



## “This she-camel of God is a sign to you”

### *Dimensions of Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Culture*

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It is frequently claimed that one position or another represents “true” Islam. Nevertheless, there exists no unified Islamic or Muslim view of nonhuman animals. It is also important to acknowledge that, while the terms are often difficult to disentangle for those both within and without the tradition, “Islamic” and “Muslim” are certainly not synonymous, since attitudes held by individuals or collectives who happen to be “Muslim” may not be “Islamic.”<sup>1</sup>

There are currently about 1.2 billion Muslims, and they can be found in nearly every country. The vast majority—about 85 percent—are not Arab but belong to other ethnic and linguistic groups. The largest concentration of Muslims, 33 percent, can be found in South Asia. The nations with the largest Muslim populations are Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. By contrast the Middle East contains 25 percent of the world’s Muslim population. Since Muslim identities and worldviews are in all cases made up of multiple sources, one would predict that attitudes toward nonhuman animals among

Muslims of diverse cultural backgrounds would show both similarities and differences. This indeed turns out to be the case.

#### *Nonhuman Animals in Islamic Texts*

Islam (literally, “submission”), as an ideal is understood by believers as the state God wills for His creation (*khalq*). This is apprehended by the Sunni majority through the revealed scripture of the Qur’ān, the life example of the Prophet Muḥammad (the *sunna*, as attested in ḥadīth reports), and the *shari’u*, a comprehensive code of life as articulated in the legal texts of the so-called Classical period (eighth to tenth centuries CE). Shī’ites also follow the teachings of their Imams, and Sufis (who can be Sunni or Shī’i) defer to the authority of their spiritual guides (*shaykhs*, or *pīrs*). The actual practices and attitudes of Muslims have always been shaped by Islamic sources in combination with extra-Islamic cultural ones. Islamic sources tend to be

embodied in authoritative texts, while cultural sources often are not.

Much of Islam's textual tradition is originally in Arabic, which for many centuries played a role analogous to the scholarly *lingua franca* in Christian Europe. The Arabic word used in the Classical texts to refer to animals, including humans, is *hayawān* (pl. *hayawānāt*).<sup>2</sup> This term appears only once in the Qur'ān, however, where it refers rather to the "true" existence of the afterlife.<sup>3</sup> For nonhuman animals the Qur'ān instead uses the term *dabba* (pl. *dawābb*).<sup>4</sup>

Human beings are often described in Arabic texts as "the speaking animal" (*hayawān al-nātiq*), although the Qur'ān itself acknowledges that nonhuman animals also have speech:

And [in this insight] Solomon was [truly] David's heir; and he would say: "O you people! We have been taught the speech of birds, and have been given [in abundance] of all [good] things: this, behold, is indeed a manifest favor [from God]!"<sup>5</sup>

Arabs in pre-Islamic times practiced animal cults, various meat taboos, sympathetic magic (*istimtar*) and possibly totemism. Some tribes had animal names, such as the Quraysh ("shark"), which was the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad, and the Asad ("lion").<sup>6</sup> Certain animals, including camels, horses, bees, and others, were believed to carry blessing (*baraka*), while others, such as dogs and cats, were associated with the evil eye. Genies (*jinn*) were believed sometimes to take animal form.

The Qur'ān proscribed many pre-Islamic practices related to animals,<sup>7</sup> which nevertheless survived in some cases. Also notable is the persistence of blood sacrifices, such as that performed on the Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha) which commemorates the prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son (Isma'il, not Isaac, in Islamic tradition). Many Muslims also make blood sacrifices in fulfillment of vows (*nazar*), seven days after the birth of a child (*aqiqa*), or on the tenth day of the month of Dhu'l-hijja

in atonement for transgressions committed during the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). Also surviving are beliefs in metamorphosis (*maskh*), several examples of which occur in the Qur'ān.<sup>8</sup> Some heterodox Muslim groups retained a belief in metempsychosis (*tanasukh*). Six chapters of the Qur'ān are named for animals: the Cow (2), the Cattle (6), the Bee (16), the Ant (28), the Spider (29), and the Elephant (105).

