



ANIMAL WELFARE
in
ISLAMIC LAW

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We thank both

“Animal People ” and

“Marchig Animal Welfare Trust”

for their support that made this book possible.

In the name of God the Most Compassionate and Merciful

*Scientific Report on the book
“Animal Welfare in Islam Law”
by Professor Dr. Kristen Stilt*

Praise be to God and prayers and peace upon the final Prophet, our esteemed Prophet Muhammad son of Abdullah, mercy and blessings upon Him. May God’s prayers be upon Him and His family, His companions, those who came in the generation after Him, and all those who follow in their path to the day of judgment. God’s prayers also upon all of the Prophets and Messengers who preceded Him.

Professor Dr. Kristen Stilt wrote a book entitled “Animal Welfare in Islamic Law.” It consists of forty-eight (48) medium-sized pages and includes an Introduction and the following contents:

1. Introduction

She presented some examples of poor treatment of animals in daily life by people who have control over the animals. The book presents evidence on this topic to clarify the correct ways of treating animals. The book serves as a guide in matters related to ideal treatment of animals in daily life. Likewise it serves as a reminder to people of the divine rules and the fine human values that Islam calls for in treatment of animals.

2. Islam is a Religion of Mercy

She showed in this part that the meaning of mercy that Islam brought extends to include all creatures, including animals. She presented many legal proofs that support what she wants to say.

3. The History of Islam and the Value of Animal Welfare

She discussed events from Islamic history and remaining architectural monuments that indicate that the Muslims had understood very well what Islam called for in terms of kindness to animals.

4. Human Responsibility for Animals

She clarified the Islamic legal basis for animal welfare, and she does not limit it to merely moral or literary recommendations but also includes legal rulings that have the strength of legal requirements. She showed that ignoring these rules amounts to a wrong for which the wrongdoer will be held accountable. This responsibility extends to whoever takes responsibility for an animal, beginning with the animal's owner and extending to society's obligation as a whole and to whoever may make decisions on an animal's behalf.

5. Work Animals (Donkeys, Horses, and Camels)

She identified the Islamic laws that have been revealed regarding these animals that show the requirement and importance of kindness to them. In Islam, they have an unsurpassed high status, undertaking work that they were created to do, praising God. On account of this, it is necessary to treat them not as neglected things, but as beings with reverence and with value for humans in their daily lives.

6. The Dog: Victim of Misunderstanding

She presented solid evidence to refute the imaginary conflict that has appeared in the legal texts that discuss the dog. She showed that the legal significance of these texts is limited to situations in which actual harm is caused or to a failure to clean well a bowl that a dog has licked. Likewise, the legal rules on keeping a dog only deal with keeping a dog for no reason or merely for the purpose of bragging or mere decoration. Keeping a dog for these frivolous reasons denies the dog the joy of freedom and exercise that it loves, and withholds from it guarding or hunting, the art of which they can learn, thereby helping humans in their activities. She dealt with these proofs very carefully and with an honest desire for uncovering the truth with neutrality and objectivity. She accomplished this without violating any opinion in Islamic law or showing bias against any view, even to the point of showing opposing views. She showed reverence in what she wrote on this delicate topic and presented an acceptable view, and showed a strong understanding, for which she is thanked.

7. The Cat: Constant Companion to Humans

She showed that the cat has a particular place in Islamic law and history. Its appearance was a part of daily life, without causing trouble or anxiety from the perspective of ritual purity of the animal or the leftovers of its food or drink.

8. When is the killing of animals acceptable?!

She explained the legal rules according to which this procedure must be carried out. It must only be done in situations in which harm from the existence of the animals is absolutely clear and certain, or when the animal is injured in an accident such that it is impossible for the animal to remain living without extreme pain. In these cases, it is permissible to kill the animal in a merciful way, after taking the opinion of a specialist in the veterinary sciences or pharmacy or someone with a high level of experience in judging the status of the life of the animal.

Killing an animal for these reasons is different from slaughter, which must occur with mercy to ensure the absence of physical or psychological pain. This should occur with the sharp blade of a knife and without slaughtering one animal in front of the other, and without pulling the animal violently and painfully to slaughter. She explained the report transmitted about ‘Umar bin Al-Khattab that he punished the person whom he saw roughly pulling a sheep by one of her legs. He said: “Take her to her death gently.” This explanation assists in making a determination on the matter of transporting animals for long distances. It is necessary to carry it out in a beautiful and extremely humane way, and this is what this report supports and what the noble actions of the Prophet, in treating animals humanely, confirm.

The author has written her book in an easily understandable manner, lacking in linguistic and typological errors. She supported what she wrote that is related to the principles of Islamic law with sound legal rules from the Qur’an and the Prophetic Sunna. She was faithful in her treatment of these sources, interpreting them correctly. Her extremely sound reliance on the books of the Sunna of the Prophet shows the

importance of the topic of the book to her, her full comprehension of it, and her belief in the idea that caused her to write the book.

On account of this, a book has been produced that is correct in terms of the principles of Islamic law, and in agreement with the consensus of the scholars on the topics she discussed. She infused it with her soul and her writing style in a way that combined accurate content—which may be described as difficult to know and difficult to understand—into a chain of information that a wide range of people will be able to understand if they were to read the book. In its manner of composition, the book is a good combination of deep specialized information and clear and simple treatment of topics. Nothing in the book deviates from the Islamic Sharia or contradicts its principles.

As a result of all of these reasons: I believe that the book “Animal Welfare in Islamic Law” by author Professor Dr. Kristen Stilt is excellent in its scientific content, accurate from the perspective of Islamic law, and beneficial. Thus, I advise its publication in order to distribute the useful ideas in it.

I ask God Allah for the success and well-being of the author of this book. In God is all success.

Given on August 19, 2008 CE

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Animal Welfare in Islamic Law

1. Introduction

In my studies of Islamic law, I have always been impressed by the extensive rules that require humans to treat animals kindly and with mercy. These rules are wide ranging, and include significant protections for work animals like horses and donkeys, requirements that slaughtering be done in the absolutely merciful way as possible, and commands to treat dogs and cats kindly in all situations. The position on animal welfare within Islamic law is an excellent example of compassion and concern for those who depend on others for their care. Islamic legal protection of animal welfare is truly a model for everyone, and if these protective rules were applied world wide, the amount of animal suffering would be radically reduced and the situation for animals would be tremendously better.

