



## ANIMAL RIGHTS

### حقوق الحيوان

#### Objectives >>>

#### Students should:

- Understand that Islam has rules and rights related to animals
- Discuss that human rights always take priority over animal rights
- Understand that while we can use animals for their proper use we are not allowed to torture or hurt animals
- Understand that Islam encourages us to take care of animals
- Discuss the impermissibility of having dogs as pets

## Animal Rights

### INTRODUCTION

Islam not only sets out rights for humans, but for all creatures. Animals have a number of rights in Islam and these rights must be observed. As Muslims, we have a responsibility towards all other creatures. This includes domestic animals that people use on farms and common household pets.

The first right that animals have is that they should not be abused or mistreated. Unfortunately, in many communities, young people abuse animals (e.g. throwing stones at birds or dogs etc...) for fun. This is something that is not allowed in Islam. This is definitely not allowed in Islam.

### SOCIAL ISLAM

### LEVEL 3

## THE HIERARCHY OF CREATION

All creatures are equal when looked at from the aspect of being the slaves of God. However, in relation to each other, there is a hierarchy among the creatures. Humankind were the last creatures to be created and so the rest of creation has the purpose of serving humans. Human life takes priority over animal life, and there is no dispute about this. If we are faced with a situation where we have to save a human life at the cost of an animal's life, of course we must give priority to the human life.

### USING ANIMALS FOR THEIR PURPOSE

Animals have served human beings in different ways over time. Some of the examples of ways we use animals are as follows:

**Transport** – Man has benefitted a lot from animals when it comes to transport. The most common animals used for transport have been horses, donkeys and camels. Camels are very useful in the desert and for carrying goods. In this aspect, it is important to know that Islam does not allow over burdening the animal by placing too much weight on its back. This amounts to cruelty to the animal and is forbidden in Islam.

**Food** – Islamic food laws allow Muslims to eat meat. Certain animals are not allowed to be used as food, and when slaughtering, several guidelines must be followed to minimize the animal's suffering. For examples, animals that are to be slaughtered must be given water and a sharp knife must be used to make the process fast and less painful.

**Pets** – In Islam we are allowed to keep certain animals as pets. A Muslim who chooses to keep a pet takes on the responsibility of the animal's care and well-being. They must be provided with appropriate food, water, and

shelter. The Prophet described the punishment of a person who neglected to care for a pet. He reported that when he ascended during his Mi'rāj he saw a woman who in this world had a cat whom she had imprisoned without food or drink, until the cat died of hunger and thirst. On Judgment Day, this woman was being tortured because of this action.

When it comes to keeping pets, there are a number of rules we must keep in mind. The first is that dogs are not allowed as pets unless they are shepherd or guard dogs on a farm. The second is that the animal should not come to harm from being kept as a pet. For example, it is not allowed to keep a bird in a cage simply for our amusement. The bird is created to fly, and imprisoning it is harming it.

**Science and research** – We are allowed to use animals for scientific research but Islam has very strict rules on how far we can go in using animals for research and testing. We will not cover the details in this lesson, but it is enough to mention that even for science and research, we cannot do anything to animals if it causes them distress or harm unless there is an exceptionally good reason for it.

## HARAM INTERACTIONS WITH ANIMALS

**Hunting and Sport** - In Islam, hunting for sport or fun is prohibited. Muslims may only hunt as is needed to meet their requirements for food. Even while hunting for food, we cannot hunt or hurt a baby bird. The Prophet (saw) says:

“While a baby bird is in its mother’s nest, it is in the refuge of God.”

It is also prohibited to make animals to fight one another. It is also not permissible to kill any animal unless it is likely to cause us harm or it is being killed for food or other good reasons.

## TAKING CARE OF ANIMALS – AN OBLIGATION

If we choose to keep a pet, then we must look after it. This includes providing the animal with:

- Food
- Drink
- Suitable accommodation
- Medication

<sup>1</sup>For example, if a person chooses to keep a cat at home, then feeding the cat and giving it a place to sleep are obligations. If it becomes ill and it is feasible to take it to a vet for care, then we should do this also.

Let us end with an example of how the Ahlul Bayt (as) cared for animals. One day, Imam Ḥasan (as) was eating, when a dog came and stood near him. A companion who was watching the Imam (as) noticed the Imam was eating one morsel and throwing the next morsel to the dog to eat. The companion offered to shoo the dog away. However, the Imam (as) said he was not being bothered by the dog. In fact, the Imam (as) said he was too shy to eat while another creature of God watched him.

## Review Questions

### Q1. Islam has taught Muslims

- a. That it is okay to mistreat animals because they have no feelings
- b. To care for and respect all creatures of God including animals
- c. To cause harm to animals if it entertains and amuses us

### Q2. Proper care of animals according to Islam means:

- a. Providing good food, water, accommodation and medical attention to animals
- b. Keeping them at home but not giving them food or water
- c. Both a & b

### Q3. If you see a harmless spider in your house, what is the Islamic way to get rid of it?

- a. Squash it under your foot
- b. Try and catch it with a tissue without killing it and then throwing it out
- c. Spray it with insecticide till it dies

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### <sup>1</sup>References

- Holy Qur’an
- Rights of Animals in Islam – Lecture by Sheikh Mansour Leghaei on Social Islam – Rights of Animals
- Animal Welfare – What does Islam say about how Muslims should treat animals? - <http://islam.about.com/od/islamsays/a/animalwelfare.htm>