

Animals in Islam

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Abstract

With roots beginning in 7th century AD Islam (literally “submission”) is one of the world’s largest monotheistic traditions. Originating with Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullāh, Islam is centered within the Qur’anic text believed by Muslims to be the verbatim word of God spoken through the Prophet. Practitioners of Islam, called Muslims, not only look to the Qur’an but to the teachings and examples of Muhammad in the Sunnah and Hadith. Muhammad is believed to be the last prophet of Islam living between 570 and 632 bc. The majority of Muslims fall into one of two denominations. Sunni (80%-90%) and Shia (10-20%). Islam is the second largest religion and has followers throughout the world. Indonesia holds largest Muslim population at 13% with the rest being divided throughout South Asia, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. Islam continues to be one of the fastest growing religions and today there are roughly 1.5 billion Muslims throughout the world. While Islam is both a vast and complex religion, there are five basic tenants that are viewed as obligatory to all believers. These are often called the Pillars of Islam and their practice is seen as a commitment to the faith. They are: 1. Shahada (creed) 2. Salah (ritual prayer) 3. Sawm (fasting during the month of Ramadan) 4. Zakat (alms giving) 5. Hajj (pilgrimage) While there is no “governing body” that can speak to all believers, each denomination has various scholars that speak to the text in order to guide Muslims through the modern world. Although both the Sunnis and Shi’ites have Imams (or “leaders”), they are viewed as having a much greater role within the Shi’ite tradition.

Keywords: Quran Majeed, Animal, Islam.

Introduction

The Qur'an Majeed states that man has dominion over animals: "He (God) it is Who made you vicegerents on earth." (Qur'an 35:39), but makes clear that this responsibility is not unconditional and states what happens to those who misuse their freedom of choice and fail

to conform to the conditions that limit this responsibility: "then We reduce him (to the status of) the lowest of the low." (Qur'an 95:4,5) "...they are those whom Allah has rejected and whom He has condemned....because they served evil" (Qur'an 5:63). "...they have hearts wherewith they fail to comprehend, and eyes wherewith they fail to see, and ears wherewith they fail to hear....Such (humans) are far astray from the right path. (Qur'an 7:179).

There are...people who take the concept of man's dominion over animals as a licentious freedom to break all the established moral rules designed to protect animal rights. The Imam Hazrat Ali has this to say about (those who misuse their authority over the weak): "A savage and ferocious beast is better than a wicked and tyrant ruler. Again, the Qur'an Majeed urges in remonstrance: "And be not like those who say, 'we have heard', while they do not hearken. Verily, the vilest of all creatures, in the sight of Allah, are those deaf and dumb ones who do not use their rationality." (Qur'an 8:21, 22).

Animals Are Our Teachers

Muslims have often been advised by their mentors to learn lessons from some species of animal. For example, the Imam Hazrat Ali gives this piece of advice: "Be like a bee; anything he heats is clean, anything he drops is sweet and any branch he sits upon does not break." The Holy Prophet Muhammad(s) puts it in these words: "All creatures are like a family (Ayal) of God: and he loves the most those who are the most beneficent to His family. The Qur'an Majeed says: "There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you...". (Qur'an 6:38). The Holy Prophet(s) used to say: "Whoever is kind to the creatures of God, is kind to himself." (Wisdom of Prophet Mohammad(s); Muhammad Amin; The Lion Press, Lahore, Pakistan; 1945).

According to the learned commentators of the Qur'an Majeed....animals all live a life, individual and social, like members of a human commune. In other words, they are like communities in their own right and not in relation to human species or its values. These details have been mentioned to emphasize the point that even those species which are generally considered as insignificant or even dangerous deserve to be treated as communities; that their intrinsic and not perceptible values should be recognized, irrespective of their "usefulness or their apparent harmfulness.

The significant point to note is that, physically, man has been put in the same bracket as all other species. The following Hadith leaves no ambiguity in the scene in which the Qur'an Majeed uses the word 'community': Abu Huraira reported the Prophet(s) as telling of an

incident that happened to another prophet in the past. This prophet was stung by an ant and, in anger, he ordered the whole of the ants' nest to be burned. At this, God reprimanded this prophet in these words: 'because one ant stung you, you have burned a whole community which glorified Me'. (Bukhari and Muslim).

The Islamic law (Shari'ah) concerning the rights of animals are very elaborate and explicit. In the case of the ants' nest, the following Juristic Rule would apply: Any damage or a damaging retaliation for a damage is forbidden.

