

Creature Comfort

October 20, 2022

**Q** With lantern flies now proliferating in central Jersey, my six-year-old and his band of friends have been catching them and dissecting them alive. Am I obligated to stop them?

**A** One is not obligated to stop children from transgressions, since they are not commanded to fulfill mitzvos. (Still, it is forbidden to directly instruct a child to transgress.) But a man carries the responsibility of *chinuch* for his own child and is obligated to prevent him from transgressing an *aveirah* once he possesses an elementary understanding of it (O.C. 343:1 and Mishnah Brurah).



*Tza'ar ba'alei chayim* (causing pain to an animal) is prohibited by Torah law (Rama C.M. 272:9). It is widely assumed that the prohibition applies to insects as well, but the Gemara's examples are livestock and other large animals, so the Ya'avetz (110) writes that only domesticable animals are included in the prohibition. Others disagree, and R' Moshe Sternbuch (Teshuvos Vehanhagos 2:726), following their approach, says that only a being whose life is strong and durable is subject to *tza'ar ba'alei chayim*, not fragile insects.

But it is nevertheless wrong to be cruel to insects. R' Moshe Sternbuch quotes the Gemara (Bava Metzia 85a) that says Rabeinu Hakadosh found his maid sweeping small rodents from the house and stopped her because (Tehillim 145:9) "*verachamav al kol ma'asav*" (His mercy is on all His works), and we are to emulate the traits of our Creator. Since this is not a full-fledged prohibition, one is not obligated to impose it upon his child. Interestingly, the Gemara (Shabbos 90b) forbids giving a nonkosher grasshopper to a child to play with because he might eat it. This may seem to apply to lantern flies as well, but the Maharshal (glosses to Rosh, *ibid.* 9:2) comments that this halacha is only applicable when kosher grasshoppers were commonly eaten. Today, since kosher grasshoppers are unknown and never eaten, a child will not become confused and eat a nonkosher insect.