

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

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Should Jews Hunt?

As a vegetarian I have given some thought to the place of animals in Jewish tradition. Different views on the place of animals in the scheme of life is an old controversy. In the middle ages, Saadiah Gaon speculates that there is a reward for animals in the hereafter, and the later sage Maimonides ridicules the idea. Whatever their metaphysical status however, there are Talmudic stories where cruelty to animals is punished, and sparing suffering is consistent with all of Jewish teaching.

In a famous *teshuva* (response to an *halachic* question) The Nodah B'yehuda, Rabbi Ezekiel Landau (d. 1793), takes up the question of whether Jews are permitted to hunt for pleasure. It is certainly true that in the Torah, the hunter Esau, seems unfavorably contrasted with Jacob

(Gen 25:27). But what is Judaism's overall attitude to hunting for the joy of the pursuit?

Rabbi Landau's response: "I cannot comprehend how a Jew would even dream of killing animals merely for the pleasure of hunting. When the act of killing is prompted by sport, it is downright cruelty."

The prohibition of *tsar ba'alei chaim*, causing pain to living things, reminds us that human beings are stewards of creation. The test of compassion is how we treat those in our power.

The Double Standard of Religious Leadership