ANIMAL WELFARE IN WORLD RELIGION

Teaching and Practice

Joyce D'Silva

earthscan from Routledge

Animal Welfare in World Religion

This unique and readable book examines the relationship between religion and animal welfare, taking a detailed dive into the teachings and practices of the major world religions.

While there are many books expounding the beliefs of the major religions and many about the rights and welfare of animals, there are few linking the two. With each chapter focusing on one of the five major religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism – the book explores the beliefs and practices which drive our relationship with and treatment of animals. The book draws on the scriptures of the major faiths and includes the voices of leading historical religious figures and contemporary faith leaders. In doing so, it compares the teachings of old with contemporary practices and showcases the impact of the major religions on both the protection and exploitation of animals, from running animal sanctuaries, to participating in or condoning cruel sports and factory farming. Importantly, the book also includes a chapter looking beyond the major world religions, where it examines a wider range of beliefs and practices, including Indigenous peoples from the USA and Australia, Jainism, Sikhism and Rastafarianism, to provide fascinating insights into another range of beliefs and views on the human-animal relationship. Overall, this book challenges and encourages religious leaders and followers to re-examine their teachings and to prioritise the well-being of animals.

This book is essential reading for those interested in the role of religion in animal welfare, human-animal studies, and animal welfare and ethics more broadly.

Joyce D'Silva is Ambassador Emeritus for Compassion in World Farming, the leading charity advancing the welfare of farm animals worldwide. She is co-editor of *The Meat Crisis: Developing More Sustainable and Ethical Production and Consumption* (Routledge, 2017) and *Farming, Food and Nature: Respecting Animals, People and the Environment* (Routledge, 2018). She has been awarded honorary doctorates by the University of Winchester and the University of Keele, UK, and is a patron of the Animal Interfaith Alliance.

"D'Silva's research shows that love for all living beings is at the core of all faiths. Her powerful book calls upon us to lift our blinkers and act accordingly."

Christiana Figueres, *Executive Secretary UNFCCC (2010–2016)*

"Joyce D'Silva has compiled, in this book, the teachings of the major religions in the world on kindness to animals. Yet practitioners of the faiths do not relate this teaching to living animals. This book is a beautiful anthology of religious ideals about sentient beings. With her background in activism for animal welfare and multi-faith studies, she has put together a gem of a book on the ocean that separates the teachings of compassion towards animals by world religions and the actual practices towards animals by their followers. A must-read book for all religious believers and those who claim to follow their faith."

Prof. Nanditha Krishna, *Director, C.P.R. Institute of Indological Research, Chennai*

"This book is an impassioned cry from the heart, a call to the conscience of humanity to heed the principle of compassion at the core of their religions by showing greater concern for our fellow travellers through life, the animals. The chapter on Buddhism is also a searing reminder to Buddhists of how far we have veered from the law of non-harming and the ethic of compassion at the centre of our creed."

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Chair, Buddhist Global Relief*

"In my view, if there was one person in the world who is qualified to lay down a challenge to the world's faiths on issues relating to the welfare of animals it is Joyce D'Silva. A fearless campaigner, activist, now Ambassador Emeritus and formally Chief Executive of Compassion in World Farming for nearly 15 years, she speaks with authority and has quite eloquently put together the essence of the teachings of the faith traditions in their relationship with animals. I join her in saying 'take heed' and this is not just about farm animals – it is about all sentient beings. This book is also particularly timely as it adds its voice to the UN campaign on the protection of biodiversity to stem the mass extinction of species resulting from human behaviour."

Fazlun Khalid, *Founder, Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences*

"It is ironic that in what is called modern civilisation, human abuse of animals takes place on a greater scale and with greater cruelty than ever before, in order to satisfy human self-indulgence. Religions are all too often silent in the face of the terrible cruelty towards sentient beings that takes place, and not infrequently are even partners in such abuse. In so doing, they betray their highest values and ideals. In this excellent book, Dr Joyce D'Silva highlights these higher noble teachings of the world's major religions, thus calling on us all to live up to these ideals. This should mean that today, in the face of the terrible consequences

of the livestock industry both for human welfare as well as for animal life, all religions should be advocating for a plant-based diet, which is more available than ever before, thus promoting greater health as well as greater compassion and harmony in our world."

Rabbi David Rosen, *CBE, former Chief Rabbi of Ireland and a President of Religions for Peace*

"Joyce D'Silva's book is a valuable contribution to the study of religion and animal ethics. The book skillfully combines a scholarly exploration of the ways that animals are understood and treated in the world's major religious traditions with an inspirational message about the sacredness of all sentient beings. D'Silva presents the diversity of views on animals that exist within every tradition, often leading to tensions and conflict within religions, while also underscoring the way that each tradition provides resources for promoting compassion for and better treatment of animals. The book, which provides passages about animals from the scriptures of the world's religions along with profiles of great Saints and thinkers, can serve as an excellent resource for scholars and activists alike. D'Silva applies the teachings found in the various traditions to contemporary issues in animal ethics, including factory farming, vivisection and biodiversity. She shows how in most cultures and traditions, people fall short of their tradition's highest teachings, but she demonstrates how religious texts and exemplars can still inspire us to be guided by their noblest ideals."

Professor Mark Berkson, *Professor and Chair in the Department of Religion at Hamline University*

"Scientific studies of non-human animals, from apes and whales to birds, rats and octopuses, have increasingly highlighted the fact that they are both sentient and sapient. This makes the cruelty towards animals used for food, clothing, entertainment, pets, trophy hunting and so on particularly shocking and heart breaking. In this meticulously researched book, Joyce D'Silva points out that, in view of our new understanding, the leaders of the world's religions could, and should, play a major role in stressing to their millions of followers the importance of treating all animals with kindness and respect. *Animal Welfare in World Religion* should be in all libraries and university curricula – you should read it whether or not you have a faith."

Jane Goodall, *PhD, DBE, Founder – the Jane Goodall Institute & UN Messenger of Peace*

"This book comes at a very appropriate time a few months after the adoption of a historic United Nations Resolution on Animal Welfare (UNEP/EA.5/Res.1). The resolution on animal welfare, environment and sustainable development calls on Member States to recognise that protecting animals and their welfare is an important contribution to the global objectives of protecting the environment, reducing the risks of emerging zoonoses, improving food systems and achieving sustainable development.

This book is an important contribution to understanding the ethical and moral aspects of animal welfare as described in the teachings and practices of religions. Joyce, while not a theologian, has, masterfully, not only told us stories we didn't know derived from religions, but has also showed us that we need to work on our practices that do not often match our beliefs and religious teachings.

Religion is about creation, purpose, destiny, life, and love. People's beliefs about the creator and the creation affect all aspects of their being and behaviour. The book will have a critical influence on how people look to animals. The language of the book is just suitable for everyone, decision makers, faith leaders and the public. This is an important factor in influencing readers. Covering a wide range of religions and addressing many aspects is a highly commendable effort that I hope will promote stronger engagement of religious actors in respecting the welfare of animals who are, to some religions, other communities created by God."

Dr Iyad Abumoghli, *Director of Faith for Earth, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)*

"This is a profoundly affecting and thought-provoking work. When were we taught that mankind is more important than the rest of creation? Was it through religion, or indifference or greed? Can we return to true compassion and find the way back to respecting all sentient beings? Can we live without inflicting cruelty? I urge you read this book, whether you have a faith or not: it may change your life for the better."

Dame Joanna Lumley, *Actor and Campaigner*

"Joyce D'Silva has spent a lifetime working, with considerable success, to improve the lives of farm animals. And yet there remains much to be done. Around the world, most people have a religious faith and, in this book, Joyce D'Silva looks at how the world's religions see animals and how these religions maintain we should live with them. The result is a book full of optimism and with many surprises. We desperately need everyone to work together to improve the lot of farm animals, which will also benefit wildlife, the environment more generally, and ourselves. This excellent book will help achieve that end."

Rev Professor Michael J. Reiss,
University College London

"For those with some biological or medical training, humans are animals and it is normal to think of other sentient beings as similar to humans and very different from inanimate objects. The message in Joyce D'Silva's book is of the 'beautiful teaching' of all of the world's major faiths emphasising the value of non-human individuals and the obligation of people to care for them and consider their needs. For example, the Qur'an refers to non-human communities as like human communities and the Prophet Muhammad equates acts of kindness to humans and to other animals. Indeed, the book emphasises that such an attitude is important for everyone who lives an ethical and compassionate life. A major problem with the

world at present is too much emphasis on humans and not enough emphasis on the rest of life."

Donald M. Broom, *Emeritus Professor of Animal Welfare, Department of Veterinary Medicine, University of Cambridge*

"This is a very timely and important work. It comes at a time when recognition of the interconnectedness of life is so significant for the future of all life and the planet. Readable and authoritative, it is essential reading for those of all faiths and none."

Professor Joy Carter, *CBE DL Cgeol FGS, Emeritus Professor of Geochemistry and Health, University of Winchester*

"Religious faiths are afflicted by a striking paradox: they preach kindness to others, yet rarely speak out against the harms we do to animals – in our farming systems, laboratories, for entertainment, and other purposes. With animals increasingly affected by our actions, it has never been more important that people of faith speak, and act, with kindness toward animals. The majority of humanity follow religious teachings, which have enormous potential to help bring about a better world. By providing key examples from major and lesser-known religions, D'Silva reminds us of the fundamental commitments of faith communities to values such as kindness and compassion for animals. *Animal Welfare in World Religion* provides the keys to unlocking the potential of religion to bring about a better, kinder world for animals. It should be essential reading for all who care about animals and about living a life consistent with core religious values."

Andrew Knight, *Professor of Animal Welfare and Ethics, University of Winchester Centre for Animal Welfare*

"Today we stand on the shore of a great ocean of human spiritual evolution, where we extend the Golden Rule – to treat others as we would wish to be treated ourselves – to our non-human, sentient sisters and brothers. Guided by the teachings and practices of the world religions, we set sail on this wondrous journey, and Joyce D'Silva's *Animal Welfare in World Religion: Teaching and Practice* is the perfect guidebook to steer us on our course. It is such a privilege to share this exciting adventure with someone as insightful as Joyce. I encourage everyone to pick up this guide and set sail."

Barbara Gardner, *founder and CEO of the Animal Interfaith Alliance (AIA)*

"This book provides a timely and comprehensive look at the major religions and their historical and indeed contemporary approach to animals and animal welfare. The authority of the work is underpinned by the fact that it is written by an individual who has actively made an actual real, measurable, and beneficial improvement in animals' lives over many years.

This is a book which demands attention and deserves to be widely read."

Chris Fegan, *Chief Executive, Catholic Concern for Animals*

"Clearly written and beautifully argued book…

The author takes great pains to explain the suffering of fellow animals… complex details that even theologians and scholars of religion overlooked and neglected. It is deep and bold thinking on our responsibilities to animals and what religious teachings of the major global faiths and some Indigenous beliefs can help us to develop an ethics of compassion and moral responsibility towards all creatures."

Ibrahim Özdemir, *Professor of Philosophy, Uskudar University, Istanbul, President, Uskudar University Forum on Environmental Ethics, core member of al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth*

"Roman Catholic Cardinal Manning in Britain was a major figure in the early 19th century animal protection movement despite the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas who held that humans have no 'direct' duties to animals. Faith leaders have mostly followed Thomist teachings and have been largely absent from discussions on animal protection and the reinvigoration of global animal protection starting in 1950. However, Joyce D'Silva demonstrates in this very accessible discussion of a variety of global faiths that concern for animals is found in the teachings of all the major world religions. Her very timely, accessible and necessary book appears a little more than seven years after Pope Francis' Laudato Si encyclical – a powerful plea to the world to change its approach to protecting the global environment and the other creatures who share the world with humans."

Andrew Rowan, *President of WellBeing International*

"The first thing to say is that Joyce D'Silva, the author of this book, is one of the three or four outstanding political campaigners for animal rights of the last fifty years. So she knows a great deal about what she is writing. I happen to agree with every word I have read.

Nearly all the great faiths have said wonderful things about the other animals (the Golden Rule applies). Yet too often they have forgotten this in practice. Why has no modern Pope, nor Archbishop, for example, ever made Animal Rights or Compassion for Animals the central subject for a leading Christian campaign? (Today's Pope Francis gets the nearest.)

Modern Christianity has failed miserably and ought to feel ashamed. This failure was one reason why I lost my Christian faith. (I am sure I am not alone in this.) The founders of faiths have nearly all shown their passionate concern for animals, as have the Saints. Yet their followers – the self-important second raters and bureaucrats have, however, let us all down.

I happen to believe that Jesus too was passionately concerned about the animals being cruelly sacrificed in the Temple. It was a money-making scam and it made

him furious. He chucked out the cruel animal exploiters. That is one reason why he was crucified."

Richard Dudley Ryder, *MA DCP PhD (Cantab) AFBPsS FZS, President, Animal Interfaith Alliance, Past Chair, RSPCA*

"Joyce D'Silva has assembled an inspiring collection of 'beautiful words' coined by the fathers of the faiths, humbly aware that when God saw that it was good, he was referring to all life, not just us. Today, these words are largely unknown, forgotten or ignored, and not just by the secular. At a time when compassion for life is not just a moral duty but essential to our common survival, she challenges the current crop of faith leaders to take heed and give a lead."

Professor John Webster, *Professor Emeritus, University of Bristol, 'Father of the Five Freedoms'*

"In this illuminating book, Joyce D'Silva very clearly makes the case for animal care and welfare in all the great religious traditions of the world. If we are to return any kind of dignity to the animal world – and save the planet from the perils of climate change and biodiversity loss – then we need to urgently align our world with these teachings."

Gopal D. Patel, *Co-Founder & Director Bhumi Global*

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To the two most important and caring teachers in my life: my late husband, guitarist Amancio D'Silva, and the founder of Compassion in World Farming, the late Peter Roberts MBE.

Contents

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I have run each chapter past a respected individual in that particular faith. I am very grateful to them for their critique and suggestions: Fazlun Khalid, Dr Richard Schwartz, Reverend Professor David Clough, Professor Mark Berkson, Robert Gussman, Wu Hung, Bhikkhu Bodhi, Professor Nanditha Krishna, Charanjit Aijit Singh, Nitin Mehta and Dr Othman Llewellyn and Doug Sam (biographies below).

I am also grateful to those who allowed me to interview them and incorporate their comments in the relevant chapter: Rabbi David Rosen CBE, Fazlun Khalid, Professor Ibrahim Özdemir, Reverend Professor David Clough, Professor Nanditha Krishna and Charanjit Aijit Singh (biographies below).

Of course, I am exceedingly grateful to all those whose published works I have been able to study and quote in places. And to the countless authors lost in history who authored some of the beautiful sacred texts from which I could draw inspiration and where I could find the relevant teachings.

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Finally, a thank you to my family and friends for their moral support.

Joyce D'Silva

Royalties from the sale of this book will go to Compassion in World Farming International – UK Charity No. 1095050

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Wu Hung was formerly a Buddhist monk and is Executive Director of the Environment and Animal Society of Taiwan (EAST).

