

## Islam and Animals

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### Abstract

The sources quoted in this book are the Qur'an Majeed, the first source of Islamic law (Shari'ah); Hadith or Tradition, the second source; and Ijtihad, inference by analogy, the third source. Together, these three sources make up Islamic case law or 'Juristic Rules' (qawaidat-ul-fiqhiyah) that are the guidelines to be followed for any legal question. Many issues relating to animals, such as vivisection, factory farming, and animal rights did not exist 14 centuries ago and therefore, no specific laws were passed about them. To decide on issues developed in recent times, Islamic Jurisprudence (fiqh) has left it to Muslim Jurists (fuqaha'a) to use their judgement by inference and analogy, based on the three above-mentioned sources.

**Keywords:** Islam, Animals, Shi'ite.

### Introduction

Where Sunnis look to the Imam as one who leads communal services, Shi'ites believe that Imams are the rightful successors of Muhammad and possess divine knowledge and authority. In Sunni Islam Imams are perceived as religious scholars often studying the schools of jurisprudence (fiqh), the science of Hadith, or the schools of theology (Aqidah). Because of this they are able to comment on religious text but do not possess divine authority in the way Shi'ite Imams do. Early experience with animals One of the most important factors when discussing attitudes towards nonhuman animals is the consideration of historical and cultural influences. Unlike some religions, practitioners of Islam are spread throughout the world living in an array of geographical regions and abiding to a varying set of cultural norms. Thus, it is important not only to examine these cultural differences, but to remember that there is no consistent Islamic view on nonhuman animals that can be seen throughout the Muslim world. A religion born out of the desert, the roots of Islam began in a society that relied heavily on animals for daily living. As a largely nomadic culture most early Muslims used animals for transportation and as a source of food. Often living in severe desert climate, a vegetarian diet would have been difficult to both obtain and sustain throughout the year.

History has shown that animals were important throughout pre-Islamic Arabia. While there is some debate as to whether these individuals practiced totemism or animalism, it is clear that many early tribes prohibited the eating of certain animals and often attributed human characteristics to qualities seen among animals.

### **In The Qu'ran**

Since Islam is such a text-bound religion it is important to understand the place that animals hold within the Qu'ran. Numerous types of animals are mentioned throughout the text and out of 114 sūras, or Qu'ranic chapters, there are six named after animals. These include the Cow (sūra 2), the Cattle (sūra 6), the Bee (sūra 16), the Ant (sūra 28), the Spider (sūra 29) and the Elephant (sūra 105). Although both humans and non-human animals are said to be creations of God, humans are often distinguished as “the speaking animal” (hayawān al-nātiq). While this may be true, the Qu'ran also acknowledges that nonhuman animals have the ability to speak. This can be seen in sūra 27:16: “Solomon succeeded David. He said: ‘Know, you people, we have been taught the tongue of birds and endowed with all good things. Surely this is the signal favour.’” The one major distinction that the Qu'ran makes between human and non-human animals is the possession of taqwa or “volition”. Since only humans possess this they are made responsible for their actions in a way that non-human animals are not. Other than this, the Qu'ran makes clear that animals possess many human and divine qualities such as the ability to receive Divine revelation, to praise God and to have souls (nafs). There are also several hadiths in which animals are seen praying and speaking to various Imams and it has been said by some Islamic scholars that animals will be resurrected on the Day of Judgement along with humans. However, the Qu'ran also specifies a type of hierarchy of creation in which humans are referred to as khalīfa. While the literal translation of this word is “successor,” many modern Islamic scholars interpret it as “vice-regent” citing the passage: “I am setting on the earth a vice-regent (khalīfa)” (Q 2:30) Thus while non-human animals are subjected to the needs of humans, the role of humans is not to be an exploiter but a steward. Indeed the Qu'ran states that animals are created for human benefit (“and he has created cattle for you...” Q: 16:5) but also makes clear that all things belong to Allah who has created the earth for all living beings. “This she-camel of God is a sign to you; so leave her to graze in God’s earth, and let her come to no harm, or you shall be seized with grievous punishment.” (Q 7:73) Much of this compassion towards animals is seen throughout the hadiths reminding Muslims of Muhammad's interest in non-

human animals. The hadiths contain many stories surrounding the care and treatment of animals and the rewards for compassion. One story concerns a man drinking from a well who upon seeing a thirsty dog dips his shoe back into the well and holds it out for the dog to drink. Upon seeing this Muhammads disciples asked if there is a reward for taking care of beasts. To which Muhammad replied: "There are rewards for benefiting every animal having a moist liver"<sup>ii</sup> [i.e. to all living creatures.

