



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

Reform Judaism

General Information

Reform Judaism is the largest branch of Judaism in North America. It emphasizes *tikkun olam* (repair of the world), a concept, according to the Reform Movement, that requires Judaism to continuously re-form itself in response to the changing needs of changing times and circumstances.

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

Number of Members in the United States and Canada: 2.2 million

Official Statements on Animals

Humans are “given mastery over the world” but “are instructed to protect all living beings”

- **Although God has given human beings “mastery over the world..., that mastery has never been considered absolute” and has always carried with it an obligation to protect all of God’s creatures, according to the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR). Holy texts are filled with passages that caution us against human self-importance, warn us against cruelty to animals, and instruct us to value all creatures, for “even those things you deem as superfluous, such as fleas, gnats and flies, even these too are purposefully included in the creation of the world.”**
- “While according to the Torah the human species is given mastery over the world (Genesis 1:28), that mastery has never been considered absolute. Cruelty to animals is prohibited several times...”
—from Central Conference of American Rabbis, “[CCAR Responsa: Endangered Species.](#)”
- “‘The Earth is the Lord’s and the fullness there of’ (Psalms 24:1). We are instructed to protect all living beings regardless of their aesthetic beauty—‘Even those things you deem as superfluous, such as fleas, gnats and flies, even these too are purposefully included in the creation of the world.’ (Genesis Rabbah 10:7).”

—from Central Conference of American Rabbis, "[Resolution Adopted by the CCAR: Endangered Species](#), Adopted by the 107th Annual Convention of the CCAR, March 1996."

- "We are taught to treat all of the Eternal's creations as holy and of intrinsic value—'Of all that the Holy One, blessed be God, created, nothing was created without purpose.' (Shabbat 77b) In fact, we are told in Talmud (Sanhedrin 38a) that human beings were not created until the "sixth day so that if our minds become too proud, we could be reminded, 'Even the gnats preceded you in creation.'" The Rambam builds upon this theme, instructing us to value nature, not in relation to human use, but for its own intrinsic worth: 'It should not be believed that all the beings exist for the sake of the existence of humanity. On the contrary, all the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes, and not for the sake of something else.' (Guide for the Perplexed)."
—from Central Conference of American Rabbis, Adopted [Resolution: Endangered Species](#).

All creatures are beautiful, are created by God, and are subjects of God's compassion

- **The CCAR publishes the *Mishkan T'filah*, a Siddur (prayerbook) for North American Reform Jews. Prayers within the *Mishkan T'filah* remind us that all creatures are beautiful, are created by God, and are subjects of God's compassion.**

- "My soul came to me pure,
drawn from the reservoir of the Holy,
All the time it remains within me,
I am thankful for its thirst
for compassion and justice.
Let my eyes behold the beauty of all creatures,
let my hands know the privilege of righteous deeds."
—from Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*, (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2007), 35.
- "Blessed is the One who spoke and the world came to be. Blessed is the One!
Blessed is the One who continually authors creation. Blessed is the One whose word is deed; blessed is the One who decrees and fulfills. Blessed is the One who is compassionate towards the world; blessed is the one who is compassionate towards all creatures."
—from Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Mishkan T'filah*, 50.

Shabbat reminds us that "to love God is to love the world God created"

- **The *Mishkan T'filah* tells us that the world is a fragile place that can be both damaged and healed by human activities. God allows us to choose our path on Earth, but warns that there will be no divine intervention if we choose a path of destruction. In order to encourage us to choose a path of healing, God has set aside one day each week when we are to pause, contemplate the miracle of creation, and remember that faith is expressed most fully through loving actions.**

- “Those who keep Shabbat by calling it a delight will rejoice in Your realm.
The people that hallow Shabbat will delight in Your goodness.
For, being pleased with the Seventh day, You hallowed it as the most precious of days, drawing our attention to the world of Creation.”
—from *Mishkan T’filah*, 162.
- “To love God is to love the world God created and to work to perfect it.”
—from *Mishkan T’filah*, 126.
- “Religion embraces both faith and action.
The primary quality is action,
for it lays the foundation for faith;
the more we do good,
the more readily do we grasp the meaning of duty and life
and the more readily do we believe in the Divine
from which stems the good.”
—from *Mishkan T’filah*, 425.
- “In the same hour that the Holy Blessed One created the first human being, God guided the person before all the trees in the Garden of Eden and said: See My works, how fine and excellent they are! Everything I have created, I created for you. Think about this carefully so that you do not corrupt and devastate My world: for if you corrupt it there is no one to repair it after you.”
—from *Mishkan T’filah*, 83.