Introduction

We start with a huge anomaly, a three-part anomaly. Over 80% of the world's people declare that they belong to a religious faith, the majority to one of the major faiths.[1] These faiths all teach that animals should be treated with respect and kindness. Some faiths say that the divine dwells in each animal as in each human or even that animals praise God. Yet humans are responsible for a huge and growing amount of suffering being experienced by animals, be they animals imprisoned in factory farms and laboratories, or wild animals trapped, hunted or "broken in" for our entertainment. How can those of faith justify this anomaly? What can they do to right these wrongs?

This is not a book on theology nor a book about animal rights. I have written in a spirit of enquiry and have concluded with something of a challenge!

In doing my research, I have been awed by some of the beautiful writing about animals contained in the scriptures of diverse faiths. Where scriptures are lacking, I have found inspiring concepts such as "Country" in the beliefs of the First Nations of Australia (see Chapter 6).

I did not know that Allah had given cattle to the people not just for food and clothing but so that "you find beauty in them when you bring them home to rest and when you drive them out to pasture".[2]

I was unaware that one of the reasons why Moses was chosen to lead his people was that he showed compassion to a thirsty lamb who had strayed from the flock.[3]

I did not know of the 20th-century Islamic theologian, Said Nursi, who, whilst imprisoned for his beliefs, wrote a Treatise on flies, his "little birds"![4]

I was heartened by the lovely Buddhist metta (loving-kindness) prayer: "May all beings everywhere be happy. May they be healthy. May they be at peace. May they be free".

I love the story in the Hindu scriptures of Yudisthira, who was prepared to give up his place in heaven to that of a faithful dog.[5]

What of the beautiful words of Saint Isaac the Syrian who described a merciful heart as "a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the birds, for the animals … and for all that exists"?[6]

How about the primacy of compassion over pilgrimage, as recorded in the Sikh's revered book, the Guru Granth Sahib: "The merit of pilgrimages to the

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sixty-eight holy places, and that of other virtues besides, do not equal having compassion for other living beings".[7]

There really is an abundance of inspiration to be found in the sacred scriptures of the faiths.

Yet we can look at the world of animals of all types and see the suffering they are enduring at the hand of humanity (inhumanity?). We can ponder the lives of the 80 billion land animals farmed for our food every year,[8] the majority of whom live in industrial "factory" farms.

I have been advised to use the term "factory farm" with caution, but truly what else are these so-called farms but factories? Like other factories, they take in "stock", process it in various ways and sell it for profit after a certain amount of time. Minimal account is taken of the fact that the "stock" in this case is composed of living, sentient creatures, who can feel not just physical pain, but emotional and mental suffering. The animals are normally deprived of their mothers and those mothers of their offspring as soon as viable after birth, so the natural maternal bond is shredded, sometimes after just 24 hours (or in the case of chickens, it never occurs at all). Instead of indulging in play, as young creatures love to do, they are crowded together in cramped conditions and the desire to play can get degraded into aggressive behaviour like tail-biting. Even walking or running or flying will be severely restricted if not impossible. Opportunities to graze or forage for food will be replaced by carefully selected rations to facilitate speedy growth or high milk yield.

Perhaps saddest of all, their own bodies may have been genetically altered by the hands of the breeding companies, in order to maximise profitable characteristics, and many may suffer lameness and other painful or uncomfortable conditions as a result. If that is not treating animals as if they were inanimate objects on a factory production line, then what is?

We all love to watch animals play. Yet over the centuries and around the globe we have forced many creatures to play for us, rather than for their own enjoyment – the tigers in the circuses, the chimpanzee tea parties, the performing bears at the roadside, the "fights" between dogs or cockerels or between human and bull (sometimes "blessed" by the clergy).

Over 100 million animals are used in research and product testing each year.[9] Some endure horrendous suffering. This is a tricky area to write about as most readers will have benefitted from medicinal products which have inevitably been tried out on animals first – the author included.

In each chapter, I have looked at the situation of animals in a country where that particular faith is predominant. Has the faith of these people affected how they treat animals, be they wild, farmed or used in other ways? The answers are sometimes surprising!

But this does perhaps take us to the heart of the matter. We humans are intrinsically self-centred; we put our own wellbeing first, both our individual wellbeing and that of our species. Let's suppose I am driving my car along a busy street. A child runs into the road on one side and a dog on the other. I have to decide which one I will hit as there's no time to stop. I know I will hit the dog and save

the child. I make this point as I am not trying to be "holier than thou" in this book. I too am speciesist. I may share my home with family members or good friends, but not with rats, spiders and mosquitoes if I can help it. Out they go – gently, if possible.

The teachings of the main faiths about the human relationship with animals perhaps inevitably reflect this human-centredness. They may acknowledge that animals have been created by God or even that divinity is somehow within each being. They may teach that we have a duty of care and compassion towards them, but, in the end, it does seem that humans always come at the apex of consideration. Even non-theistic faiths like Buddhism place the animal "world" as lower than the human world.

The history of humanity's relationships with other animals is a mixture of the beautiful and the cruel. We have loved the beings closest to us, the animals we take into our homes to live with us, often dogs, cats or exotic birds. We may pay out fortunes to keep them in good health or to prolong their lives. If we leave our homes for work or pleasure, we will employ dog-sitters, cat-feeders or kennels to keep them going until our return (although we know in our hearts that they will miss us).

At the other extreme we may poison so-called "pests", hunt innocent creatures for the fun of the chase or the satisfaction of the "good shot", and of course we may wear their skins or sometimes their furs, we may sleep on pillows made from their feathers, and – ah yes – we eat them too!

Perhaps we are just honestly conflicted beings.

Can the great faith traditions help us to resolve these conflicts?

I think that perhaps they can.

All of the faiths covered in this book contain inspiring teaching about animals, about their relationships with their deity or with us. Where there are faith-founders, they too have spoken or acted in compassionate ways. Each faith has wonderful examples from history, like the medieval Saint Francis or, from more recent times, leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and many others, some of whom I have mentioned in their respective chapters.

So, the inspiration is there. If you are a person of faith, I hope this book may encourage you to find out even more from your own tradition or to look with more interest at other traditions. If you are an atheist or agnostic (truth-seeker?) then please also read on to find inspiration for your own life. Just because a teaching or a story comes from a spiritual tradition does not nullify its truth.

We are all in this together. For the Buddhists, there is no permanence, everything changes all the time. That's a hard belief to take on board as we are so sure of our own self, our own status in the world. Yet we know we are born, we mature, we age and we die. Where is the permanence?

It's the same for the animals. We are all in this together. If we are just these tiny specks of vitality in the history and geography of this earth (itself ultimately impermanent too), then perhaps we can make each speck count for something.

If caring for other sentient beings and extending a gentle spirit of fraternity towards them is something we can do, then let's do it!

We are all in this together.

Notes

1 Religion by Country 2022. https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/religion-by-country.
2 Qur'an 16:6.
3 Exodus Rabbah 2:2.
4 S. Vahide, 1998. *The Author of the Risale-i Nur, Bediüzzaman Said Nursî* (2nd ed.). Istanbul: Sözler Publications.
5 Swaha International, 2017. Yudhisthir and The Dog, based on K.M. Ganguli, (1883–1896) "Mahaprasthanika Parva" in The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa (12 Volumes). Calcutta. www.swahainternational.org/yudhisthir-and-the-dog/.
6 Fr. S. Freeman, 2006. Words from St. Isaac of Syria. Homily 81. https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/glory2godforallthings/2006/11/01/words-from-st-isaac-of-syria/.
7 Guru Granth Sahib, p136.
8 Based on figures from FAOstat, www.fao.org.
9 RSPCA, 2022. Animals in Science. https://tinyurl.com/5x5vbbvy.

1 Judaism

Teaching and Practice regarding Humanity's Relationship with Animals

Introduction

As the oldest of the three main monotheistic faiths, Judaism could be said to have set the scene for both Islam and Christianity in terms of our relationship with animals. To the modern reader, this relationship may seem beset by contradictions and different interpretations of the Hebrew Bible (the Tanakh).

For all Jewish believers, one thing is certain and that is that the one God created the world and all the creatures in it. Humanity has a special role in relation to the other creatures, and although very much "in charge", is meant to exercise that role with compassion.

Looking at ancient practices such as animal sacrifice, we need to see them in their historical context. Perhaps it is more relevant to contrast practices such as industrial chicken farming with the practice of vegetarianism among a significant proportion of Jews today.

Teaching

The Genesis (Bereishit) creation story declares that man is made in God's own image:

> And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and they shall rule over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the heaven and over the animals and over all the earth and over all the creeping things that creep upon the earth'.[1]

As God created all the creatures of the earth, the fish, the creeping things and the cattle and other animals, He "saw that it was good".[2] So, although man is given the power to rule over these creatures, they are also part of God's creation and therefore must be treated with respect.

There is an interesting comment on the order of creation in the Talmud reflecting that human beings were not created until the "sixth day so that if our minds become too proud, we could be reminded, 'Even the gnats preceded you in creation.'"![3]

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There is another reason for this distinction between man and animal. In Genesis (2:7), humans are seen as distinct from animals as only humans have a "neshama", a spiritual soul, which seeks fulfilment in God. Both humans and animals also have a "nefesh" which is our life force, our urge for survival. When humans die, their neshama lives on. When humans or animals die, their nefesh ceases to exist.[4] There are other viewpoints in Judaism including the idea of reincarnation traversing boundaries between human and animal.[5]

Adam, the first human according to the book of Genesis, gives names to all the animals. But it appears he cannot find fruitful communication with them, so a female human companion is created for him.[6]

The serpent, accused by Eve of encouraging her to eat the forbidden fruit, is cursed by God "above all cattle and above every beast of the field".[7] Here the serpent, one of God's own creatures, is seen as guilty of initiating Eve's sin. (Many cultures portray the snake family in negative terms apart from Chinese astrology, which says that to be born in the Year of the Snake is a positive happening as such people are said to be calm, thoughtful and wise.)

Genesis tells us that God was so distressed by the way people were living that He decided to destroy his whole creation. Only Noah and his family were saved in the Ark. This too turns into a conservation story as Noah saved at least two (one male, one female) of each of the "impure" species (likely meaning non-domesticated), and seven each of the "pure" species so that when the terrible Flood was over, they could begin again to populate the earth.[8]

After the Flood, God declares that His new covenant with mankind shall also be "with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you".[9] Yet at the same time, God makes a concession, saying that humans can now eat meat, as "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you".[10]

Many of the Psalms see a beneficence in God's relationship with animals. One Psalm declares that God provides food not only for land animals but also for birds.[11] Another Psalm, praising God for all His power and loving kindness, refers to God preserving both man and beast.[12]

One Psalm declares that animals of all kinds, from "sea monsters" to "beasts and all cattle, creeping things and winged fowl", also praise God.[13] (This concept is seen later in Islam.) God cares for the animals too: "The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works".[14]

A passage in Ecclesiastes declares that people and animals share the common fate of mortality and it perhaps questions the concept of a common animal soul and a special human soul:

> For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them; as the one dies, so dies the other; yea, they all have one breath; so that man has no pre-eminence above a beast; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are of the dust. Who knows the spirit of men whether it goes upward; and the spirit of the beast whether it goes downward to the earth?[15]

Looking at the prophetic works included in the Hebrew Bible, Isaiah's vision foresees an idyllic time when carnivores and herbivores alike will live in harmony:

> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.[16]

This truly extraordinary vision turns nature on its head and must have seemed very far removed from the daily lives of the people, who would naturally fear large carnivores like lions, bears or wolves. Perhaps it is a vision of a world we would all like to see.

The Book of Isaiah contains a lovely allegory of the Lord as a caring shepherd: "Even as a shepherd that feedeth his flock, that gathereth the lambs in his arm, and carrieth them in his bosom, and gently leadeth those that give suck…"[17]

The Role of Humanity

God's covenant is now with man but also with the animals. Yet the initial Genesis declaration that man rules over the animals has not been set aside. The concept of dominion is nowadays sometimes interpreted as stewardship, which combines both authority and care. But there is no doubt that humans are seen as beings on a different level to other creatures.

Yet animals are part of God's creation and should be treated with compassion. A fundamental Jewish teaching is that human beings must avoid tsa'ar ba-alei chayim – causing pain to any living creature. Why? Perhaps because they too are created by God and because "The righteous person regards the life of his animal".[18]

The Union for Reform Judaism clarifies this famous saying:

> One of the most touching expressions in the Jewish lexicon is tsa'ar ba-alei chayim, literally, 'pain of living things.' In the Jewish view, animals are just as much creatures of God as is humankind; and humankind has the responsibility, not only of respecting their needs and their feelings, but also of treating them with compassion. Animals suffer tsa'ar, pain, sorrow, and Jews are therefore prohibited from inflicting pain upon them.[19]

The renowned medieval rabbi and scholar Maimonides (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, often called Rambam, 1135–1204) promoted kindness to animals. Considered by many to be the greatest of all rabbinic scholars and authorities on Jewish law, he writes in his famous book *Guide for the Perplexed*:

> It should not be believed that all the beings exist for the sake of the existence of humanity. On the contrary, all the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes, and not for the sake of something else.[20]

This is a really radical statement and could have been penned – in modern idiom – as a basic belief in the rights of animals.

Scholars have noted that several Biblical stories demonstrate that kindness to animals is a desirable quality in humans.

A later Jewish text goes into detail as to how Moses was tested by God through his shepherding: "While our teacher Moses was tending the sheep of Jethro in the wilderness a lamb ran away from him. He ran after her until she reached Hasuah. Upon reaching Hasuah she came upon a pool of water [whereupon] the lamb stopped to drink. When Moses reached her, he said, 'I did not know that you were running because [you were] thirsty. You must be tired'. He placed her on his shoulder and began to walk. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'You are compassionate in leading flocks belonging to mortals; I swear you will similarly shepherd my flock, Israel'".[21]

This implies that Moses, the most revered prophet, was found worthy to lead his people *because* of his compassion for animals.

Rebecca was chosen as the ideal wife for Isaac perhaps partly because of the kindness she showed to animals. Eliezer, Abraham's servant, asked Rebecca for water for himself. She not only gave him water, but also drew water from the well for his camels. This shows that Rebecca had compassion for animals too. Was this why Eliezer deemed Rebecca fit to be chosen as a suitable wife for Isaac, Abraham's son?[22]

The Bible tells us that when Jacob lay dying and called his 12 sons together, representing the 12 tribes of Israel, Simeon and Levi were chastised by him, not only for killing a man, but for ill-treating their oxen.[23]

This more modern Jewish prayer sums up the way humans should relate to animals:

> Blessed is the One who spoke and the world came to be. Blessed is the One! Blessed is the One who continually authors creation. Blessed is the One whose word is deed; blessed is the One who decrees and fulfills. Blessed is the One who is compassionate towards the world; blessed is the one who is compassionate towards all creatures.[24]

Rabbi David Rosen says, "Care for the wellbeing of our eco-system and especially for sentient beings should be the moral imperative that flows from the affirmation that the world is a Divine Creation. As the 16th-century Rabbi Judah Loewe of Prague stated 'One cannot love the Creator if one does not love His creatures'".[25]

Caring for Animals

Kindness to animals is stressed throughout the Hebrew Bible and is even required in the most sacred laws, the Ten Commandments. Not only should people observe a day of rest on the Sabbath, but God also forbids making farm animals work on the Sabbath; they too need a day of rest.[26] Is it possible that this is the first law requiring consideration of animal welfare?

