

Animals in Islam

It is often said that Americans spend more money and effort on rescuing a beached whale or suffering animal than they do on the average human being. In the United States there are a large and growing number of national animal rights and protective organizations. The World Animal Net Directory, which is the world's largest database of animal protection societies, has close to 10,000 listings of organizations.

The Muslim world may not have as many animal rights and protective organizations, but within the tenets of Islam are found strong support and guidelines for the protection and treatment of animals.

In the Qur'an and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet), it is emphasized that animals be treated as humanely as any other of God's vast creation. The Qur'an goes as far to say that cruelty to animals is equivalent to cruel treatment of a human being. Kind treatment of animals is considered a good deed in the same sense that good conduct and treatment between human beings is deemed a good deed. The following Hadith illustrates this point:

The Prophet said, "While a man was walking he felt thirsty and went down a well, and drank water from it. On coming out of it, he saw a dog panting and eating mud because of excessive thirst. The man said, 'This (dog) is suffering from the same problem as that of mine.' So, he (went down the well), filled his shoe with water, caught hold of it with his teeth and climbed up and watered the dog. Allah thanked him for his (good) deed and forgave him." The people asked "O Allah's Apostle! Is there a reward for us in serving (the) animals?" He replied: "Yes, there is a reward for serving any animate (living being)." (Narrated by Abu Huraira -- Volume 3, Book 40, Number 551)

God created man to be the guardian of the Earth and gave him dominion over its inhabitants. Therefore, mankind is held responsible for an injustice he has done to any of God's creatures. The Qur'an specifies that animals function as a community in the same way that human beings do, and all creatures have their place. The Qur'an also shows that it is not only human beings that give praise and worship to God through prayers but animals as well, as evident from this passage.

"Seest thou not that it is Allah Whose praises are celebrated by all beings in the heavens and on earth, and by the birds with extended wings? Each one knows its prayer and psalm, And Allah is aware of what they do." (Qur'an 22:18)

In Islam, the Qur'an and Hadith give clear guidance on several matters concerning animals, aside from their treatment and roles. Another issue which is carefully described in the Qur'an and Hadith is the slaughter of animals for food. In Islam, one must follow strict guidelines from the Qur'an and Hadith on the process and proper way of slaughter.

The manner in which Muslims slaughter animals for food is important to discuss here because the slaughter of an animal is to be done with the least pain possible for the animal, and in the name of God. The allowance of human beings to slaughter certain animals for food is one ordained by God and comes with strict rules regarding the careful procedure. When a Muslim slaughters an animal for food, it is done in the quickest and most painless way for the animal. The animal is placed in a comfortable position facing Qibla (the direction of prayer).

When a Muslim makes his intention to slaughter an animal he must utter the name of Allah or say "Bismillah Allahu akbar" (in the name of God, God is great). The slaughtering is to be done by cutting the throat of the animal with a sharp object. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "If the blood is drained (from the animal) and the name of Allah has been mentioned over it, you may eat of it." (Reported by al-Bukhari and others) When an animal is slaughtered by a Muslim following the correct procedure, the meat is considered "halal" which means with God's blessings. "And do not eat of that over which the name of Allah has not been mentioned, for truly that is impiety..." (6:121)

The religion of Islam provides mankind with many answers and guidance on all issues, and the humane treatment of animals is certainly not one to be taken lightly by believing Muslims. The large number of animal rights and protective organizations found throughout the world could in general be seen as a signifier of man's ultimate realization of his place in the world. Perhaps it is man's way of preserving a part of creation that should be left free of the corruptions of mankind. Whatever the case, animals are beautiful creations from God and should be treated as such. As Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said "Whoever is kind to the creatures of God is kind to himself."

by Anayat Durrani

Islam and animals



Camel train

"There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you..."

Muslims believe that:

- all living creatures were made by Allah
- Allah loves all animals
- animals exist for the benefit of human beings
- animals must be treated with kindness and compassion

Muslims are instructed to avoid:

- treating animals cruelly
- over-working or over-loading animals
- neglecting animals
- hunting animals for sport

- hunting for food is permitted if the animals are killed humanely
- cutting the mane or tail of a horse
- animal fighting as a sport
- factory farming

Using animals is permitted

The Qur'an explicitly states that animals can be used for human benefit.

It is God who provided for you all manner of livestock, that you may ride on some of them and from some you may derive your food. And other uses in them for you to satisfy your heart's desires. It is on them, as on ships, that you make your journeys.

Muhammad and animals

There are many stories and sayings of the Prophet (pbuh) that demonstrate his concern for the welfare of animals.

Once someone travelling with the Prophet took some eggs from a nest, causing the mother bird great grief. The Prophet saw this and told the man to return the eggs.

When the Prophet was asked if Allah rewarded acts of charity to animals, he replied: "Yes, there is a reward for acts of charity to every beast alive."

The Prophet said "Whoever kills a sparrow or anything bigger than that without a just cause, Allah will hold him accountable on the Day of Judgment." The Prophet explained that a killing would be for a just cause if it was for food.

Ritual slaughter

Muslim ritual slaughter

Muslims are only allowed to eat meat that has been killed according to Sharia law.

This method of killing is often attacked by animal rights activists as barbaric blood-thirsty ritual slaughter.

Muslims disagree. They say that Islamic law on killing animals is designed to reduce the pain and distress that the animal suffers.

Islamic slaughter rules

These are the rules for Islamic slaughter:

- the slaughterer must be a sane adult Muslim
- the slaughterer must say the name of God before making the cut
 - The name of God is said in order to emphasise the sanctity of life and that the animal is being killed for food with God's consent
- the animal must be killed by cutting the throat with the single continuous back and forth motion of a sharp knife
 - the cut must sever at least three of the trachea, oesophagus, and the two blood vessels on either side of the throat
 - the spinal cord must not be cut
- animals must be well treated before being killed
- animals must not see other animals being killed
- the knife must not be sharpened in the animal's presence
- the knife blade must be free of blemishes that might tear the wound
- the animal must not be in an uncomfortable position
- the animal must be allowed to bleed out

Is this a cruel way to kill an animal?

Some experts say that the animal killed in this way does not suffer if the cut is made quickly and cleanly enough, because it loses consciousness before the brain can perceive any pain.

Other experts disagree and say that the animal remains conscious long enough to feel severe pain.

Pre-stunning to prevent pain

Secular animal slaughter involves pre-stunning animals so that they are unconscious before they are killed. Until recently Muslim law has not permitted pre-stunning.

Muslims feared that pre-stunning might reduce the amount of blood that could drain from the carcass and also because they thought that the animal was sometimes killed by the stunning.

But recently (2004) Masood Khawaja, president of the Halal Food Authority, stated that it was not against halal practice to "immobilise" animals, provided they were not actually killed before their throats are cut.

Halal meat imported to the UK from New Zealand is stunned before slaughter. Masood Khawaja said that this was acceptable to Muslims, provided the religious rites were observed.

It is acceptable as long as the animal is not dead prior to slaughter, all flowing blood has been drained, and a Muslim has done the ritual slaughter.

Experiments on animals

According to Al Hafiz B A Masri, using animals for research may be permitted in Islam. The animals must not suffer pain or mutilation and there must be a good reason for the experiment:

Actions shall be judged according to intention. Any kind of medical treatment of animals and experiments on them becomes ethical and legal or unethical and illegal according to the intention of the person who does it.