With these incredibly strong protections for animals in Islamic law, however, I am dismayed to see the rejection and negligence of these rules on the streets of Cairo today. It has become normal to see young boys running after a small dog or pitiful cat and throwing rocks at the poor creatures, or tying up the puppy and dragging him by the

rope. They may even continue with this torture until they kill the animal. It is even more common to see an emaciated donkey (or mule or horse) pulling a heavy cart through the streets of Cairo, and the driver of the cart has whipped the donkey so badly that he has bleeding sores. If you asked the children who are torturing the dog why they are doing it, sometimes they even say that Islam requires this cruelty to dogs. Likewise, the driver of the cart believes that because he owns the donkey (or mule or horse), he is permitted to do what he wants with his property. He is not concerned that the donkey will suffer, drop from the weight of the burden, or even die from this treatment.

I fear that the Islamic rules requiring kindness to animals are being neglected and forgotten. I have noticed, for example, that no one will try to exhort the driver of the cart to lighten the load or to stop beating the donkey, because people have gotten used to this kind of behavior. It takes so little to avoid cruelty, and so the cruelty is even more tragic. When foreigners visit Cairo and see these actions, they think, unfortunately, that cruelty to animals is allowed—or worse, required—by Islamic law.

I wrote this booklet for two reasons. First, I want to show the amazing range of animal welfare and protection that is required by Islamic law. Despite all of the attention on Islam and Islamic law throughout the world in recent years, the area of animal welfare has been completely missing in discussions about Islamic law. The rules of Islamic law

on animal welfare, established in the seventh century, do more to protect animals than the laws of any country today. Second, through this booklet I ask Egyptians and Muslims generally to follow the wonderful rules of animal welfare that the religion requires, and thereby lead us all to a kinder and safer place for animals world wide. The field of animal welfare desperately needs positive examples and leaders, and I invite Muslims to be the example for everyone else to follow.

2. Islam: Religion of Compassion and Justice

Islam is based on overarching principles of kindness, mercy, compassion, justice, and doing good works. These principles are seen pervasively throughout the texts of the religion—the Qur’an and the examples of the Prophet—as well as in many examples from Islamic history. For example, Aisha reported an admonition of the Prophet: “Truly God is kind and loves kindness. He rewards kindness and does not reward violence.”¹

The Prophet was kind and compassionate to all creatures, great and small. Ibn Mas’ud reported: “We were traveling with the Prophet, and he stepped off to the side to attend to his need, when we saw a small bird with her two babies, and we took them. The mother bird came over and began fluttering in the direction of the Prophet. So he said, ‘who

1 *Sahih* Muslim 4697.

made her miserable by taking her two babies? Return them to her.”¹

Even kindness to a small bird did not escape his attention and concern. This hadith also shows how any human can easily—and unintentionally—neglect his duty to treat animals properly. For they were not just any men, but were companions of the Prophet and were traveling with him. When the Prophet explained to them the importance of kindness to the small bird and kindness to the mother who was distressed by the loss of her child, they obeyed his order and returned the baby bird.

Cruelty is strongly condemned over and over in the Qur’an and the hadith of the Prophet. Specifically, cruelty to animals is condemned and punishments are provided for it, just as cruelty to humans is punished. God sees all deeds, and good will be rewarded and bad will be punished. The Qur’an states: “Whoever has done an atom’s weight of good, it will be seen. Whoever has done an atom’s weight of bad, it will be seen.”²

Most of the *sahih* hadith collections include the following important hadith, which Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar reported: “The Prophet cursed the one who treated animals harshly.”³ In his explanation of this hadith, al-‘Asqalani specified that: “The cursing indicates that the action is prohibited.” Al-

1 Sunan Abu Dawud 2300, 4584

2 Qur’an 99:7-8.

3 Bukhari 5091; Ibn Hajar, vol. 20, p. 56, hadith 5515.

‘Asqalani also reports that another version of the text of this hadith is: “Whoever treats harshly a living being and then does not repent, God will treat him just as harshly on judgment day.”¹

The following three hadith make these general principles very clear. Abdullah b. ‘Umar reported that the Prophet said: “A woman went to hell because of a cat that she confined and did not feed the cat nor even allow the cat to find bugs to eat.”² Nawawi explains that the hadith means that the women’s actions are forbidden, and that the reason she went to hell was her bad treatment of the cat. Nawawi stated: “The hadith indicates that killing a cat is forbidden, and confining a cat without food and water is also forbidden. The plain meaning of the hadith is that she was a Muslim and that she went to hell because of the cat.”³

A human who fails to treat animals with the kindness that Islamic law requires will be held to account by God. The opposite is also true: kindness to animals brings a reward to the kind person. One example given by the Prophet is famous story of the man who gave water to a thirsty dog, and God rewarded him by forgiving him of past sins. According to Abu Hurayra: “The Prophet said that among us there was a man who was traveling and he became very thirsty. So he

1 Ibid.

2 Bukhari 3071; Ibn Hajar, vol. 10, p. 112, hadith 2364; Ibn Hajar, vol. 10, p. 112, hadith 2365; Muslim _____

3 Nawawi, vol. 8, p. 501.

found a well and descended into it and drank, then exited, when he saw a dog panting and eating the ground from his thirst. The man said: ‘This dog has reached a level of thirst that I almost reached,’ and so he descended into the well and filled his shoe with water and provided the water to the dog. God thanked the man and forgave him of all his sins. The men listening to this story said: ‘Oh Prophet, will we be rewarded for assisting animals?’ The Prophet said: ‘There is the possibility for a rewarded for helping each living being.’”¹

Further, a prostitute was forgiven of her sins for her kind act of giving water to a thirsty dog, thereby saving the dog’s life. A prostitute passed by a dog near the head of a well and the dog was panting and it seemed that he was going to die of thirst. The woman managed to give the dog water by filling up her shoe with water. Her sins were forgiven for doing that.² This hadith is very powerful. Even a woman who had committed such a sin was forgiven for saving the life of a dog.

3. Animal Welfare in Islamic History

It was not the Europeans who established the first animal welfare organizations and animal shelters, rather it was Muslims. In fact, the Prophet was the first to call for kindness and mercy to animals, and to call for humans

1 Bukhari, hadith 168, 2190, 2286; Ibn Hajar, vol. 2, p. 159, hadith 173.

2 Bukhari 3208.

to provide animals with food and water and to treat them kindly. Compassion for all creatures is a basic part of Islamic law, history, and culture.

Islamic history shows that animal welfare is an exalted Islamic value. In the medieval period, Cairo was already a flourishing city in terms of culture, economics, and population. Thriving hotels, schools, mosques, and palaces filled Cairo's streets. Among these buildings were places reserved for the needs of animals, such as stables, resting areas, and water troughs to provide water for all kinds of animals. Likewise, water troughs were at the beginning of the long distance routes that the merchants' caravans would travel and at the beginning of the routes that connected cities.

