

# Animal Rights and Wrongs

**BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

I have not eaten chicken or meat for decades. I readily acknowledge that Judaism does not ask this of me. Kashrut is not vegetarianism. But kashrut is a reminder of Judaism's concern with animal suffering.

The Talmud tells the story of a frightened calf on its way to slaughter breaking free to hide under the robes of Rabbi Judah Hanasi, one of the greatest of the Talmudic Rabbis. Rabbi Judah Hanasi pushes the calf away declaring, "Go — for this purpose you were created." This insensitivity was punished, the Talmud relates, and the rabbi later repented. (B.M. 85a)

*Tza'ar Ba'alei chayim*, acknowledging and preventing the suffering of living creatures, is an important Jewish principle. Nature may be "red in tooth and claw," but we are both part of nature and commanded to rise above it. For human beings, instinct is the beginning of the story, not its culmination. To make those in our power suffer, whether people or animals, is to darken our own souls.

Many biblical heroes are shepherds; animals too must rest on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:20) and the bible legislates many other protections for animals. We are the custodians of creation. Our first responsibility is to be kind