RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY כנסת הרבנים

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Who Eats First?

Parashat Ḥayyei Sarah 2026/5787 | Rabbi Noam Kornsgold*

A. Establishing the Order of Precedence

1. Genesis 24:17-19, 32-33, 46	1. בראשית כד:יז–יט, לב–לג, מו
(17) The servant ran toward her and said, "Please, let me sip a little water from your jar." (18) "Drink, my lord," she said, and she quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and let him drink. (19) When she had let him drink his fill, she said, "I will also draw for your camels, until they finish drinking."...(32) So the man entered the house, and the camels were unloaded. The camels were given straw and feed, and water was brought to bathe his feet and the feet of the men with him. (33) But when food was set before him, he said, "I will not eat until I have told my tale." He said, "Speak, then."...(46) She quickly lowered her jar and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels.	(יז) וַיָּרָץ הָעֶבֶד לִקְרָאתָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַגְמִיאִינִי נָא מְעַט־מַיִם מִכַּדֵּךְ: (יח) וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁתֵה אֲדֹנִי וַתְּמַהֵר וַתֹּרֶד כַּדָּהּ עַל־יָדָהּ וַתַּשְׁקֵהוּ: (יט) וַתְּכַל לְהַשְׁקֹתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר גַּם לִגְמַלֶּיךָ אֶשְׁאָב עַד אִם־כִּלּוּ לִשְׁתֹּת:...(לב) וַיָּבֹא הָאִישׁ הַבַּיְתָה וַיְפַתַּח הַגְּמַלִּים וַיִּתֵּן תֶּבֶן וּמִסְפּוֹא לַגְּמַלִּים וּמַיִם לִרְחֹץ רַגְלָיו וְרַגְלֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ: (לג) (ויישם) [וַיּוּשָׂם] לְפָנָיו לֶאֱכֹל וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֹכַל עַד אִם־דִּבַּרְתִּי דְּבָרָי וַיֹּאמֶר דַּבֵּר:...(מו) וַתְּמַהֵר וַתּוֹרֶד כַּדָּהּ מֵעָלֶיהָ וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁתֵה וְגַם־גְּמַלֶּיךָ אַשְׁקֶה וָאֵשְׁתְּ וְגַם הַגְּמַלִּים הִשְׁקָתָה:

2. Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 40a	2. תלמוד בבלי, ברכות דף מ עמוד א
And Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav, "It is forbidden for a person to eat before he gives food to his animal. As it says, 'And I will give grass in your field for your animals,' afterwards, 'And you shall eat and you shall be satisfied'" (Deuteronomy 11:15).	אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: אָסוּר לָאָדָם שֶׁיֹּאכַל קוֹדֶם שֶׁיִּתֵּן מַאֲכָל לִבְהֶמְתּוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדְךָ לִבְהֶמְתֶּךָ" וְהָדַר "וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבָעְתָּ" (דברים יא:טו).

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3. Babylonian Talmud, *Gittin* 62a	3. תלמוד בבלי, גיטין דף סב עמוד א
Thus said Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav, "It is forbidden for a person to taste anything until he gives food to his animal. As it says, 'And I will give grass in your field for your animals,' and afterwards, 'And you shall eat and you shall be satisfied'" (Deuteronomy 11:15).	הָכִי אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: אָסוּר לוֹ לְאָדָם שֶׁיִּטְעוֹם כְּלוּם עַד שֶׁיִּתֵּן מַאֲכָל לִבְהֶמְתּוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדְךָ לִבְהֶמְתֶּךָ," וַהֲדַר: "וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבָעְתָּ" (דברים יא:טו).

Discussion Questions:

- Explain the order of events as described in the Torah (source #1). Who/what was eating/drinking, and in what order?
- According to both Talmudic passages (sources #2 and #3), upon whom does the obligation fall to precede feeding one's animal before feeding oneself? Who is excluded from this obligation?
- How do both Talmudic texts use the verse from Deuteronomy 11:15 to prove their contention?
- What is different between the two presentations in Tractate *Berakhot* (source #2) and Tractate *Gittin* (source #3)? Are the passages contradictory? If so, how would you resolve the contradiction?

B. Eating, Tasting, and Drinking

4. ***Dibberot Moshe, Gittin* 10:2** [R. Moshe Feinstein, 20th century, Russia/United States]	4. דברות משה, גיטין י:ב
According to this, we can resolve the discrepancy between the passage in *Berakhot* 40a, which states, "It is forbidden for a person to eat before he gives food to his animal," implying that tasting is permitted, and the passage at the end of *ha-Nizakin* (*Gittin* 62a), which states, "It is forbidden to taste."...The explanation is that as a matter of strict law, only eating is prohibited, whereas as a matter of pious conduct (*middat ḥasidut*), one should	וניחא לפ"ז מה שבברכות דף מ' איתא אסור לאדם שיאכל קודם שיתן מאכל לבהמתו דמשמע שטעימה שרי ובסוף הנזיקין איתא אסור שיטעום...דהוא משום דמדינא אסור רק אכילה וממדת חסידות יש להחמיר אף בטעימה מאחר שאסור באכילה מדינא.

