



# THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

## Conservative Judaism

### General Information

Conservative Judaism (known as Masorti Judaism outside of the United States and Canada) was founded as “a reaction against Reform [Judaism] on the one hand and orthodoxy on the other,” according to the *Emet Ve’Emunah* (*Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*).

Based on the principles of Rabbi Zechariah Frankel (1801-1873), Conservative Judaism, says the *Emet Ve’Emunah*, strives to preserve “intact the structure and content of traditional Jewish observance” while remaining open to “the new conditions and insights of the modern age.”

More information about Conservative Judaism, including the movement’s beliefs, structure, and history, can be found by going to <http://masortiworld.org>

**Number of Members in the United States: 1.5 million**

### Official Statements on Animals

***There is a hierarchy in creation “in which human beings have superior status to animals”***

- **The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) “issues rulings shaping the practice of the Conservative community.” According to the CJLS, “God reigns supreme over all creation, including human beings,” but within creation there is a hierarchy in which human beings are superior to, and have dominion over, all other creatures.**
  - “God reigns supreme over all creation, including human beings, and human beings are to have dominion over all other terrestrial and celestial phenomena, including creatures of the sea, sky, and land. Human beings are set into an environment furnished for human beings and are authorized to utilize animals for human benefit.”

—from the Rabbinical Assembly, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, Rabbi Pamela Barmash, [Veal Calves](#), 3. This responsum was approved on December 12, 2007 by a vote of 9 in favor, 5 opposed, and 7 abstaining.

- “[...]n biblical texts, a definite hierarchy is established in which human beings have superior status to animals. Human beings are created in the image of God at the culmination of creation and are granted a license over the animals: ‘God blessed them, and God said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subjugate her. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and the animals that roam on the earth.’ (Genesis 1:28)”  
—from the Rabbinical Assembly, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, [Veal Calves](#), 3.

### **Human superiority does not give us the right to inflict suffering on animals**

- **Although human beings “have superior status to animals” and are permitted to use them to satisfy human needs, “it is forbidden...to cause suffering to any living being.”**
  - “The rabbis extracted the principle that it is forbidden...to cause suffering to living things, and utilized this as a test of the propriety of various actions throughout the Talmud. They debated if this was a Biblical prohibition or a Rabbinic one, and, on the whole, concluded that it was a Biblical precept, wherefore it requires greater strictness or vigilance.”  
—from The Hekhsher Tzedek Commission of the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Rabbi Avram Israel Resiner, *Hekhsher Tzedek: [Al Pi Din](#)*, 16.
  - “The classical rabbis coined the terminology ... [tsaar ba’alei hayyim or “pain of living creatures”] as a way of expressing the requirement to avoid inflicting suffering on animals and to relieve the suffering of animals that is expressed in the biblical verses on compassion for animals. In b. Bava Metzia 32a-32b, the principle comes into effect in the requirement to unload an animal struggling under its burden. The animal must be unloaded by a passerby because the suffering of animals must be relieved. In b. Hullin 7b, an act that would benefit human beings is disallowed because of the prohibition of inflicting suffering on animals.”  
—from The Rabbinical Assembly, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, [Veal Calves](#), 7-8.

### **God cares for the well-being of all creatures and desires us to treat animals with compassion**

- **“Since God is concerned with the well-being of all God’s creatures, we too should be,” says the CJLS and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ). Many biblical texts portray God’s concern for the welfare of animals and repeat God’s command “that human beings treat animals with compassion.”**
  - “God is portrayed in biblical texts as being concerned for the welfare of animals. God creates vegetation as food for both human beings and animals (Gen 1:29-30). In the account of the Deluge, God commands Noah to expend a significant amount of effort to preserve every species of animal (Gen 6:19-21; 7:2-3). Jonah is

reprimanded by God, who makes it clear that he has compassion on both children and cattle (Jonah 4:11). The psalms and the book of Job declare that God supplies food for all creatures (Psalms 104:27-28; 36:9; 145:16; 147:9; Job 38:41)."

—from The Rabbinical Assembly, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, [Veal Calves](#), 3-4.

- "God is concerned with the well-being of all his creatures, and so must we be. The ninth verse of Ashrei (Ps. 145) announces this, and the peroration of the book of Jonah upbraids Jonah for failing to have similar compassion. There are several express Biblical commands predicated on concern for the welfare of domestic animals. It is said in the Book of Proverbs (12:10): ...A righteous man considers the soul of his beast' reflecting a relationship of man to beast similar to that of God to man and the cadence of Ps. 34:23: ...'God redeems the soul of His servants.' The Talmud extrapolates from the text of the Sh'ma, ...'I will provide grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be satisfied' (Deut 11:15), that before one may sit down to eat, one must attend to the needs of one's animals (Berakhot 40a). A poignant midrash has Moses designated as the leader of Israel out of Egypt, because God saw that 'you have compassion in shepherding a mortal's flock' and swore, 'by your life, you will shepherd My flock, Israel.' (Ex. Rabbah 2:2). Another (Bava Metzia 85a) understands that Rabbi Judah the Patriarch suffered illness in punishment for his callousness toward a frightened animal bound for slaughter, whom he chased out, saying 'Go. That is what you were created for,' and that eventually he recuperated on account of a later act of magnanimity toward a family of weasels."

