

President's Message November 2008

It is that time of year again. I knew it was when our two cats wanted to come in the house at night. For about six months a year, they live outside. Yes, we feed them, as well as a stray. They are an important part of our farm. They take care of the rodents. They also signal to me that it is time to change the batteries in the smoke detectors. I realize that every animal has a purpose, but other than helping to find a cure for cancer, I cannot fathom the need for rodents.

Then I started thinking. Without getting into the big bang or creationist argument, I note that our Torah says that God said "...bring forth swarms of living creatures...living creatures of every kind that creep..". That not being enough, on the next day God "...let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts..." Continuing, "...and all kinds of creeping things of the earth..." Noteworthy that man was created on the same day as all of these "creeping things."

As a lay person, I believe that even in the days of the writing of the Torah, intelligent people knew the interdependence of all of this life.

Portions of what follow are "stolen" from www.urj.org without further attribution. It is a great website, very down to earth. In the Talmud, it is said that a famous Rabbi HaNasi observed a calf as it was being led to the slaughterhouse. The animal broke away from the herd and hid itself under his clothing, crying for mercy. The Rabbi, preoccupied, pushed the animal away. For many years after this act Rabbi HaNasi suffered a series of painful illnesses. One day, the Rabbi's maid was sweeping the house. She was about to sweep away some young rodents that she found on the floor. "Leave them alone," the Rabbi spoke. Subsequently, they spoke of this Rabbi in heaven "Since he has shown compassion to these rodents, we will be compassionate with him."

Very interesting. The Talmud notes there is a heaven, and that our deeds really do go punished or supported.

On a more timely note, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the President of the Union for Reform Judaism writes (<https://forward.com/opinion/14271/orthodoxy-s-kosher-crisis-02581/>) on the Agriprocessors role in a controversy over their allegedly inhumane practices in producing kosher meat. The fact that PETA is also involved makes this material that no one could make up, and will probably lead to a major motion picture. These flippant comments on my part do not speak as powerfully as Rabbi Yoffie. "The Conservative movement deserves praise for its strong stance in favor of strengthening the bond between social justice and Jewish law. Its new Heksher Tzedek initiative is working to create an additional certification for kosher products that would take into account our ethical considerations." Rabbi Yoffie then goes on to blast others in the Jewish community, that for whatever reasons, are turning a blind eye to what has been a series of violations at these kosher (and non-kosher) meat packing plants.

The owners of these plants which are in the Midwest, are members of Chabad in Brooklyn. Chabad has been silent on these issues. Rabbi Yoffie ends his discussion saying that "...O.U. Kosher threatened to withdraw its kashrut certification unless Agriprocessors changed its management". Additional information on this controversy can be located at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriprocessors>.

It is noteworthy that our Confirmation students are contemplating ways to make our Temple "green". Please help them in this noteworthy endeavor. It is my belief that this type of activity is the best training for our future leaders to know that cutting corners to make a buck is not part of our way of life.

Please contact me at arvesen@att.net or by phone at 917-941-4332 for any questions or comments.

Shalom,
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