

Treatment of Animals

Description: Islamic perspective on compassion to animals.

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Published on 25 Feb 2013 - Last modified on 25 Jun 2019

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Objectives

- To learn that animal treatment can earn rewards or sins.
- To understand the Islamic perspective on kind treatment and mistreatment of animals.
- To appreciate that slaughtering an animal by following certain humane guidelines is allowed by Allah.
- To appreciate that killing harmful animals is allowed in Islam.

Arabic Terms

- *Dhabh* - prescribed Islamic ritual slaughter of animals deemed fit for Muslims to eat.

Does Islam teach us to view animals as friends or mere products for our use? Do animals have any rights to be treated in a particular way? What duty, if any, do human beings have towards animals?

Long before the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the world's oldest animal welfare group, Islam prescribed kindness to animals and raised animal cruelty to the level of a sin - an action that displeases the Creator.

A human being is held responsible by Allah for how he treats an animal. Treating an animal can be a source of reward from Allah or a source of punishment. People asked the Prophet of Allah, 'Messenger of Allah, is there any reward for us in the treatment of animals?' The Prophet said, 'There is a reward for serving any living being.'

The Prophet of Mercy 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 what I was suffering from!' So he (went down the well), filled his shoe with water, caught hold of it with his teeth and climbed up and gave the water to the dog. Allah rewarded him for his (good) deed and forgave him". The people asked, "O Messenger of Allah! Is there a reward for us in serving (the) animals?" He replied, "Yes, there is a reward for serving any living being". (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*)

Allah's Prophet said, "While a dog was going around a well and was about to die of thirst, a prostitute from the Children of Israel saw it. She took off her shoe filled it with water and gave it to drink. So Allah forgave her on account of that good deed." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

A person can also go to Hell for mistreating an animal. 'A woman entered Hell because of a cat which she tied up and did not feed, nor did she allow it to eat of the vermin of the earth.' (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*)

One time the Prophet entered a garden belonging to the Ansar - the original residents of Madina. A camel saw the Prophet and began to weep. Allah's Prophet went to it and petted its head until it calmed down and then the Prophet went to find its owner. The Prophet told the owner, '**Do you not fear Allah with respect to this animal which Allah has placed in your possession? It has complained to me that you keep it hungry and load it with heavy burdens, which tire it out.**' (*Abu Dawud*)

On another occasion, a man took an egg from a bird's nest and this act caused the mother-bird to go around the Prophet's head. He inquired who has hurt the mother by taking her egg. Upon finding the man who did it, the Prophet instructed him, 'Put it back out of mercy to the bird.' (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari in Adab al-Mufrad*)

The Prophet had declared, 'The one who does not show mercy will not be shown mercy.' (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

At the same time animals have been created for the benefit of man. Allah has allowed human beings to eat from the good things He has prepared for them and that includes the meat of certain animals. In doing so, Islam has laid out humane guidelines for the ritual slaughter (known as *dhabh* in Arabic). Islam requires that the instrument used for slaughtering the animal be extremely sharp. Another guideline is not to slaughter an animal in view of other animals about to be slaughtered. Allah's Messenger said, '**Whoever shows mercy even to an animal he is slaughtering will be shown mercy on the Day of Judgment.**' (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari in Adab al-Mufrad*).

In addition to the humane slaughter of animals made permissible for Muslims to eat by Allah, it is also permissible to kill harmful animals, such as rabid dogs, wolves, poisonous snakes, scorpions, and mice. Even so, they must not be killed with cruelty and their suffering should not be prolonged.

In summary, a Muslim must observe the following etiquettes in treating animals:

1. Feed them and give them water to drink.
2. Treat the animal with compassion.
3. Put the animal to be slaughtered at ease and observe the guidelines set in Islamic Law for the humane treatment of that animal.
4. Never torture an animal, mutilate it, or burn it with fire.

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