



*Reprinted from Moment Magazine, May/June 2013, "Ask the Rabbis" column*

***"What are our duties as Jews towards our animals?"***

***Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer***

In the Shabbat service in my Humanistic community we recite the following words:

*On Shabbat we pause to reflect upon our yesterdays and tomorrows, to renew our ties with our families and friends, to restore our energies, to refresh our spirits.*

We also say:

*On Shabbat we commemorate the first labor law ever written to guarantee workers, and even animals, a break from their toils.*

Now even though most of us live far from the farm, it is good to remind ourselves of this important ethical maxim.

Recently I read a story about a Jewish peddler traversing the American countryside who looked for shelter not only for himself, but also for his horse, not just for Shabbat, but each evening. He knew that his horse needed a refuge from the cold and the rain as much as he did. He also kept up a running conversation with his horse, essentially his best friend, long before dogs took over that role.

At least for some of us. I've aware that traditional Jewish texts cast aspersion on dogs as noisy, filthy, greedy, vicious, and even demonic. Personally, I am glad that I grew up in an Enlightened home where dogs were viewed as loyal, loving and obedient, and earned and deserved our love in exchange. These days we feel the same devotion to our two cats – Willy and Leah. And, most remarkably, they mostly seem to feel the same way to each other.

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