Muslims in Egypt established watering troughs for animals adjacent to schools and mosques, and endowed pious trusts (*waqf*) to support the burden of providing care to these animals and supplying them with water. The services were provided to all animals—owned and stray alike. These troughs were made of stone or marble and were a charitable way to provide water to people, their working animals, and all other kinds of animals that found themselves in the city and in need of water.

The historians recorded many examples of these troughs from different times in medieval Islamic history, and in particular the Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods. From the Fatimid period, there are records of many

troughs in the Qarafa established to provide water to the animals in that area. Examples are the water trough of the palace in the Qarafa that Sitt al-Malak, daughter of al-Muizz al-Din Allah, built in 976 CE. There were many troughs attached to the palaces of the Qarafa, some of which the historian Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi saw before they went to ruin. There is also the trough for pack animals at the front of the mosque of al-Aqmar on al-Muizz Street, and the trough that Amir Yalbugha al-Salami restored in 1396 CE. During the reign of Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub, the Amir Ibn Hannas established a pious endowment for a watering trough. In the Mamluk period, historians recorded the existence of a number of troughs that were built as endowments to provide water to animals, such as the trough of the madrasa of Um Sultan al-Ashraf Sha'ban and the trough of the madrasa of Amir Aytmiş al-Bajasi, who was one of the Mamluks of Yalbugha, located outside Bab al-Wazir.

The establishment of pious endowments was not limited to watering troughs for animals. The historians documented that Sultans, Amirs, and others established endowments to provide food for stray animals, such as cats and dogs. The English orientalist Edward William Lane reported that the Chief Judge of Egypt in 1835 told him that the Mamluk Sultan al-Zahir Baybars established an endowment to provide food for stray cats. If the endowment was not producing enough revenue, the Judge would contribute his own funds, and so it became the norm that each afternoon

a large group of cats would gather in front of the court house and the Judge would feed them.¹ The Ottoman Amir in Egypt Kutkhuda established a pious endowment to distribute food to stray dogs and cats each day.²

4. Human Responsibility for Animals

If a human takes control over a specific animal, whether a donkey, horse, camel, cat, or dog, he must take care of that animal. We see and hear about terrible stories—such as a person who adopts a cat, for whatever reason, and cares for the cat at home such that the cat is used to being fed and having her needs met. And then the person, for some reason, throws the cat into the street and expects that the cat will survive on her own or simply does not care what happens to the cat. This is completely wrong, as evidenced by the hadith above about the woman who went to hell for confining a cat without food or water such that the cat died.

The principle underlying the ruling in that particular hadith is stated in the Qur'an: "Serve God and do not join with Him any partners (i.e. polytheism) and do good—to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors whom you know, neighbors who are strangers, your closest friends,

1 Edward William Lane, *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 287 (1860).

2 Imad Ajwa, "Establishments for the Care of Animals: Evidence of the Glory of Islamic Civilization" at www.ikhwanonline.com (May 22, 2006).

the traveler whom you meet, and what your right hand possesses. God does not love the arrogant and the vain.”¹

Many esteemed commentators have said that “what your right hand possesses” includes animals in your control. For example, the commentator al-Sa‘dī stated that what your right hand possesses can include animals and humans, and then he specified what humans must do for their animals: “Provide for them adequately and do not impose upon them anything that is unbearable for them.”

Some people will say that God gave humans control over the earth to do whatever they want, and this might include harming the environment or neglecting animals. Proponents of this idea often cite the Qur’an, verse 2:29, and claim that this verse gives humans, to whom this verse is addressed, the right to do with the earth whatever they want: “It is He [God] who created for you [plural] all things that are on earth. Then He turned to the heaven and made them into seven firmaments. And of all things He has perfect knowledge.”²

This argument of unlimited human dominion is wrong for several reasons. The commentaries to this verse make clear that humans have a responsibility to care for the earth and all that is on it, including animals. Al-Jalalayn, for example, stated that the phrase “It is He who created for you all things that are on the earth” means that these things

1 Qur’an 4:36.

2 Qur’an 2:29.

were created for humans to “benefit from and respect.” Al-Sa‘di’s elaboration of the phrase “for you” is “in order to make use of, benefit from, and respect.” Both of these explanations mean that humans may make use of animals provided that humans respect and give proper consideration to the needs of these animals. In fact, being able to make use of an animal properly requires that the animal be well cared for.

For example, if a man owns a donkey and the donkey pulls the cart around the city in order for the man to transport and sell his goods, then under what circumstances will the man be able to make the best use of the donkey? Certainly not if the cart is too heavy for the donkey. Certainly not if the donkey is sick, or if the donkey is not fed properly. The donkey will perform best if the owner provides adequate food and water and medical care for the donkey, and makes sure that the load is not too heavy. Sometimes people make the terrible mistake of thinking that they can overload the cart and then harshly beat the donkey so that the donkey will pull the cart. This is not only wrong but also leads to a bad result. It is like overloading a small truck and then trying to drive it very fast. You may succeed for a few hours, but soon the engine of the truck will stop working and require expensive repair. It would have been better to make two trips than to ruin a truck out of impatience. And the same for animals. This is the only right result according to Islamic law and is also the only right result from a logical

perspective. We will see more examples like this one below in the discussion of horses, donkeys, and camels.

More generally, God has made humans His deputies on the earth. The Qur'an, verse 35:39, states that: "It is God who made you (pl.) vice-regents on the earth."¹ We are supposed to protect God's creatures, and take care of them in the same sense as the four Righteous Caliphs took the responsibility of caring for the early Muslim community. What humans are doing on the earth has profoundly affected all living beings, including non-human animals. The growth of cities and the spread of human communities into new areas mean that the number of wild animals living on their own in nature has greatly decreased. Animal communities are part of our cities, and the animals we see living on urban streets are highly dependent upon and at the mercy of humans.

Animals were part of urban life in Cairo from the earliest part of the Islamic era, and Egyptians were well aware of their responsibilities to animals. As we mentioned, Muslims established endowments to build and maintain drinking troughs for animals and to provide stray animals food. And today—What does the responsibility of serving as vice-regent of the earth mean today? What if a person simply does not like animals? Each person does not need to take home stray cats, feed skinny donkeys that they have no responsibility for, or other similar acts. Of course, kind acts are rewarded, as we have shown, but you are not forced to

1 Qur'an 35:39.

act, rather those who undertake to help decide for themselves to do so. However, all of us should cooperate with those individuals and organizations that are trying, through kind, compassionate, and just means, to solve our problems of cruelty to animals and our problems of overpopulation of animals. Most importantly, we must never be cruel to animals.

The charitable organizations in Egypt concerned with animal welfare are working to stop animal abuse and to implement Islamic solutions to the problems of stray animals on the streets. These organizations deserve our appreciation and support. The organizations are spreading a spirit of kindness and welfare, which all of God's creatures are entitled to receive. These creatures all form communities like us. Accordingly, people must cooperate to the extent of their ability with people and organizations concerned with animal welfare. They should never let fear and hatred lead them to cruelty to animals to prevent them from helping an animal in need.