Historical Statements on Animals

Concepts such as *bal tashchit* tell us “even the tiniest insect...is one of God’s creations”

- **Although Reform Judaism was founded in the 19th century, it, like all branches of Judaism, lays claim to the full history of the Jewish people. Within this history are concepts such as *shomrei adamah* (guardians of the earth), *tikkun olam* (repair of the world), and *bal tashchit* (do not destroy) that promote environmental and animal protection.**
- “- *Bal Tashchit*: This concept teaches us we should not be wasteful in our consumption and we should consider the value of even the tiniest insect as it is one of God’s creations...
- *Shomrei Adamah*: Meaning guardians of the earth, this phrase captures the Jewish belief that we are charged with the task of protection and renewal of the earth...”

- *Tikkun Olam*: As the Jewish teaching that we are to repair the world in partnership with God, this is the phrase most commonly used when speaking about the Jewish obligation to care for the environment.”
—from Union for Reform Judaism, “[Green Glossary](#).”

The concept of tsa’ar ba-alei chayim teaches that we are prohibited from inflicting pain on animals

- **The concept of tsa’ar ba-alei chayim (the pain of living things) has been especially relevant to animal protection throughout Jewish history. This concept teaches that “animals suffer tsa’ar, pain, sorrow, and Jews are therefore prohibited from inflicting pain upon them.” This prohibition is so important that heaven is said to show compassion to human beings when we show compassion to animals.**
 - “One of the most touching expressions in the Jewish lexicon is *tsa’ar ba-alei chayim*, literally, ‘pain of living things.’ In the Jewish view, animals are just as much creatures of God as is humankind; and humankind has the responsibility, not only of respecting their needs and their feelings, but also of treating them with compassion. Animals suffer *tsa’ar*, pain, sorrow, and Jews are therefore prohibited from inflicting pain upon them.”
—from Union for Reform Judaism, “10 Minutes of Torah: [Pity for the Living](#).”
 - “Rabbi Y’hudah HaNasi observed a calf as it was being led to the slaughterhouse. The animal broke away from the herd and hid itself under Rabbi Y’hudah’s clothing, crying for mercy. But Y’hudah pushed it away, saying, ‘Go. This is your destiny.’ They said in heaven, ‘Since he showed no compassion, we will bring suffering to him.’ For many years after this act, Rabbi Y’hudah suffered a series of painful illnesses. One day, Y’hudah’s servant was sweeping the house. She was about to sweep away some young weasels that she found on the floor. ‘Leave them alone,’ Y’hudah said to his housekeeper. Subsequently they spoke of Y’hudah this way in heaven, ‘Since he has shown compassion to these rodents, we will be compassionate with him,’ and he was cured of his illness.”
—from Union for Reform Judaism, “10 Minutes of Torah: [Kindness to Animals: Story of the Calf](#), Babylonian Talmud, Bava M’tzia 85a.”

Contemporary References on Animals

We should support the protection of endangered species and their habitats

- **Reform Judaism’s commitment to *tikkun olam* has inspired it to tackle a broad range of issues connected with animals. Among these issues is the protection of endangered species and the vulnerable habitats upon which they depend. According to the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, we “are currently faced with the greatest rate of species extinction worldwide since the disappearance of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago.” This alarming situation requires us to maintain and strengthen legislation that “preserves and restores biological diversity.”**