Islam is what contemporary ecologists would probably call a strongly anthropocentric religion, although Muslims might prefer to see their worldview as "theocentric." Within the hierarchy of Creation, Muslims see humans as occupying a special and privileged status. The Qur'ān says, "Hast thou not seen how Allah has subjected (*sakhhara*) to you all that is in the earth?"<sup>9</sup> The term *khalīfa* (lit., "successor"), which in the Qur'ān is applied to humans, is generally defined by contemporary Muslims as "vice-regent," as in the verses that state "I am setting on the earth a vice-regent (*khalīfa*)," and "It is He who has made you his vice-regent on earth."<sup>10</sup> According to this view, while nonhuman Creation is subjugated to human needs, the proper human role is that of conscientious steward and not exploiter.<sup>11</sup> The earth was not created for humans alone: "And the earth has He spread out for all living beings (*anām*)."<sup>12</sup> Everything in Creation is a miraculous sign of God (*aya*), inviting Muslims to contemplate the Creator. Nonhuman animals fall into this category, as in the following verse:

... This she-camel of God is a sign to you; so leave her to graze in God's earth, and let her come to no harm, or you shall be seized with a grievous punishment.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the Qur'ān specifies that certain animals were created for the benefit of humans:

And He has created cattle for you: you derive warmth from them, and [various] other uses; and from them you obtain food; and you find beauty

in them when you drive them home in the evenings and when you take them out to pasture in the mornings. And they carry your loads to [many] a place which [otherwise] you would be unable to reach without great hardship to yourselves. And [it is He who creates] horses and mules and asses for you to ride, as well as for [their] beauty; and He will yet create things of which [today] you have no knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

Yet despite this hierarchy, humans are described as similar to nonhuman animals in almost all respects. Unlike in Christianity, in Islam nonhuman animals are considered to have souls (*nafs*). Some Muslim scholars have opined that nonhuman animals will be resurrected along with humans on the Day of Judgment. The Qur'an states that all creation praises God, even if this praise is not expressed in human language.<sup>15</sup> The Qur'an further says that "There is not an animal in the earth, nor a flying creature on two wings, but they are communities (*umām*, sg. *umma*) like unto you."<sup>16</sup> A jurist from the Classical period, Ahmad ibn Habit, even surmised from this verse that since the Qur'an elsewhere states that "there never was a community (*umma*) without a warner [i.e., a prophet] having lived among them,"<sup>17</sup> then perhaps nonhuman animals also have prophets. Ibn Hazm (d. 1062) denied this, arguing that "the laws of Allah are only applicable to those who possess the ability to speak and can understand them,"<sup>18</sup> but his rebuttal lacks weight since the Qur'an explicitly states that animals do speak, albeit in their own languages.

The Qur'an emphasizes that God takes care of the needs of all living things: "There is no moving creature on earth, but Allah provides for its sustenance."<sup>19</sup> The world is not for humans alone: "And the earth: He has assigned to all living creatures."<sup>20</sup> Nonhuman animals can even receive divine revelation, as in the verse which states: "And your Lord revealed to the bee, saying: 'make hives in the mountains, and in the trees, and in [human] habitations.'"<sup>21</sup> It has thus been argued by some Islamic commen-

tators that humans are unique only in that they possess volition (*taqwa*), and are thus responsible for their actions.<sup>22</sup>

### *Meat-Eating and Slaughter*

Islamic dietary laws are derived both from the Qur'an and from the Classical legal tradition. The overwhelming majority of Muslims eat meat; indeed, meat-eating is mentioned in the Qur'an as one of the pleasures of heaven.<sup>23</sup> The Qur'an explicitly allows the eating of animal flesh, with certain exceptions:

O you who have attained to faith! Be true to your covenants! Lawful to you is [the flesh of] every beast that feeds on plants, save what is mentioned to you [hereinafter]: but you are not allowed to hunt while you are in a state of pilgrimage. Behold, God ordains in accordance with his will.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand the Qur'an prohibits the eating of animals that have not been ritually slaughtered, as well as the eating of blood, and pigs:

Forbidden to you is carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that over which any name other than God's has been invoked, and the animal that has been strangled, or beaten to death, or killed by a fall, or gored to death, or savaged by a beast of prey, save that which you [yourselves] may have slaughtered while it was still alive; and [forbidden to you] is all that has been slaughtered on idolatrous altars.<sup>25</sup>

A similar verse, however, adds an exemption in case of dire need:

... but if one is driven [to it] by necessity—neither coveting it nor exceeding his immediate need—verily, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.<sup>26</sup>

Muslim jurists later expanded these restrictions, categorizing all animals in terms of whether eating them is lawful (*halāl*), discouraged (*makrūh*), or forbidden (*harām*). Classifications differed somewhat from one school to the next, but among the animals forbidden by the jurists are dogs, donkeys, frogs, peacocks, storks, beetles, crustaceans, and many kinds of insects (although locusts are popular among Bedouins). Some prohibitions arise from the animal's behavior, such as scavenging or eating other forbidden animals, from the unpleasant flavor of their meat, or merely because they are considered "disgusting." The eating of carnivores, monkeys, or reptiles is mostly forbidden, although the Maliki school permits the flesh of jackals, birds of prey, monkeys, and most reptiles.