The book of Jonah describes how the Lord decides to spare the city of Nineveh from destruction, saying, "… should not I have pity on Nineveh … wherein are

more than six score thousand persons … and also much cattle?"[27] Moreover, Psalm 36 states, "…Thy righteousness is like the mighty mountains; Thy judgments are like the great deep; man and beast Thou preservest, O Lord".[28]

There is even a suggestion that practicing conservation and compassion toward animals may assure one of a long life. In a passage that is remarkable for an ancient agricultural society that gathered all it could from nature, in Deuteronomy God says that if one comes across a bird's nest containing eggs or fledglings, the mother should not be taken.[29]

The same chapter exhorts everybody to care for domestic animals who have strayed or had an accident, even if these animals belong to someone else.[30] The motivation here may be brotherly love for one's fellow humans, but the passage also recognises how important these animals are to their owners and may hint at a concern for the creatures themselves.

The book of Numbers relates the story of Balaam and his donkey. Because the donkey could see the angel of the Lord in front and, at first, Balaam could not, the donkey kept moving aside and Balaam hit her three times. For this he was rebuked, the angel of the Lord saying,

> Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? Behold, I am come forth for an adversary, because thy way is contrary unto me; and the ass saw me and turned aside before me these three times; unless she had turned aside from me, surely now I had even slain thee, and saved her alive.[31]

The Talmud sets forth a moral tale of why compassion to animals is an essential quality in a human: "Once a calf being led to slaughter thrust its head into the skirts of Rabbi [Yehudah HaNasi]'s robe and began to bleat plaintively. 'Go', he said, 'for this is why you were created'. Because he spoke without compassion, he was afflicted [at the hand of Heaven]. Then one day, his maidservant was cleaning his house and came upon some young weasels. She was about to chase them away with a broom, when Rabbi Yehudah said to her, 'Let them be for it is written: 'His tender mercies are upon all His works'[32] They said [in Heaven], 'Since he is merciful, let him be treated with mercy'".[33] So, the rabbi's painful condition was caused by his lack of compassion and relieved later when he showed compassion to other animals.

While sacrificial offering of an animal is understood to please God, in a passage in Exodus God declares that newborn calves or lambs should remain with their mothers for seven days before being sacrificed.[34] This is seen as an act of mercy, although in reality both mother and offspring would suffer distress by being separated. The same instruction is recorded in Leviticus, with the additional declaration that the mother cow or ewe should not be killed on the same day as her offspring.[35]

The medieval Hebrew work, *Sefer Hasidim: The Book of the Pious*, states:

> Be kind and compassionate to all creatures that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in this world. Never beat nor inflict pain on any animal, beast, or bird, or insect. Do not throw stones at a dog or a cat.[36]

The 16th-century Code of Jewish Law (Schulchan Aruch) clearly states that

> it is forbidden, according to the law of the Torah, to inflict pain upon any living creature. On the contrary, it is our duty to relieve the pain of any creature, even if it is ownerless or belongs to a non-Jew.[37]

The Talmud also states that one should not have an animal unless one can properly feed and care for it.[38] Another teaching is that "a good man does not sell his beast to a cruel person".[39]

Rabbi Yonassan Gershon tells a lovely story about the revered 16th-century teacher, Isaac Luria, who was known as "The Holy Ari" (Lion). One day the Rabbi Luria dismissed one of his students from his class. When the student asked why he had been dismissed, the Rabbi told him it was because he had not fed his chickens for three days. Because of this, the gates of Heaven would be shut to him and only opened again if he fed his chickens every morning, even before he said his prayers.[40]

The Gates of Repentance prayer book service for the Day of Atonement states, "The Lord is good to all; His compassion shelters all His Creatures". Observant Jews recite this verse, which is found in all siddurs (daily prayer books), three times a day.[41]

We can see that kindness to animals becomes a constant theme within Judaism. This was recognised by the renowned Irish historian W.E.H. Lecky (1838–1903) who wrote in his monumental work *History of European Morals, from Augustus to Charlemagne* (1869) that "the rabbinical writers have been remarkable for the great emphasis with which they inculcated the duty of kindness to animals".[42]

Dr Richard Schwarz, who has written widely on the subject of Judaism and compassion for animals, says:

> Jews are mandated to be rachmanim b'nei rachmanim, compassionate children of compassionate ancestors (Beitzah 32b), emulating a compassionate God. God is referred to in daily Jewish prayers as Ha-rachaman (the compassionate One) and as Av harachamim (Father of compassion). Since Judaism teaches that human beings, uniquely created in God's image (Genesis 1:27; 5:1), are to imitate God's positive attributes, we should surely strive to be exemplars of compassion.[43]

Farming Methods

As with so many major faiths, early teachings and writings which deal specifically with farm animals are scarce. The early Prophets, writers and Rabbis could not have envisaged the kinds of industrial animal farming we see globally today. Contemporary voices within the Jewish community are beginning to take positions on the issue and are not unanimous.

One specific rule is found in Deuteronomy: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn".[44] Presumably it was a common practice to muzzle oxen

when they were threshing, in order to speed up the process. However, here it seems it is seen as more important to allow the animals the opportunity to have a munch while they are working, a welfare-oriented instruction. Today, of course, threshing is often a machine-operated business, with no oxen or horses involved.

Deuteronomy also forbids harnessing an ox and ass together,[45] presumably out of concern for the smaller, weaker animal.

In a long list of "do's and don't's" in Proverbs, we find the important command: "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast".[46] This sits neatly alongside mentions of the virtue of being a good shepherd. There is no doubt that a small-scale herder or farmer with a few cattle, goats or chickens is able to regard the lives of their animals and has the potential to take care of them. But how can this regard be fulfilled in the world of factory farming? How can one "regard" the lives of 20,000 chickens in an intensive broiler chicken shed?

So, what kind of farming is approved of in the Hebrew Bible? The Lord says: "And I will give grass in thy fields for thy cattle".[47] This clearly implies that cattle should be allowed to graze on grass. We know from science that the physiology of ruminants like cattle is designed to deal with digestion of highly fibrous foods like grass.[48]

Modern behavioural science also demonstrates that cattle love being out on grass. Contemporary film of cows being let out on grass for the first time in springtime, after a winter indoors, shows the animals leaping about in an apparent state of joy, but then getting their heads down and munching on the lovely green grass before them.[49]

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, known as Rashi, was a revered medieval French-Jewish scholar of the Torah and the Talmud, whose teachings are still followed widely. He declared that the duty to let animals rest on the Sabbath means they must be free to roam in the fields on this day. There are no fields in factory farms.

One particularly horrendous form of factory farming is the taking of (male) calves from their dairy cow mothers within a day of being born and raising them in narrow veal crates for the rest of their four to six month lives. They soon grow too big to be able to turn around in the crates, where they have no bedding and stand on a wooden, slatted floor and are fed a liquid-only diet of reconstituted milk powder. Being ruminants, calves need to eat fibrous food like grass after a week or so, but this they are never allowed to do. Moreover, the iron content of the milk is kept low, so that they produce white, anaemic flesh, the so-called, prized, "white veal".

The widely respected 20th-century scholar, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, declared that raising calves for veal in such a way would qualify as tsa'ar ba'alei chayim, and therefore the meat would be unacceptable.[50] Many Jews have avoided veal because of this.

More recently, such systems have been banned in the UK and the European Union as well as in several US states. Rabbi Feinstein's son, Rabbi Dr Moshe Dovid Tendler, has said that if the crate system was banned, then more humanely raised veal might be acceptable.[51]

In the USA, in 2007 the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards ruled that raising calves in narrow crates was wrong and that only veal from animals raised

under humane standards can be sold, purchased or consumed. Humane standards for the raising of veal calves include sufficient space for calves to lie down, stand up, turn around and groom themselves, and proper nutrition in a mixed diet appropriate for young calves, with sufficient iron, dry, clean bedding, and limited isolation of calves.[52]

It is reasonable to look at the farming of animals for food in Israel, which has a predominantly (73.9%) Jewish population. Of Israeli Jews over age 20 in 2020, 43% self-identify as secular, 22% as traditional but not very religious, 13% as traditional-religious, 11% as religious and 10% as ultra-Orthodox.[53]

Kibbutzim are communal agricultural settlements. Kibbutz farmers and their families pool resources and share in the wealth that is produced as a result of their work. The majority of kibbutzim now identify as secular, but some still identify as religiously based. About 2% of the Israeli population live in kibbutzim. Large-scale intensive farming is a feature of many kibbutzim, while smaller farmer village-based co-operatives are called moshavim.

Many kibbutzim farm intensively. Hens are kept in cages, broiler chicken units are intensive and even beef and dairy cattle, sheep and goats are usually reared indoors. In fact, the Israeli government forbids grazing on cattle farms, so Israel's very high-yielding, mostly Holstein breed, dairy cows are zero-grazed.[54]

Although Israel's climate varies from region to region, much of the weather is hot and dry, with some regions in the south having little rainfall at all. Even the regions with a rainy winter season receive much less than half the annual rainfall of, for example, the UK. Such conditions do not encourage the growth of grass on a scale suitable for pasture-based farming.

An example of an Israeli company involved in building intensive farms is Agrotop. A recent project involved designing two sheds which will hold around 110,000 hens in cages. The cages will meet EU cage standards (as of 2021), i.e. 750 cm^2 per bird.[55] But respected voices within Israel are calling for a different view on eggs.

Rabbi Yonatan Neril, founder and director of The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development in Israel, writes,

> We try to be ethical, moral, and spiritually-aware. The incredible, edible egg is incredible for the person who eats it and bound up in so much suffering for the chicken that produces it. There is a major gap between what is happening to tens of billions of chickens, the mainstream consumption of eggs, and manifesting ethical, moral, and God-resonant living on earth. The time has come to make a change. We can start by reducing or eliminating our personal consumption of eggs.[56]

Good news came in June 2022 when a Knesset (Israeli Parliament) committee approved new regulations that will end the use of cages for laying hens. Existing cages will be banned immediately, but the newer cages with slightly more space per hen will not be banned until 2038.[57]

In the book of Exodus, God describes Israel as a land "flowing with milk and honey".[58] This is certainly an accurate description today as dairy farming in Israel

is now predominantly intensive and high-tech. The cows are mostly of the Holstein breed. These cows have been bred to yield high quantities of milk. Unfortunately, they are prone to suffer from lameness, partly related to their breeding but also to the high-protein diets they are fed.

In 2009, the European Commission's European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) asked its learned Panel on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (AHAW) to report on the wellbeing of dairy cows. These dairy cow experts produced several reports on the health and welfare of dairy cows. They declared that:

> the selection for high milk production has produced a cow that is dependent on a high level of management in order to maintain its health, and which requires certain management practices to maintain its high milk output, which may themselves reduce animal welfare e.g. high-starch grain-based diets, and minimal grazing.[59]

These grain-based diets are fed to the cows, who are unable to go out to graze on grass, their natural food. Many cows now produce around 3,000 gallons of milk a year (3,000 gallons is well over 13,000 litres – a very high yield – Ed). This figure is "among the highest productions in the world, if not the highest", says Dr Ephraim Maltz, a senior researcher emeritus at the Volcani Center, the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture's research arm.[60]

The EFSA Panel made it clear:

> Long term genetic selection for high milk yield is the major factor causing poor welfare, in particular health problems, in dairy cows… The genetic component underlying milk yield has also been found to be positively correlated with the incidence of lameness, mastitis, reproductive disorders and metabolic disorders.[61]

Perhaps the most telling aspect of the lives of these high-yielding Holstein-type cows is that they are commonly sent for slaughter after just two or three lactations, at less than a quarter of the normal life span of a cow. Due to failure to get pregnant, ill-health or repeated bouts of lameness, they become no longer economically viable. It is a condemnation of this type of farming that the cows' own genetic make-up, combined with their unnatural feeding regime and often poor housing, makes their longevity superfluous to the dairy industry. Wherever such systems are used – and they are widespread in the US, Europe and elsewhere – they are not in the best interests of the cows themselves.[62]

Rabbi Rosen is outspoken about the harms cause by this kind of selective breeding for productivity: "Regarding animals it is clear that making them grow unnaturally fast and especially making them unnaturally large and 'productive', involves cruelty that cannot be justified".[63]

It is not just the cows who are zero-grazed. Due to the lack of pasture in Israel, most sheep and goat farmers are using zero-grazing systems, with a full supplement feeding regime.[64]

Sadly, we see that feedlots – barren open mud yards – are growing in number in Israel, and are stocked with imported calves being reared for beef.[65]

However, extensive farming methods are used by Bedouin farmers in the southern part of the country. They raise their herds traditionally and nomadically but account for only about 20,000 goats.[66]

Perhaps it is not surprising that Israel has gone down the intensive farming route. However even if God's "tender mercies" are over all these intensively farmed animals,[67] it is not so obvious that the farmers' mercies are to be seen. Neither am I assured that the intensive farmers are observing the "tsa'ar ba'alei chayim" teaching.

It is also obvious that animals in intensive farms do not get a Sabbath day of rest and recuperation. The cows still get milked, the broiler chickens still struggle to get to their feed and watering points, the laying hens still endure the cramped conditions in their cages. Factory farms are intense in every sense of the word.

Can the owner of a factory farm really be "righteous" and "regardeth the life of his beast"?[68] If there are 20,000 broiler chickens in a shed, it is simply not possible to give each one the care that they deserve, whether on theological grounds or welfare grounds.

Several modern Jewish teachers have condemned factory farming. Rabbi Aryeh Carmell, a modern Torah scholar and teacher in Jerusalem states: "It seems doubtful from all that has been said whether the Torah would sanction 'factory farming', which treats animals as machines, with apparent insensitivity to their natural needs and instincts. This is a matter for decision by halachic authorities".[69]

Jewish author Richard H. Schwartz notes that "the condition under which [factory farm] animals are raised today are completely contrary" to the Biblical principle of the Sabbath. For:

> instead of animals being free to graze on the Sabbath day to enjoy the beauties of creation, they are confined for all of their lives to darkened, crowded stalls and cages without air, natural light, or the room in which to exercise.[70]

Rabbi David Rosen is adamant on the subject of factory farming:

> I do not see how anyone familiar with Jewish teaching in relation to animals and with the abhorrent cruelties involved in animal factory farming can justify the latter. For me it is obvious that Jewish teaching explicitly condemns such conduct.[71]

Peter Roberts, the founder of the international farm animal welfare group, Compassion in World Farming, defined factory farming in these words: "Factory farming begins where the individuality of the animal ends".[72]

Slaughter

Prior to the Jewish laws, it was a common practice for meat to be torn from a live animal. With no refrigeration available, this was one way to obtain a little meat but have some left for the ensuing days, no matter the agony that the animals

must have suffered. The Bible specifically forbids this. Severing a limb from a live animal and eating it is forbidden.[73]

Religiously observant Jews are only allowed to eat meat that has been slaughtered according to the shechita method. They believe that this is the most humane way to kill animals for food.