5. Work Animals: Donkeys, Horses, Camels

Donkeys, horses, and camels all perform important services to humankind, and in exchange humans have a duty to treat these animals properly and to respect the work they perform. Many hadiths instruct humans to treat these animals kindly. According to Sahil b. al-Handhala: "The Prophet passed by a camel whose stomach was taut, and he

said: ‘Fear God regarding your treatment of these animals, who cannot speak from themselves. Ride them properly, and feed them properly.’¹ The commentator of this hadith explains that: “The camel’s stomach was taut from hunger, and the rule applies to all animals with four legs.”

Other hadith express how personally angered the Prophet was by neglect of animals. According to Abdullah b. Ja’fir Abi Talib: “The Prophet went into a garden of a man from the ansar, and there was a camel. When the Prophet saw the camel he felt compassion and his eyes shed tears. The Prophet went up to the camel and stroked him between his ears, and the camel calmed down. The Prophet then said: ‘Who is the owner of this camel?’ A young boy from the ansar came and said, ‘He is mine, Prophet.’ The Prophet said: ‘Don’t you fear God with regard to this animal, whom God has given to you? For the camel complained to me that you starve him and work him endlessly.’”²

These rules of kind treatment apply to everyone, regardless if he is rich or poor, famous or an ordinary person. It is everyone’s religious duty to obey God regarding His creatures and to follow His law for how to treat them. The Prophet even chastised his wife Aisha for her treatment of a camel she was riding: “Aisha rode a camel and the camel was giving her a difficult time, so she began to struggle with

1 Abu Dawud 2185.

2 Sunan Abu Dawud 2186. Musnad Ahmad 1654 and 1662 are similar.

the camel. The Prophet said: ‘you are obligated to be kind.’ He later repeated this as a lesson to others.”¹ Many hadith also explain how to treat animals who are carrying you or your goods on a journey: “God is kind and loves and desires kindness. He gives credit for it, which he does not do for violence. So if you ride a riding animal, descend from the animal and allow it to rest at an appropriate site. If the earth is barren of food/water for the animal, then make the trip quickly, for the distance can be covered quickly at night when it cannot be during the day. And you should provide the animal rest at night, because the animal is the one covering the trail, and needs a resting place for living beings.”²

Medieval treatises written for the *muhtasib*, who was a legal official responsible for commanding the good and forbidding the wrong that took place in public and in the market in particular, clearly indicate that overburdening or mistreating pack animals is a violation of Islamic law. The *muhtasib* was empowered to punish people who abused their pack animals. The Ayyubid period manual by al-Shayzarī and the two Mamluk-era manuals by Ibn al-Ukhuwwa and Ibn Bassam all direct the *muhtasib* to ensure that pack animals are not mistreated. They also direct the *muhtasib* to punish those who violate the law.

1 Abu Dawud 1516; Muslim 4698. Musnad Ahmad reports a similar hadith. 24217.

2 Muwatta’ Malik 1551.

Al-Shayzari instructs the *muhtasib* to “order the importers of wood and straw and the like that if they stop with these goods in the courtyards of the market, they should unload these goods from the backs of the pack animals, because if the animals stand with the goods on them it causes pain to them, and that is torture to them.”¹ Ibn al-Ukhuwwa, writing in the middle of the Mamluk period in Egypt, instructs the *muhtasib* to: “order the transporters of wood, straw, tiles, sulfur, turnips, and melons that if they stop with these goods in the courtyards of the market, they should unload these goods from the backs of the pack animals, because if the animals stand with the goods on them it causes pain to them, and that is torture to them.”² This text resembles al-Shayzari’s text in both language and meaning.

And Ibn Bassam, who wrote his manual towards the end of the Mamluk period, likewise paid attention to the conditions of the working animals in the marketplace. He ordered the *muhtasib* to watch out for those individuals responsible for bringing goods into the market on the backs of animals. “It is also necessary that the animals’ loads and burdens are proportional to their strength and ability, and they should not have put upon them a load that will injure them, and they should not be driven quickly while carrying loads, nor prodded with strong prods, nor should they be stopped in the courtyards of the marketplace while

1 Al-Shayzari, Ch. 2, p. 13-14.

2 Ibn al-Ukhuwwa, Ch. 8, p. 79 (Levy ed.).

carrying their loads or supplies. The people responsible for them should have the fear of God in them when it comes to providing food for their animals and they should be fed sufficiently according to their work, and whoever violates these rules should be punished.”¹

Good treatment of work animals can result in a reward from God to humans. According to Abu Hurayra, the Prophet said: “Giving a horse food or water is the source of a reward.” When the Prophet was asked about the reward that can result from the kind treatment of donkeys, the Prophet referred to the Qur’anic verse 99:7-8: “Whoever does good equivalent to the weight of an atom shall see it; whoever does evil equivalent to the weight of an atom will see it.”²

6. A Victim of Human Misunderstanding: the Dog

Many harmful acts are related to people’s misunderstandings about dogs, and in particular misunderstandings about dogs in Islamic law. As a result, it is common to find people with incorrect ideas that actually lead them to behave in a manner that contradicts all opinions in Islamic law. People often cling to an idea they heard without examining whether it is legally correct. It is very important to know the teachings of Islam and adhere to them. The primary rule calls for kindness and the avoidance of cruelty, violence and harm to other beings. One of the basic

1 Ibn Bassam, Ch. 77, p. 165.

2 Ibn Hajar, vol. 10, p. 117, hadith 2371.

principles in Islam is “there should be no harm and no causing of harm.”

The Dog in the Qur’an

The Qur’an mentions the dog on three occasions. One verse briefly mentions that dogs have a tendency to pant.¹ This reference is merely descriptive; the verse makes no judgment about dogs panting but rather states that one characteristic of dogs is that they pant.

The second occasion is in the story of the “cave sleepers.” The verse states: “You would have deemed them awake, while they were actually asleep, and we turned them on their right and on their left sides; their dog stretching forth his two forelegs on the threshold. If you had come up to them, you would have turned away from them and ran and would have been filled with terror.”² The cave sleepers are discussed honorably and positively in the Qur’an. The cave sleepers were Christian youths who lived in the reign of a Roman Emperor who persecuted Christians. The youths hid from the Emperor in a cave with their dog.