—from The Hekhsher Tzedek Commission, [Al Pi Din](#), 16.

### **Compassion toward animals promotes human piety and habits of kindness**

- **Compassion toward animals is important, according to the CJLS, not only because of "the prohibition of inflicting suffering on animals," but also because it promotes the "character trait of piety" and prevents "human beings from behaving cruelly" toward each other.**
- "[Rabbi Mordecai Yaakov] Breisch argues that cruel behavior is prohibited because Jews must adopt certain character traits: 'For (the prohibition of) cruelty is a character trait of piety, based on the saying of the sages that a Jew must have the traits of compassion and humility.'"  
—from the Rabbinical Assembly, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, [Veal Calves](#), 16.
- "Rambam [i.e., Moses Maimonides] argues that the purpose of this prohibition [against inflicting suffering on animals] was...to inculcate habits of kindness in human beings and prevent human beings from behaving cruelly: 'The need to train human beings not to act cruelly regulates human behavior beyond the prohibition of inflicting suffering on animals.'"  
—from the Rabbinical Assembly, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, [Veal Calves](#), 11.

### **When human need requires the use of animals, their suffering must be minimized**

- **The CJS and USCJ recognize that there is a “paradox” between the Bible’s injunction against causing animal suffering and its acceptance “that human beings are permitted to use animals and indeed must use them.” While neither organization contends that a simple formula exists for solving this paradox, both assert that human need alone does not nullify “the prohibition of inflicting suffering on animals,” so suffering “must always be minimized.”**

- “Here lies the paradox. At the same time that human beings are permitted to use animals and indeed must use them, they must also treat them with compassion...Rabbi Mordecai Yaakov Breisch (1896-mid-1970’s, Zurich) ...dismisses the claim that since human beings are permitted to use animals, they are thereby permitted to use them as they wish...While many hold that human necessity alone nullifies the prohibition of inflicting suffering on animals, avoiding cruelty can serve as an alternate reason for banning the harsh treatment of animals, a reason that is not nullified by the consideration of human need.”

—from the Rabbinical Assembly, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, [Veal Calves](#), 5, 15, 17.

- “But the concession that causing suffering to animals might be acceptable, if necessary, opens a Pandora’s box of differing interpretations of how great must be the necessity and whether the amount of the animal’s pain might be calibrated against that...[T]he tradition...concluded that animal suffering might be justified for human needs but must always be minimized in that context...it is correct to recall the comment of Sefer haChinnukh that any suffering must be justified by the need and may not be gratuitous.”

—from The Hekhsheer Tzedek Commission, [Al Pi Din](#), 16-17.

## Historical References on Animals

### **Rambam: We must not kill an animal “out of cruelty or for sport”**

- **Although Conservative Judaism was founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it, like all branches of Judaism, lays claim to the full history of the Jewish people. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Moses Maimonides, also known as Rambam, explained that biblical injunctions against causing suffering to animals mean that “we must not kill out of cruelty or for sport.”**

- “As for their dictum: *[To avoid causing] suffering to animals is [an injunction to be found] in the Torah*—in which they refer to its dictum: *Wherefore hast thou smitten thine she-ass*—it is set down with a view to perfecting us so that we should not acquire moral habits of cruelty and should not inflict pain gratuitously without any utility, but that we should intend to be kind and merciful even with a chance animal individual, except in the case of need—*Because thy soul desireth to eat flesh*—for we must not kill out of cruelty or for sport.”

—from Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, as quoted by the Rabbinical Assembly, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, [Veal Calves](#), 11.

### **Sefer haChinnukh: Humans must never cause animals “gratuitous suffering”**

- In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, an anonymous book known as the *Sefer haChinnukh* (*Book of Education*) was published in Spain. This work systematically discussed the 613 commandments of the Torah and explained that while humans are allowed to use animals, we must never cause them “gratuitous suffering.” The *Sefer haChinnukh* asserts that shehitah (religious regulations governing the slaughter of animals) is designed to minimize animal suffering.
- “We will say further, that the reason for slaughter at the neck and with an inspected knife is so as not to cause excessive suffering to living things, for the Torah permitted them to humans on account of their preeminence, so that they might be nourished by them and for all their needs, but not to cause them gratuitous suffering.”  
—from *Sefer haChinnukh* #451, as quoted by The Hekhsher Tzedek Commission, [Al Pi Din](#), 16.

