

# Parsha Ponders

Chayei Sarah | Nov 22, 2024 | 20 Marcheshvan 5785

## *Proper pet precedence*<sup>1</sup>

ותמהר ותורד כדה מעליה ותאמר שתה וגם-גמליך אשקה ואשת וגם הגמלים השקתה  
She hurried and lowered her jug from upon her and said, “Drink, and also I’ll give water to your camels.”  
I drank and she also gave water to my camels.<sup>2</sup>

There’s an interesting law we derive from the language of a verse in *Shema*. “I will give the grass of your fields to your animals, and you will eat and you will be satiated.”<sup>3</sup> From here<sup>4</sup> our Sages teach that it is prohibited to eat before feeding one’s animals. This is how the teaching is expressed. As a result, some<sup>5</sup> want to infer that only a prominent eating session is prohibited, meaning a bread meal, before feeding one’s animals. Having a light snack would be permitted. In other contexts, our Sages expressed forbidden *tasting*, but here they mention *eating*. This is also inferred from the verse which is the source of this prohibition, as it says “you will eat and you will be satiated”. Only eating to satiation is forbidden before feeding one’s animals. A light snack would be fine.

The problem is, this teaching is repeated in a different context<sup>6</sup>. There, the text as we have it says it is forbidden to *taste* anything before feeding one’s animal. True, there seems to be an inconsistency in the proper text, but the prominent halachic authorities<sup>7</sup> quote this version of the text. Even according to the text which says, “it’s prohibited to eat”, we can deflect the inference that tasting is permitted.

The *Sefer Chassidim* derives<sup>8</sup> from a verse in our *parsha* that even though it is prohibited to eat before feeding one’s animals, it is permitted to drink before giving a drink to one’s animals. When Eliezer went to find a mate for his master’s son Yitzchak, he brought along his camels on his journey. He quickly found Rivka, who promptly offered him water, as well as his camels. Rivka was exceedingly righteous, and we see from her behavior that drinking isn’t included in this prohibition. She first offered Eliezer, and only afterwards offered the animals.

One could say then that this is the reason why the *gemarra* says it is prohibited to *eat* before feeding one’s animals. True, one cannot even have a snack, but if it said it’s prohibited to *taste* before, I would think even drinking is included. It explicitly said eating, to exclude drinking from the prohibition. However, even the tiniest snack would be included in this prohibition<sup>9</sup>.

The problem is, as we said, the accepted text is that the *gemarra* *does* say it is forbidden to taste before feeding one’s animal. This would include drinking, precluding the innovation of the *Sefer Chassidim*. Even logically, it’s hard to discern what should be the difference. It’s harder when one is thirsty than when one is hungry. If we’re supposed to take care of our animal first, if it’s thirsty, all the more so we should give it to drink before ourselves!

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<sup>1</sup> Based on [Teshuvos Kesav Sofer Orach Chaim § 32](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Genesis 24:46](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Deuteronomy 11:15](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Berachos 40a](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Taz to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 167:7](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Gittin 62a](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Rif](#) and [Rosh](#) to [Berachos](#) *loc. cit.* This is pointed out by the *Mesoras HaShas ad. loc.*

<sup>8</sup> [Sefer Chassidim](#) § 531, brought by [Magen Avraham ad. loc.](#) § 18

<sup>9</sup> See [Kesav Sofer](#), who also addresses the other inference of “you will eat and be satiated”

How then should we understand the actions of Rivka? The renowned *Chasam Sofer* suggested the following distinction. The difference isn't food and drink. Rather, it's whose food and animal are we discussing. When it comes to my food and my animal, the animal comes first. My animal is my responsibility, and my food is there to provide for the animal before even myself. However, when someone gives me food or drink as a gift, I have no obligation to give that food or drink to the animal first. The giver has the right to decide what happens with the food or drink. Since Rivka was giving water to Eliezer, he had the right to drink first<sup>10</sup>.

Either way, we see the sensitivity the Torah has towards all creatures<sup>11</sup>. Although in many ways human beings take precedence over animals, the Torah requires us to inculcate within ourselves the attitude of thinking outside ourselves. We often are responsible for others, be it our children, students, or even animals. Sometimes our needs need to be pushed aside for those who are dependent upon us. May we always be able to learn the proper attitude from our forefathers and foremothers.

Good Shabbos

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<sup>10</sup> Tangentially, there's a somewhat similar prohibition of eating or drinking before praying ([Berachos 8b](#); [Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 89:3](#)). See [Teshuvos Beis Naftali § 8-9](#), who also derives a leniency in this matter from Rivka's behavior

<sup>11</sup> See [Rav Asher Weiss'](#) analysis if this prohibition is from the Torah, Rabbinic, or merely the behavior of the pious: [https://m.torahbase.org/pdf/Chayei Sarah he 85.pdf](https://m.torahbase.org/pdf/Chayei_Sarah_he_85.pdf)