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be stringent even regarding tasting, since eating itself is prohibited as a matter of strict law.	

5. *Sefer Ḥasidim* 531 [R. Judah *he-Ḥasid*, 12th-13th centuries, Germany]	**5. ספר חסידים (מרגליות) תקלא**
Regarding thirst, when both a person and an animal are thirsty, one should give water to the person first and afterward to the animal, as it is written, “And she said to him, ‘Drink,’” and afterward, “And I will also water your camels. So I drank, and she also watered the camels” (Genesis 24:46). It is also written, “And you shall give the congregation and their livestock water to drink” (Numbers 20:8), first the congregation and afterward their livestock. With regard to eating, however, the animal takes precedence, as it is written, “The camels were given straw and feed,” and afterward, “When food was set before him” (Genesis 24:32-33). It is also written, “And I will give grass in your field for your animals,” followed by, “And you shall eat and you shall be satisfied” (Deuteronomy 11:15). Similarly, it is written, “And to every animal of the earth, etc., I have given every green plant for food” (Genesis 1:30).	לענין צמאון אדם ובבהמה יתנו לאדם תחילה ואח”כ לבהמה דכתיב ותאמר אליו גם אתה שתה ואח”כ וגם לגמליך אשקה ואשת וגם הגמלים השקתה (בראשית כד:מו), וכתיב והשקית את העדה ואת בעירם (במדבר כ:ח) העדה תחילה ואח”כ בעירם, אבל באכילה הבהמה קודמת דכתיב ויתן תבן ומספוא לגמלים ואח”כ ויישם לפניו לאכול (בראשית כד:לב–לג) וכתיב ונתתי עשב בשדך לבהמתך וכתיב ואכלת ושבעת (דברים יא:טו) וכן לאדם ולכל חית הארץ וגו׳ נתתי את כל ירק עשב לאכלה (בראשית א:ל).

***Discussion Questions*:**

- How does Rav Moshe (source #4) resolve the seeming dispute between the two Talmudic passages (sources #2 and #3)? What do you think about his resolution?
- Rav Moshe distinguishes between strict law and *middat ḥasidut*. What is the practical significance, if any, of describing a behavior as an expression of piety rather than as a legal obligation?
- What extra distinction, not mentioned in the Talmud, does *Sefer Ḥasidim* (source #5) introduce?

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- Why does *Sefer Ḥasidim* distinguish between the order of precedence vis-a-vis eating and drinking?
- Does this distinction reflect a difference in the urgency of hunger and thirst, or is it primarily an attempt to reconcile seemingly conflicting biblical passages?
- Can we apply Rav Moshe's explanation (source #4) to the drinking protocol established by *Sefer Ḥasidim* (source #5)?

C. From Obligation to Compassion

6. ***Nehar Shalom* 167:4** [R. Sabbatai Ventura, 18th century, Italy]	6. נהר שלום קסז:ד
I saw in *Sefer Beit David*, responsum 80, that the reason an animal takes precedence over a person is that one can place food before an animal in an instant, whereas if a person eats first, it takes considerably more time.	ראיתי בספר בית דוד תשובה פ' שהטעם שבהמה קודם לאדם משום דברגע משים המאכל לפני הבהמה ואם הוא אוכל קודם צריך זמן מרובה.

7. ***She'eilat Ya'avet"z* 17** [R. Jacob Emden, 18th century, Germany]	7. שאלת יעב"ץ יז
For its primary rationale is the prevention of suffering to animals *(tza'ar ba'alei ḥayyim)*, since it is dependent upon you. If you do not have for it a fixed time for feeding, a fixed and inviolable rule, it will die of hunger, for there is no one else to feed it, nor can it find food readily available before it...Therefore, the Torah imposed an obligation upon a person to provide sustenance for those that are his before he himself eats, in order to cultivate the attribute of compassion within his soul.	שעיקרו מפני צער בעלי חיים שהרי היא סמוכה עליך, ואם לא תהא לה עת קבוע לאכילה חק ולא יעבור, תמות ברעב, כי אין מי שיאכילנה, וגם היא אינה מוצאה מאכלה מזומן לפניה, לכן הטילה תורה חובה על האדם שהן שלו, לפרנסם קודם שיאכל הוא עצמו לקנות מדת רחמנות בנפשו.

Discussion Questions:

- According to *Nehar Shalom* (source #6), why must someone feed one's animal before oneself? According to *She'eilat Ya'avet"z* (source #7), why must someone feed one's animal before oneself? What is the root of the disagreement between these two explanations?

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- According to *Nehar Shalom* (source #6), would the nature of the obligation change if feeding an animal required significant time or effort? How does the story of Rebecca (source #1) provide some insight into this question?
- According to the explanation of *She'eilat Ya'avet"z* (source #7), is compassion the reason for the obligation, its intended result, or both?
- To what extent does the drinking order of operations of *Sefer Ḥasidim* (source #5) map onto the rationales of *Nehar Shalom* (source #6) and *She'eilat Ya'avet"z* (source #7)?
- How would you now understand Rebecca's decision to give Abraham's servant water before watering his camels? What rule was she following?