

Information Sheet - Religious Views (R.E. Lesson)

Judaism

The way Jews should treat animals is encapsulated in Proverbs 12:10: "The righteous person regards the life of his beast."

Judaism teaches that animals are part of God's creation and should be treated with compassion. Human beings must avoid "tzar baalei chayim" - causing pain to any living creature. God himself makes a covenant with the animals, just as he does with humanity. The Talmud specifically instructs Jews not to cause pain to animals, and there are also several Bible stories which use kindness to animals as a demonstration of the virtues of leading Jewish figures.

Judaism also teaches that it is acceptable to harm or kill animals if that is the only way to fulfill an essential human need. This is because people take priority over animals, something stated very early in the Bible, where God gives human beings the right to control all non-human animals. Human beings are therefore allowed to use animals for food and clothing - and to provide parchment on which to write the Bible.

Scripture and animals

"And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.

"And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.

"Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things." (Genesis 9: 1-3.)

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, states that God has given human beings dominion over all living things. Dominion is interpreted as stewardship - living things are to serve humanity but human beings, as part of their dominion, are required to look after all living creatures.

"His tender mercies are over all His creatures" (Psalm 145:9)

The Bible gives several instructions on animal welfare:

- A person must feed his animals before himself (Deuteronomy 11:15)

- Animals must be allowed to rest on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10, & Deut 5: 14)
- An animal's suffering must be relieved (Deuteronomy 12:4)

Jews are instructed to avoid:

- Severing a limb from a live animal and eating it (Genesis 9:4)
- Killing a cow and her calf on the same day (Leviticus 22:28)
- This demonstrates that Judaism accepts that animals have powerful family relationships
- Muzzling an animal threshing corn (Deuteronomy 25:4)
- Harnessing an ox and donkey together (Deuteronomy 22:10)

Experiments on animals

Jewish teaching allows animal experiments as long both of these conditions are satisfied:

- There is a real possibility of a benefit to human beings
- There is no unnecessary pain involved

Islam

"There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you..."

Qur'an 6:38

Muslims believe that:

- all living creatures were made by Allah
- Allah loves all animals
- animals exist for the benefit of human beings
- animals must be treated with kindness and compassion

Muslims are instructed to avoid:

- treating animals cruelly
- over-working or over-loading animals
- neglecting animals
- hunting animals for sport
- hunting for food is permitted if the animals are killed humanely
- cutting the mane or tail of a horse
- animal fighting as a sport
- factory farming

Using animals is permitted

The Qur'an explicitly states that animals can be used for human benefit.

"It is God who provided for you all manner of livestock, that you may ride on some of them and from some you may derive your food. And other uses in them for you to satisfy your heart's desires. It is on them, as on ships, that you make your journeys."

Qur'an 40: 79,80

Muhammad (pbuh) and animals

There are many stories and sayings of the Prophet (pbuh) that demonstrate his concern for the welfare of animals. Once someone traveling with the Prophet (pbuh) took some eggs from a nest, causing the mother bird great grief. The Prophet (pbuh) saw this and told the man to return the eggs.

When the Prophet (pbuh), was asked if Allah rewarded acts of charity to animals, he replied: "Yes, there is a reward for acts of charity to every beast alive."

The Prophet (pbuh) said "Whoever kills a sparrow or anything bigger than that without a just cause, Allah will hold him accountable on the Day of Judgment The Prophet explained that a killing would be for a just cause if it was for food.

Experiments on animals

According to Al Hafiz B A Masri, using animals for research may be permitted in Islam.

The animals must not suffer pain or mutilation and there must be a good reason for the experiment:

"Actions shall be judged according to intention. Any kind of medical treatment of animals and experiments on them becomes ethical and legal or unethical and illegal according to the intention of the person who does it."

Masri, B.A., Al-Hafiz. Animals in Islam. Great Britain:Athene Trust. 1989

Christianity

Introduction

For most of history Christians largely ignored animal suffering. Christian thinkers believed that human beings were greatly superior to animals. They taught that human beings could treat animals as badly as they wanted to because people had few (if any) moral obligations towards animals. Modern Christians generally take a much more pro-animal line. They think that any unnecessary mistreatment of animals is both sinful and morally wrong.