As People of the Book they put their trust in and prayed to God for protection. God protected them by putting them into a deep kind of sleep so that they slept for a long but unknown amount of time until the danger had passed. Verse 18:22 involves speculation about how many were in the

1 Qur’an 7:176.

2 Qur’an 18:18.

cave: “Some say there were three, the dog being the fourth of them; others say there were five, the dog being the sixth, guessing at the unknown. Yet other say there were seven, the dog being the eighth.”¹

The story of the cave sleepers is very important in understanding the Islamic conception of the place of the dog. The verse shows the dog playing an essential role. It describes what the sleepers were doing in the cave and that the dog was doing the same thing as the humans. The dog was stretching out his forelegs in a relaxed comfortable position suitable to an extended slumber. Second, notice that the verse does not describe the dog as merely a guard dog, but one of the individuals that comprised the group, doing exactly what the others were doing.

Do not be confused by the statement in 18:18 of “If you had come up to them, you would have turned away from them and ran and would have been filled with terror,” for this is not about the dog being frightening because he is a dog. Rather, the statement is clearly about the group of them—the boys who seemed awake while they were actually asleep. The dog in this story is a companion to the sleepers, not a guard dog to frighten people. If he had been a guard dog, he would not have been included in the count of those who were asleep while appearing awake. A guard dog would have been truly awake, watching over the youths in the cave.

1 Qur’an 18:22.

Another important lesson of the cave sleepers is what the verse did not say about the Christian youths and their dog. The verse made no negative comment about the presence of the dog with the boys, who were monotheists, people of the Book, protected by God. Rather, the verses portray the dog as an important and welcome part of the scenario. If the presence of the dog was problematic or dangerous to these special people, whom God chose to protect, then a warning would have been given to them.

The third mention of a dog in the Qur'an is a very significant verse dealing with the permissibility of dogs or other trained hunting animals catching food for humans. The verse states: "They ask you what is lawful to them as food. Lawful unto you are things good and pure, and what you have taught your trained hunting animals to catch in the manner directed to you by God. Eat what they catch for you, but pronounce the name of God over it. Fear God, because God is quick to take account of your rights and wrongs."¹

The question that is answered in this verse is whether Muslims may have their dogs hunt game for them and whether the hunted animal is lawful to eat. The verse explains that the trained animal may lawfully hunt food for a Muslim only when the hunting is overseen by the Muslim. Further, the person must say the name of God when dispatching the animal. Thereby, when the hunting animal kills the prey, it is considered a lawful slaughter.

1 Qur'an 5:4.

The medieval legal scholar al-Qurtubi explained that people asked the Prophet about hunting with trained dogs and falcons, because sometimes the person would witness their dog killing the animal and sometimes the person would not witness the killing. Since carrion is prohibited, they asked for a ruling on the permissibility of eating the prey when the person did not witness the killing of that prey. What is important for our purposes is that in all of the commentary on this verse, there is never any concern about the saliva or impurity of the dog or any effect on the purity of the hunted food. The issue in this verse is related to the conditions for lawful or unlawful hunted food, not the impurity of the saliva of the dog or the fact that the dog's saliva will come into contact with the hunted animal. The conclusion drawn on this issue is that hunting by the dog is permissible with conditions that are unrelated to any purity questions about the dog.

Rules Derived from the Sunna of the Prophet

As is the case with Islamic law generally, most of the rulings are derived from the Prophetic hadith, since the Qur'an does not provide all of the information a person needs to know to live his life in an Islamic way. The hadith deal with a vast array of topics related to dogs. By studying these hadith and their commentary one by one, it is clear that the dog is one of God's creatures and deserves proper treatment.

Very few people today remember that dogs would enter mosques, and even urinate in them, in the time of the Prophet. No one would oppose this, nor even clean with water the areas where the dogs had urinated in the mosques. According to Hamza b. Abdullah, ‘Umar b. Khattab reported on the authority of his father that: “in the time of the Prophet, dogs would come and go easily into the mosque, and no one would sprinkle water on those areas of the mosque.”¹ Ibn Hajar al-’Asqalani’s commentary explains that in the time of the Prophet, the mosques were open and did not have doors, and some of the companions of the Prophet would sleep in the mosques.²

The Prophet’s rule on dogs entering the mosque was in contrast to his action when a man urinated in the mosque. According to Anas b. Malik: “The Prophet observed a Bedouin urinating in the mosque. He said, ‘let him be,’ and when he finished, the Prophet called for water and poured it on the urine.”³

The Dog and Drinking Bowls

I hear many people say that something is wrong with dogs since the Prophet is reported to have said that if a dog drinks from a person’s bowl, the bowl must be washed a certain number of times. The significance of this rule on washing

1 Bukhari, hadith 168; Ibn Hajar, vol. 2, p. 60, hadith 174.

2 Ibn Hajar, vol. 2, p. 60, hadith 174.

3 Ibn Hajar, vol. 2, p. 113, hadith 219.

the bowl is misunderstood. There are many versions of this hadith, but let us examine the most popularly known of them. Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet said: “if a dog drinks from a vessel of yours, then wash it seven times.”¹

First, it is important to note that other versions of the hadith contain different numbers of required washings. There is nothing fixed about the number seven, rather the numbers are used for emphasis, as if to say, “wash the bowl well.” More importantly, people often cite this hadith to indicate something generally bad about dogs, but such a meaning is not contained in the hadith. What does it literally mean? If a dog drinks from one of your bowls, then you should wash it well.

This does not mean that if a dog drinks from a bowl you have dedicated to be used by a dog you need to wash it thoroughly every time the dog laps some water. The hadith specifically states one of *your* bowls, meaning one of the bowls you use for yourself—not a bowl you have designated for a hunting or guard dog to drink from, for example. This instruction is common sense and good hygienic practice: keep the water vessels for humans and dogs separate and you will never even encounter this problem.

This meaning is reinforced by the hadith discussed above where a man gave a dog water to drink using his shoe as the vessel to contain the water. The hadith praises the man, and

1 Bukhari 167.

God forgives his sins as a result of his kind act of providing the dog water. The hadith does not say that the man should wash his shoe seven times! Of course not, because the man is not going to drink water himself out of his shoe, but rather will wear the shoe on his foot.

The hadith about dogs drinking from a person's bowl also contains another lesson: dogs in the time of the Prophet were part of the daily life of humans and shared the same environment. Dogs must have entered the homes of people and lived among them and humans must have provided them with water. If this mixing of dogs and humans was not the case, there would not be so many hadith dealing with the matter of what to do if a dog drinks from your own vessel.

Purity

Another issue of cleanliness related to dogs is the question of purity. Islamic rules of purity mainly pertain to prayer. Islamic law requires that a Muslim's body, clothing, and space for prayer be pure. Thus, the body, clothing, or space must be washed and purified if touched by a substance that is considered impure. Scholars have debated the question of what substances are considered impure. The generally agree that blood, urine, pus, and feces are unclean and must be washed off the person or his clothes or his prayer space before prayer.

