Nonhuman Others: 
The Jerusalem Talmud On Animal Ethics

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I. Talmud Yerushalmi Damai 1:3, 21d-22a.

Stories of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair

Y. Damai 1:3, 21d-22a

A. The donkey of R. Pinchas b. Yair was stolen by thieves at night. It remained in hiding with them for three days and would not eat a thing. After three days, they changed their minds and returned her to her master. They said, “Let’s send her to her master, so she won’t die with us and ruin our cave.” They sent her out and she went and stood outside her master’s gate and started to bray. He said to them, “Open the gate for that poor creature that hasn’t eaten a thing in three days!”

They opened the gate for her and she came in. He said to them, “Give her something to eat.” They placed before her barley, but she did not want to eat. They said to him, “Master, she does not want to eat.” He said to them, “Has the food been properly tithed?” They said to him, “Yes.” He said to them, “Have you taken damai (tithes taken in the account of doubt)?” They said to him, “But has the master taught us: one who buys produce for planting, [to feed] domesticated animals, to use as flour for hides, for lamp oil, or oil for anointing utensils is exempt from damai?”

[R. Pinchas] said to them, “What can we do with this poor one? She is so strict with herself!” They took damai and she ate.

B. R. Pinchas b. Yair came to a certain place. They came and said to him, “mice ate all of our grain.” He set a [divine] edict upon [the mice] and they came together and began to clamor. He said to them, “do you know what they are saying?” They said to him, “no.” He said to them, “they are saying that the grain has not been tithed.” They replied, “pledge

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1. Dr. Rabbi Alexander Weisberg

All translations are my own. This story is also found in Y. Shek. 5:1, 48d; Genesis Rabbah 60:32.

2. M. Dam. 1:3.
yourself to us [that if we tithe the grain, the mice won’t eat it all].” He pledged to them and they were no longer injured [by the mice].

C. A Saracen king’s pearl fell and a mouse swallowed it. He came to R. Pinchas b. Yair. He said to him, “Am I a charmer?” He said to him, “I came to you because of your good name.” He set a [divine] edict upon [the mice] and they came together. He saw one of them walking like a hunchback. He said, “It is by that one.” He set a [divine] edict upon it and it spit out [the pearl].

D. R. Pinchas b. Yair was going to the house of assembly. The river Ginnai was overflowing. He said to it, “Ginnai, Ginnai, why do you prevent me from the house of meeting?” It split before him and he crossed. His students said to him, “Are we able to cross?” He said to them, “Whoever knows of himself that he has never done anything wrong to another Jew may pass and not be injured.”

E. Rabbi desired to loosen [some restrictions of] the Sabbatical year. [At this time] R. Pinchas ben Yair came to him. [Rabbi] said to [R. Pinchas], “What is happening with the crops?” He replied, “The wild endives are beautiful.” He said to him, “What is happening with the crops?” [Rabbi] said to him, “Will the master eat a little bit with us today?” He replied to him, “Yes.”

When he was leaving Rabbi’s house, he saw Rabbi’s mules standing [outside]. He said, “All these the Jews nurture [but Rabbi does not]? May I never see his face again!”

They went and told Rabbi. Rabbi sent to appease him. They caught up with him near
his town. He said, “Townsfolk, draw near me.” His townsfolk came down and surrounded him [so that Rabbi’s messengers could not reach him]. The [messengers] said to them, “Rabbi wants to appease him.” The townsfolk left him and went their way. He said, “Children of my dear one [God], draw near me.” Fire descended from heaven and surrounded him [so that Rabbi’s messengers could not reach him].

They went and told Rabbi. He said, “Because we did not merit to satiate ourselves from him in this world, may we merit to satiate ourselves from him in the world to come.

2. Talmud Yerushalmi Kil. 9:3, 32b

Story of Rabbi and the Calf

Talmud Yerushalmi Kil. 9:3, 32b

Rabbi dwelled in Tziporein for seventeen years and he repeated the verse [Gen 47:28] about himself “Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt, [so that the span of Jacob’s life came to one hundred and forty-seven years].” Yehuda lived in Tziporein for seventeen years and of that time, he suffered from a toothache for thirteen years. R. Yosi b. R. Bun said, “For all those thirteen years, laboring woman did not die in the Land of Israel, nor was there a miscarriage in the Land of Israel.” And why did he suffer from a toothache? One time he was passing by and saw a calf being taken [to slaughter]. It cried and said to Rabbi, “Rabbi, save me!” Rabbi replied, “For this, you were created.” And in

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3 The story is also found in Genesis Rabbah 33:1, Y. Ket. 12:2, 35a; B. Bav. Mats. 85a.
the end how was the toothache released? He saw them killing a nest of mice. He said to them, “Leave them. [For it is written in Psalm 145:9: ‘The LORD is good to all], and His mercy is upon all His works.””