Ritual (*halāl*) slaughter is said to follow the principle of compassion for the animal being killed. According to the ḥadīth literature, Muḥammad said, "If you kill, kill well, and if you slaughter, slaughter well. Let each of you sharpen his blade and let him spare suffering to the animal he slaughters."<sup>27</sup>

Apart from condoned slaughter for purposes of human survival, Muḥammad frequently reminded his companions to take the interests of nonhuman animals into consideration. The ḥadīths report him as saying, "For [charity shown to] each creature which has a wet heart [i.e., is alive], there is a reward."<sup>28</sup> In another ḥadīth, Muḥammad is said to have reprimanded some men who were sitting idly on their camels in the marketplace, saying "Either ride them or leave them alone."<sup>29</sup> He is also reported to have said, "There is no man who kills [even] a sparrow or anything smaller, without its deserving it, but Allah will question him about it [on the Day of Judgment],"<sup>30</sup> and "Whoever is kind to the creatures of God, is kind to himself."<sup>31</sup> The ḥadīths mention two contrasting stories with particular relevance to the treatment of animals. In one, a woman is condemned to hell because she has mistreated a cat;<sup>32</sup> in another, a sinner is saved by the grace of Allah after he gives water to

a dog dying of thirst.<sup>33</sup> In the interpretation of G. H. Bousquet, Islam thus "condemns to hell those who mistreat animals, and . . . more importantly, accords extraordinary grace to those who do them good."<sup>34</sup>

The killing of some animals for any reason is forbidden on the basis of certain ḥadīths. Animals that Muslims are never to kill include hoopoes and magpies, frogs, ants and bees. On the other hand, Muḥammad ordered the killing of certain other animals, including mottled crows, dogs, mice, and scorpions. Muslims are not allowed to kill any living thing while in a state of ritual purity, for example while praying or on pilgrimage. Animal skins may be used as prayer rugs, but only if the animal has been ritually slaughtered. Hunting for sport is forbidden on the basis of numerous ḥadīths, as are animal fights and other such entertainment, although Muslims have often not abided by these prohibitions.

#### *Animal Rights in the Islamic Legal Tradition*

The thirteenth-century legal scholar 'Izz al-din ibn 'Abd al-salam, in his *Qawā'id al-abkām fi masālih al-anām* (*Rules for Judgment in the Cases of Living Beings*), has the following to say about a person's obligations toward his domestic animals:

- He should spend [time, money or effort] on it, even if the animal is aged or diseased in such a way that no benefit is expected from it. His spending should be equal to that on a similar animal useful to him.
- He should not overburden it.
- He should not place with it anything that might cause it harm, whether of the same kind or a different species.
- He should kill it properly and with consideration; he should not cut their skin or bones until their bodies have become cold and their life has passed fully away.

- He should not kill their young within their sight.
- He should give them different resting shelters and watering places which should all be cleaned regularly.
- He should put the male and female in the same place during their mating season.
- He should not hunt a wild animal with a tool that breaks bones, rendering it unlawful for eating.<sup>35</sup>

The legal category of water rights extends to animals through the law of “the right of thirst” (*haqq al-shurb*). A Qur’ānic basis can be found in the verse, “It is the she-camel of Allah, so let her drink!”<sup>36</sup> It has been noted with some irony that Classical Islamic law accords nonhuman animals greater access to water than do the “modern” laws of the United States.<sup>37</sup>

However, although the rights of nonhuman animals are guaranteed in the legal tradition, their interests are ultimately subordinate to those of humans. As ibn ‘Abd al-salam writes:

The unbeliever who prohibits the slaughtering of an animal [for no reason but] to achieve the interest of the animal is incorrect because in so doing he gives preference to a lower, *khasīs*, animal over a higher, *nafts*, animal.<sup>38</sup>

The tenth-century poet al-Ma‘arri, who became a vegan late in life, was accused by a leading theologian of the time of “trying to be more compassionate than God.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, despite the rights accorded to nonhuman animals in Islamic law, contemporary animal rights philosophers would probably conclude that Islam does not simply condone attitudes which they would label as “speciesist,”<sup>40</sup> but actually requires them.