Human/Animal Communication

There are numerous legends about the Muslim saints and other holy men who could talk to animals. However, for lack of authentication, they are taken generally as mere fables. There is one statement in the Qur'an Majeed, though, which proves that man had acquired the lore of speech with animals as early as the time of King Solomon. Perhaps in those days human civilization was more in tune with nature than it is today. The Qur'anic verse runs like this: "And Solomon was David's heir, and he said: 'O ye people! We have been taught the speech of birds..." (Qur'an 27:16).

The Qur'an Majeed tells us that God actually communicates with animals, as the following verse shows: And your Lord revealed to the bee, saying: 'make hives in the mountains and in the trees, and in (human) habitations'. (Qur'an 16:68).

The Qur'an Majeed uses the same Arabic word "Wahi" for God's revelation to all His Prophets, including the Holy Prophet Muhammad(s), as it has been used in the case of the bee....it proves the basic fact that animals have a sufficient degree of psychic endowment to understand and follow God's messages - a faculty which is higher than instinct and intuition.

Animals Have Consciousness

Many passages from the Qur'an Majeed and Ahadith state that all animals are endowed with spirit and mind and "...there is ample evidence in the Qur'an Majeed to suggest that animals' consciousness of spirit and mind is of a degree higher than mere instinct and intuition. We are told in the Qur'an Majeed that animals have a cognizance of their Creator and, hence, they pay their obeisance to Him by adoration and worship: 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 24:41).

It is worth noting the statement that 'each one knows its prayer and psalm'. The execution of a voluntary act, performed consciously and intentionally, requires a faculty higher than that of instinct and intuition. Lest some people should doubt that animals could have such a faculty, the following verse points out that it is human ignorance that prevents them from understanding this phenomenon: The seven heavens and the earth and all things therein declare His glory. There is not a thing but celebrates His adoration; and yet ye mankind! ye understand not how do they declare His glory...(Qur'an 17:44).

The following verse tells us how all the elements of nature and all the animal kingdom function in harmony with God's laws; it is only some humans who infringe and, thus, bring affliction on themselves. The Qur'an Majeed dwells on this theme repeatedly to emphasize the point that man should bring himself into harmony with nature, according to the laws of God -- as all other creation does: Seest thou not that unto Allah payeth adoration all things that are in the heavens and on earth -- the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the animals, and a large number among mankind? However, there are many (humans) who do not and deserve chastisement...(Qur'an 22:18).

A Dutch team of scientists has found scientific evidence of mental suffering in animals. They have discovered that, like the human brain, an animal's brain too releases a substance called 'Endorphin' to cope with emotional distress and pain, caused by frustration or conflict.

Meat Eating

Forbidden to you are the dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been ”slaughtered as a sacrifice for other than Allah...”iv

Historically, many pre-Islamic Arab cultures were meat eaters. This was often necessary for survival in harsh desert climates and was a tradition left over from earlier Pagan groups. Today the majority of the worlds Muslims continue to eat meat however; they are often restricted by religious doctrine to the kinds of meat they eat and how it is prepared. Many people are familiar with the terms Halal and Haram and their importance when understanding Muslim dietary restrictions. Haram, meaning forbidden, is used throughout religious texts to describe something that is prohibited by the Muslim faith.

The opposite term, halal, describes something that is legal and is usually restricted to dietary laws and forbidden substances. Luckily the majority of the Qu'ran designates what foods are halal or haram however there can be differences in belief within schools and geographical regions. The majority of foods are considered halal except for the following, which are considered haram:

(Meat from swine (including pork products and by-products-

The majority of carnivorous animals-

.Animals without extended ears such as snakes, reptiles, insects etc-

Alcohol or other Intoxicants-

Blood and blood by-products-

Any food contaminated by any of the above-

Slaughter

Verily Allah has enjoined goodness (ihsan) on everything; when you kill, kill in a good way ” and when you slaughter, slaughter in a good way. So everyone of you should sharpen his knife, and let the slaughtered animal die comfortably.”v

Islam prescribes that Muslims only eat animals that have gone through the process of ritual slaughter (dhabb). While the Qur'an does not necessarily require this method of ritual slaughter, such techniques were prescribed by Muhammad to comply with statements concerning food made within the Qur'an.

