



ANIMAL RIGHTS

حقوق الحيوان

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand that Islam has rules and rights related to animals as well
- Discuss that human rights always take priority over animal rights
- Discuss some specific rules related to animal rights
- Understand that while we can use animals for their proper use (e.g. slaughtering a chicken) we are not allowed to torture or hurt animals
- Understand that Islam encourages us to take care of animals

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 5

Animal Rights

In this lesson, we will discuss some of the Islamic teachings related to animal rights.

ANIMALS IN THE HOLY QUR'AN

It is worth noting that the Holy Qur'an has named several chapters after the name of animals. Allah (SWT) has also mentioned the uses of some animals in the Holy Qur'an, for example obtaining milk and meat from the cow, donkeys and camels as a means of transport, and honey from bees which has a curative function for human beings.

This way, the Holy Qur'an takes a moderate approach by showing the importance of animals while simultaneously pointing out that they have been created to serve human beings.

The Holy Qur'an also confirms that animals have their own organised systems and societies:

“There is not a moving (living) creature on earth, nor a bird that flies with its two wings, but are communities like you. We have neglected nothing in the Book, then unto their Lord they (all) shall be gathered” (6:38)

On this basis, some of our great scholars have concluded that animals possess a limited level of intellect. In addition, the Holy Qur'an also confirms that animals will be resurrected on the day of Judgement:

“And when the wild beasts shall be brought forth” (81:5)

The following narration also confirms this:

“One day, the Prophet (saw) saw two goats fighting and told his companions: “God knows why they are fighting, and the one that has been unfair will be treated accordingly on the Judgment Day.”

HOW SHOULD WE CARE FOR ANIMALS?

The least care that we should show toward animals is to avoid harming them physically for the sake of amusement. The other ways to care for animals is to provide them basic necessities such as food, water, suitable accommodation and medication when they fall ill.



So comprehensive is Islam in its teachings that it is considered Makrūh (disliked by Allah (SWT)) to scrape out the remains cooked meat or chicken off a bone such that nothing remains of it! This is because the remains on the bone are usually a source of food for the birds.

Here is an example of how the Prophet (saw) looked after animals. The Prophet of Islam was once performing ablution for prayers from a pot of water. A cat passed there and turned its eyes at the pot of water with a thirsty look. The Prophet realised at once that the cat was very thirsty, so he stopped the ablution and placed the pot before the cat. Only after the cat had fully quenched its thirst, did the Prophet resume the ablution.

PROHIBITIONS WHEN DEALING WITH ANIMALS

- Keeping a bird in a cage for fun is not permissible. This is because a bird is naturally created to fly and thus

restricting it from doing so causes harm and stress to it.

- Similarly, keeping a dog as a pet is also not permissible unless it is a guard dog or shepherd dog. In these cases, they should not be allowed to enter the house itself.
- Furthermore, cursing an animal is not permissible since they are also the creatures of Allah (SWT) and they play a significant role in our ecosystem, albeit usually unnoticed.
- We cannot slap an animal in the face because the Prophet (saw) confirms that they are also constantly glorifying Allah (SWT)
- While hunting, we cannot hunt or hurt a baby bird. The Prophet (saw) says that while a baby bird is in its mother's nest, it is in the refuge of Allah (SWT)
- It is not permissible to instigate animals to fight one another. Therefore bull-fighting and other such activities organised for fun are impermissible.
- Killing an animal for fun is not permissible. We can only do so if it is for human benefit such as if the animal must be used in medical research.

When the Prophet (saw) ascended during his Me'raj he saw a woman who was being tortured. On inquiring about this he was told that the woman had caged her pet cat for days without providing it with any food or water such that it died as a result of this starvation.

OTHER SUBLIME TEACHINGS WHEN DEALING WITH ANIMALS

- Islam has also set rules for when there is a clash between the welfare of two animals. For example, if there is sufficient water only for a dog or a sheep, the water should be given to the dog. As for the sheep, it can be slaughtered and eaten.
- Also, if we are travelling with an animal and there is sufficient water only for Wuḍū' or for the animal, we should do tayammum and give the water to the animal.
- We can only collect milk from a cow if she (the cow) has enough milk to feed her calf.
- When collecting honey, we must not collect all of it but leave some behind for the bees especially in winter.

MASS PRODUCTION OF MEAT

In today's world, where human populations are growing at a rapid rate, there is always a need for mass supplies of food products including meat. This has unfortunately led to cruel practices such as:

- Animal overcrowding
- Unsanitary and oppressive conditions for animals to live in
- Cruel slaughtering practices where animals may be subjected to unnecessary pain and suffering
- The use of antibiotics and other substances to increase the yield of meat from animals
- Genetic manipulation of animals to maximise output

There must be a reasonable balance between the needs of humans for basic food supplies, and the protection of animals from abuse and suffering. We should try to be moderate and responsible in our meat consumption in order to reduce the need for mass production of meat. However, we should not take the extreme option of being vegan, as this is not encouraged in Islam, but is rather discouraged. Moderation and being careful about waste and extravagance are Islamic principles which must be kept in mind when we approach issues like this.

ⁱ Risala of Syed Sistani (Point ix of Fatwa No. 2646)

Review Questions

Q1. Islam has:

- a. Focussed on aspects of worship but has neglected the issue of animal rights
- b. Comprehensively discussed the issues of animal rights
- c. Both *a* and *b*

Q2. According to the principle of 'Allah's hierarchy of creation':

- a. Human beings can be sacrificed for the perfection of animals
- b. Animals can be sacrificed for the perfection of humans
- c. Nothing should be sacrificed as Allah (SWT) has already made everything perfect

Q3. Which of these is not prohibited?

- a. Using animals for medical research
- b. Caging birds for fun
- c. Instigating animals to fight so as to attract large crowds to raise money for charity