Most animal welfare and veterinary organisations believe that animals should be stunned before their throats are cut. The stun should render the animal unconscious and insensible to pain or terror. Stunning is done by firing a retractable metal bolt into the brain (usually used for cattle) which causes instant unconsciousness or by using electricity to stun the animal (usually used for sheep and poultry) and render it unconscious for long enough for the actual slaughter to be carried out. More recently gas stunning has been introduced, especially for poultry.

Shechita slaughter is opposed to stunning. Jewish law does not permit pre-slaughter stunning because it requires the animal to be uninjured at the time of the actual slaughter, and all pre-stunning methods are seen as involving an injury to the animal. There is also concern that the pre-stunning might kill the animal, so it would be dead already when the knife was used in the act of slaughter. This would render the meat unfit to eat. Many Jews believe that shechita produces instant loss of consciousness, so stunning is not necessary.

There is also a concern that stunning an animal before slaughter makes the ensuing bleed-out less effective. This would conflict with the Divine instruction that no blood is to be consumed.[74] This belief has been contradicted by several modern experiments, which demonstrate little difference in the amount of blood loss after stunned or un-stunned slaughter.[75]

The reason for avoiding blood is explained as follows: "The Talmud explains that the "animal soul" resides in their blood, and since the animal soul is essentially coarse and unrefined, eating blood internalizes that trait. The Torah's message is "Don't take the animal instinct, the animal life force, and increase its prominence within your personality. Minimize that part of you and maximize the aspect of you which is spiritual".[76]

Shechita requires the act of slaughter to be done by a fully trained shochet. In fact, shochetim are likely to be better trained in animal physiology than most other slaughter operatives. The animal must be killed by cutting the throat with a single stroke from a very sharp instrument called a chalaf. The cut must sever the trachea, oesophagus, carotid arteries and jugular veins. The animal must then be allowed to fully bleed out and the shochet must check the animal to see that it was correctly slaughtered, and that the animal was in a fit condition to be declared kosher or fit to be eaten.

A group of leading scientists, brought together by the European Commission, viewed all the research on stunning and slaughter and concluded:

> Without stunning, the time between cutting through the major blood vessels and insensibility [unconsciousness], as deduced from behavioural and brain response, is up to 20 seconds in sheep … up to 2 minutes in cattle, up to 2½ or more minutes in poultry, and sometimes 15 minutes or more in fish.[77]

As science indicates that animals do not lose consciousness instantaneously when their throats are cut, they must endure a period of possible pain and certainly confusion and distress as they bleed to death. Some argue that the pain from the cut is not immediately felt. It can happen (in humans too) that a very traumatic wound can sometimes induce temporary analgesia. Be that as it may, the experience of bleeding out must surely cause suffering and distress until unconsciousness is achieved.

Temple Grandin is a highly respected expert on slaughter. She has worked with Jewish communities in the US and elsewhere to change any aspects of shechita which she sees as causing unnecessary suffering. For example, some Jewish slaughterhouses were inverting the animals before slaughter. Being upside down is very stressful for the animals – even if it facilitated easier slaughter. She has now persuaded most slaughterhouses to restrain the animal in an upright position, making sure that the head is held steady in an upright position to facilitate the use of the slaughter knife. Maimonides (Rambam) explicitly permitted upright slaughter.[78] Now, in the US, the Orthodox Union and all other major kosher certifiers in the United States accept upright slaughter.[79]

We know from much evidence that, globally, slaughtering animals is often done in a cruel way and that animals are handled roughly. Grandin thinks that the religious aspect of shechita may engender more careful handling. She says:

> It is the religious belief of the rabbis in the kosher plants that helps prevent bad behavior. In most kosher slaughter plants, the rabbis are absolutely sincere and believe that their work is sacred. The rabbi in a kosher plant is a specially trained religious slaughterer called a shochet, who must lead a blameless life and be moral. Leading a blameless life prevents him from being degraded by his work.[80]

These conflicting views on slaughter are a subject of concern to Jews and non-Jews alike. In the world right now, Orthodox Jews will only eat meat which has been killed by the shechita method. The views of secular Jews are more relaxed, and many will eat meat not necessarily of shechita origin. Those whose priority is the welfare of animals will continue to press for all animals to be stunned before slaughter – as well as for slaughterhouse practices and inspections to be upgraded in *all* slaughterhouses.

The act of slaughter has always been a subject for debate within Judaism. Even that great medieval scholar of the Torah, Maimonides, writes of a particular aspect of killing:

> It is prohibited to kill an animal with its young on the same day, in order that people should be restrained and prevented from killing the two together in such a manner that the young is slain in the sight of the mother; for the pain of animals under such circumstances is very great. There is no difference in this case between the pain of people and the pain of other living beings, since the love and the tenderness of the mother for her young ones is not

> produced by reasoning but by imagination, and this faculty exists not only in people but in most living creatures.[81]

Rabbi David Rosen is aware of the incredibly fast speeds at which animals are slaughtered in today's large slaughterhouses and says:

> One of my concerns about "stunning" is that it facilitates very rapid killing of animals (to meet the modern demand for meat) and as a result it is not always done effectively. Ritual slaughter at least ensures that the animal is given "personal attention" and the immediate severance of the trachea and oesophagus means that the cessation of pain is more effective than stunning. Nevertheless, I would of course far prefer that animals were not killed at all.[82]

Eating Animals

The original Biblical creation story makes it clear that humans were to follow a vegan diet:

> And God said: 'Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed-to you it shall be for food;

and He prescribed a similar diet for other creatures: "and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is a living soul, [I have given] every green herb for food".[83]

It is not until the fourth chapter of Genesis, when Adam and Eve have been cast out of the Garden of Eden, do we hear that their son Abel was a shepherd.[84] Although Abel is seen as offering a lamb to God, it seems reasonable to presume that the meat from his sheep were also being killed for food.

It is only after the Flood that the Divine permission to eat meat is given, as God declares that humans can now eat meat: "Every moving thing that liveth shall be food for you".[85]

However, not all living creatures are allowed as food for Jews. Based on Biblical rulings, Jewish dietary rules or Kashrut say that the only animals who are kosher (allowed, fit,) are those that have cloven hooves and chew the cud, such as cows, sheep, goats and deer. Pigs have split hooves but do not chew the cud, so pig-meat is forbidden as is camel-meat as camels chew the cud but do not have partially split hooves.[86] For seafood to be kosher, the animal must have fins and scales. Certain types of seafood, such as shellfish, crustaceans, and eels, are therefore considered non-kosher. Both chickens and turkeys are permitted in most Jewish communities. Other types of animals, such as amphibians, reptiles, and most insects, are prohibited altogether.

Traditionally, Jews have eaten meat and it has formed an important part both of the weekly Sabbath meal and of certain festivals. Other festivals focus on dairy foods. Dairy and meat are not eaten together at the same meal. Specifically, the Bible says that one should not stew a goat kid in its mother's milk.[87]

After the original Genesis command to eat plant foods, there are further allusions to eating such a diet, for example, in Deuteronomy, the Lord talks of the bounteous land he has given: "a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig-trees and pomegranates; a land of olive-trees and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it".[88] However, this chapter goes on to refer to "thy herds and thy flocks",[89] so we must presume that animals were being eaten. A few chapters later the Lord refers to cattle "And I will give grass in thy fields for thy cattle, and thou shalt eat and be satisfied".[90]

Many modern Rabbis are now questioning not only factory farming, but meat consumption itself. One of the most respected of these rabbis is the Orthodox rabbi, David Rosen, former Chief Rabbi of Ireland and an International President of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (www.religionsforpeace.org). Regarding farming methods, he writes: "the current treatment of animals in the livestock trade definitely renders the consumption of meat as halachically[91] unacceptable as the product of illegitimate means…"; he goes on to declare such practices as a "flagrant violation" of the principle of not causing tsa'ar ba'alei chayim.[92]

Rabbi Rosen believes his vision is rooted in Jewish teaching:

> Aside from the fact that both the original Garden of Eden and the Messianic vision of the future reflect the vegetarian ideal in Judaism, it is of course such a dietary lifestyle that is most consonant with the goal and purpose of Torah to maximize our awareness, appreciation, and sensitivity to the Divine Presence in the world. It is therefore only natural for us to affirm as did Rav Kuk (Kook, Rav Kook, 1865–1935), the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi in Israel, that a redeemed world must perforce be a vegetarian world.[93]

Rabbi Rosen urges Jews not to eat meat at all: "As it is halachically prohibited to harm oneself and as healthy, nutritious vegetarian alternatives are easily available, meat consumption has become halachically unjustifiable".[94]

In a film shown on the website of JewishVeg, he says:

> Judaism's way of life, its dietary practices, are designed to ennoble the human spirit. It is therefore a contradiction in terms to claim that products that come through a process that involves inordinate cruelty and barbarity toward animal life can truly be considered kosher in our world. In our world today, it is precisely a plant-based diet that is truly consonant with the most sublime teachings of Judaism and of the highest aspirations of our heritage.[95]

Rabbi Rosen points out:

> A plant based diet is the Biblical ideal (in the Garden of Eden, and in the Messianic vision) and in today's world where animal products (not just meat, but eggs and dairy products as well) on the market, result from much cruelty; and where fruits and vegetables and plant based products are freely available;

> I believe that truly religious Jews (and indeed all people of moral sensibility) should avoid animal products as much as possible.[96]

In 2017, 74 rabbis signed the following statement:

> We, the undersigned rabbis, encourage our fellow Jews to transition toward animal-free, plant-based diets. This approach to sustenance is an expression of our shared Jewish values of compassion for animals, protection of the environment, and concern for our physical and spiritual well-being.

The rabbis come from all kinds of Jewish traditions: 13 Orthodox rabbis, 24 Conservative rabbis, 25 Reform rabbis, 8 Reconstructionist rabbis, 3 transdenominational rabbis, 1 Renewal rabbi and 1 Secular Humanist rabbi, as well as by 2 rabbinic students and 1 cantorial student.[97]

With so many Jewish people turning to vegetarianism and veganism, it is interesting to note the plethora of vegan Jewish websites offering for example, vegan versions of the Shabbat meal.[98]

Five percent of Israel's population is now reckoned to be vegan, and the world's largest vegan festival was hosted in Tel Aviv in 2014.[99]

Sacrifice

As with so many other faiths, sacrificial offering, usually of an animal, to God was an important part of the faith in the early days. There are numerous Biblical references where God calls for a sacrificial offering to be made, or when people decide to make an offering themselves.[100]

Usually, sacrifices were undertaken as either a thanks offering, a votive offering or a spontaneous free-will offering. Slaughter offerings were also made at times of the ratification of solemn covenants, treaties and alliances. In fact, the book of Deuteronomy makes it clear that God required sacrifices to be made at certain times.[101]

Eventually sacrificial offerings became focussed on the great temple in Jerusalem. According to Maimonides, these offerings were a concession to the conditions in Biblical times. Since sacrifices were the universal expression of religion in that period, if Moses had tried to eliminate them, his mission would probably have failed, and Judaism would have disappeared. Offerings of animals were supposed to be accompanied by good deeds. After the destruction of the Temple, the rabbis stated that sacrifices should be replaced by prayer and good deeds.

In Hosea, we find that God declares "For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings".[102]

In Isaiah, God appears to reject continued animal offerings:

> To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the LORD; I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.[103]

Maimonides said that the people learned that "the sacrificial service is not the primary objective of the commandments, but that prayer is a better means of obtaining nearness to God". Agreeing with the early rabbis, Maimonides emphasized that the superiority of prayer is that "it can be offered everywhere and by every person".[104]

It is interesting to note that the Ten Commandments do not mention sacrifice.

Modern voices within the Jewish community are also querying whether animal sacrifices are necessary. Nathan Lopes Cardozo, an Orthodox rabbi in Jerusalem, writes:

> Does Judaism really need animal sacrifices? Would it not be better off without them? After all, the sacrificial cult compromises Judaism. What does a highly ethical religion have to do with the collection of blood in vessels and the burning of animal limbs on an altar?[105]

The Union of Reformed Judaism says:

> Whether we have sinned or not, whether we have done so intentionally or unintentionally, we still have the desire to move closer to God, to offer our own korbanot (sacrifice). To do so, we must put forth the effort to show kindness, compassion, generosity, and goodwill even if that is not easy. At the same time, we must put forth the effort to study Torah and attend worship services…the more good we do, the more good we do. This is really a model for life. Sacrifices are alive and well: They just have to be slightly redefined.[106]

Hunting

Generally, Jews are opposed to hunting, although it did take place in Biblical times. One passage declares that the blood from a hunted animal should be buried in the earth.[107] Some modern commentators see this as meaning that hunting is shameful in the sight of God. It is clear that hunting was happening at that time.

The kind of hunting is important. If people hunt for food for themselves and their families, this is permissible, but should be done in a way that causes the least suffering. Hunting just for sport is different in its goals and is regarded as wrong.

A query was addressed to Rabbi Ezekiel Landau (1713–1793) by a man wishing to know if he could hunt in his large estate, which included forests and fields. The response stated:

> In the Torah the sport of hunting is imputed only to fierce characters like Nimrod and Esau, never to any of the patriarchs and their descendants…. I cannot comprehend how a Jew could even dream of killing animals merely for the pleasure of hunting…. When the act of killing is prompted by that of sport, it is downright cruelty.[108]

Vivisection

Obviously, the issue of animal experimentation was not addressed in the Hebrew Bible nor in many other historical books and teachings of the Jewish faith. Any decision on whether it is permissible, must call on the accepted criteria of tsa'ar ba'alei chayim, not causing suffering and bal tashchit (wastefulness). In view of the many millions of animals subjected to experiments every year, one must ask – are not some of these experiments not only cruel, but very wasteful of animal life?

The Central Conference of American Rabbis has published on this topic. While upholding the human right to use animals, they refer constantly to the need to cause as little suffering as possible, saying: "Human life must be saved if it is at all possible…When dealing with experimental animals we should be quite certain that they are not subjected to pain or used for frivolous reasons as for example cosmetic experimentation.

