

In Islam, cruelty toward an animal is considered a sin. The Quran and guidance from the Prophet Muhammad, as recorded in the hadith, a record of Muhammad's traditions and sayings, give many examples and directives about how Muslims should treat animals.

## Animal Communities

The Quran says that animals form communities, just as humans do:

"There is not an animal that lives on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but they form communities like you. Nothing have we omitted from the Book, and they all shall be gathered to their Lord in the end" (Quran 6:38).

The Quran further describes all living things as Muslim, in that they live the way Allah created them to live and obey Allah's laws in the natural world. Although animals don't have free will, they follow their natural, God-given instincts and can be said to "submit to God's will," which is the essence of Islam.

Because animals are living creatures with feelings and connections to the larger spiritual and physical world, Muslims must consider their lives as worthwhile and cherished:

"Seest thou not that it is Allah Whose praise all beings in the heavens and on earth do celebrate, and the birds (of the air) with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise, and Allah knows well all that they do." (Quran 24:41)

## Kindness to Animals

Islam forbids treating animals cruelly or killing them except for food. Muhammad often chastised his companions, or followers, who mistreated animals and spoke to them about mercy and kindness. Here are examples from the hadith that instruct Muslims how to treat animals:

- **Mercy is rewarded:** "Whoever is merciful even to a sparrow, Allah will be merciful to him on the Day of Judgment."
- **Animals are like humans:** "A good deed done to an animal is like a good deed done to a human being, while an act of cruelty to an animal is as bad as cruelty to a human being."
- **Animals cannot speak up for themselves:** Muhammad once passed a camel that was so emaciated its back had almost reached its stomach. He said, "Fear Allah in these beasts who cannot speak."
- **Mental cruelty is also forbidden:** A group of companions was once traveling with Muhammad when he left them for a while. During his absence, they saw a bird with its two young, and they took the young ones from the nest. The mother bird was circling above in the air, beating its wings in grief, when Muhammad came back and said, "Who has hurt the feelings of this bird by taking its young? Return them to her."
- **Give rest to beasts of burden:** Muhammad said, "Do not use the backs of your animals as chairs. Allah has made them subject to you so that by them you can reach places that you would not otherwise be able to reach except with great fatigue."

## Treatment of Pets

Muslims who choose to keep pets take on responsibility for their care and well being, including appropriate food, water, and shelter. Muhammad described the punishment of a person who neglected a pet:

"It is related from Abdullah ibn Umar that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "A woman was once punished after death because of a cat which she had kept confined until it died, and because of this she entered the Fire. She had neither given it food or drink while confining it, nor had she let it free to eat the creatures of the earth."

## Hunting for Sport

In Islam, hunting for sport is prohibited; Muslims may hunt only by Allah's permission as needed for food. Sport hunting was common during Muhammad's time, and according to companions and relatives, he condemned it. Muhammad:

- Cursed those who used any living thing as a target.
- Forbade inciting animals to fight one another.
- Forbade eating *mujaththama* animals—that is, animals that have been tied up and shot with arrows.

Islamic dietary law allows Muslims to eat meat, though certain animals are not allowed as food. Guidelines must be followed when slaughtering to minimize the animal's suffering.

## Cultural Disregard

In some Muslim communities, Islamic guidelines regarding animals aren't followed. Some people mistakenly believe that humans' needs take priority, so animal rights are not an urgent issue. Others find excuses to be cruel to animals.

The best way to combat such ignorance is through education and good example. Individuals and governments have important roles to play in educating the public about the care of animals and establishing institutions to support animal welfare.