### **Contemporary References on Animals**

#### **In Eden, “Adam and Eve ate no meat”**

- God revealed in the Garden of Eden that the ideal human diet is vegetarian, according to the Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the Magen Tzedek (the latter of which is responsible for determining ethical standards for kosher food).
- “What humans might consume as food was of concern to God from the moment of creation. In the Garden of Eden, God had set the bar high. All creatures of the animal kingdom were to be vegetarian. Dietary needs could be met without shedding blood (Genesis 1:29-30).”  
—from Jewish Theological Seminary of America: [Chancellor’s Parashah Commentary](#): Community Development: Parashat Sh’mini 6765; Shabbat Parah; Leviticus 9:1-11:47; April 2, 2005 22 Adar II 5765.
- “Although only a few teachers of Judaism even went so far as to promote vegetarianism, the Torah implies that it is an ideal. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve ate no meat.”  
—from Magen Tzedek: An Ethical Certification for Kosher Food, [What is Kashrut](#).

#### **Noah’s descendents were allowed to eat meat as “a concession to human weakness”**

- Although God’s ideal for humanity was vegetarianism, “after the flood...and the decadence which triggered it, God lowered the bar.” “The permission granted Noah to eat meat seems to be a concession to human weakness.”

- “After the flood, however, and the decadence which triggered it, God lowered the bar. Animals would now be fair game for human consumption. In this less than idyllic world, the one remaining restriction forbade eating blood. The prohibition preserved a trace of respect for the sanctity of all life (Genesis 9:3-4).”  
—from Jewish Theological Seminary of America: [Chancellor’s Parashah Commentary](#).
- “After the Flood, the permission granted Noah to eat meat seems to be a concession to human weakness.”  
—from Magen Tzedek: [What is Kashrut](#).

**At Sinai, God once again removed “much of the animal kingdom from [the] menu”**

- **At Sinai, God “partially withdrew the carte blanche” given to Noah and removed “much of the animal kingdom from [Israel’s] menu.” These restrictions were partly intended to teach humanity “self-denial for the benefit of the whole” and partly intended to drive home the point that “life—even an animal life—is sacred.”**
- “Later at Mount Sinai, God partially withdrew the carte blanche he had extended to No-ah’s descendants. Israel would be held to a higher bar, removing much of the animal kingdom from its menu. The past, though, did not give God a lot of assurance that Israel would comply. Humanity since Adam had given scant evidence of an ability or willingness to curb its appetite and passions. And yet, civilization rests on self-denial for the benefit of the whole. With Israel God seems to be testing the waters, whether at least a sample of humanity could renounce enough of its combative instincts to forge a just and harmonious society.”  
—from Jewish Theological Seminary of America: [Chancellor’s Parashah Commentary](#).
- “Animals are also creatures of God. If we take their lives for the sake of our own sustenance, we are obliged to do so in a restricted way, one in which the animal experiences a minimum of pain. This is one of the ways in which Jewish tradition teaches reverence for all life. If an animal is to be slaughtered, this must be done in the manner prescribed by Jewish law. Because life—even an animal life—is sacred...”  
—from Magen Tzedek: [What is Kashrut](#).

**Food animals must be treated humanely at all stages of their life-cycle**

- **In 2007, the USCJ and the Rabbinical Assembly joined together to form the Hekhsher Tzedek Commission. This Commission was assigned the task of articulating the ethical standards behind Kashrut (religious dietary laws). After careful consideration, the Commission concluded that these standards require more than the traditional food limitations and prescribed methods of slaughter, they also require that animals be treated according to the “highest possible Jewish ethical values” at all stages of their life-cycle. In order to certify that animals have received this treatment, and that justice has been observed in the areas of “labor concerns,...environmental impact,**

**consumer issues and corporate integrity,” the Commission created the Magen Tzedek seal. This seal is visible on kosher products that meet the Commission’s standards.**

- “[T]he [Hekhsher Tzedek] Commission has created Magen Tzedek, the world’s first Jewish ethical certification seal which will help assure consumers that kosher food products are produced in keeping with the highest possible Jewish ethical values and ideals for social justice in the areas of labor concerns, animal welfare, environmental impact, consumer issues and corporate integrity.”  
—from the Rabbinical Assembly: [Resolution on Hekhsher Tzedek](#)
- “Magen Tzedek certification will restore harmony to the ritual and ethical dimensions of meat consumption. It will ensure that the principle of avoiding gratuitous animal suffering, both prior to and during slaughter, becomes concretized through explicit, reviewable practices. This would be a revolutionary development within the kashrut marketplace that we, as Conservative Jews, ought to feel proud of.”  
—from the Rabbinical Assembly: [A Summary of Magen Tzedek’s New Standards and Religious Underpinnings](#), September/Elul, 2011.