> A mouse engineered genetically for a specific set of experiments, which will eventually help human beings, lies within the boundaries of utilizing animals for the benefit of human beings. Naturally the humane treatment of the animals in accordance with our tradition must be observed. It would be appropriate for Jews to be involved in this kind of genetic engineering and to use the animals that they themselves have genetically changed.[109]

Rabbi Rosen has a similar view:

> From a Jewish perspective, human life has a sanctity above that of animals (Of course that does not justify the exploitation of the latter, on the contrary.) Thus, if the use of animals in science can help advance human health, then it is justified. Nevertheless, this still has to be done in a manner that causes as little pain and suffering as possible. Such sensitivity appears to be lacking in many scientific contexts. Happily, new developments in AI appear to enable testing and analysis to be done without needing to resort to animal experimentation.[110]

Many anti-vivisectionists point out that evidence from experiments on animals does not always translate similarly in humans. There is no doubt that reconciling human need with not causing suffering to experimental animals is a difficult issue, both for Jews and for non-Jews alike.

Wildlife and Biodiversity

The Hebrew Bible contains several passages full of praise for the world created by God and for the wild creatures who inhabit it alongside humanity: "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea".[111]

In the book of Proverbs, certain creatures are singled out for praise:

> There are four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: The ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in the summer; the rock-badgers are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the crags; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the spider thou canst take with the hands, yet is she in kings' palaces.[112]

Job himself declares:

> But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee; Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee; Who knoweth not among all these, that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.[113]

The Psalms too, full of praise and joy, declare:

> The trees of the LORD have their fill, the cedars of Lebanon, which He hath planted; Wherein the birds make their nests; as for the stork, the fir-trees are her house. The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the conies. Who appointedst the moon for seasons; the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth… How manifold are Thy works, O LORD! In wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy creatures. Yonder sea, great and wide, therein are creeping things innumerable, living creatures, both small and great.[114]

This kind of ecstatic writing displays a real reverence for wildlife and the environment, always within the context of the Divine Creation.

Today, in Israel, there are organisations which aim to protect wildlife and biodiversity. The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) points out:

> Israel is blessed with a wide array of biodiversity. It is home to some 2,800 species of plants, more than 500 species of birds and 100 species of mammals. Located along the African-Eurasian flyway, Israel hosts over 500 million migrating birds twice each year. Israel is designated as a biodiversity hotspot where focused international conservation efforts will have the greatest effect.[115]

The SPNI's website says that their International Ornithological Center (IOC) operates "a network of birding centres that monitors migration patterns of 500 million birds on behalf of the international community, provides safe haven for birdlife and makes Israel a world centre for bird watchers".[116]

There is still one use of wild animals that is contentious among modern Jews and that is the wearing of fur. Jewish authorities are divided on the subject,

though always paying at least lip service to avoiding tsa'ar ba'alei chayim. Historically, there was an association between the fur trade and Jews, especially in Eastern Europe.[117]

Every year, globally, over 100 million animals are killed for their fur, 90% of them raised in cages on fur farms, where they cannot fulfil their natural behaviours and often suffer greatly.[118] (The author has spent a day on a mink farm in the UK. She still remembers that day with feelings of horror and sadness.)

Several countries have now banned fur farming, including the UK, many European Union countries and Japan.[119]

Based on the prohibition of tsa'ar ba'alei chayim, the late Rabbi Haim Dovid Halevy, Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, issued a p'sak (rabbinic ruling) in March 1992, prohibiting the manufacturing and wearing of fur. He based his decision on extensive research of the Torah, the Talmud, and other authoritative texts.[120]

Rabbi Rosen is also outspoken on this issue:

> I do not see the wearing of animal products in itself as illegitimate – for example in a case where an animal died naturally, and its fur is then used by humans (this would also be good environmentally responsible recycling.) However, to kill, let alone breed to kill animals for their fur is abhorrent, and far greater Jewish authorities than me have condemned such as being in contravention of Jewish teaching.[121]

It was not until June 2021, after many years of campaigning, that the Israeli government banned the sale of fur with a few exemptions for religious reasons, such as the sale of Shtreimels – fur hats traditionally worn on Shabbat and holidays by ultra-Orthodox men. The ban came into force six months later.[122]

Conclusion

Judaism embraces the world created by God. It views humans as the most important beings in this world but recognises that animals have a rightful place in the Divine scheme. The Hebrew Bible admonishes people to be kind and to "regard" the lives of animals entrusted to their care.

The criterion for the human relationship with animals, both wild and domestic, is that one should avoid causing them pain and suffering – tsa'ar ba'alei chayim. That is surely a wonderful criterion.

There is a huge variety of opinions within Judaism about how to implement that instruction. But that variety of views perhaps only reflects the views within wider society about our relationship with animals.

Since finishing this chapter, I have come across an interesting proposal made by Dr Richard Schwartz. Writing in The Times of Israel, he proposes:

> I, along with other Jewish activists, am championing an initiative to restore the ancient Rosh Hashanah L'ma'aser Beheimah, a day initially for tithing

> animals for sacrifices, and to transform it into a Rosh Hashanah LaBeheimot (a New Year for Animals), a day devoted to increasing awareness of Judaism's powerful teachings on compassion for animals and to considering a tikkun (healing) for the horrible ways that animals are treated today on factory farms and in other settings.

He goes on to give several good reasons for abandoning factory farming and other inhumane and environmentally harmful practices. He concludes:

> Renewing an ancient, almost completely forgotten Jewish holiday may seem audacious. But it is essential to help revitalize Judaism, improve the health of Jews, sharply reduce the current massive mistreatment of animals, and help move our precious but imperilled planet to a sustainable path.[123]

With such a strong foundation, it would be good to see even more Jewish leaders and lay people advancing arguments for animal welfare and even for recognising the rights of animals and moving towards more plant-based diets.

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2 Christianity

Teaching and Practice regarding Humanity's Relationship with Animals

Introduction

Christians see themselves as inheritors of the Old Testament and its teaching as well as being believers in the teaching of Jesus, and of his early followers such as St Paul, as recorded in the New Testament. These two books make up the Christian Bible. Jesus is understood to be both human and Divine, the incarnation of the second aspect of the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in one God. Christians base their faith on this revealed wisdom and teaching.

From being persecuted as a cult in its early days, all changed for Christians when the Emperor Constantine embraced their minority faith. As the Franciscan theologian Fr. Richard Rohr puts it:

> It's possible to trace the movement of Christianity from its earliest days until now. In Israel, Jesus and the early "church" offered people an experience; it moved to Greece, and it became a philosophy. When it moved to Rome and Constantinople, it became organized religion. Then it spread to Europe, and it became a culture. Finally, it moved to North America and became a business… The original desire or need for a "Jesus" experience was lost, and not even possible for most people.[1]

So, from Jesus being a revolutionary campaigner, crucified by the local Roman ruler, and with early Christians being fed to the lions in Rome, suddenly Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire. Even though the Empire itself fell away, the Church was by now a strong moral force in much of Europe and its blessing and authority were sought by kings and commoners alike for many centuries.

Christianity became absorbed in the rightness of its official teaching (and the wrongness of the teaching of others) and in encouraging or disciplining its followers to follow that teaching, as only in this way could people ensure their eternal salvation in heaven. It became a very anthropocentric, perhaps theocentric, set of teachings. Animals did not feature to any great extent in the core, established teaching.

As Professor Charles Camosy reflects, Christianity is "an imperfect tradition with respect to animals".[2]

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That prolific author of books on Christianity and the status of animals, Dr Andrew Linzey, also ruefully confesses, "It has, I think, to be sadly recognised that Christians, Catholic or otherwise, have failed to construct a satisfactory moral theology of animal treatment".[3] Linzey himself believes in the theos-rights (God-rights) of animals; in other words, they have rights based on the right of the Creator to have His creation treated with respect.

Over the centuries, there seem to be at least two strands of thought and practice within Christianity regarding animals, strands that seem irreconcilable. One strand sees animals on earth solely within our power and with the human right to use them for our own purposes in any way we want. Catholic theologian Deborah Jones describes this well: "Christianity has erected a barrier between human beings and animals which can seem insuperable".[4]

The other strand sees animals as God's creatures, capable of suffering, and believes that humans have a responsibility to care for them.

It is perhaps an anomaly that the Christian faith, so associated with the gospel teachings on love and mercy, should be so mute on our fellow creatures, their place in the Divine plan and how we should relate to them.

Symbolic Animals

Although Christianity professes only one God, particular animals have been associated, often within art, as symbols of Christ and of the four evangelists who wrote the gospel accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus. Christians perhaps "appropriated" the lion symbol for Jesus Christ, as the Lion of Judah originally represented the Israelite tribe of Judah. We first meet this Christianised lion in the book of Revelation: "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'"[5] Some interpret this as referring to the second coming of Christ (and see the piece on Rastafarianism in the final chapter of this book).

The Holy Spirit is often depicted as a dove, bringing grace "down" from heaven, which was still seen as "up there". The dove was mentioned in the Old Testament, but its inaugural reference in the New Testament was when Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist: "At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him".[6]

The animal symbols of the four evangelists are derived from the four living creatures seen in Ezekiel's vision in the Book of Ezekiel, chapter one. Later they are identified as cherubim, angels, in chapter ten. Applied much later to the evangelists, they are ascribed as follows: Matthew the man, Mark the lion, Luke the ox, and John the eagle. When the symbols of the four evangelists appear together, it is called a Tetramorph and is common in the medieval art of Europe. Various writers have ascribed particular characteristics of each of the four creatures to each particular evangelist.

The use of these creatures is not viewed as idolatry, but it is interesting to see how close an association has been made between humans and animals. As we shall see later, some theologians view the Incarnation of Jesus as the Divine becoming "flesh", all flesh, not just human flesh.

The Teaching

Christians incorporate the Genesis teachings into their belief system. So, God creates the world and all the creatures in it, including humanity, and He sees that it is "very good".[7] God goes on to make humanity in His own image, the "imago Dei" as the Latin world came to call it. Theologians have long argued as to what exactly this means – perhaps most ending up with the view that only humans have the capacity to relate to God and are thus made in His image.

This view would be supported by the highly influential St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) who adopted the Aristotelian view of the divisions of the "soul": inanimate, vegetative, sensitive (animals) and reasoning (only humans). Aristotle wrote that "if nature makes nothing incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man".[8]

Humanity came to be seen as at the apex of the Divine creation, apart from the angels. Everything else in the created world is there to serve humanity, although Aquinas concedes that ultimately everything in creation "exists for the sake of the universe" which "is ordained towards God as its end…thus it is plain that Divine goodness is the end of all corporeal beings".[9] Aquinas is the master of this strand of Christian thought, the Aristotelian-Thomistic strand.

Many other important historical figures within Christianity have taken a similar or even more limited view. Martin Luther (1483–1546), regarded as a founding figure of Protestantism, wrote: "The beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven were created for mankind; these are the wealth and possessions of men".[10] Luther rebelled against much traditional Church teaching, but his view of animals mimics that of Aquinas.

Rev Dr David Clough, Chair in Theology & Applied Sciences at the University of Aberdeen, believes that there are some positive points in the Aristotelian/Thomistic view:

> There is much in Aristotelian and Thomistic accounts of animals that is valuable for contemporary Christian animal ethics. Both value the diversity of creaturely life. Both affirm the importance of appreciating the particular mode of life of all creatures and the goods that they pursue in their flourishing. Both were wrong to believe in hierarchy between different kinds of humans and to understand the role of animals as serving human needs. Aquinas was wrong to exclude animals from Christian ethical concern. Modern scientific understandings of animals are helpful in providing grounds for revising their views about the uniquely rational nature of humans. Christian animal ethics should draw on core elements in Aristotelian and Thomistic thought while offering correction at appropriate points.[11]

With animals usually relegated to a lower status than human animals, there exists a fairly horrendous history of human exploitation and abuse of animals, often seemingly sanctioned by Christian authorities. In medieval times, animals were sometimes put "on trial" for their apparently devilish actions, such as attacks on humans.[12]

Some Catholic writers, such as the French Jesuit Père Bougeant, suggested that animals were, in fact, evil spirits and should be treated harshly, as befitted such creatures.[13]

In more modern times, bishops have apparently attended and sanctioned bullfights, monastic abbeys and convents have owned and run factory farms, where the animals are caged or confined, and some of the clergy have participated in hunting for sport.

One contemporary example of this first strand can be found in the fundamentalist Christian website, Gospelway, which declares:

> So the Bible teaches that men have dominion over animals, including the right to control them, confine them, and require them to obey us. We have the right to possess them as property, use them, and make them work for us. They are required to serve our purposes to meet our needs. God did not "liberate" them as if they have the "right" to act as they please.[14]

Another very conservative Catholic voice is that of the writer Joseph Sobran (1946–2010), who wrote: "Broadly speaking…animals are violent, predatory … and lacking in compassion. We owe them no apologies. Besides, many of them taste good".[15]

Could it be that centuries of teaching and practice have ignored the actual teaching of the Christian saviour, Jesus Christ? What does the New Testament tell us about his teaching and relationships with animals?

Although traditional Nativity scenes of the birth of Jesus depict an ox and an ass, there is no mention of their presence in the gospels. Some theologians think that the ox represents Israel and the Jewish people and the ass represents the Gentiles, or non-Jewish people, with the implication that Jesus brings the two together.[16] While the Nativity stories include visits by the wise men from the East[17] they also include the visit of the shepherds.[18] If these stories imply that the Christian teaching is for the high and the lowly in society, including the "foreigner", could the addition of the ox and ass imply that the birth of Jesus is also important for our relationship with animals?

The gospel of Mark tells us that as the public work of Jesus is about to begin, he is baptised by Saint John the Baptist in the river Jordan. After the Holy Spirit speaks to him, he then spends 40 days in the wilderness "with the wild beasts".[19] Does this suggest that the wild creatures left Jesus alone or that he had some kind of influence or control over them? Did they comfort him in his isolation? We just do not know. Some think that this period of peace with wild animals is meant to foreshadow the future peaceable kingdom described by the prophet Isaiah.[20]

In the recorded teaching of Jesus, he does give status to animals, particularly birds. However, his analogies end up with his saying that people are more important than such creatures. For example, in Luke's gospel he says: "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all counted. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows"[21] and: "Consider the ravens: they do not sow or reap, they do not

have storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!"[22]

Perhaps it is comforting to hear that each tiny sparrow has a place in the Divine consciousness and that the ravens are cared for by God.

On one occasion when Jesus finds a man with a withered hand, his disciples ask if it is permissible to heal on the Sabbath rest day. He replies: "He said to them, 'If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath'" and he heals the man.[23]

Jesus gives a similar answer to another question about the Sabbath: "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?"[24]

While these references to the animal world are somewhat inconclusive and disappointing to those who seek support for their view of animals as our fellow beings, some of the analogies used by Jesus show an appreciation for the beauty and wholeness of nature: "Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade'".[25]

Then there is the rather lovely analogy, which Jesus uses, of the mother hen protecting her chicks: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing!"[26]

In his teaching to his disciples, Jesus makes repeated use of the analogy of the good shepherd who cares for his flock. He engages with Simon Peter: "When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord', he said, 'you know that I love you'. Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs'. Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you'. Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep'. The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you'. Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep.'"[27]

Yet again:

> I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.[28]

These shepherd references are perhaps based on similar verses in the Book of Isaiah.[29] The shepherd analogy would make sense to those listening to Jesus. They would appreciate the importance of the shepherd watching over and caring for his flock.

