

# THE NATURE OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

There are many moral lessons that are derived from the story of creation as related to us in this parsha and also in next week's parsha of Noach. One of the insights that I find most relevant and instructive has to do with the relationship of humankind to the animal kingdom and the rest of the natural world.

According to Jewish tradition Adam and Chava and their immediate descendants were herbivorous, subsisting on the fruit, plants and the bounty of the earth. According to rabbinic tradition the animal kingdom imitated the human species and also refrained from killing other creatures to satisfy their own daily need for food. The lion ate as did the elephant, the leopard as did the giraffe. In short, the animal kingdom followed the lead of the human species.

It was only after the Great Flood and the new lower level of human existence that the Lord allowed humankind - Noach and his descendants - to become flesh eaters and to kill animals for human purposes and gain. The rabbis again taught us that this change in human behavior precipitated a change in animal behavior as well. Now deadly predators and killers stalked other creatures in the animal world.

Judaism sees humans as the primary creature in the process of creation. It is human behavior that influences animal behavior. Those who deny a Divine Creator have it the other way round - it is animal behavior that influences human behavior and civilization. To them, humans are not exceptional and unique creatures. A humans is just a more dangerous lion or leopard or crocodile.

The prophet Yeshayahu, in his majestic and soaring description of the utopian era - the end of days - states that the lion will lie down with the lamb and that war between nations will no longer be possible. Maimonides chooses to view this prophesy in an allegorical sense rather than in a literal sense. He interprets it as stating that large and powerful nations will no longer impose their will and wring unfair concessions from poorer and weaker countries.

This is in line with his statement that nature will not change in any given way even when the messianic era of the end of days arrives. However there are many great scholars and commentators who reject this idea of a rather bland messianic era as foretold by Maimonides. Instead, they state categorically that nature will change and that predators such as the lion and the bear will now revert

back to their original state at the time of creation and become wholly herbivorous.

Again that seems to presuppose that humans, when giving up war and violence in the messianic era will no longer eat the flesh of animals, and herbivorous humans will influence the animal world to do the same. There remains the problem of what to do then with animal sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple.

Answers are advanced but as is easily understood, the topic is esoteric and no one really knows what that world of the messiah will look like. But it is clear that Judaism preaches that the animal kingdom follows the behavior of the human race and certainly not vice versa.

Shabat shalom.

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