### *Nonhuman Animals in Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*

Islamic philosophers and mystics have often used nonhuman animals in their writings. Almost invariably, however, animal figures are employed as symbols for particular human traits, or are entirely anthropomorphized actors in human-type dramas. In other words, even where nonhuman animals appear, the real message is about humans. The philosophical treatise of the so-called “Pure Brethren” (*Ikhwān al-safā*) of Basra, *The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn*, and the epic poem of Farid ad-Din Attar, *Conference of the Birds* (*Mantiq al-tayr*) are two examples. Both works are treated in this volume in the two essays that follow this one, by Zayn Kassam and Ali Asani, respectively.

Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*) in the early centuries derives primarily from the Hellenistic tradition. Aristotle’s *Historia animalium* was translated into Arabic in the eighth or ninth century, and Muslim mystics (Sufis) associated the “animal soul” of the philosophers with the “lower self” (*nafs*), that is, the baser instincts which the spiritual seeker must strive to overcome.

In addition to Attar’s *Conference of the Birds*, many other Sufi treatises also contain animal stories and characters. Jalal ad-Din Rumi’s thirteenth-century *Mathnawī al-ma‘anawī*, which some Muslims have called “the Qur’an in Persian,” is one of the best-known. In most cases animal characters are used to represent human traits, such as a donkey for stubbornness. Elsewhere, however, they serve as a contrast for human weaknesses, as when Rumi emphasizes the exemplary faith of nonhuman animals in their Creator:

The dove on the tree is uttering thanks to  
God, though her food is not yet ready.  
The nightingale is singing glory to God,  
saying, “I rely on Thee for my daily  
bread, O Thou who answerest prayer.

...

You may take every animal from the gnat  
to the elephant: they have all become  
God's dependents . . .  
[While] these griefs within our breasts arise  
from the vapor and dust of our existence  
and vain desire.<sup>41</sup>

According to Rumi, nonhuman animals even excel humans in some qualities, particularly that of loving devotion to which Sufis aspire:

Wolf and bear and lion know what love is: he that is blind to love is inferior to a dog! If the dog had not a vein of love, how should the dog of the Cave have sought to win the heart of the Seven Sleepers?<sup>42</sup>

You have not smelt the heart in your own kind: how should you smell the heart in wolf and sheep?<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, Rumi's vision of the mystic quest follows Aristotle's "great chain of being," in which the soul travels upward from an inorganic state to vegetable to animal to that of a human, before ultimately becoming lost in its Creator:

I died to the inorganic state and became endowed with growth, and [then] I died to [vegetable] growth and attained the animal.

I died from animality and became Adam [man]: why then should I fear? When have I become less for dying?<sup>44</sup>

So it would seem that even if nonhuman animals possess laudable qualities, the value of these lies mainly in their instructive potential for humans, who are nevertheless a stage above them in the cosmic hierarchy.

Other Sufi stories offer lessons about compassion and renunciation, using the theme of abstention from killing animals for meat. One such story, from a hagiography compiled by Farid al-din 'Attar, features the eighth-century female Muslim mystic Rabi'a of Basra:

Rabi'a had gone up on a mountain. Wild goats and gazelles gathered around, gazing upon her. Suddenly, Hasan Basri [another well-known early Muslim mystic] appeared. All the animals shied away. When Hasan saw that, he was perplexed and said, "Rabi'a, why do they shy away from me when they were so intimate with you?"

Rabi'a said, "What did you eat today?"

"Soup."

"You ate their lard. How would they not shy away from you?"<sup>45</sup>

'Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri (d. 1074 CE) tells a similar story about the early Sufi Ibrahim ibn Adham, who, it is said, liked to go hunting. One day, as he was pursuing an antelope, he heard a voice asking him, "O Ibrahim, is it for this that We have created you?" Immediately he got down from his horse, gave his fine clothes to a shepherd in exchange for a wool tunic, and assumed the life of a wandering dervish.<sup>46</sup>

A number of Sufism's well-known historical figures have been vegetarian. An early female Sufi, Zaynab, is said to have been persecuted for her refusal to eat meat.<sup>47</sup> Most stories about Sufi vegetarians originate in South Asia, suggesting possible Hindu or Buddhist influence.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, a few vegetarian anecdotes also occur among the Sufis of North Africa and the Ottoman world.<sup>49</sup> Generally speaking, however, among the Sufis vegetarianism is seen as a form of spiritual discipline intended to benefit the one who practices it, rather than out of interest for the animals who are spared.