- “We are currently faced with the greatest rate of species extinction worldwide since the disappearance of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. More than 50,000 species become extinct worldwide each year (that’s five to six each hour!)... If we fail to stop this crisis, fully one-quarter of the world’s species could be lost forever within 50 years.”
—from Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, “[Endangered Species: The Basics](#).”
- “[T]housands of creatures are at risk of extinction. Worldwide, 25% of mammals, 20% of reptiles, 25% of amphibians, and 34% of fish are in danger of extinction. ...Our heritage calls on us to serve as protectors and defenders of God’s magnificent creations...Therefore, the Central Conference of American Rabbis...calls upon the federal government to...manage all public lands in such a manner that preserves and restores biological diversity...”
—from Central Conference of American Rabbis, “[Protecting Ancient Forest Ecosystems](#): Resolution Adopted at the 111th Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, March, 2000.”
- “Despite the progress made in the past 35 years, there is still much to be done to raise awareness about the threats to our ecology including animal species. Among the most urgent is the...plan to waive more than 35 environmental laws, including the Endangered Species Act, in order to continue construction of the U.S.-Mexico border fence. Across the country, the gray wolf, the polar bear, jaguars and scores of other precious animals that are an integral part of our nation’s ecology, risk devastation at the hands of irresponsible human actions on the part of individuals and government policies at all levels.”
—from Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, “[Reform Jewish Movement Commemorates Endangered Species Day](#), Condemns Border Fence Plans Threatening Biological Diversity in the Southwest.”

Hunting for sport is a violation of Jewish ethical codes

- **Hunting for sport is both cruel and wasteful, and therefore violates the principles of *tsa’ar ba-alei chayim* and of *bal taschit*. Hunting for other purposes such as for skin or food is also socially frowned by Jews but has been historically permitted.**
- “Of course we Jews could not consume the meat of an animal taken during a hunt unless it had been ritually slaughtered. This was possible when the animal was trapped. Such hunting was permissible to provide food (M. Shab. 7.2), but it was considered wrong to hunt merely for sport. This was cruel to animals and was also considered wasteful (Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*, Chap. 48; Meir of Rothenburg, *Responsa* #27).”
—from Central conference of American Rabbis, “CCAR Responsa: [Judaism and the Environment](#).”

Medical experiments should not subject animals to pain or be done for frivolous reasons

- **The CCAR states that while medical research on animals is permissible if it will save human lives, animals must not be subjected to pain during these experiments or be used in “frivolous” experiments such as cosmetic testing.**
 - “Human life must be saved if it is at all possible...When dealing with experimental animals we should be quite certain that they are not subjected to pain or used for frivolous reasons as for example cosmetic experimentation.”
—from Central Conference of American Rabbis, “New American Reform Responsa: [Jewish Involvement in Genetic Engineering.](#)”

We are “duty bound” to give pets and other domesticated animals proper care

- **The CCAR asserts that Reform Jews have a moral obligation to ensure that all domesticated animals are properly fed, rested, and given medical attention when necessary. Cruelty to pets is prohibited, including the abandonment or euthanizing of pets.**
 - “...[O]ne should not consider acquiring an animal unless one has the means to feed it (J Ket 4.8) and a person should then feed his animals before feeding himself (Git 62a; Yad Hil Avadim 9.8).”
—from Central Conference of American Rabbis, “New American Reform Responsa: [Jewish Involvement in Genetic Engineering.](#)”
 - “...[T]he Sabbath commandment of the Decalogue insisted that animals rest on the Sabbath along with their masters ([*Midrash Rabbah Noah*] 20.9; Deut 5.14)...Sick or injured animals were to be healed if that was possible (Shab 144a; Ker 22a; Tos M K 2.11).”
—from Central Conference of American Rabbis, “New American Reform Responsa: [A Blessing for Pets.](#)”
 - “...[T]he care of animals was always an important part of our tradition. We would, therefore, say that the heirs [of a man who left behind a cat when he died] are duty bound to either care for this animal which was important to their father or to find an appropriate home for it. They may certainly not put it to sleep or abandon it.”
—from Central Conference of American Rabbis, “New American Reform Responsa: [Responsibility Toward Pets.](#)”

Vegetarianism is not a requirement, but it is a valid personal and religious choice

- **God created humans to be vegetarian, but allowed us to eat meat after the Flood as a concession to human weakness. Today, we may eat meat if we choose, but**

minimizing the amount we eat would improve our health, reduce our environmental impact, and allow us to live closer to God's original plan for humanity.

- “God commanded Adam and Eve to be vegetarians. That was what God wanted for our dietary practices. God commanded Noah to eat whatever he wanted, as long as it was dead. That is what humans want for our own dietary practices—unrestrained omnivorism. In ultimate wisdom, God offered a compromise: God commanded Moses concerning prohibited and permitted meats and forbade boiling a kid in its mother's milk. These were developed and evolved by the Rabbis of the Talmud into the dietary laws called kashrut. If we are able to live by this compromise, that is wonderful. If we are able to live closer to what God wants and go vegetarian, even better.”

