

## Shariah advocates Animal Rights

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Recently, we witnessed some outrageous footage of animal cruelty in some Indonesian abattoirs. This has caused an outcry in Australia leading to the banning of live cattle export.

Sadly, Australian cattle farmers suffered tremendously as a result. While I hope to see a quick solution to their suffering, I am more eager to see that animal cruelty in Indonesian abattoirs comes to an end.

We are morally obliged to end such cruelty because such practices contravene Islamic Law.

Unfortunately, some of our Australian politicians were quick to link Islam to these practices.

Federal Member for Dawson, George Christensen, criticised "the religion that actually inspires the torture of the cattle" in his recent address to the parliament. Like those who commit cruelty against animals in Indonesian abattoirs, Mr. Christensen is unaware of Islam's revolutionary teachings about animal rights.

Long before the West began discussing animal rights, 14 centuries ago Islamic scripture made such rights part of its laws. Yes, the same Shariah laws that conjure fear in the hearts of many people in the West stipulated many injunctions to protect animal rights.

Concern for animal rights is a recent phenomenon in the West. It was not until 1820 that the first anti-cruelty law made it onto the British statute-books.

Long before it daunted on the West that animals should be treated with care and compassion, Islamic law taught that animals have rights, and more importantly that animal welfare is a religious obligation. To demonstrate this point I shall highlight some textual evidence from Shariah primary sources: the Quran and Sunnah (tradition) of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

There is an entire chapter in the Quran titled 'The Cattle' in which Allah (God most High) declares: "And there is neither animal that walks upon the earth nor a bird that flies with its two wings but (they are) nations (or communities) like yourselves" (6:38). In *Tanwir al-Miqbas min Tafsir Ibn Abbas*, one of the foremost commentators of the Quran, Ibn Abbas, states that 'nations' means that "they resemble you in eating, copulation, understanding one another, just as you understand one another."

This is revolutionary given that it was revealed 14 centuries ago. From this and other textual evidence, Muslim scholars have always maintained that animals have feelings, a concept that was introduced recently in Western discourse.

In an authentic tradition Prophet Muhammad (SAW) informs us about a prophet of past ages who was bitten by an ant for which he burnt the entire ant hill. God reprimanded him for this act (Sahih Bukhari). Muslim scholars deduced that it is therefore forbidden to burn ant hill or colony in retaliation.

Ibn 'Umar reported that he passed by two lads from the tribe of Quraysh who had set up a bird and were shooting at it. When they saw Ibn 'Umar, they ran off. Ibn 'Umar said, "Who did this? May Allah curse whoever did this. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, cursed people who used a live creature as a target" (Agreed upon).

The companion Anas said, "The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, forbade tying up animals so that they could be shot at and killed" (Agreed upon).

Elsewhere, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) informed us of a woman who will be punished in the hereafter because she neglected feeding her pet cat, and prevented it from eating outside.

When he once saw a thin starving camel, the Prophet (SAW) reprimanded its owner and asked him to fear God and look after his camel (Abu Dawud, Sahih).

Ibn 'Abbas said, "The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, saw a donkey with a branded face and he disliked it." Ibn 'Abbas said, "By Allah, I do not brand except as far away from the face as possible." He commanded that his donkey should be branded on its haunches. He was the first to brand on the haunches (Muslim).

Islamic scripture has repeatedly advocated mercy and compassion toward animals, birds and all other creatures.

Ibn Mas'ud said, "We were with the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, on a journey and he went to relieve himself. We saw a red bird with two chicks and took the chicks. The red bird came and began to flap its wings. The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, came back and said, 'Who has distressed this bird by taking its young? Return her young to her.' He saw an ant hill which we had set alight. He said, 'Who has set fire to this?' We replied, 'We did.' He said, 'Only the Lord of the Fire should punish with fire'" (Abu Dawud).

When the Prophet (SAW) once saw a man intending to slaughter his sheep with a blunt knife he remarked "do you want to kill it twice. If anyone intends to kill his animal let him sharpen his knife" (Tabari).

Animals also have the right to be fed and watered. One of the most famous and amazing traditions is regarding a woman (in some narrations a man) who gave a thirsty dog water.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, "A prostitute was forgiven by Allah, because, passing by a panting dog near a well and seeing that the dog was about to die of thirst, she took off her shoe, and tying it with her head-cover she drew out some water for it. So, Allah forgave her because of that" (Sahih al-Bukhari).

From this scholars derived the rule that animals should be protected from hunger and thirst.

When the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab saw a donkey overloaded he removed the extra load a reprimanded its owner saying 'do not load your animal above its capacity.'

Based on the above and other textual evidences for Islamic scripture, Muslim scholars have derived many rules pertaining to animal rights. Human and compassionate slaughtering of animals for the purpose of consumption is no exception.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) declared "Allah has ordained kindness (and excellence) in everything. If the killing (of animals) is to be done, do it in the best manner, and when you slaughter, do it in the best manner by first sharpening the knife, and putting the animal at ease" (Muslim).

Islam prohibits torturing of animals before and during slaughtering. The knife must be sharpened. The animal should be well cared for before being killed; it should not be killed before other animals; the knife blade must be free of blemishes that might tear the wound; the animal must not be in an uncomfortable position; the animal must be killed by cutting the throat with the single continuous back and forth motion of a sharp knife; the spinal cord must not be cut and so on.

It should be also noted that many Islamic scholars accept *halal* compliance stunning of animals before slaughtering.

The footage on the Four Corners program goes against all Islamic principles and practice of *halal* slaughter.

Halal slaughtering is practiced daily in Australian abattoirs in accordance with Islamic and Australian practices, and no one has ever suggested that this has been "torture inspired by the religion."

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