John's gospel also records how Jesus went to Jerusalem and became angry when he witnessed the lively trade in sacrificial animals attached to the Temple. Cattle, sheep and doves were being sold for sacrifice, as well as money-changing taking place: "So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves, he said, 'Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!'".[30] Was his anger due to the captivity and sacrifice of the animals or was it the nature of the trading so close to the venerated Temple? Perhaps both? We do not know for sure.

The most problematic passage in the New Testament is in Mark's gospel, where Jesus tells the bad spirits to leave a man who is being tortured by them. Whereas it is often said that Jesus ordered the bad spirits to enter into the large herd of pigs nearby, in fact the text says that it is the spirits who ask to enter instead into the pigs, who then dash down the hillside into the lake and drown. Jesus simply acquiesces in the request of the spirits.[31]

Some see the whole story as metaphorical. The spirits are called "Legion". Could they simply be symbolic of the Roman legions who kept the country under control? Or did Jesus really have no concern for the pigs themselves? An agriculturalist might ask: How could the supposed 2,000 pigs sustain themselves on the comparatively barren soils of the area? A historian might ask: Why would a predominantly Jewish community be keeping pigs anyway, when they were not allowed to be eaten?

It is important to note that Jesus did make clear that God values animals, including the birds, each one of them. The New Testament writers saw the mission of Jesus as directed towards humanity, so it is not surprising that they record how he emphasises the importance of humans and how God cares especially for them.

Dr Andrew Linzey suggests that whereas the canonical gospels, the official ones recognised by most Churches, contain little about Jesus and his relations with animals or his teaching on animals, the many apocryphal accounts of Jesus, which were not accepted into the official New Testament, show a different picture. One such "Coptic fragment" records how Jesus comes upon an overloaded mule, who had fallen on a steep hill. Jesus upbraids the animal's owner "Man, why do you beat your animal? Do you not see that it is too weak for its burden, and do you not know that it suffers pains?" When the man denies this, Jesus calls out "Woe to you, that you do not hear how it complains to the Creator in heaven and cries out for mercy". He then heals the mule and tells the man, "From now on do not beat it any more, so that you too may find mercy".[32]

Even the limited official gospel accounts do portray Jesus as having respect and sympathy for others. He says, "Blessed are the merciful"[33] and in many instances refers to helping those who are worse off than oneself. This could be understood as helping not only fellow humans but fellow creatures who are suffering on the earth.

Several Christian theologians have given deeper meaning to the belief in the Incarnation of Jesus, the Divine made man, the cornerstone of Christian belief. David Clough explains that the incarnation was not just that God became

human, but that God became a fleshly creature, like all other creatures, and he quotes John's gospel: "the Word became flesh".[34,35]

Father Richard Rohr, the respected Franciscan teacher, expresses it thus: "The early Church theologians saw incarnation and divine indwelling as occurring as a metaphysical union with nature as a whole, not just in one human being (Jesus)".[36]

Fr. Rohr is also blunt about God's relationship with animals: "Either God is for everybody, and the divine DNA is somehow in all creatures, or this God is not God by any common definition, or even much of a god at all".[37]

Archbishop Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch, wrote in 2012: "We cannot undermine the crucial importance of animals, too, for the orderly function of the world…Man's relationship with animals has been very close…It is characteristic that God reserves special care for the preservation of the animal kingdom".[38]

Back in 1986, Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical which includes the roots of the same concept, that by the Incarnation of God the Son, not only was human nature united with God, but "the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world…with all "flesh", with the whole of creation".[39]

Theologian Sallie McFague (1933–2019) described creation as "the body of God" and the place of salvation. She wrote, "Creation as the place of salvation means that the health and well-being of all creatures and parts of creation is what salvation is all about—it is God's place and our place, the one and only place".[40]

Indeed, there seems to be Biblical justification for this wider view. When Jesus speaks to his 11 remaining disciples after his resurrection, he tells them: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation".[41] Not just to humans, then.

St Paul's Letter to the Romans seems to imply that all creation, not just humanity, will be "saved":

> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.[42]

This view of the Divine incarnation being with all flesh, not just in one human being, can raise further thoughts, such as: Why was a human body chosen? Might the incarnation have happened in another kind of intelligent sentient being, a whale perhaps or an elephant? If that sounds incongruous, then perhaps the answer is to see the incarnation in the form of a human, Jesus, as simply representing all creatures, all "flesh".

Way back in medieval times, the controversial Dominican friar known as Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1328) wrote: "A person who knew nothing but creatures would never need to attend to any sermons, for every creature is full of God and is a book".[43]

The founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley, spoke passionately about the place of animals in creation. He abhorred that they have to live under

"the bondage of corruption" but believed that they will share in the resurrection, alongside humanity, and then "they shall enjoy happiness, suited to their state, without alloy, without interruption and without end".[44]

The Role of Humanity

Christian teacher Brian McLaren describes how we all need to see ourselves in a context, a "framing story". He writes:

> But if our framing story tells us that we are free and responsible creatures in a creation made by a good, wise, and loving God, and that our Creator wants us to pursue virtue, collaboration, peace, and mutual care for one another and all living creatures, and that our lives can have profound meaning if we align ourselves with God's wisdom, character, and dreams for us… then our society will take a radically different direction, and our world will become a very different place. As Christians, we have the opportunity to live the story that was given to us at the very beginning (Genesis 1), that creation is "good," even "very good," and that it is our vocation to nurture and grow such goodness wherever we can.[45]

The old Genesis story of humans being given the power of dominion over all the other creatures is perhaps better seen in its more modern interpretation of stewardship, rather than dominion. Or is stewardship still a paternalistic concept? Is stewardship simply dominion without its rough edges? Is it a kinder type of dominion?

Would we relate better to other creatures if we viewed them as fellow beings, almost as brothers and sisters on our shared planetary home?

David Clough puts it this way: "Humans and other animals are fellow creatures of God. Each of God's creatures has a unique vocation to glorify God in their particular mode way of being a creature. Part of the human vocation is to promote the flourishing of their fellow creatures, both human and more-than-human. In relation to animals that means avoiding practices that inflict harm or suffering unnecessarily, only keeping domesticated animals in ways that are compatible with their flourishing and protecting the environments wild animals need to flourish".[46]

Caring for Animals

Away from the power centre of Rome, early Christian mystics and saints would often retreat to the wilderness to pray and develop their own personal relationship with God. Tales abound of their close relationships with the surrounding wild animals and their harmonious and simple living. As Fr. Richard Rohr points out: "These issues were still taken seriously by those who fled to the deserts of Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Cappadocia. Their practices grew into what we now call 'religious life' as observed by monks, nuns, hermits, and anchorites who held onto the radical Gospel in so many ways".[47]

Most of their stories were translated from Greek into Latin between the 5th and 6th centuries. The few following examples are based mainly on the wonderful book *Beasts and Saints* by the scholar, Helen Waddell, originally published in 1934.[48] One such tale tells us of St Gerasimus (d. 475) (sometimes confused with St Jerome), an abbot living near the river Jordan. Coming upon a lion in extreme pain with a thorn in his foot, Gerasimus removed the thorn. From then on, the lion followed the saint everywhere and was told to guard the donkey who fetched water every day. When the donkey was stolen the lion stood accused of eating him, but years later, the lion came upon the same donkey and rescued it, bringing it back to the monastery. When Gerasimus died, the lion searched everywhere for him, roaring his sorrow. Finally, the new abbot took him to where Gerasimus had been buried and explained that he had died. The lion lay down on the grave, beat his head on the earth and died.

Saint Isaac the Syrian (613–700) was a scholarly monastic who was at one time Bishop of Nineveh. He wrote one of the most beautiful descriptions about love and compassion: "What is a merciful heart? It is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the birds, for the animals … and for all that exists. By the recollection of them the eyes of a merciful person pour forth tears in abundance. By the strong and vehement mercy that grips such a person's heart, and by such great compassion, the heart is humbled and one cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in any in creation".[49]

Saint Cuthbert was a famous early English saint who became Prior of Lindisfarne on the coast of Northumberland. Most nights he spent standing in the sea, praying and chanting. An inquisitive fellow monk followed him one night and described how when Cuthbert finally returned to the shore, a couple of sea otters would follow him and rub their fur on his feet to dry them and warm them. After ten busy years he retired to the Inner Farne island and lived as a hermit. It is said that he would sing and play his lute-type instrument to the seals, who would come up on the rocks to listen to him. He died in 687 CE, and his remains are interred in Durham Cathedral. St Cuthbert is also credited with establishing the first animal welfare rule in England. He forbade the killing and eating of the many Eider ducks who lived close to his island hermitage.[50]

The story of the Irish Saint Kevin (d.618) was recorded by the 12th-century chronicler Giraldus Cambrensis. St Kevin was another monk who favoured the life of a hermit and settled by a beautiful lake in the Wicklow mountains, now called Glendalough. Of the many tales of his affinity with animals, perhaps the most beautiful, is the story of the blackbird. While Kevin was praying in his tiny cell he stretched one arm out through the window recess, with his hand palm upwards in prayer. A blackbird came and laid her eggs in his hand. The story says that Kevin waited until all her eggs had hatched and her fledgelings had flown before he retracted his hand.

The Irish Nobel Laureate poet Seamus Heaney wrote a lovely poem based on this story of "St Kevin and the Blackbird".[51]

These and many other stories of the early saints show how a remarkable affinity can develop between animals and the saintly men and women who posed

no threat to the creatures themselves. It is as if the animals could recognise the goodness in the saints' hearts. Perhaps, in recording these stories, the writers were foreshadowing the future as prophesied in the Book of Isaiah, "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;" and so on.[52]

The Greek Orthodox theologian, Rev Dr John Chryssavgis, writes of these early desert fathers and other mystics and hermits: "In God's eyes, the wild animals and the sand dunes are of sacred importance and have their unique place alongside humanity. In their understanding of heaven, birds and trees could never be eliminated or excluded".[53]

Moving forward in time we come to the best-known saint to develop close relationships with a variety of animals, Saint Francis of Assisi (1181–1226). As Saint Bonaventure wrote, just 25 years after he died, Francis would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of "brother" or "sister", because he knew they shared with him the same beginning. He had an "all-embracing love for every creature" and often bought back lambs who were being taken to slaughter. When other animals – or even a fish – were brought to him, he would greet them and set them free, even returning the fish to the lake. When a wolf was threatening the local town of Gubbio, Francis is said to have done a deal – the townsfolk promised to feed the wolf and the wolf promised not to attack any more. "For of a truth it is this piety which, allying all creatures unto itself, is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come".[54] Francis also was known for his love of the poor and the sick and he lived a life of absolute simplicity and devotion. His love and compassion seemed to embrace all beings.

St Bonaventure himself appears to have shared the Franciscan outlook, writing: "For every creature is by its nature a kind of effigy and likeness of the eternal Wisdom. Therefore, open your eyes, alert the ears of your spirit, open your lips and apply your heart so that in all creatures you may see, hear, praise, love and worship, glorify and honour your God".[55]

One other saint whose life mirrors that of Francis in many ways is Saint Martin de Porres (1579–1639) who lived in Peru. The son of a Spanish nobleman and a freed slave of African and native Peruvian origin, he served as a lay brother in the Dominican order of friars, doing menial work. Although he is famed for his care of the sick and dying, his intense devotion and his associated healing miracles, he was known to avoid eating meat and to care for all stray animals. When the monastery was plagued by mice, who were about to be exterminated, Martin asked them to leave, promising that he would feed them at the kitchen door every night. The mice left. Pope John XXIII canonised him in 1962.[56]

As the well-known philosopher Lynn White wrote:

> Francis tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures. With him the ant is no longer simply a homily for the lazy, flames a sign of the thrust of the soul toward union with God; now they are Brother Ant and Sister Fire, praising the Creator in their own ways as Brother Man does in his.[57]

The Christian mystic, Thomas A' Kempis (1380–1471), wrote that the soul desiring communion with God must learn from all of God's creatures, including the non-humans: "…and if thy heart be straight with God", he wrote, "then every creature shall be to thee a mirror of life and a book of holy doctrine, for there is no creature so little or vile, but that showeth and representeth the goodness of God".[58]

An outstanding Christian advocate for animals was the Quaker Benjamin Lay (1682–1759), who moved from England to America and became an outspoken campaigner against slavery. He also adopted a vegetarian diet, refusing to eat or wear anything that had caused loss of animal life or had involved slave labour.[59]

We can conclude that although there are no recorded words of Jesus about how we should care for animals, it became an important theme in the lives of many saintly Christians. In fact, their affinity and care for animals seemed to signify their high level of holiness. These theologians and holy folk demonstrate the other strand of Christian thinking about our relationship with animals. We could call it the Franciscan school of thought – animals are our fellow creatures, our brothers and sisters on the earth. They are creatures of God, as we humans are, and should be treated with respect and love.

In the early years of the 19th century, we find Christians such as the evangelical William Wilberforce (1759–1833) leading the fight in Britain against the slave trade, and later, slavery itself, but also known for promoting animal welfare. Inspired by their faith, in 1824 he and Rev Arthur Broome, an Anglican clergyman, helped found the first modern animal welfare society, now known as the RSPCA. Again, we find people who care deeply about the suffering of humanity, but who can extend their circle of compassion to embrace animal welfare as well. The Society adopted a resolution in 1832 that "the proceedings of the Society were entirely based on the Christian faith and Christian principles".[60] This resolution was dropped in 1932 when the Society became a different legal entity.

As the 20th century moved on, more Christian voices spoke out about our relationship with animals. The Benedictine scholar Dom Ambrose Agius, who was later appointed Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines by Pope Pius X in 1904, wrote:

> The Bible…tells us that cruelty to animals is wicked and that it is opposed to God's will and intention…The duty of all Christians (is) to emulate God's attributes, especially that of mercy, in regard to animals. To be kind to animals is to emulate the loving kindness of God.[61]

Dom Ambrose goes further: "If our ambition is to be able to say with St Paul, 'I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me' (Gal. 2: 20), consideration for animals will be one sign of the indwelling Christ".[62]

The Christian theologian and missionary Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) developed a philosophy which he called "Reverence for Life", for which he received the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize. He wrote:

> Only by means of reverence for life can we establish a spiritual and humane relationship with both people and all living creatures within our reach. Only

> in this fashion can we avoid harming others, and, within the limits of our capacity, go to their aid whenever they need us.[63]

The famous environmentalist Rachel Carson dedicated her ground-breaking book, *Silent Spring*, to Albert Schweitzer.

