

# Animal Rights And Wrongs

**BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

When God wishes to choose leaders, the Rabbis teach, God looks to see how they tend sheep. Jacob, Moses, and David were all shepherds. This rabbinic teaching reminds us how important it is to be kind to those whom we do not need. But let's take it more literally: how nice are you to sheep?

Judaism is quite clear on the animal/human divide. The life of a human being is infinitely precious. The Torah does not insist on the Divine in animals or presumably it would not permit us to eat them. A vegetarian myself, I still acknowledge that the Jewish tradition never mandated that we stop eating animals.

Yet, how we treat animals is indeed a powerful measure of how we treat those who will not return the favor. A dog can't help you climb up the corporate ladder nor a cat swell your coffers. But we have an obligation to be kind to those in our power, and there is no reason at all why that ought to suddenly stop at the species barrier. The cruelty of much factory farming, the callousness of some experimentation — all these things should arouse our compassion. How do you tend sheep?