—from Rabbi David N. Young, quoted in “Voices: Small Bites,” in *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, ed. Mary L. Zamore (New York: CCAR Press, 2011), electronic location 453.

- “While Judaism mandates that people should be very careful about preserving their health and their lives, countless scientific studies have linked the consumption of animal products directly to heart disease, stroke, many forms of cancer and other chronic degenerative diseases...While Judaism teaches that ‘the earth is the Lord's’ (Psalm 24:1) and that we are to be God's partners and co-workers in preserving the world, animal-based agriculture contributes substantially to global warming, soil erosion and depletion, air and water pollution, overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the destruction of tropical rain forests and other habitats and other environmental damage...I believe that kashrut today should be interpreted to include the elimination of animal products or the reduced consumption of animal products that are raised under more humane, environmentally-sustainable conditions.”

—from Union for Reform Judaism, “Ten Minutes of Torah: [Kashrut in Modern-Day Reform Society](#).”

Factory farming and aquaculture cause harm to humans, animals, and the environment

- **The industrialized confinement of food-animals, known as factory farming for land-based animals and aquaculture for fish, frequently violates the Jewish moral principles of *tsa'ar ba'alei chayim*, *bal tashchit*, and *tikkun olam*. Animals raised in this way “live in cramped, confined spaces and are often drugged, mutilated and denied fresh air.” In addition, they are fed a diet that contributes to human hunger and live in conditions that promote disease and environmental damage. Reform Jews who eat meat are encouraged to choose meat that has been “certified humane.”**
- “While Judaism forbids *tsa'ar ba'alei chayim*, inflicting unnecessary pain on animals, those animals raised on ‘factory farms’ live in cramped, confined spaces and are often drugged, mutilated and denied fresh air, sunlight, exercise and any enjoyment of life before they are slaughtered and eaten...While Judaism mandates *bal tashchit*, that we are not to waste or unnecessarily destroy anything of value, and we are not

to use more than is needed to accomplish a purpose, animal agriculture requires the wasteful use of grain, land, water, energy and other resources. While Judaism stresses that we are to assist the poor and share our bread with hungry people, over seventy percent of the grain grown in the United States is fed to animals destined for slaughter, while an estimated twenty million people worldwide die due to hunger and its effects each year...Perhaps the Reform Movement should encourage its members to base the foods that they eat on what may be deemed 'tikkun-kosher.' In this way their food can be part of a *tikkun*, a healing or repair...By doing so, we should keep in mind that God's compassion is over the entire world and its creatures..."

—from Union for Reform Judaism, "Ten Minutes of Torah: [Kashrut in Modern-Day Reform Society](#)," by Richard Schwartz.

- "The realities of aquaculture must make us cringe as Jews, we who are commanded not to cause undue suffering to animals. Farm-raised fish live in water that is so fouled and crowded that it makes it hard for them to breathe, and they cannibalize one another at a high rate. They have nutritional deficiencies that weaken their immune systems, and they are slaughtered in horrible, inhumane ways. Fish raised through aquaculture live in terrible suffering and die the same way. To combat the illnesses—parasitic bacteria, rickettsia, lesions—that farm-raised fish contract, producers introduce chemicals and medications. Millions of other fish destined for sale in the United States are raised with chemicals and drugs not approved for use in this country. Yet...devastating viruses still spread, killing millions of fish each year. When we purchase most farm-raised fish, we are violating the values of both *baltashchit* and *tzaar baalei chayim* by supporting an industry in which large-scale death rates and animal suffering are inherent in nearly all methods of aquaculture."
—from Joel Mosbacher, "Fish: A Complex Issue," in *The Sacred Table*, electronic location 3267
- "...[W]e have to consider that 'free-range' typically is still far from humane, that almost ten billion chickens are slaughtered annually each year in the U.S. alone and that chicken industries will wage a fierce battle to prevent changes that will reduce their profits. It would be great if the Reform movement would state that those who eat meat should only eat meat that is certified humane, and that Judaism opposes eating animal products from modern factory farms, the kind you get in virtually every restaurant and supermarket, including meat labeled kosher."
—from Union for Reform Judaism, "Ten Minutes of Torah: [Kashrut](#): Richard Schwartz's Concluding Statement."

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For more information, visit The Humane Society of the United States Faith Outreach program at www.humanesociety.org/faith