Some scholars, mainly in the Hanbali and Shafi'i schools of law, believe that dogs are impure, so that touching a dog or being licked by a dog requires washing that portion of the body or clothing before prayer. The Maliki school, however, does not consider dogs impure at all. Scholars of the Hanafi school generally consider only the saliva of dogs to be impure, so only the part of the body or clothing that the dog's saliva touched needs to be washed and purified before the person prays.

What is often forgotten in discussions about the dog is that many substances are considered impure and need to be washed off before prayer. Even for the scholars who believe that the dog is impure, it is important to remember that they consider many other substances impure too, and a simple washing is all that it required. Butchers, for example, routinely get blood on their clothing and body, and must wash it off before prayer. The urine of humans certainly is impure. Al-Asqalani, in the hadith about dogs entering the mosque in the time of the Prophet, said that all of the scholars believed that the urine of all animals is pure, except for human urine. Anyone who is touched by human urine on his clothes, body, or place of prayer must purify it. But just because the blood, urine, and feces of a human are impure certainly does not mean that humans should treat one another with contempt or avoid each other! In fact, many of the people who come into contact with these substances, such as doctors in hospital emergency rooms or intensive

care units, are some of the most valued and important members of society. The lesson here is that impurities are a part of daily life. Even if you take the position that dogs are impure—either entirely or just their saliva—this is just one of the many impurities you encounter.

Keeping a Dog at Home

Most people do not understand the rules about possessing a dog in the home. There are many versions of a hadith relating that the Prophet restricted possessing a dog, saying that a person will lose one or two “qirats” [a monetary unit of measure in the early Islamic period] daily if he keeps a dog other than for certain lawful purposes.¹ Various versions of this hadith give different lawful purposes, but the typical purposes listed are guarding, herding, hunting, and for assistance with agriculture.

We now know, based on the hadiths previously discussed, of the Prophet’s concern for mercy, kind treatment, and proper care for animals. The hadiths that specify behavior for keeping a dog require only that the person who wants to keep the dog have a good, beneficial purpose for the dog. At the time of the Prophet, the most common reasons people kept dogs were for guarding, herding, hunting, and protecting agriculture from birds, wild animals, and theft. Naturally, these are the permissible reasons that the hadith define for keeping a dog.

1 Bukhari, hadith 2154; Ibn Hajar, vol. 10, p. 70, hadith 2322.

These restrictions are requirements to protect dogs from abuse and mistreatment, and to penalize humans who do not treat dogs properly. According to the rule of the hadith, you may not keep a fancy dog just as a status symbol to brag to your friends about. Dogs are active and social creatures, and it is cruel to lock up a dog in a room or confine a dog to a balcony. The dog must have a purpose for you, or else you are treating a living being as if it were a mere object of decoration without regard for the dog's own needs. Dogs need training and exercise, and many dogs need to have tasks and duties to accomplish or else they are bored and even depressed.

The idea that dogs can be kept as guard dogs covers most of the situations today in which humans keep dogs as pets. What does guarding mean? Protecting people, animals, and property are all considered examples of guarding. Today, guarding has a very broad meaning. Even the bark of the smallest dog can scare away an intruder trying to get into the house. A dog who lives with an older person may guard that person against loneliness through the dog's companionship. The dog may bark to alert neighbors that the elderly person is sick or needs help and is otherwise alone in the house.

Many people believe that the hadith that states that “angels will not enter a home if a dog or pictures are present”¹ has a very broad meaning negative to all dogs. The most widely

1 Ibn Hajar, vol. 13, p. 35, hadith 3225; vol. 13, p. 36, hadith 3227.

cited version of this hadith, however, provides context to the statement and explains why the statement is applicable in only very limited circumstances. Aisha reported: “The Prophet arranged to meet the angel Gabriel at a certain time, and when that time came, Gabriel had not arrived at their house. The Prophet threw a stick that was in his hand and said, ‘God does not break promises or promises of his messengers.’ He turned around and there was a puppy under the bed. The Prophet said: ‘Aisha, when did this dog enter the house?’ Aisha said ‘I did not notice.’ The Prophet ordered the puppy to leave and then Gabriel came in. The Prophet said: ‘You made an appointment with me and I waited for you and you did not come.’ Gabriel said: ‘The dog in your house prevented me. We do not enter houses that have dogs or pictures.’”

In his commentary on this hadith, Shawkani discussed the different views on the intended meaning of the term “angels” in the shorter form of this hadith—“angels will not enter a home if a dog or pictures are present.” He said that some commentators believe that the angels referred to are the itinerant angels, not the guardian angels or the angels of death. Another opinion is that they are the angels who bring mercy and blessings, since guardian angels never separate themselves from the people they are guarding.¹

1 Nayl al-Awtar, commentary on hadith 573.

Shawkani noted that al-Khatabi limited the applicability of the hadith to the kinds of dogs that are forbidden to be kept at home and to pictures that are forbidden because they contain a soul. Al-Khatabi did not include dogs that hunt or herd or a picture that is woven into a rug or cushion, since none of those prevent the entry of angels.

The author of *Umdat al-Qari* said that the apparent meaning of “angels” is “all angels” but he excluded guardian angels because they never leave the person they are guarding under any circumstances. They said that what was intended by the term “angels” in this hadith are angels carrying out the revelation, like Gabriel. As for guardian angels, they enter all houses and never leave the person.

With regard to what is meant by the term “dogs” in the hadith, al-Khatabi excluded the dogs that law permits and those who clearly may be kept legally, such as dogs for herding and agriculture. Ibn Habban believed that this ruling applies only to dogs in the Prophet’s house.

By providing these different interpretations, we are showing how scholars have disputed the meaning of a text and how they each can have their own opinion and still be faithful to the Sharia. There are many ways that scholars have interpreted the hadiths referring to loss of qirats and angels entering houses with dogs. There is no one agreed-upon meaning for these hadiths. Instead, many different meanings are accepted and respected.