There are several parts to the process of ritual slaughter however not all are agreed upon by the entire Muslim community. Many Muslims agree that a mentally stable adult Muslim must conduct the slaughter and a prayer to Allah must be read before the killing. This is seen as a way to thank God and remember that you are killing one of the creations he put on earth. However, some Muslims consider it acceptable to eat animals slaughtered by the “People of the Book” which would include Jews and Christians who might not say such a prayer.

Great consideration is taken for the animal before it is to be slaughtered. Muhammad stipulated that the blade must be sharp so as to kill in one swipe and that no animal is to be

slaughtered in front of another. He also noted that the blade should remain hidden until the last moment and that the animal's throat be cut on the large arteries of the neck but not sever the spinal chord. Since the consumption of blood is considered haram, the animal must be left until all the blood has drained from its body. These methods are within the practice of Islam and ensure that the animal dies quickly and with the least amount of pain as possible. Practices such as stunning an animal to induce unconsciousness are frowned upon by many Muslims and the meat is often considered haram.

Is Animal Suffering Fate (Allah's Will) or the Fault of Humans?

Many people misunderstand the real sense of the doctrine of 'pre-destination', or 'fate' (Qaza wa Qadr or Qismat). The literal meaning of 'pre-destination', in the Islamic sense, is: 'pre-fixing the fate of someone or something', in the sense of determining the capacity, capability, endowment, function and other faculties. The Qur'an Majeed uses the Arabic word 'taqdir' meaning 'destiny' even for the decreed orbits of the planetary motions; for inorganic substances; as well as for animated creatures, including human beings. Within those pre-fixed limitations, however, conditions could be changed for the better, suffering could be avoided or lessened by human effort and skill.

Experimentation on Animals

Scientific and pharmaceutical experiments on animals are being done to find cures for diseases, most of which are self-induced by our own disorderly lifestyle. All human problems - physical, mental or spiritual - are of our own creation and our wounds self-inflicted. By no stretch of imagination can we blame animals for any of our troubles and make them suffer for it. All this (experiments), and much more, is being done to satisfy human needs, most of which are non-essential, fanciful, wasteful and for which alternative, humane products are easily available. To kill animals to satisfy the human thirst for inessentials is a contradiction in terms within the Islamic tradition. Let us hope a day will dawn when the great religious teachings may at last begin to bear fruit; when we shall see the start of a new era, when man accords to animals the respect and status they have long deserved and for so long have been denied.

Vivisection did not exist at the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad(s) and therefore, was not specifically cited in the law (Shari'ah). Guidance on such issues comes from analogy and inference (Ijtihad). One of the main excuses for all kinds of cruelties to animals is selfish

interest or human needs. Let us see how the juristic Rules define 'needs' and 'interests' and judge these cases according to those definitions. The basic Juristic Rule (qaidatul-fiqhiyah) that would apply to pecuniary experiments is: "One's interest or need does not annul other's right" (al-idtiraru la yabtil haqqal-ghair).

Needs are classified in three categories: necessities (al-Masalih ad-darurfyah) without which life could not be sustained; needs required for comfort and easement from pain or any kind of distress, or for improving the quality of life (al-Masalih-al-haiya); and luxuries (al-Masalih at tahsiniyah) desirable for enjoyment or self-indulgence.

Some rules that can be applied to these needs to determine whether experiments on animals would be allowed: What allures to the forbidden, is itself forbidden. (Ma'ad'a ela al-harame, fahuwaharamun"). This rule implies that material gains, including food, obtained by wrongful acts, such as unnecessary experiments on animals, become unlawful.

No damage can be put right by a similar or a greater damage." (Ad-dararu la yuzalu be mislehi au be dararin akbaro minho). When we damage our health and other interests by our own follies, we have no right to make the animals pay for it by inflicting similar or greater damage on them, such as by doing unnecessary experiments to find remedies for our self-induced ailments.

Resort to alternatives, when the original becomes undesirable. (Iza ta'zuro al-aslu, yusaru ila l-badle). This rule places a great moral responsibility on experimenters and medical students to find alternatives.

The basic point to understand about using animals in science is that the same moral, ethical and legal codes should apply to the treatment of animals as are being applied to humans. According to Islam, all life is sacrosanct and has a right of protection and preservation.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad(s) laid so much emphasis on this point that he declared: "There is no man who kills {even} a sparrow or anything smaller, without its deserving it, but God will question him about it." (Narrated by Ibn 'Omar and by Abdallah bin Al-As. An-Nasai, 7:206,239, Beirut. Also recorded by Musnad al-Jami - Ad-Darimi; Delhi, 1337. Also, Mishkat al-Masabih; English translation by James Robson, in four volumes; Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, Pakistan; 1963 (hereafter referred to as 'Robson)).

