uncompassionate.” In other words, the reason not to kill two generations of an animal family in one day is to help our own *neshamot* (souls) grow and thrive.

When one stops to think about it, one realizes that this should be the motivation behind all good works. As we do good works, our *neshama* flourishes, and as our *neshama* flourishes, we are inspired to do more good works, thereby creating more good in the world.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What other things should we do to be kind to animals?
- In what other ways can we help our *neshamot* develop?
- What is a *neshama*? Why is it important that each person has a unique one?