7. A Constant Companion for Humans: the Cat

Without doubt, the cat has a special status in Islamic law and history. One of the most well-known companions of the Prophet, Abu Hurayra [father of the little kitten], was given this nickname by the Prophet because he often carried a kitten in the sleeve of his shirt.¹

A widely transmitted hadith shows how welcome and accepted the cat was in matters of purity: Kabsha bint Ka'b b. Malik, who was the wife of Abu Qatada, said that Abu Qatada came into the room and she poured out for him his water for washing before prayer [wudu']. A cat came into the room and drank from the water and Abu Qatada tipped the bowl towards the cat so she could drink. Kabsha said: 'He looked at me and said 'Are you astonished, my cousin?' She said 'yes' and he replied 'the Prophet said that the cat is not impure.'"²

The Prophet himself would also use water from which cats drank for washing before prayer. Aisha related that the Prophet would put his bowl of water out for a cat to drink from it, then he would use the remaining water for washing.³ The cat is considered so clean that Aisha shared her plate of food with a cat. Dawud ibn Salih ibn Dinar al-Tamar related on the authority of his mother that "her master sent her to take harisa (a food made of wheat and bulgar) to Aisha and

1 Al-Mustadrak ala al-*Sahihayn*, vol. 3, p. 579.

2 Sunan Abi Dawud, vol. 1, p. 19; Sunan al-Nisa'i, vol. 1, p. 76.

3 Sunan al-Daraqatni, vol. 1, p. 70.

when she arrived, she found Aisha praying. Aisha indicated to here to put down the harisa and she did, and then a cat came and ate from the harisa. Aisha finished her prayers and ate from the harisa too. Aisha said that the Prophet said that the cat is not impure.”¹

Harming a cat carries grave consequences. As we saw above, a woman who confined a cat without food or water, resulting in the cat’s death, went to hell for her actions. In another case, a woman accidentally caused the death of three cats and had to pay compensation for her misdeeds. Zayd b. Aslam reported that Um al-Fadl Abu Bakr closed the door of her house in Mecca and inside were a mother cat and her two kittens. She traveled to Mina and Arafat and when she returned she found that the cats had died. She told this to the Prophet and he ordered her to pay the money to free a slave for each of the dead cats as a means of atonement.²

In this case, this companion of the Prophet accidentally caused the death of the cats—she did not intend to confine them so that they would die. Thus, she had to compensate for her bad acts by performing the good act of paying to freeing slaves. Since her actions were accidental, she was not subject to the more severe penalty of the woman who intentionally locked a cat up without food or water, for that woman went to hell as a result.

1 Sunan Abi Dawud, vol. 1, p. 20. In another version, Aisha said that she ate from harisa after a cat had eaten from it. Sunan al-Daraqatni, vol. 1, p. 70.

2 Musannaf Abd al-Razaq, vol. 4, p. 409.

8. When is it Necessary or Permissible to take the Life of an Animal?

In some circumstances, it is necessary to take the life of an animal. The slaughter of animals for food is discussed below, but first, we address a type of killing that has been the source of many problems.

A. Cases of Killing Animals for Merciful Reasons

What are we supposed to do if a car hits a donkey on the street and the donkey is seriously injured and collapses in the street in terrible pain? It appears that the donkey is too badly injured to recover, but will spend many hours in terrible agony before dying. What is the right thing to do here? A person knowledgeable in matters of animal health, such as a veterinarian, pharmacist, or member of an animal welfare society, should consider what is best for the poor animal. Can the animal be treated and recover to live? If not, then the donkey should receive an injection of a medicine to quickly bring a peaceful death that does not add any suffering to the animal.

This principle that any killing should be merciful is found in a famous hadith: “The Prophet said that God required being kind in all things. So if you kill, be kind in the killing, and if you slaughter, be kind in the slaughtering.”¹ The

1 *Sahih* Muslim 3615; Tirmidhi 1329; Nasa’i 4329, 4335-4338; Abu Dawud 2432; Ibn Majah 3161; Musnad Ahmed 16490, 16494, 16506, 16516; Sunan al-Darimi 1888.

famous scholar Nawawi's explanation of this hadith states that the rule applies to all legally justified killing: "The rule applies to all legal killings, such as slaughtering, or legal retaliation, or the crimes specified in the Qur'an that carry capital punishment." Thus, this rule applies to the example of the donkey given above.

The message of this important hadith is very clear. The fact that a person or animal will be put to death according to law does not mean that we may treat the animal or person badly until the point of death. Nor does it mean that any manner of killing may be used, such that the person or animal can be violently or brutally killed. This hadith states very strongly that the killing must be as kind as possible. Tirmidhi's commentary explains that: "Being kind in this context means choosing the method that is easiest and the least painful for the person or animal to be killed." Furthermore, the legal validity of the hadith is very strong. Nawawi stated that "This hadith is part of the hadith that comprise the fundamental rules of Islam."

Another example when the killing of an animal may be necessary is a vicious dog who cannot be tamed and who poses a danger to the community. Sometimes a dog who seems violent is only just scared and requires a skilled person to catch the dog and take him to an animal shelter, and the dog may be trained and adopted. In other cases, the dog truly is violent, and perhaps even very ill, and a person

trained in animal welfare needs to evaluate the situation and determine what should happen to the dog.

There is a very important lesson here. If you are not trained in animal welfare, you do not have the authority to decide what should be done with the dog. If you are being attacked by the dog and have to defend yourself at the moment of attack, then of course you have the right to protect yourself with force proportionate to the level of the threat. But if you simply think that a dog might be dangerous, you must not assume the responsibility for knowing what is best because you might take a life unnecessarily on the basis of mere suspicion, and you will be accountable for that sin. Further, you will not know the most merciful means of killing the dog, and you will commit a bigger sin by torturing the dog in his death and causing the dog unnecessary suffering, which is prohibited in Islam.

If a person trained in animal welfare determines that the dog needs to be killed, then the killing must be done in the kindest way possible. Methods of killing that cause unnecessary pain and suffering are simply not Islamic and clearly violate the rule: “If you kill, be kind in the killing.”

In the example of the donkey above, it is known which donkey was hit by a car and is dying in the street. But some people have the mistaken idea that if there is one dangerous dog in a neighborhood, then every dog in the area may be killed out of precaution. This is simply not permissible in Islam.

A similar situation is related in all the major hadith collections: “An ant bit a prophet and he ordered that the ant colony be burned. God spoke to him and said: ‘Because of an ant’s bite you have burnt a community that glorifies Me?’”¹

The meaning of this hadith is clear on its face: that particular prophet did not have the right to retaliate against an entire community of ants just because one of those ants harmed him. Although not specifically stated in the hadith, it seems implied that the prophet could have punished that one particular ant, if that ant could be identified, but that collective punishment is forbidden, even to someone with the special status of a prophet in Islam.

B. Slaughter

We all are aware that there are particular rules that must be followed when an animal is slaughtered in order for the meat to be considered permissible for Muslims (halal). The determination of halal meat deals with the kind of meat, of course, and also prescribes detailed rules and specific means of slaughter so that the slaughter takes place with as much compassion and respect to the animal as possible. The rules are also to make the process as hygienic as possible to protect the health of the human consumers. Therefore,

1 Muslim 4157; Ibn Hajar, vol. 12, p. 121, hadith 3019.

slaughtering must be done strictly according to Islamic rules for all of these important reasons.

