

THE CREATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIENCE (PART 3 OF 4): ANIMAL RIGHTS AND WRONGS

Rating: 3.9

Description: The ethical treatment of animals in Islam; from the Quran and authentic narrations of the Prophet Muhammad.

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By: AbdurRahman Mahdi (© 2006 IslamReligion.com)

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~~The Creation of an Environmental Conscience (part 3 of 4)~~ **Nothing** there are some **that creep on their bellies, some that walk on two legs, and some that walk on four. God creates what He wills. Verily! God is Able to do all things.” (Quran 24:45)**

Throughout the revealed texts of Islam, we find that God has animals playing not insignificant roles in the fate of nations. After all, in the above verse we are informed of our common origin: water.

In the story of the People of Thamud, for example, we are given an indication of Islam's enforcing of ethical treatment of animals, or more precisely, the severe consequences of mistreating them. For it was only after Thamud slaughtered the she-camel miraculously sent to them by God as a Sign, after they had already oppressed the beast by denying her water to drink, that God destroyed the nation in one single mighty blast.

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“(The People of) Thamud denied (their Prophet, Salih) through their transgression, when the most wicked man among them went forth (to kill the she-camel). But the Messenger of God (Prophet Salih) (had) said to them: Be cautious! That is the she-camel of God! (So do not harm it) and bar it not from having its drink (of water)! Then they denied him and they killed it. So their Lord destroyed them because of their sin, and made them equal in destruction!” (Quran 91:11-4)

In order to best appreciate just how seriously Islam champions what in modern times are popularly referred to as “animal rights”, and how seriously Islam criminalises any wrong done to animals, one need venture no further than the authentic narrations (ar. ahadith) of the Prophet Muhammad. No detailed commentary will be necessary as the words of the Prophet, often highly charged with emotion and empathy for the suffering of birds and beasts alike, speak loudly for themselves as they vividly illustrate Islam's unprecedented “humanistic” regard for man's fellow creatures. From amongst the many sayings of the Prophet Muhammad are:

“Whilst a man was walking on a road, he was overcome with severe thirst. So he found a well, descended into it, drank (his fill), and then came out. Then he saw a dog panting hard and eating the moist earth. So he said: ‘Verily, this dog is overcome with thirst like I had been.’ So he (again) descended into the well and filled his leather socks with water. Grasping his socks in his mouth, he came out of the well and then quenched the dog’s thirst. Therefore, God thanked the man and forgave him his sins.” The Companions asked: ‘O Messenger of God! Do we really get reward for (being kind even to) animals?’ The Prophet replied: ‘There is reward for (showing kindness to) every living thing.’” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim, Abu Dawood)

“A woman was punished on account of a cat. She imprisoned it until it died, so was entered into Hellfire. She neither fed it nor quenched its thirst whilst she held it captive, nor did she leave it be to eat from the insects of the earth.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim, Ibn Majah)

“Whoever kills [even] a sparrow without good reason, God will question him about it on the Day of Resurrection.” (Ahmed)

“Do not use living creatures for target practice.” (Saheeh Muslim)

“An earlier Prophet of God was stung by an ant and so, in anger, ordered the entire ants nest be burned. At this, God reprimanded this Prophet with the words: ‘Because one ant stung you, you have burned a whole community which glorified Me.’” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim)

“The one to whom his horse is a source of reward is the one who keeps it in the path of God, and ties it by a long rope in a pasture or a garden. Such a person will get a reward equal to what the horse’s long rope allows it to eat in the pasture or the garden. And if the horse breaks its rope and crosses one or two hills, then all marks of its hoofs and its dung will be counted as good deeds for its owner. And if it passes by a river and drinks from it, then that will also be regarded as a good deed on the part of its owner.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

“Do not clip the forelock of a horse, for decency is attached to its forelock; nor its mane, for it protects it; nor its tail, for it is its fly-swatter.” (Abu Dawud)

“While a man was riding a cow, it turned toward him and said: ‘I have not been created for this purpose; I have been created for plowing.’” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

Abdullah ibn Abbas narrated:

“God’s Messenger forbade inciting animals to fight each other.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim, at-Tirmidhi)

Abdur-Rahman ibn Abdullah ibn Mas'ud narrated:

“We were on a journey with the Messenger of God, and he left us for a while. During his absence, we saw a bird called Hummara with its two young and so we took the young ones. The mother bird was circling above us in the air, beating its wings in grief, when the Prophet came back and said: ‘Who has hurt the feelings of this bird by taking its young? Return them to her!’” (Saheeh Muslim)

Jabir ibn Abdullah narrated that the Prophet, upon seeing an ass which had been branded in its face pass him by, became so upset that he exclaimed:

“May God curse the one who branded it.” (Saheeh Muslim)

The Prophet's wife, A'isha, narrated: “I was riding a restive camel and turned it rather roughly. The Prophet said to me:

‘It behooves you to treat animals gently.’” (Saheeh Muslim)

Yahya ibn Said narrated:

“The Prophet was seen wiping the face of his horse with his gown. When asked why he was doing that, he replied: ‘Last night I was reprimanded by God for having neglected my horse.’” (Muwatta)

Abdullah ibn Ja'far mentioned that when the Prophet passed by some children who were shooting arrows at a ram, he rebuked them, saying:

“Do not maim the poor beast.” (an-Nasai)

Even a cursory reading of the Prophet's words above will have revealed how harming, abusing or disfiguring animals carries stern censure in this world and severe penalty in the Hereafter; while protecting animals and showing mercy and kindness to them is rewarded by God, a path to forgiveness, and expiation of one's sins. It is clear also that Islam acknowledges the pain and suffering felt and experienced by animals – both physical and psychological - and how they instinctively recognise when injustice is done to them. Quite remarkably, Islam also recognises animals as possessing a conscience, natural dignity, and even unique individual identities (a bird named “Hummara”, a donkey named “Uqayr”, and so on).

“And the earth He has put for the living creatures. Therein are fruits and palms producing sheathed fruit-stalks; and also corn, with (its) leaves and stalks for fodder, and sweet-scented plants. Then which of the Blessings of your Lord will you deny?” (Quran 10:10-13)

Footnotes:

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The destruction of the She-Camel in itself is not the reason God destroyed the nation. Rather, it is the destruction of His Special Sign which had been sent to them, such destruction symbolizing their utter denial of God as the One to whom they will return, and Tawheed as the religion that he ordained. Similarly, when a man hurts any animal without just cause, he is denying one of the aspects God has ordained mankind should act on, which is mercy. When a man denies an animal (or vegetation) its right to mercy, then the right to mercy the man has from God is similarly withdrawn, and he will be punished. Furthermore, if a man intentionally performs a mercy to an animal, vegetation (or person), then God will reward him out of His mercy.

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