

THE SONG OF THE CAT



The cat says:

I will pursue my enemies and reach them, and I shall not turn back until they are annihilated.

Despite its small size and generally timid nature, the cat is an adept hunter. It has a flexible body, sharp teeth, and retractable claws. The thick, soft pads on its paws enable it to sneak up silently on its prey. It is exceptionally agile, capable of jumping up to six times its length, and has quick reflexes and an acute sense of balance, with an uncanny ability to right itself in the middle of a fall. The cat is further aided by its especially keen senses. It can search for prey even at night, requiring only one-sixth of the light needed for human vision. It can hear a wide range of sounds, even ultrasonic calls made by rodents. It stalks its prey with confidence, always hunting alone.

Long ago, when people realized the cat's unparalleled proficiency in hunting mice and other harmful pests, they began to domesticate cats, which spread throughout the world. The process of domestication did little to stymie the cat's hunting instinct. Even a house cat, which is fed by its master daily, will hunt at every given opportunity.

Although the domestic cat is the smallest of the cat family, it alone is beneficial to mankind, by preventing mice and other pests from destroying crops and infesting homes. Therefore, King David saw in it an expression of his own experiences eradicating the enemies of Israel which pestered them on all sides. In Perek Shira, he ascribed to the cat the verse, "**I will pursue my enemies and reach them, and I shall not turn back until they are annihilated.**"

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The Sages teach that even if the Torah would not have been given, we would have learned a basic understanding of its precepts from animals. Good character traits are not merely a mutually beneficial code of social conduct; they are part of the very nature of the world. From the cat, we learn the trait of modesty. The cat practices modesty in the private way in which it

performs its bodily functions, which is unusual for an animal that has no concept of shame. It retreats to an area out of sight to expel waste, which it thereafter covers over. It has a similar instinct to seek privacy when copulating. The cat also embodies modesty with its overall meek and reserved nature.

These aspects of modesty are regarded by the Torah as being of paramount importance. The Torah teaches that when we go out to war, in order for Hashem's Presence to rest upon us, and thereby grant us victory over our foes, we must keep our encampment clean of both waste matter and immoral behavior. With the cat's success as a hunter, it expresses this lesson. Also notable, there is a Talmudic teaching that one who conducts himself with modesty in the lavatory merits protection from snakes, which are amongst the more potent prey of the cat. Remarkably, cats are mostly immune to snake venom. Perhaps its fastidious self-grooming, with which it engages itself for about a third of its waking hours, is a further expression of its message.

Accordingly, we should do our best to keep our environment clean from both physical and spiritual contamination, allowing Hashem to rest His Divine Presence upon us. In fact, our pristine souls, breaths of God Himself, yearn for nothing more than the purest and holiest of lives. Moreover, modesty is an inherent Jewish trait, to the extent that bashfulness is the sign of a Jew. Yet, our bodies, descending from Adam who was fashioned from the earth, pull towards that which is base and lowly. It is a struggle we engage in throughout our lives. When we conduct our lives with dignity and sanctity, and focus on virtuous pursuits, our bodies become inspired and uplifted in tandem. Then, bolstered by Hashem's Presence and assured of His blessing, we can leap at our life-goals with confidence.