The traditional Christian view

When early theologians looked at "nature red in tooth and claw" they concluded that it was a natural law of the universe that animals should be preyed on and eaten by others. This was reflected in their theology.

Christian thinking downgraded animals for three main reasons:

- 1) God had created animals for the use of human beings and human beings were therefore entitled to use them in any way they want
- 2) Animals were distinctively inferior to human beings and were worth little if any moral consideration, because:
 - humans have souls and animals don't
 - humans have reason and animals don't
- 3) Christian thought was heavily humano-centric and only considered animals in relation to human beings, and not on their own terms

Animals and saints

Not all leading Christians disparaged animals. Some of the saints demonstrated that virtuous Christians treated animals respectfully and kindly:

- St Antony of Padua preached to fishes
- St Francis of Assisi preached to the birds and became the most popular pro-animal Christian figure
- Cows are protected by St Brigit

Modern Christian thinking about animals

Modern Christian thinking is largely sympathetic to animals and less willing to accept that there is an unbridgeable gap between animals and human beings. Although most theologians don't accept that animals have rights, they do acknowledge that some animals display sufficient consciousness and self-awareness to deserve moral consideration.

The growth of the environmental movement has also radically changed Christian ideas about the role human beings play in relation to nature. Few Christians nowadays think that nature exists to serve humanity, and there is a general acceptance that human do-

minion over nature should be seen as stewardship and partnership rather than domination and exploitation.

This has significantly softened Christian attitudes to animals.

Animal-friendly Christian thoughts

Here are some of the animal-friendly ideas that modern Christians use when thinking about animals:

- The Bible shows that God made his covenant with animals as well as human beings
- Human and non-human animals have the same origin in God
- St. Francis of Assisi said that animals "had the same source as himself"
- In God's ideal world human beings live in harmony with animals
 - The Garden of Eden, in which human beings lived in peace and harmony with animals, demonstrates God's ideal world, and the state of affairs that human beings should work towards
 - The prophet Isaiah describes the Kingdom of Heaven as a place where animals and human beings live together in peace
- God has the right to have everything he created treated respectfully - wronging animals is wronging God
- God is not indifferent to anything in his creation
- The example of a loving creator God should lead human beings to act lovingly towards animals
 - Inflicting pain on any living creature is incompatible with living in a Christ-like way
 - Animals are weak compared to us - Christ tells us to be kind to them
 - Jesus told human beings to be kind to the weak and helpless
 - In comparison to human beings, animals are often weak and helpless
 - Christians should therefore show compassion to animals
- To love those who cannot love you in the same way is a unique way of acting with generous love.
- "If you love them that love you, what reward have you?"
- It is a great good to take responsibility for the welfare of others, including animals

What the churches say about animals

The Anglican view

This resolution from the 1998 Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church is typical of contemporary Christian thinking about animals:

This conference reaffirms the biblical vision of creation according to which Creation is a web of inter-dependent relationships bound together in the covenant which God the Holy Trinity has established with the whole earth and every living being. The divine Spirit is sacramentally present in creation, which is therefore to be treated with reverence, respect and gratitude. Human beings are both co-partners with the rest of creation and living bridges between heaven and earth, with responsibility to make personal & corpo-

rate sacrifices for the common good of all creation. The redemptive purpose of God in Jesus Christ extends to the whole of creation.

The Roman Catholic view

The Papal Encyclical “Evangelium Vitae” recognises that animals have both an intrinsic value and a place in God's kingdom.

The Roman Catholic Ethic of Life, if fully accepted, would lead Christians to avoid anything that brings unnecessary suffering or death to animals.

The official position of the Church is contained in a number of sections of the Church's official Catechism (the paragraphing within each section is ours):

373 In God's plan man and woman have the vocation of "subduing" the earth as stewards of God.

This sovereignty is not to be an arbitrary and destructive domination. God calls man and woman, made in the image of the Creator "who loves everything that exists", to share in his providence toward other creatures; hence their responsibility for the world God has entrusted to them.