Muhammad enjoined many of his followers to show kindness towards animals and only use them for necessary purposes. In one hadith he is seen reprimanding several of his followers for sitting idly on their camels in the market saying

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"Do not treat the backs of your animals as pulpits, for God Most high has made them subject to you only to convey you to a place which you could not otherwise have reached without much difficulty."<sup>iii</sup>

Muhammad forbade hunting for sport and the branding or hitting of animals in the face. However, he did allow the killing of certain animals such as poisonous snakes, mice and scorpions.

### **Animals and Humans Must Share Natural Resources**

Once it has been established that each species of animal is a "community" like the human community, it stands to reason that each and every creature on earth has, as its birth-right, a share in all the natural resources. In other words, each animal is a tenant-in-common on this Planet with human species.

But "Man has always been in competition with animals for food, and the problem has been aggravated in the current world situation, especially because of modern agrarian mismanagement." The Qur'an Majeed has tried to allay this fear of man by reassuring him that God is not only the Creator but also the Sustainer and the Nourisher of all that He creates. However, the Qur'an Majeed lays down the condition that human beings, like all other creatures, shall have to work for their food, and that their share would be proportionate to their labor: "And that man shall have nothing, but what he strives for." (Qur'an 53:39)

The Qur'an Majeed repeatedly emphasizes that food and other resources of nature are there to be shared equitably with other creatures. Below are just a few of numerous such verses: Then let man look at his food: how We pour out water in showers, then turn up the earth into furrow-slices and cause cereals to grow therein - grapes and green fodder; olive-trees and palm-trees; and luxuriant orchards, fruits and grasses....as Provision for you as well as for your cattle. (Qur'an 80:24-32).

Again, in the following verses, the bounties of nature are enumerated with the accent on animals' share in all of them. Everything was created for human AND non-human animals: And He it is Who sends the winds, as glad tidings heralding His mercy. And We send down pure water from the clouds, that We may give life thereby, by watering the parched earth, and slake the thirst of those We have created - both the animals and the human beings in multitude. (Qur'an 25-48,49).

And do they not see that We meander water to a barren land and sprout forth from it crops, whereof their cattle as well as they themselves eat? Will they take no notice of it? (Qur'an 32:27).

We {God} brought forth from it {the earth} its waters and its pastures, and established the mountains firm - as a source of provision for you and for your animals. (Qur'an 79:31-33).

There is no doubt that the message includes all animals, not just domestic livestock, in whose welfare we have a vested interest: There is no moving creature on earth, but Allah provides for its sustenance... (Qur'an 11:6).

And the earth: He {God} has assigned to all living creatures. (Qur'an 55:10).

The essence of Islamic teachings on 'Animal Rights' is that depriving animals of their fair share in the resources of nature is so serious a sin in the eyes of God that it is punishable by punitive retribution: The Qur'an Majeed describes how the people of Thamud demanded that the Prophet Saleh(s) show them some sign to prove he was a prophet of God. (The tribe of Thamud were the descendants of Noah).

At the time of this incident, the tribe was experiencing a dearth of food and water and was, therefore, neglecting its livestock. It was revealed to Prophet Saleh(s) to single out a she-camel as a symbol and ask his people to give her her fair share of water and fodder. The people of Thamud promised to do that but, later, killed the camel. As a retribution, the tribe was annihilated. This incident has been mentioned in the Qur'an Majeed many times in different contexts. (Qur'an 7:73, 11:64, 26:155, 156; 54:27-31).

## **Conclusion**

When examining modern issues of animal protection it is important to remember that these concerns did not exist at the time that Islamic ideology was founded. This means that religious law and belief surrounding modern issues, such as vivisection and factory farming, have not been laid out in traditional religious text. Consequently modern Islamic scholars must rely on sources of Islamic law (the Qur'an and Hadith) to make inferences regarding modern practices. Ijtihad, or inference by analogy, is similar to our concept of jurisprudence and allows Islamic clerics to rule on contemporary issues that Muslims face. This process is often called upon when discussing the concept of vivisection, which did not exist in its contemporary form fourteen centuries ago. Fortunately, Islamic scholars have examined religious teaching in regards to this subject and many have agreed on several points.

The killing or harming of an animal to satisfy what is unessential to humans is seen to be in violation with Islamic teachings. However, research may be justified in social and biological sciences if humans or other beings would benefit through such research. Citing Muhammad many scholars note that "actions shall be judged according to intention" vii and that the ethicality of an act is based on the intention of the individual who performs it.

## **References**

1) The holy Quran

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