If you buy your meat from a butcher or store, you may wonder why you need to be familiar with the rules of slaughter, since that is for someone else to do. But every Muslim who eats meat must be sure that his meat is halal, and so we must all pay attention to the rules of slaughter. Furthermore, at the time of the Festival of the Sacrifice, many people undertake to slaughter their own animals. This creates many problems because people do not know the rules or do not have the conditions at home to be able to follow them. Thus, all slaughtering should be done in slaughterhouses by slaughterers with the training and license to slaughter animals.

Slaughtering must be done in a way to minimize the fear and pain to the animal. Recall that the general rule is: “The Prophet said that God required being kind in all things. So if you kill, be kind in the killing, and if you slaughter, be kind in the slaughtering.”¹ First, the transport to the place of slaughter must be done mercifully. Ibn Sirin related that ‘Umar saw a man violently leading a sheep of his to slaughter. ‘Umar beat the man with a whip and said to him: “gently lead the sheep to death.”² This example clearly

1 *Sahih* Muslim 3615; Tirmidhi 1329; Nasa’i 4329, 4335-4338; Abu Dawud 2432; Ibn Majah 3161; Musnad Ahmed 16490, 16494, 16506, 16516; Sunan al-Darimi 1888.

2 Kasani, *Bada’i’ al-Sana’i’*, vol. 5, p. 60.

shows that ‘Umar was very concerned about mercy and kindness to animals. ‘Umar emulated the proper Islamic way. Even the process of transporting the animals to the slaughterhouse must be done with kindness and mercy, and never with force, violence, or neglectful actions resulting in bad conditions for the animals.

There are rules controlling the actions at the site of the slaughter and in the actual slaughtering process. Ukrama narrated a hadith that most Muslims know by heart. He said that “the Prophet saw a man who had put the sheep on her side and while he was sharpening his knife the sheep was watching him. The Prophet said: ‘Do you want to kill her many times over? Why didn’t you sharpen your knife before you put her on her side?’”¹ The lesson here is that the animal must be kept as calm and relaxed as possible before the moment of slaughter. If the sheep is put on her side and then she sees the sharpening of the knife, the sheep will become extremely agitated and want to fight for her life. This is cruel and unnecessary. The Prophet wanted to protect the animal from all suffering prior to the very moment the jugular veins are cut in the slaughter, and even the cutting itself must be done with as little pain as possible.

In a similar story, “ ‘Umar saw a man who had laid the sheep on her side and then put his foot on the side of

1 Sarakhsi, *Mabsut*, vol. 11, p. 226; Kasani, *Bada’i’ al-Sana’i’*, vol. 5, p. 60.

the sheep's face to hold her down while he sharpened his knife. 'Umar whipped him for this reprehensible behavior, and the man fled from 'Umar. The sheep also ran away, because animals know what instruments harm them, just like they know what situations are dangerous for them and they protect themselves from them. If you sharpen your knife when you have already put the animal on its side, you increase the animal's pain."¹

Safwan b. Salim reported that 'Umar b. Khattab forbade slaughtering a sheep in front of another sheep.² He forbade this because of the fear and pain it causes to the second sheep. It is like a sheep watching the sharpening of the knife that will kill her but much worse. If a sheep is aware that her death is coming by watching the sharpening of the knife, imagine the terror a sheep experiences when perceiving or seeing directly the slaughter of another sheep, while the first sheep awaits her turn? This is clearly forbidden.

'Umar said that in addition to these rules, the passage of the knife over the jugular veins must be very quick.³ This requires a very sharp knife and much skill. The purpose here again is to minimize the pain and stress caused to the animal.

1 Kasani, *Bada'i' al-Sana'i'*, vol. 5, p. 60-61.

2 'Abd al-Razaq, *Musannaf*, vol. 4, p. 494, hadith 8610.

3 Sarakhsi, *Mabsut*, vol. 11, p. 226.

C. Wrongful Killing

The taking of an animal's life other than for food or out of necessity is forbidden. Abdullah b. 'Umar related that the Prophet said: "If anyone kills even the smallest bird without justification, God will ask him about it on judgment day." The hadith shows that there is no tolerance or forgiveness for killing outside legal slaughter or other legal killing. If a person thinks that he is able to kill for fun, God will hold him accountable. Killing of an animal without legal cause is forbidden and the killer will be punished on Judgment Day.

In another hadith, al-Sharid b. Suyid al-Thaqafi related: "I heard the Prophet saying that whoever kills a small bird frivolously, then he will cry out to God on the judgment day 'O God—a person killed me senselessly and needlessly, and without any reason or benefit to him!'"¹ The meaning is that the person who killed frivolously will suffer the same treatment. Killing any animal, no matter how large or small, without legal cause, is punishable.

Hisham b. Zayd b. Anas b. Malik reported that he: "entered a certain place with Anas and he saw a group of slave boys or just young boys who had positioned a chicken and were throwing things at the chicken. Anas said that the Prophet prohibited setting up of animals in order to throw

¹ Nasa'i 4370. Also reported in Musnad Ahmed 18651 and with a different variation in Sunan Abu Dawud 4561.

or shoot things at the animal.”¹ Nawawi explained what the boys were doing as “restraining an animal while it is alive in order to kill it by throwing things at it [such as rocks] or shooting things at it [such as arrows or, today, bullets].” and that “the prohibition of this action means that it is forbidden.”

Nawawi explained that the prohibition is because the act is: inflicting torture on the animal, destroying the animal’s soul, wasting the animal’s worth, losing the opportunity to slaughter the animal if the animal is one that is slaughterable, and losing the opportunity to benefit from the animal if the animal is not subject to slaughter, such as the service to man that dogs provide.

It was also reported that “Abdullah b. Umar passed by boys from the Quraysh tribe who had set up a bird and were shooting at it. They gave the bird’s owner each arrow that they shot that missed the bird. When Ibn Umar saw this, the boys ran away. He said: ‘Who did this? God’s curse upon the one who did this. The Prophet cursed he who takes the live of a soul intentionally.’”

These hadith are primarily concerned with the pain and suffering caused to the animal. For while the monetary loss is absolutely unnecessary, a human can still find another sheep to slaughter or another donkey to work for him. However, once an animal’s life is taken, the person who

1 Bukhari 5089; Muslim 3616.

took the animal's life can never undo the pain and suffering he caused the animal, and will carry the sin of the act with him to the day of judgment.

Killing animals other than in the context of proper slaughtering and for reasons of necessity as discussed above is not fun, and it is not a game or sport. It is wrong, cruel, and a sin.

Conclusion

Islam is based on principles of kindness, mercy, compassion, justice, and doing good works. These principles are seen pervasively throughout the texts of the religion—the Qur'an and the examples of the Prophet—as well as in many examples from Islamic history. Islam requires kindness and compassion towards all animals in all situations, and I hope most fervently that these rules can truly become a part of daily life.



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