2415 The seventh commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation.

Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity.

Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives.

Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbour, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation.

2416 Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory.

Thus men owe them kindness. We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Neri treated animals.

2417 God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure.

Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives.

2418 It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly.

It is likewise unworthy to spend money on them that should as a priority go to the relief of human misery.

One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons. Some writers have criticised the statements above for being so firmly centred on human beings. Causing animals to suffer needlessly, for example, is described in 2418 as being contrary to human dignity, rather than as being a wrong towards animals.

Buddhism

Although Buddhism is one of the most animal-friendly religions, some aspects of the tradition are surprisingly negative about animals.

The positive

- Buddhists try to do no harm (or as little harm as possible) to animals
- Buddhists try to show loving-kindness to all beings, including animals
- The doctrine of right livelihood teaches Buddhists to avoid any work connected with the killing of animals
- The doctrine of karma teaches that any wrong behaviour will have to be paid for in a future life - so cruel acts to animals should be avoided

Buddhists treat the lives of human and non-human animals with equal respect. Buddhists see human and non-human animals as closely related:

- both have Buddha-nature
- both have the possibility of becoming perfectly enlightened
- a soul may be reborn either in a human body or in the body of a non-human animal

Buddhists believe that is wrong to hurt or kill animals, because all beings are afraid of injury and death:

*All living things fear being beaten with clubs.
All living things fear being put to death.
Putting oneself in the place of the other,
Let no one kill nor cause another to kill. (Dhammapada 129)*

The negative

Buddhist behaviour towards and thinking about animals is not always positive. The doctrine of karma implies that souls are reborn as animals because of past misdeeds. Being reborn as an animal is a serious spiritual setback. Because non-human animals can't engage in conscious acts of self-improvement they can't improve their karmic status, and their souls must continue to be reborn as animals until their bad karma is exhausted. Only when they are reborn as human beings can they resume the quest for nirvana.

This bad karma, and the animal's inability to do much to improve it, led Buddhists in the past to think that non-human animals were inferior to human beings and so were entitled to fewer rights than human beings. Early Buddhists (but not the Buddha himself) used the idea that animals were spiritually inferior as a justification for the exploitation and mistreatment of animals.

Experimenting on animals

Buddhists say that this is morally wrong if the animal concerned might come to any harm. However, Buddhists also acknowledge the value that animal experiments may have for human health. So perhaps a Buddhist approach to experiments on animals might require the experimenter to:

- accept the karma of carrying out the experiment
- the experimenter will acquire bad karma through experimenting on an animal
- experiment only for a good purpose
- experiment only on animals where there is no alternative
- design the experiment to do as little harm as possible
- avoid killing the animal unless it is absolutely necessary
- treat the animals concerned kindly and respectfully
- The bad karmic consequences for the experimenter seem to demand a high level of altruistic behaviour in research laboratories

Buddhism and vegetarianism

Not all Buddhists are vegetarian and the Buddha does not seem to have issued an overall prohibition on meat-eating. The Mahayana tradition was (and is) more strictly vegetarian than other Buddhist traditions.

The early Buddhist monastic code banned monks from eating meat if the animal had been killed specifically to feed them, but otherwise instructed them to eat anything they were given.

Hinduism

Because Hinduism is a term that includes many different although related religious ideas, there is no clear single Hindu view on the right way to treat animals, so what follows are generalisations to which there are exceptions.

- The doctrine of ahimsa leads Hindus to treat animals well
- Most Hindus are vegetarian
- No Hindu will eat beef
- Butchery and related jobs are restricted to people of low caste
- Most Hindus believe that non-human animals are inferior to human beings
- Cows are sacred to Hindus
- Some Hindu temples keep sacred animals
- Some Hindu gods have animal characteristics
 - Ganesh has the head of an elephant
 - Hanuman takes the form of a monkey

Animal sacrifice

Hinduism permits animal sacrifice.

Cows

The cow is greatly revered by Hindus and is regarded as sacred. Killing cows is banned in India and no Hindu would eat any cow product.

Taken from BBC Website - Religion and Ethics

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/ethics/animals/index.shtml>