### *Nonhuman Animals in Muslim Literature and Art*

Nonhuman animals appear throughout the literary and artistic production of Muslims. As in the philosophical and mystical texts, in poetry and prose literature they are most often used as embodiments of specific human traits and for purposes of teaching moral lessons relevant to

humans. Among the animal stories popular in Muslim societies, perhaps the best-known is Ibn al-Muqaffa's ninth-century translation of *Kalila and Dimna*, a collection of fables, mainly political in nature, which came to pre-Islamic Iran from India.<sup>50</sup> Other works that feature animals include Warawini's thirteenth-century *Book of the Border-keeper* (*Marzbān-nāma*) and Nakhshabi's fourteenth-century *Parrot Book* (*Tūtī-nāma*). The *Thousand and One Nights* (*Alf layla wa layla*) stories also contain many animal characters.

The tradition of Muslim representational art (as opposed to ‘‘Islamic art’’ strictly speaking, which is nonrepresentational), which was most highly developed in Iran and spread from there to India and Turkey, is rich with animal themes, especially illustrated stories (such as *Kalila and Dimna*) and royal hunting scenes, whether in books, carpets, metalwork, ceramics, or rock engravings. Lion figures, associated in the Iranian tradition with monarchy, appear on many public buildings, even sometimes (as in the case of Samarkand's *Shir-dār* seminary) religious ones.

Works of Muslim scientists on zoology should also be mentioned. Among these the best known is the seven-volume *Book of Animals* (*Kitāb al-hayawān*) of al-Jahiz (d. 868/9 CE).<sup>51</sup> As in the fable literature, al-Jahiz's use of animals is instrumental; although ostensibly a comprehensive zoological catalogue, al-Jahiz's opus aims primarily at demonstrating the magnificence of God through a study of his created beings. The later work of al-Damiri (d. 1405), *Hayat al-hayawān al-kubra*, is largely a commentary on and expansion of al-Jahiz.<sup>52</sup>

#### *Contemporary Muslim Views on Vegetarianism and Animal Testing*

In recent years individual Muslims have given attention to animal issues as never before. Within this emerging consciousness, extra-

Islamic (mainly Western) influences are clearly present. Growing numbers of Muslim vegetarians and animal rights activists appear in most cases first to have been converted to the cause, then sought support and justification for it within their Islamic tradition. Some radical reinterpretations have been put forth as a result, although that preoccupation with the rights of nonhuman animals remains firmly outside of the mainstream in Muslim societies around the world today.

Perhaps the most prominent contemporary voice in articulating Islamic concern for nonhuman animals is the late Basheer Ahmad Masri (1914–1993), a native of India who spent twenty years as an educator in Africa before moving to England in 1961, where he became imam of the Shah Jehan mosque in Woking. Masri's stated worldview, that ‘‘life on this earth is so intertwined as an homogeneous unit that it cannot be disentangled for the melioration of one species at the expense of the other,’’<sup>53</sup> sounds as much deep ecological as Islamic.

At first glance, Masri's views on factory farming and animal testing are not incompatible with those of today's animal rights activists. He writes, for example, that

to kill animals to satisfy the human thirst for inessentials is a contradiction in terms within the Islamic tradition. Think of the millions of animals killed, in the name of commercial enterprises, in order to supply a complacent public with trinkets and products they do not really need. And why? Because we are too lazy or too self-indulgent to find substitutes.<sup>54</sup>

Yet Masri does not argue against animal testing as such, only that it should not result in pain or disfigurement to the animal.<sup>55</sup> Masri is careful to couch his arguments in Islamic language, and ultimately he leaves the traditional Islamic notion of human exceptionalism unchallenged.

The late Turkish Sufi master Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877–1960) is heralded by his fol-

lowers as a model animal lover. As a result of time spent in prison, where he witnessed indiscriminate spraying of insecticides, Nursi wrote an entire treatise on the importance of flies.<sup>56</sup> He also claimed to be able, like Solomon, to understand animal languages, as in the following passage:

... one day I looked at the cats; all they were doing was eating, playing, and sleeping. I wondered, how is it these little monsters which perform no duties are known as blessed? Later, I lay down to sleep for the night. I looked; one of the cats had come. It lay against my pillow and put its mouth against my ear, and murmuring: "O Most Compassionate One! O Most Compassionate One!" in the most clear manner, as though refuting in the name of its species the objection and insult which had occurred to me, throwing it in my face. Then this occurred to me: I wonder if this recitation is particular to this cat, or is it general among cats? And is it only an unfair objector like me who hears it, or if anyone listens carefully, can they hear it? The next morning I listened to the other cats; it was not so clear, but to varying degrees they were repeating the same invocation. At first, "O Most Compassionate!" was discernible following their purring. Then gradually their purrings and meowings became the same "O Most Merciful!" It became an unarticulated, eloquent and sorrowful recitation. They would close their mouths and utter a fine "O Most Compassionate!" I related the story to the brothers who visited me, and they listened carefully as well, and said that they heard it to an extent.<sup>57</sup>

Another contemporary Sufi teacher, the Sri Lankan M. R. Bawa Muhaiyadeen (d.1986), enjoined his followers to practice vegetarianism, saying:

All your life you have been drinking the blood and eating the flesh of animals without realizing what you have been doing. You love flesh and enjoy murder. If you had any conscience or any

sense of justice, if you were born as a true human being, you would think about this. God is looking at me and you. Tomorrow his truth and his justice will inquire into this. You must realize this.<sup>58</sup>

Still, it must be acknowledged that such perspectives remain well outside of the Muslim mainstream. In pushing the limits of Islamic tradition, Masri, Nursi, and the Bawa all go further than any of today's numerous self-proclaimed Islamic environmentalists who have written on the rights of nonhuman animals. Mawil Izzi Dien, in his recent groundbreaking book *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam*, takes due note of the rights accorded to nonhuman animals in Islamic law. Elsewhere, however, Izzi Dien makes his speciesist preferences clear, as when he offers the following justification of meat-eating:

According to Islamic Law there are no grounds upon which one can argue that animals should not be killed for food. The Islamic legal opinion on this issue is based on clear Qur'anic verses. Muslims are not only prohibited from eating certain food, but also may not choose to prohibit themselves food that is allowed by Islam. Accordingly vegetarianism is not permitted unless on grounds such as unavailability or medical necessity. Vegetarianism is not allowed under the pretext of giving priority to the interest of animals because such decisions are God's prerogative.<sup>59</sup>

While to date no Muslim legal scholar has argued (in print at least) that the permissibility of meat-eating should be reconsidered,<sup>60</sup> increasing numbers of Muslim vegetarians are making their views known, especially over the internet. A number of postings suggest that the Prophet Muhammad, though an occasional eater of meat, kept mainly to a vegetarian diet.<sup>61</sup> Muslim doctors are recognizing the benefits of a vegetarian diet for human health.<sup>62</sup> The worldwide spread of factory farming techniques



means that Muslims often cannot be sure that their meat is truly *halāl*, especially now that even pig remains are often mixed into livestock feed. For these and other reasons, vegetarian and animal rights societies have begun to appear all over the Muslim world.<sup>63</sup> Vegetarian restaurants are cropping up in some Muslim countries.

### *Reassessing Traditional Views of Dogs*

One area of interspecies relations in which traditional Muslim attitudes differ markedly from those in Western societies is the keeping of dogs as pets. In most schools of Islamic law dogs are classified as ritually unclean (*najis*), which means, among other things, that a Muslim may not pray after being touched by a dog.<sup>64</sup> There is a joke about a pious man who is rushing to the mosque after hearing the prayer call. It has been raining, and a stray dog steps in a puddle and splashes him. Realizing he has no time to return home and change, the man looks the other way and says, “God willing, it’s a goat.”

Even Muslims who do own dogs, such as farmers who use them as guards or herders, generally will not touch them. In June 2002 Iran’s formal head of state, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene’i, decreed a ban on public dog-walking and even the sale of dogs, as being “offensive to the sensitivities of Muslims.”

When one of the most significant living legal thinkers in the Islamic world, Kuwaiti-born Khaled Abou El-Fadl, recently admitted that he is a devoted dog lover and began combing through the Classical law books to see whether Muslim anti-dog views were supported by the texts, reaction from conservative Muslims was extreme, even amounting to death threats.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, as a result of his research, Abou El-Fadl determined that the *ḥadīths* used to justify aversion to dogs were highly questionable and perhaps spurious.<sup>66</sup>

### *Conclusion*

It can be said today that although traditional attitudes among Muslims toward nonhuman animals remain unchanged in most cases, new influences and emerging global concerns may bring about large-scale shifts in the years to come, especially as environmental protection movements raise awareness of human dependence on nonhuman actors within the earth’s complex ecosystems. While the number of Muslims who think in such terms today is small, it is growing; and ways of conceptualizing human relations with nonhuman animals are emerging which are both new and relevant to contemporary needs, yet succeed in keeping within the established framework of Islamic thought.