Also in 1915, the year in which Schweitzer's book was published, and in the midst of the First World War, Pope Benedict XV wrote to the Italian Society for the Protection of Animals, saying that he favoured everything that may "foster respect for these other creatures of God, which Providence forbids us to exploit without concern and enjoins us to show wisdom in our use of them…". He went on to encourage the clergy to: "train souls in sentiments of enlightened gentleness and fostering care and guidance so that they may offer to the animals refuge from every suspicion of roughness, cruelty or barbarism…".[64]

The first Catholic Society devoted to animal welfare was formed in England in 1935 and still goes strong today, with over 50 branches and links to similar societies worldwide. Now a registered charity called Catholic Concern for Animals, its regular publication is "The Ark".[65] Other denominations have since formed their own societies, such as the Anglican Society for Animal Welfare, begun in 1970[66] and more recently SARX – For All God's Creatures, another, perhaps more evangelical, Christian charity.[67] These are great examples of Christians who believe that promoting care for animals is a fundamental part of a good Christian life.

Leading Lutheran theologian, Professor Jurgen Moltmann, says: "Nature is not our property…All living beings must be respected by humans as God's partners in the Covenant…Whoever injures the dignity of animals, injures God".[68] Moltmann has also called for a Universal Declaration of Animal Rights which "should be part of the constitutions of modern states and international agreements".[69] These rights would include a prohibition on factory farming and genetic modification of animals.

Pope John Paul II (Pope from 1978 to 2005) wrote in his encyclical *Gospel of Life*: "Human beings may be merciful to their neighbours, but the compassion of the Lord extends to every living creature".[70] These are beautiful sentiments, but there is a lack of detail as to how to interpret them. (This Pope was canonised by Pope Francis I in 2014 and is now also known as Saint John Paul the Great.)

The newest Catechism of the Catholic Church declares: "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". But it goes on to say: "it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing" and:

> 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.[71]

So, we can kill animals for food and clothing, but we must be kind to them – just not too loving! If this sounds like a passage written by a group of theologians with widely differing views, that is probably correct!

In June 2015, Pope Francis 1 issued a radical encyclical, "Laudato Si' – on care for our common home", in which he proposes an "ecological conversion", which is based on "attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness" and which "entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures but joined in a splendid universal communion".[72]

The encyclical lists the actions which individuals can take in their own lives, from avoiding waste and using less water to "showing care for other living beings". The issue of our relationship with the other creatures in the world is constantly referred to in the encyclical. The Pope quotes from the most recent edition of the Catechism which he says,

> clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism: 'Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection… Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things'.[73]

This encyclical has been hugely influential and is being studied and discussed by Christians and others all over the world.

Farming Methods

In 1984, Peter Roberts, a highly spiritual person and the founder of Compassion in World Farming, took an intensive veal farm to court. These calves were owned by the Norbertine friars in Sussex in southern England. The case generated huge publicity. Many Catholics were outraged that the friars sustained themselves by subjecting calves to being chained by the neck throughout their lives in narrow crates, unable to turn round.[74] Peter lost the case and lost again on Appeal, but just a few years later, the UK government banned the keeping of calves in narrow crates.[75]

The friars who ran the Sussex veal crate farm were not the only religious order to own a factory farm. The Sisters of Our Lady of the Passion ran a battery hen farm near Daventry in Northamptonshire in England in the 1980s. The convent strongly defended its farm on the grounds that the caged hens were happy, but the place became the subject of much animal rights protest. In a strange turn of events a large outbreak of salmonella in the UK egg industry in the late 1980s led to the hens being slaughtered and this factory farm coming to an end.[76]

David Clough sums up the case against industrial farming of animals:

> Industrialised animal agriculture prioritises productive efficiency above what farmed animals need to flourish. It subjects farmed animals to impoverished environments that disallow their preferred behaviours, prevents maternal care and the establishment of family and social groups, and frequently involves painful and disabling bodily mutilations. It cannot be defended as necessary for human wellbeing because it threatens human food and water security and creates serious threats to human health. It subjects farm and

> slaughterhouse workers – who are disproportionately migrant and members of ethnic minorities – to dangerous working conditions.[77]

One can only wonder how the fine sentiment expressed in Pope John Paul II's encyclical could be applied to farm animals – could the "compassion of the Lord" ('Evangelium Vitae', 1995) possibly be compatible with factory farming? Almost certainly not! Factory farming seems obviously incompatible with true "reverence for life" as evinced by Dr Schweitzer.[78]

When the future Pope Benedict XVI was interviewed (while still Cardinal Ratzinger) he spoke out against force feeding geese for foie gras and battery cages for hens, describing these practices as an "industrial use of creatures" which seemed to him "to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible".[79]

The contemporary theologian Dr Andrew Linzey is one of the few outspoken voices within the Christian community (Anglican in his case) speaking out clearly about the horrors of factory farming:

> Does the Church really see the suffering of farm animals? Does it have any appreciation of what they have to endure in intensive farming – debeaking, castration, tail-docking without anaesthetics, battery cages – to take only a few examples?… Has it really grasped that now, as never before, we have turned God's creatures into meat machines?[80]

The Rt Rev John Austin Baker, former Bishop of Salisbury (UK), who died in 2014, spoke out against factory farming from the pulpit. He said that when taken around some local farms he was "disgusted" with the farrowing pens for pigs and found the battery hen unit "harrowing". He described the breeding and factory farming of turkeys for Christmas as "absolutely scandalous". He said: "it is wrong to exploit animals or be cruel to them in order to feed ourselves".[81]

After a conference in 1988, the World Council of Churches issued a non-official report which recommended: "Avoid meat and animal products that have been produced on factory farms. Instead purchase meat and animal products from sources where the animals have been treated with respect or abstain from these products altogether".[82] Sadly, this report has not been officially adopted.

Theologian Charles Camosy declares, "Christians should refuse to serve factory-farmed meat in their homes".[83]

David Clough writes:

> Given the unprecedented cruelties we are currently inflicting on farmed animals in intensive systems, it seems to me urgent for Christians to reclaim the connection between concern for animals and Christian faith, and be in the vanguard of campaigns to resist production systems that have no regard for the flourishing of animals.[84]

Dr Clough has started an organisation aimed at Christian churches and institutions, called CreatureKind. It calls on Christians to sign up to a triple commitment:

> 1 Reduce our consumption of animal products, such as meat, fish, dairy, and eggs, by consuming more plant-based foods that are less resource-intensive.
>
> 2 Source animal products we do consume from farms or fisheries where we are confident animals are able to flourish in a good life as creatures of God.
>
> 3 Continue to consider how our Christian faith should be put into practice in relation to other ways we treat our fellow animal creatures.[85]

Dr Clough has also produced a Policy Framework for Churches and Christian organisations, devised in cooperation with representatives of several Christian churches and animal welfare groups and academics. He writes:

> Farmed animals glorify God by fully living out their particular abilities, activities, relationships, and characteristics. Their flourishing is threatened when they are subjected to impoverished environments and painful mutilations, deprived of social and familial relationships, killed after severely shortened lives and selectively bred to prioritize productivity over welfare.

The Framework's theme is that farmed animals should be able to flourish. In their flourishing, the animals give glory to God. Clough fondly describes how that flourishing of farmed animals may manifest: "By gathering in social groups, dust-bathing, rooting, grazing, swimming, caring for their young, teaching and learning, and growing to maturity. All as created by God in their species-specific particularity". The common methods used in industrial "factory" farming are condemned as they obstruct flourishing. In fact, such methods amount to "systemic sin". He calls them no more than "product management, which seriously impairs their ability to flourish as animal creatures". He calls on Christians to "promote the highest level of welfare possible, both for each species of farmed animal and for each individual within species".[86]

This most helpful document then examines each of the species commonly farmed and gives details about good or poor welfare. It is truly a spiritual and very practical guide for Christians of every denomination – and indeed for those outside the Christian community.

Teaching and Global Practice

It is interesting to see if belief in Christianity has had any effect on how various majority Christian countries treat their animals in law and general practice.

Brazil is a secular country, but nearly 80% of its population identify as Christian, with Catholicism being the main religion, a legacy of the Portuguese heritage. Brazilian governments have produced documentation on farm animal welfare

but, at the time of writing, no legislation has been passed to ban some of the most inhumane systems, such as sow stalls (gestation crates).

Breeding sows are kept in these narrow sow stalls throughout their 16.5-week pregnancies, unable to turn round and take more than a step or two forwards or backwards. The floor is usually concrete, with a slatted area at the back for drainage. The system makes it easy to keep huge numbers of sows together in a small area. As they cannot exercise, they can be given less feed. However, the system totally flouts the animals' needs.[87] Keeping pigs almost immobile on a hard floor is inherently inhumane. Research shows that pigs like to spend most of their daytime rooting in the soil with their sensitive snouts, searching for roots or insects to eat.[88]

This system has been banned in several European countries such as Sweden and the UK and it is partially banned in all 27 EU countries.[89] Many US states such as California have also banned the system. It is surely time for Brazil to enact similar legislation.[90]

Brazil has become the world's largest beef exporter, exporting 2 million tons in bovine carcass weight each year, approximately one-fifth of its production, a trade worth more than $5.4 billion per year (in freight-on-board value).[91] Many of these cattle have to undergo long and stressful journeys to slaughterhouses within Brazil.

In addition, Brazil exports around half a million live cattle a year, some to destinations as far away as Lebanon, Angola and Egypt.[92] Such long journeys subject the cattle to the vagaries of sea and wind conditions and may cause immense stress and suffering. Although we have no data on particular Brazilian tragedies, a similar export ship, carrying thousands of live sheep and cattle from Uruguay to Syria in 2009 capsized in the Mediterranean Sea. All the animals drowned as well as about half the 80-plus crew.[93] With beef exports being so large, it does seem unnecessary to export live animals on such very long journeys.

Sadly there is still recent evidence of workers in the Brazilian beef industry being treated as slave labourers.[94]

So, these workers suffer, the animals suffer and of course, we know that much of the Amazonian forest has been cut down to facilitate cattle rearing or the growing of soya for export for animal feed. Satellite data shows that destruction of the Brazilian rainforest surged by 22% in the 12 months to July 2021, the fastest rate recorded in 15 years.[95]

Many of the owners, managers and farmers involved in rearing, marketing, slaughtering and exporting cattle in Brazil must, statistically, be Christian. It is perhaps a sad reflection on Christianity's failure to preach and practice the "mercy" required by Jesus, that they maintain these activities and benefit from them.

Perhaps the one piece of better news from Brazil is that organic farming is also on the increase, with over 17,000 producers in 2018, up from around 7,000 in 2013.[96]

The United States of America is another predominantly Christian country, with Protestants of various kinds being the majority.[97]

Although change is on its way there, the general treatment of all kinds of animals has been among the worst globally. There is no federal (national) law protecting the welfare of farm animals on farm, and poultry are excluded from slaughter laws incorporating welfare. Purpose-bred rats, mice and birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates who make up 90% of the animals used in laboratories, are not covered by legislation on animal experimentation.[98]

If you wonder why this is so, then you need to understand the strength and wealth of the groups lobbying on behalf of agribusiness and the pharmaceutical industry, many of whose members are presumably adherents of the Christian faith in one form or other.

Nationally, pig farming is highly industrialised. Pigs just don't go out, and the majority of sows are kept in the narrow stalls described above throughout their pregnancies.

When they are ready to farrow (give birth) they will be moved into farrowing crates. Yet again these are narrow crates in which the sow can only stand up and lie down or take a step or two backwards or forwards. Here the sow farrows and feeds her piglets for three to four weeks. There will be an extra restriction to prevent the sow from lying on her piglets. The piglets are removed long before their natural weaning (which would be at 11 or 12 weeks old), as they are to be fattened up for slaughter. The sow is then impregnated again and is returned to her narrow gestation crate for another long, miserable pregnancy.

With the failure of federal laws, animal welfare groups in the US have shown ingenuity and campaign energy in getting some reform at state level, with the first successful ban on gestation crates taking place in Florida in 2002, coming into force in 2008.[99]

A big campaign in Arizona led to the phasing out of both gestation crates and veal crates for calves in 2006, coming into force in 2012. Some other states followed.[100] The biggest change of all came in California in 2008 when a large majority of citizens voted to ban gestation crates, veal crates and cages for laying hens.[101]

Although some industry bodies have tried – and are still trying – to overthrow these successes, many agribusiness companies have seen how the public is becoming more welfare-conscious and they are setting their own phase-out dates for the abysmal confinement systems they have been using for so long.[102]

Statistically, some factory farmers, agribusiness company executives and animal welfare campaigners must have professed Christianity in their personal lives. Perhaps this anomaly demonstrates very clearly the two strands of Christian thinking about the place of animals in the world in relation to humans.

David Clough is clear: "Christians should avoid supporting the operation of industrialized animal agriculture as consumers, workers, and investors wherever possible and support legal and regulatory reform aimed at bringing it to an end".[103]

Anecdotally, the author recalls a discussion with animal welfare colleagues from different US groups after a busy conference day in San Francisco. Of the eight of us around the table, seven had been brought up as Catholics!

Eating Animals

We cannot be sure that Jesus ate meat, although it is likely that he partook of the Jewish Sabbath and other festivals of the time, where meat-eating was involved. There is a Biblical record that he ate fish, as when he came upon his disciples after his resurrection from the dead:

> And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.[104]

Matthew's gospel records the "miracle of the loaves and fishes" when the hungry crowd needed to eat and the disciples said to Jesus: "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish" and he said

> Bring them here to me. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.[105]

It would be likely that Jesus himself would also have eaten of this food, but we do not know. It could be argued that by miraculously multiplying the two dead fish, he spared more fish being caught and killed!

John's gospel records how, again after the Resurrection, Jesus joined some of his disciples who were fishing. They had fished all night without catch, but when Jesus ordered them to try again, they caught a massive number of fish. Some fish were grilled over the charcoal fire for breakfast and Jesus handed the food out to them. We can only presume that he also ate this food.[106]

When Jesus partook of the Last Supper, it was not lamb or goatmeat that he distributed to his disciples, but bread and wine, basic vegan food and drink. To this day the Communion Service or Mass continues to use this simple meal as a symbol of his body and blood or in the case of Catholics, as transformed into his body and blood. (Nowadays wine may be clarified with animal-based ingredients such as egg white or the swim bladders of certain fish, but it is unlikely that these additions were used at the time of Jesus.)

One passage which has proved troubling to Christian vegetarians is the vision which Saint Peter had, which showed all kinds of edible animals jumbled together in a large sheet, accompanied by a voice from heaven saying: "Get up Peter. Kill and eat".[107] Peter is shocked to learn that he can eat animals which are forbidden in Jewish teaching. The voice is heard again: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean".[108]

Rather than seeing this as a dietary lesson, it is important to see this story in its context. Peter is immediately invited to the home of a Roman centurion who wants to accept the Christian faith. Peter comes to understand his vision

as meaning that faith in Jesus is open to all kinds of Gentile people, not just to Jewish people.

Christians believe that when Jesus was crucified on the cross, his sacrifice replaced the sacrifice of a lamb at the Jewish Passover festival. It was the ultimate and final sacrifice. Jesus is sometimes referred to or depicted as the Paschal Lamb, who takes away the sins of humanity.