**“Hoisting,” foie gras, and most methods of veal production are not humane and must stop**

- **Conservative Judaism has examined several issues impacting the quality of life of food animals. Among these issues are the “shackling and hoisting” of animals just prior to slaughter, the production of pate de foie gras, and standard methods of raising veal calves. Each of these three issues has been declared inhumane and in violation of “the requirements of Jewish law forbidding cruel treatment of animals.”**
- “Shackling and hoisting is a method of slaughter restraint in which a fully conscious animal is shackled with a chain around its back leg and hoisted into the air. The animal hangs upside down, often for minutes, prior to slaughter. ...Today 10% of larger cattle are being shackled and hoisted. However, 50% of veal calves and 100% of sheep and lamb are still being shackled and hoisted. [M]eat from cattle that have been shackled and hoisted while they were conscious is still kosher in the sense that the technical procedures required by the laws of kosher slaughter can be fulfilled even if the cattle are shackled and hoisted, but shackling and hoisting violate the laws prohibiting undue pain to animals in doing so. We therefore maintain that now that both sanitation and Jewish ritual fitness...can be assured through the use of upright pens without shackling and hoisting, the latter procedures should no longer be used so as not to violate the prohibition of causing undue pain to animals...To be clear, then, in this ruling we intend not only to ban shackling and hoisting animals, but also those pens that turn the animals upside down before slaughtering them.”  
—from the Rabbinical Assembly, Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards, [Shackling and Hoisting](#), 94-96. This measure was approved on September 20, 2000 by a vote of 21 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstaining.

- “[In] *pate de foie gras*...geese...are forced to ingest a large amount of high calorie food that exceeds their physical needs. In the force-feeding process, a tube is inserted down the bird’s mouth and gullet by which food is forced into the goose, causing the animal’s liver to contract a degenerative disease and grow ten times its normal size...[T]he goal of preventing suffering ...[and] [e]ven the more limited goal of reducing suffering could not be reached in the case of forcefeeding. The method itself simply cannot be reformed. Furthermore...the harm suffered by the geese outweighs the benefit of the production of *foie gras*.”  
—from the Rabbinical Assembly, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, [Veal Calves](#), 18.
- “Veal calves are raised in appalling conditions in which their movement is severely restricted and their diet limited, among other severities. According to the biblical sources, Jews are allowed to utilize animals as long as the animals are treated with compassion...In response to the claim that human necessity overrules...[the prohibition against inflicting suffering] in every situation, Rabbi Israel Isserlein, followed by the Rabbi Moshe Isserles, rules that...cruel behavior toward animals, is forbidden, even when there might be benefit to human beings. Jews should be cultivating the character trait of compassion, not cruelty...We rule that only veal from animals raised under humane standards can be sold, purchased, or consumed. Humane standards for the raising of veal calves include sufficient space for calves to lie down, stand up, turn around, and groom themselves, proper nutrition in a mixed diet appropriate for young calves with sufficient iron, dry, clean bedding, and limited isolation of calves.”  
—from the Rabbinical Assembly, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, [Veal Calves](#), 34-35.

**We should avoid products from farms that turn animals “into factories”**

- **Modern industrialized farms keep animals in small enclosures, prevent animals from engaging in natural behavior, and fatten animals on food they “never would eat in nature.” These farms operate like factories, treating animals like machines rather than like creatures capable of enjoying their lives or experiencing suffering. For this reason, families should buy animal products only from farms that allow their animals to range freely.**
- “[W]e can insure that the proper treatment of animals becomes a standard for personal practice. Families should buy eggs laid by free-range chickens. We should oppose farming practices that turn chickens into factories, housing them in tight cages, with fluorescent lights shining on them 24 hours a day, so that they will produce the maximum number of eggs with the smallest possible amount of human labor. Similarly, as much as we can we should buy the meat of free-range chickens. It is one thing to feel that eating meat is necessary, but quite another to deprive animals of their natural life. We need not consume food produced through cruelty...For the same reasons, we should buy grass-fed beef. American cattle growers often use feed that cows never would eat in nature. Sometimes the feed

contains ground up blood and animal products, though cows are vegetarian by nature.”

—from *CJ: Voices of Conservative/Masorti Judaism*, Summer 2012/5772 Vol. 5 No. 4, Rabbi Edward Feld, “[What We Eat](#): Looking at Kashrut Through a Conservative Lens,” 12-13.

For more information on Judaism and animal protection, visit The HSUS Faith Outreach program at [humanesociety.org/faith](http://humanesociety.org/faith). 07/12

-END-