## NOTES

1. See the discussion by Marshall Hodgson in *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1: *the Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 57–60.

2. The notion appears to derive from that of possessing life, *haya(t)* (cf. Hebrew *chayah*).

3. For the life (*al-hayawān*) of this world is nothing but a passing delight and a play—whereas, behold, the realm of the hereafter is indeed the only life (*al-hayawān*). (29:64)

4. Qur’ān, 2:159, 164; 24:44–45; 31:9–10; 42:29; 43:11–12; 45:3–4; and 51:49 (Muhammad Asad version).

5. *Ibid.*, 27:16.

6. Ch. Pellat, “Hayawān,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edition (Leiden: Brill, 1971–), 3:305.

7. For example, 5:102–103; 6:139.

8. Qur’ān, 5:65; 2:61, 65.

9. *Ibid.*, 22:65.

10. *Ibid.*, 2:30; 6:165.

11. But see the critique of the stewardship defini-

tion in Jafar Sheikh Idris, "Is Man the Viceregent of God?" *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1990): 99–110.

12. Qur'ān, 55:10.
13. *Ibid.*, 7:73.
14. *Ibid.*, 16:5–8. I have slightly corrected Asad's translation.
15. *Ibid.*, 17:44; 22:18; 24:41.
16. *Ibid.*, 6:38.
17. *Ibid.*, 35:24.
18. Ibn Hazm, *Al Fisāl fī l-Milāl wa l-Ahwā' wa n-Nihāl*, 5 vols., (Cairo: Yutlab min Muhammad Ali Subayh, 1964), 1:69.
19. Qur'ān, 11:6.
20. *Ibid.*, 55:10.
21. *Ibid.*, 16:68.
22. Al-Hafiz B. A. Masri, *Islamic Concern for Animals* (Petersfield, UK: The Athene Trust, 1987), p. 4.
23. Qur'ān, 52:22, 56:21.
24. *Ibid.*, 5:1; see also 6:145; 16:5, 66; 40:79; and elsewhere.
25. *Ibid.*, 5:3; see also 2:173 and 6:145.
26. *Ibid.*, 16:115; see also 2:173 and 6:145.
27. Sahih Muslim, 2/11, "Slaying," 10:739.
28. *Ibid.*, Bukhārī, 2:106.
29. Musnad of Ibn Hanbal. Muḥammad adds that some of these animals were better than those who rode them, since they remembered God more.
30. Nasa'i, 7:206, 239.
31. Cited in Masri, *Islamic Concern for Animals*, p. 4.
32. Sahih Muslim, trans. A. Siddiqi, 4 vols. (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf), 4:1215, 1381.
33. *Ibid.*, Muslim, 4:1216.
34. G. H. Bousquet, "Des animaux et de leur traitement selon le Judaïsme, le Christianisme et l'Islam," *Studia Islamica* 9, no. 1 (1958), p. 41. These ḥadiths are retold in a recent book for Muslim children, *Love All Creatures* by M. S. Kayani (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1997 [1981]).
35. 'Izz al-din ibn 'Abd al salam, *Qawā'id al-Abkām fī Masālib al Anām* (Damascus: Dar al-Tabba, 1992); cited in Mawli Izzi Dien, *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2000), p. 46.
36. *Ibid.*, 91:13.

37. James L. Wescoat, Jr., "The 'Right of Thirst' for Animals in Islamic Law: A Comparative Approach," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13 (1995): 638.

38. *Qawā'id al-abkām fī masālib al anām*, cited in Izzi Dien, *Environmental Dimensions*, p. 146.

39. Geert Jan van Gelder, *Of Dishes and Discourse: Classical Arabic Interpretations of Food* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), p. 88. I am grateful to Jonathan Benthall for suggesting this reference.

40. Peter Singer defines speciesism as "a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species." (Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Random House, 1975), p. 7.

41. Jalal ad-din Rumi, *Mathnawī al-ma'anawī*, trans. R. A. Nicholson, *The Mathnawī of Jalal'uddin Rumi*, 5 vols. (London: Luzac, 1925–40), 1:2291–6.

42. The reference is to Qur'ān, 18:17–21.

43. Rumi, *Mathnawī al-ma'anawī*, 5:2008–11.

44. *Ibid.*, 3:3901–2.

