PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S KINDNESS TO ANIMALS

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Description: Prophet Muhammad cautions humankind to be merciful towards all living creatures.

Category: Articles Comparative Religion Tolerance in Islam

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When we mention the religion of Islam, often the first word that comes to mind is peace. The word Islam is derived from the infinitive 'sa-la'ma' which also is the root for the word *salam*, which means peace. Islam is a way of life that promotes peace, dignity, respect, tolerance, justice and mercy and all of these qualities are tempered with serenity (calmness) that comes from submission to God. Perhaps the greatest of these qualities is mercy. It is one of the overriding themes throughout the Quran.

"Certainly, We have brought them a Book (the Quran) which We have explained in detail with knowledge, - guidance, and a mercy to a people who believe." (Quran 7:52)

Mercy is that ethereal quality that embodies gentleness, piety, care, consideration, love, and forgiveness. When these qualities are observable in this world, they are a mere reflection of God's mercy towards His creation. God said clearly that Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, was a mercy for all of creation, not just his family and friends or the Arab nation, or the people of the 7th century CE, and not for human beings alone.

"And We have sent you O Muhammad not but as a mercy for all of humankind, jinn, and all that exists." (Quran 21:107)

Prophet Muhammad was the embodiment of mercy, he showed compassion to all those around him, family, orphans, friends, strangers and even enemies. He also treated the environment and animals with respect and mercy. He taught his followers that because animals were part of God's creation they should be treated with dignity and due care.

The traditions of Prophet Muhammad remind us that humankind was put on this earth to be the custodian of God's creation. Treating animals with kindness and mercy is just

one of the responsibilities embedded in that custodianship. Prophet Muhammad's words and behaviour make it clear that causing defenceless creatures pain and suffering is not only completely unacceptable, but we will also be answerable to God for such actions.

"If someone kills a sparrow for sport, the sparrow will cry out on the Day of Judgment, "O Lord! That person killed me in vain! He did not kill me for any useful purpose.'[1]

The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said, **"Whoever kills a sparrow or anything bigger than that without a just cause, God will hold him accountable on the Day of Judgment."** The listeners asked, "O Messenger of God, what is a just cause?" He replied, "That he will kill it to eat, not simply to chop off its head and then throw it away."[2]

Islam expects humankind to treat all animals (all living creatures - birds, sea creatures, and insects) with respect and dignity. Prophet Muhammad continuously advised people to show kindness. He forbade the practice of cutting tails and manes of horses, of branding animals at any soft spot, and of keeping horses saddled unnecessarily. [3]If the Prophet saw, any animal over-burdened or ill fed he would speak mildly to the owner and say*,* **"Fear God in your treatment of animals."**[4]

However, refraining from physical cruelty is not enough; abstaining from mental cruelty is equally as important. Even a bird's emotional distress should be treated seriously. One of Prophet Muhammad's companions narrates*,* **"We were on a journey and during the Prophet's absence, we saw a bird with its two chicks; we took them. The mother bird was circling above us in the air, beating its wings in grief. When Prophet Muhammad returned he said, "Who has hurt the feelings of this bird by taking its chicks? Return them to her."**[5]

In another narration, a Companion of the Prophet came to him carrying baby chicks in his clothing and mentioned that the mother bird had hovered over them. He was directed to return the chicks back to the same bush.[6]

In pre Islamic times, pagan superstitions and polytheistic practices included acts of torture and cruelty to animals. Islam condemned this and put a stop to all such practices. When Prophet Muhammad and his companions migrated to Medina, they noticed that people cut off camels' humps and the fat tails of sheep for food. The Prophet forbade them from them from doing this and said, **"Whatever is cut off an animal while it is still alive, is carrion and is unlawful to eat."**[7]

In Islam, the rules pertaining to slaughtering animals are very strict and fixed. Protecting animals from pain and undue suffering is paramount.

"God 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."[8]

When you set your dog (for the chase), mention the name of God if he catches the game, and you reach it while it is still alive, cut, its throat quickly (so it won't suffer)." [9]

Humankind must strike a balance in their treatment of animals. All living creatures were put on this earth by God for our benefit. They are not at the same level as human beings but neither should they be treated cruelly. It is humankind's responsibility to see that they have food, water, and shelter from the elements. Living creatures must not be overburdened, abused, or tortured and doing so will surely result in God's just punishment. A true believer in God demonstrates his or her belief by respecting the entire creation, and Prophet Muhammad's character and actions are a shinning example of respect for all that exists.

Footnotes:

[1]	Sunnan An Nasai
[2]	Ibid
[3]	*Saheeh Muslim*
[4]	*Abu Dawood.*
[5]	*Saheeh Muslim*
[6]	*Abu Dawood*
[7]	*At-Tirmidhi*
[8]	*Saheeh Muslim*
[9]	Saheeh Bukhari & Muslim

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