He who takes pity {even} on a sparrow and spares its life, Allah will be merciful on him on the Day of Judgement. (Narrated by Abu Umama. Transmitted by Al-Tabarani).

Like all other laws of Islam, its laws on the treatment of animals have been left open to exceptions and are based on the criterion: "Actions shall be judged according to intention." (Al-A'amalo binniyah)...If the life of an animal can be saved only by the amputation of a part of its body, it will be a meritorious act in the eyes of God to do so.

There is no doubt that the Islamic prohibition against the cutting or injuring of live animals, especially when it results in pain and suffering, does apply to modern vivisection in science. We are able to support this interpretation of the Islamic teachings by referring not only to the above-quoted representative Traditions (Ahadith), but also to the Qur'an Majeed. In the verses quoted below, the principle is expressed that any interference with the body of a live animal which causes pain or disfigurement is contrary to the Islamic precepts. These verses were revealed in condemnation of the pagan superstitious custom that she-camels, ewes or nanny goats which had brought forth a certain number of young in a certain order should have their ears slit, be let loose, and dedicated to idols. Such customs were declared by the Qur'an Majeed as devilish acts, in these words: It was not Allah who instituted the practice of a slit-ear-she-camel, or a she-camel let loose for free pasture, or a nanny-goat let loose..."(Qur'an 5:106). "Allah cursed him {Satan} for having said: 'I shall entice a number of your servants, and lead them astray, and I shall arouse in them vain desires; and I shall instruct them to slit the ears of cattle; and most certainly, I shall bid them - so that they will corrupt Allah's creation'. Indeed! He who chooses the Devil rather than Allah as his patron, ruins himself manifestly. (Qur'an 4:118, 119).

Fur and Other Uses of Animals

There is a large-scale carnage of fur-bearing animals....to satisfy human needs, most of which are non-essential, fanciful, wasteful and for which alternative, humane products are easily available....The excuse that such things are essential for human needs is no longer valid. Modern technology has produced all these things in synthetic materials and they are easily available all over the world, in some cases at a cheaper price.

Some juristic rules that apply are: "That which was made permissible for a reason, becomes unpermissible by the absence of that reason." (Ma jaza le uzrin, batala be zawalehi) and "All false excuses leading to damage should be repudiated." (Sadduz-zarae al-mua'ddiyate ela-l-

fasad). These rules leave no excuse for the Muslims to remain complacent about the current killing of animals in their millions for their furs, tusks, oil, and various other commodities.

The Qur'an Majeed does mention animals as a source of warm clothing (Qur'an 16:5), but modern-day clothing made of synthetic fibers is just as warm as clothing made from animal skins and makes clothing from animal skins unnecessary. The Qur'an refers only to the skins and furs of domesticated cattle which either die their natural death or are slaughtered for food. Today, millions of wild animals are killed commercially just for their furs and skins, while their carcasses are left to rot. Fourteen centuries ago Islam realized the absurdity of this wasteful and cruel practice and passed laws to stop it in the following Ahadith:

The Holy Prophet Muhammad(s) prohibited the use of skins of wild animals. (Narrated by Abu Malik on the authority of his father. Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi as recorded in Garden of the Righteous - Riyadh as-Salihin of Imam Nawawi; translated by M.Z. Kahn; Curzon Press, London, 1975; [hereafter referred to as Riyadh]; Hadith No. 815, p. 160).

The Holy Prophet(s) said: 'Do not ride on saddles made of silk or leopard skins.' (Narrated by Mu'awiah. Abu Dawud; (see Riyadh, Ref. No. 28); Hadith No. 814, p. 160).

Animal Fights

All kinds of animal fights are strictly forbidden in Islam. Out of the numerous such injunctions, one would suffice here: God's Messenger(s) forbade inciting animals to fight each other. (Narrated by Abdullah bin Abbas. Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi and Abu al-Darda; recorded in Riyadh (Ref. No. 28); Hadith No. 1606; p. 271. Also 'Robson' (Ref. No. 15), p. 876).

Like camel-humps, fat-tails of sheep and target-animals (mujaththema), the meat of animals who die as a result of fights is also declared in Islam as unlawful to eat (haram). For example, the Spaniards hold fiestas on special occasions to eat the bull killed by a matador.

References

- 1) The holy Quran
- 2) Al-Imams's sayings