45. Farid al-din 'Attar, *Tazkirat al-Awliyā*, tr. Paul Losensky and Michael Sells, in Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1996), p. 160.

46. Qushayri, cited in Emile Dermenghem, *La culte des saints dans l'Islam Maghrebin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 100.

47. Margaret Smith, *The Way of the Mystics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 154–162.

48. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp. 348, 358.

49. Dermenghem, *La culte des saints*, pp. 97–101.

50. Ramsey Wood, *Kalila and Dimna* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1986).

51. Abi Uthman Amr ibn Badr al-Jahiz, *Kitāb al-hayawān*, 4 vols., (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1998).

52. Muhammad ibn Musa al-Damiri, *Al-Damiri's Hayat al-hayawān al-kubra: A Zoological Lexicon*, trans. A. S. G. Jayakar (London: Luzac, 1906–1908).

53. Masri, *Islamic Concern for Animals*, p. vii.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

55. Al-Hafiz B. A. M. tion: *The Muslim View Religious Perspectives on*, ed. Tom Regan (P city Press, 1986), p. 192

56. Bediüzzaman S (Istanbul: Sözlük Yayın trans. in *The Flashes Col lications*, 1995), pp. 339– Özdemir for alerting n reference.

57. Nursi, *The Flash*

58. M. R. Bawa Mu' Garden: *Sufi Tales of Wi ship Press*, 1985), p. 26.

59. Izzi Dien, *Envire*

60. I have suggested light of the many demõt humans of producing n not only human health t efficiency of meat versus ries available for human emphasis on social justic

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*asālih al anām*, cited  
in *Dimensions*, p. 146.

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eciesism as ‘‘a preju-  
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bers against those of mem-  
bers. Singer, *Animal Lib-*  
*erty and Treatment of Animals*

1975), p. 7.  
*al-ḥanawī al-ma‘anawī*,  
*al-ḥanawī of Jalāl al-Ḍīn*  
1925–40), 1:2291–6.  
*ḥanawī*, 18:17–21.  
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Michael Sells, *Early*  
Islamic Press, 1996),

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*ḥanawī* (Paris: Galli-

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York, 1978), pp. 154–162.  
*Mystical Dimensions*  
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*of Dimna* (Roches-

of al-Jahiz, *Kitāb al-*  
*ḥanawī al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya*,

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*of Animals*, p. vii.

55. Al-Hafiz B. A. Masri, ‘‘Animal Experimentation: The Muslim Viewpoint,’’ in *Animal Sacrifices: Religious Perspectives on the Use of Animals in Science*, ed. Tom Regan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p. 192.

56. Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Latif Nükteleler* (Istanbul: Sözlük Yayinevi, 1988), pp. 5–11. English trans. in *The Flashes Collection* (Istanbul: Sözlük Publications, 1995), pp. 339–43. I am grateful to Ibrahim Özdemir for alerting me to this and the following reference.

57. Nursi, *The Flashes Collection*, pp. 384–85.

58. M. R. Bawa Muhaiyadeen, *Come to the Secret Garden: Sufi Tales of Wisdom* (Philadelphia: Fellowship Press, 1985), p. 26.

59. Izzi Dien, *Environmental Dimensions*, p. 146.

60. I have suggested elsewhere, however, that in light of the many demonstrable negative effects on humans of producing meat industrially—including not only human health but also hunger, given the inefficiency of meat versus grains in making food calories available for human consumption—the Islamic emphasis on social justice has implications for meat

eating that Muslims may begin to explore in the future, perhaps through applying the principle of ‘‘the public good’’ (*maslaha*). See Richard C. Foltz, ‘‘Is Vegetarianism Un-Islamic?’’ *Studies in Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 1 (2001): 53–54.

61. The site IslamicConcern.com contains links to many of these other sites.

62. Dr. Shahid Athar of Indiana University Medical School, for example, writes, ‘‘There is no doubt that a vegetarian diet is healthier and beneficial to health in lowering weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar.’’ (<http://www.islamicconcern.com/comments.asp>)

63. A list of organizations can be found at the Islamic Concern site under the ‘‘Resources’’ section.

64. The Hanafi school of law, more lenient than the others in many respects, does not have this restriction.

65. Teresa Watanabe, ‘‘Battling Islamic Puritans,’’ *Los Angeles Times* (January 2, 2002), p. A1.

66. Even a millennium ago, al-Jahiz argued that the ḥadīths about killing dogs referred to specific cases and not general ones.