

LIFE IS WHAT IT IS - ??

Our thoughts can be stimulated by the most intriguing events. I just had the privilege of witnessing the birth of a calf from one of our beef cattle on our farm. It made me rethink how precious life is. I watched as the mother of the calf did what all mothers of calves do. She made sure the calf was alive and ok. She set about licking him clean, preparing him for his next move in life. I saw him stand and take a drink of precious milk from his mum. Milk that provided the very nutrients he needed in the first hours of life. Without the colostrum from his mother's milk he would not survive. The mother cow removed the afterbirth so there would be nothing to attract predators that would and could attack her calf. The cow was fully focused on the job at hand. She had given this calf life, now she was engaged in the responsibility to take care of this life. She will always be there to guide her calf through the journey of life. In his early days she will devote her life to care for him knowing where he is at all times. She will never be far from his side as she takes the necessary time to eat and drink, so she can provide the milk he requires. She will attend to all his needs and if she has to leave him for a moment she will place him in a hiding place that makes him impossible to find. After a few days she will introduce him to the rest of the herd, where a well organised mothers club exists. Here the cows take it in turns to be responsible for the welfare of the calves staying with them as the other mothers move off to feed and have some rest and down time.

All this stimulated my mind to ponder the following saying: "There are two certainties in life, death and taxes". This is difficult to argue against, but there is another certainty in life and that is life itself. Once born, we are engaged in the journey of life. We begin life at the mercy of our parents, especially our mother. We don't get to choose the time or the place. We don't get to choose our sex, our features, our environment, or our primary caregivers. Our early years are the responsibility of others. It is the primary caregivers who fulfil this role. In Judaism the mother is commonly known as **akeret habayit** meaning the **mainstay or pillar of the home**. It is the mother who nurtures the child in every aspect. How she goes about this role will have a profound effect on the child and the household. It is vital for a child to have a mother that will provide, protect and nurture them in their early days. We know that if we train our children up in the way they should go, then when they are older they will not depart from it. I simply want to ask: Why is it that we humans find something so hard that cows can do with ease? Are we not meant to be the smart ones created in God's image?

Perhaps it would be far better if we followed the instructions HaShem has given us to care for our children instead of inventing our own. If primary caregivers employed HaShem's instructions, then our communities would be happy healthy ones with well organised mother's clubs.

I leave you to ponder these thoughts.

Rabbi Philip [Yochanan] Hammond. PhD.

Rabbi Hammond can be contacted at – reconciliation@jsi-edu.org