Although some of those early Christian saints probably followed a vegetarian or vegan diet and many Christians today will adopt such diets, there is no standard Christian teaching on the issue. For centuries, Catholics were forbidden to eat meat on Fridays. Orthodox Christians follow many meatless fast days during the year. However, abstinence from meat was usually undertaken as a penance for oneself in honour of God, rather than out of a belief that slaughtering animals for food was wrong.

The formidable early theologian, Saint Augustine, declared that the command "Thou shalt not kill" obviously only refers to not killing another human and does not apply to the killing of "irrational animals, because they have no fellowship with us".[109]

Vegetarian diets were condemned by the Protestant reforming theologian John Calvin as "unsupportable tyranny", causing injury to God.[110]

Ellen White, founder of the Seventh Day Adventist Church believed that kindness to animals was a Christian duty. She urged her followers to: "Think of the cruelty that meat eating involves, and its effect on those who inflict and those who behold it. How it destroys the tenderness with which we should regard these creatures of God!"[111]

In the mid-20th century, Rev Basil Wrighton wrote:

> Our minds are in compartments and to preserve our comfort we see to it that the contents of different compartments do not get mixed. May I remind you that 'holiness' carries the meaning of 'wholeness', so that he who aspires must needs see about breaking down these compartments. I hold that because of our kinship we have a clear ethical duty to protect animals from cruelty and sudden death, and not to eat them.[112]

More recently the Christian philosopher Stephen Clark wrote: "But vegetarianism is now as necessary a pledge of moral devotion as was the refusal of emperor-worship in the early church…Those who still eat flesh when they could do otherwise have no claim to be serious moralists".[113]

Kenneth Rose believed that as the first diet recommended for humanity was a plant-based one, then, in order to prepare for the Kingdom to come, Christians should follow a vegetarian diet: "To live in this way must be considered as part of God's ultimate intention for humanity, for how else can one account for the fact that the Bible both begins and ends in a kingdom where the sound of slaughter is unknown?"[114]

Theologian Brian McClaren says:

> If Christians were to join God in God's concern for creation…especially sentient creation, animal life, I think it would … make us more concerned about

> the conditions in which our food is grown, it might make us much more willing to eat more of a plant-based diet than an animal-based diet….[115]

David Clough also leans towards the plant-based diet but is realistic about where the average Christian might place themselves on a meat-to-vegan scale:

> There are strong faith-based reasons for Christians to adopt a plant-based diet. Reducing the global consumption of animals is crucial to address issues of human welfare, such as food and water security, the growth of antibiotic resistance, the risk of zoonotic disease pandemics, and to improve human dietary health. It is essential in order to reduce global carbon emissions and reverse the changes in land use currently contributing to a global loss of biodiversity and the sixth mass extinction event of animals. It would also reduce the numbers of animals being drawn into industrial animal agriculture. All Christians should recognize that industrial animal agriculture is incompatible with their responsibilities towards fellow animal creatures. All Christians should recognize that a significant reduction in the global consumption of animals is necessary. Christians may continue to disagree as to whether it is justifiable to kill animals for food if they have been farmed to high welfare standards, or whether it is impermissible to kill animals for food where there are adequate alternative sources of nutrition.[116]

In July 2022, perhaps for the first time, Pope Francis urged young people to consider their meat consumption:

> May you aspire to a life of dignity and sobriety, without luxury and waste, so that everyone in our world can enjoy a dignified existence. There is an urgent need to reduce the consumption not only of fossil fuels but also of so many superfluous things. In certain areas of the world, too, it would be appropriate to consume less meat: this too can help save the environment.[117]

Slaughter

There is no "Christian" way to slaughter, as there is in Judaism and Islam. Methods to stun animals before the cut have been developed in predominantly Christian countries, so they might be associated with a Christian desire to spare animals the agony of slaughter. There is nothing fundamentally Christian about these developments.

Hunting and Sport

Bullfighting was condemned by Pope Pius V in 1567,[118] although this prohibition was later relaxed by other popes. Pope Benedict XV, who seems to have had genuine concern for animals (see above), condemned the "human savagery" of bull fights and declared that the Church continues to "condemn these shameful and bloody spectacles".[119]

In the 1930s, Pope Pius XI forbade priests from attending bullfights in Spain.[120] This cruel sport still continues in much of Spain, although the province of Catalonia has voted to stop it and the last bullfight in Barcelona's huge bullring took place in 2011.[121]

Today there are still priests in Spain who act as chaplains for the bullrings and support the bullfighters.[122]

In medieval times it was common for bishops to go hunting, but in the 21st century, it is more unusual. However, the occasional vicar can be seen joining their local hunt.[123]

Vivisection

In 19th-century England, there seems to have been an increase in debates about our relationship with animals. As scientific investigation into how our bodies worked and how sicknesses could perhaps be healed, experimenting on animals became more common. Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801–1890) held the traditional view of animals as being here for our own ends, but he was outspoken in his opposition to vivisection: "Cruelty to animals is as if man did not love God… There is something so very dreadful, so Satanic, in tormenting those who have never harmed us, who cannot defend themselves, who are utterly in our power".[124]

Another Cardinal, Henry Edward Manning (1808–1892), also spoke out against cruelty to animals, especially experimentation upon animals. He wrote: "We owe ourselves the duty not to be brutal or cruel; and we owe to God the duty of treating all His creatures according to His own perfections of love and mercy".[125]

Of course, strong arguments can be made for experimenting on animals to ensure our medications are safe and effective. Experimenting for human vanity such as cosmetics is hard to justify and thankfully, more and more countries and companies are abandoning this type of testing.

Globally it is calculated that around 192 million animals are used in experiments every year.[126]

If we apply Clough's concept of "flourishing" to the lives of animals kept in laboratories for experiments, we can see at once that true flourishing must be absolutely impossible for them.

For many Christians who believe in the more Franciscan approach, using medication tested on animals is a genuine dilemma and one that only each individual can answer for themselves.

David Clough sums up a modern, humane viewpoint:

> Most experiments on animals require them to be kept in impoverished environments, subjected to suffering, and end in their being killed. Imposing these kinds of costs on animals should only be done in situations of grave urgency. The vast majority of experiments currently carried out do not meet this criterion. Many experiments are performed for regulatory reasons where other measures to assess safety would provide results that are as good or better. Others are used to increase scientific knowledge that could be pursued

> using other methods that do not require animal experiments. Many animals are still unnecessarily subjected to suffering and death for the purposes of education. Christians in nineteenth century Britain campaigned for the abolition of vivisection against the scientific and medical establishment of their day, arguing that the strong should not exploit the weak for their own ends. An appropriate Christian regard for the flourishing of animals as fellow creatures would result in the ending of virtually all experimentation on animals.[127]

Wildlife and Biodiversity

In 2021 researchers at Texas Tech University found that land areas dedicated to growing soy in South America had more than doubled over the past two decades – from 264,000 to 551,000 square kilometres. It now covers an area larger than the state of California or the Iberian Peninsula. Most of the land encroachment for soy has been through taking over pasture previously used for raising cattle. As the pasture is depleted, ranchers move to new areas, which means destroying the rainforest. They also found that the largest expansion of soy came in Brazil, with an increase of 160%, nearly half located in the Brazilian Cerrado.[128] As the forest and biodiversity-rich areas like the Cerrado are cut down or dug up for soy or cattle, millions of wild creatures lose their homes and habitat. Indigenous peoples may also find their traditional homes devastated. There are few winners in this situation, except perhaps the big agribusiness companies that deal in soy-based animal feed or beef cattle.

Again, if we apply the "flourishing" concept to the creatures living in the areas being deforested, it is obvious that flourishing may be a state in which they have previously lived but which becomes impossible, unless they are able to flee with speed to a different area. Not all creatures are able to move with speed, so they will be doomed.

On 21 July 2022, Pope Francis gave a strong message on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, saying:

> In the first place, it is our sister, mother earth, who cries out. Prey to our consumerist excesses, she weeps and implores us to put an end to our abuses and to her destruction. Then too, there are all those different creatures who cry out. At the mercy of a "tyrannical anthropocentrism" (Laudato Si', 68), completely at odds with Christ's centrality in the work of creation, countless species are dying out and their hymns of praise silenced.[129]

Sacrifice

Christians believe that the crucifixion of Jesus was the ultimate and final sacrifice, that he gave his life so that our sins may be forgiven by God. Animal sacrifice may continue in a few isolated churches, but it is not part of any formal church belief.[130]

Christianity and Animal Use

All over the world believing Christians farm animals, sometimes in dire conditions, they may experiment on them, hunt them for sport or even go "trophy hunting" to shoot lions or elephants, subject animals to stressful "entertainments", confine them in zoos and, of course, eat them regularly and as part of the celebrations at major Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter. Some keep dogs, cats and other species as companion animals or so-called "pets". Many have a sincere love for these animals and take great care of them. They are all surely following the Aristotelean-Thomistic tradition.

More and more may begin to see the anomaly of loving dogs and eating pigs and chickens.

A minority of Christians follow the more Franciscan strand. They may rescue abandoned animals, donate to animal charities, avoid factory-farmed animal products and are likely to move towards plant-based diets, or even go entirely vegan. They will choose products not tested on animals and possibly campaign against animal exploitation such as in hunting or animal circuses.

Which "way" is closer to Christian teaching and to the qualities that Jesus proclaimed?

Conclusion

What a dilemma for the believing Christian! Should they follow the Thomist way, so clearly expressed in that Gospelway website (see above)? Should they see animals just as here for our own purposes, as food, clothing, experimental creatures etc?

As Dr Christina Nellist, Eastern Orthodox theologian, explains:

> Unfortunately for the non-human beings and the environment, this compassionate tradition has too often been hidden under a tradition that focused on the role and superiority of the human being, rather than on our unique role as icon of God. Thus, the rest of the created world was forgotten, abused and exploited to the detriment of us all.[131]

Personally, I think that the modern Christian now has so much more scientific knowledge about the cognitive and emotional capacities of other animals, that adopting the more Franciscan strand of Christian thought is the way to go. Pope Francis has thrown out the challenge in "Laudato Si".

The Rt Rev John Arnold, Roman Catholic Bishop of Salford, explains this more compassionate way of living:

> We all need to grow in an understanding that we share a common home for which we need to care and that care must encompass the environment, the reality of climate change, the consumption of unsustainable resources, the detrimental impact of industry and consumerism on people who have

> done least to damage our world – and a care for the animal kingdom with its delicate balance and dependence. Animals have their own dignity as part of God's creation.[132]

In 1989, Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I of the Eastern Orthodox Church proclaimed the 1st of September as a day of prayer for creation. The World Council of Churches has adopted the idea and Pope Francis welcomed it to the Catholic Church in 2015. The original Day of Prayer for Creation now lasts over a month, until 4 October, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.[133] This is truly encouraging.

Rev Fletcher Harper who founded and runs the environmental organisation GreenFaith has proposed three possible actions which Christians can adopt to reduce their impact on the climate. One of these is "reduce your meat consumption or go vegetarian or vegan".[134]

If the fraternal relationship with our fellow creatures, as lived so vividly by St Francis, can become the inspiration and the standard teaching and practice of the world's 2 billion plus Christians, then there is no doubt that much suffering could be avoided and much goodness achieved.

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3 Islam

Teaching and Practice regarding Humanity's Relationship with Animals

Introduction

Many people in the West have negative ideas about Muslim concern for animal welfare. If you asked the average European or American which religion they most associated with poor animal welfare, I suspect they might well choose Islam.

As I researched this chapter, I have found that Islamic teaching contains a wealth of concern for animals. The Qur'an refers to them as communities like our own communities and it declares that they praise God. The Prophet Muhammad is on record as equating acts of kindness to animals with acts of kindness to humans.

Travellers to predominantly Muslim countries often return with tales of having seen donkeys overworked and beaten, of scarecrow-thin ponies pulling tourist vehicles and of markets selling caged wildlife. I believe them. I have seen them too. What these stories really tell us is that many Muslims may be unaware of the teaching of their own faith with respect to animals.

In this chapter, I shall show the wealth of teaching within the Islamic holy books as well as positive examples of good practice by individual Muslims or Muslim-owned companies. I shall not shy away from recounting the negative examples as well.

Having discovered the teaching, I shall end with a call to Muslims individually and collectively, to take action to rediscover the teaching of their own holy books and to put this into practice, becoming leaders in the movement for better animal welfare globally.

The Teaching

Allah is the Creator and Originator, the one God; although He has many names (99 are known), there is no other than Him. He is the Almighty. He is Great. Yet He is also the Compassionate, the Merciful and the Source of Peace.[1]

The word "Islam" means "submission" and to be a Muslim is to submit oneself to this one and only Allah ("God" in Arabic). Allah is the Regulator and so Muslims often say *insha allah* (God willing). Islam also means peace, in the sense that by submitting fully to Allah, one finds peace within oneself.

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Islam is one of the three major monotheistic, Abrahamic religions. Islam recognises the Biblical prophets such as Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa) etc. – and, indeed, Jesus (Isa).[2]

The Prophet Muhammad is regarded as the last of the prophets and the Qur'an is believed to have been transmitted to him by the angel Gabriel (Gibril). The Prophet Muhammad then dictated the verses, which he had received, to his scribes – over a period of 23 years.

As the Qur'an makes clear: "Prophet Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone".[3]

Allah created the world and everything in it, but for whom did He create it? The Qur'an tells us "He set down the earth for his creatures".[4] Indeed, the animals are on earth to enjoy its benefits, just as humans do: "…and the earth too He spread out, bringing waters and pastures out of it, and setting firm mountains (in it) for you and your animals to enjoy".[5]

This is a really important point: the pastures are for humans and animals to enjoy. As we shall discuss, many farmed animals never get to "enjoy" pastures.

The Qur'an makes it clear that not only did Allah create the animals, but that they actually praise Him: "Do you not see that all those who are in the heavens and earth praise God as do the birds with wings outstretched?"[6] Another verse makes clear that animals prostrate or submit before God: "Do you not realize that everything in the heavens and earth submits to God: The sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the animals?"[7]

Moreover, Allah cares for all creatures: "There is not a creature that moves on earth whose provision is not His concern. He knows where it lives and its final resting place".[8]

Although the earth has been created for all His creatures, there is no doubt that, in Islam, humanity is regarded as the pinnacle of His creation. In fact, there is a strong understanding that the earth and its bounty have been created primarily for humanity: "It was He who has created all that is on the earth for you".[9] Only humanity has a spiritual awareness of closeness to Allah and fear of Him (sometimes referred to as Taqwa). Only a human has the capacity to use her reason and to choose between good and evil.

Yet the animals resemble humans in so many ways: "All the creatures that crawl on the earth and those that fly with their wings are communities like yourselves".[10] This last reference is followed in the Qur'an by an interesting allusion which implies that on the Last Day, not only will humans experience a resurrection, but also the animals: "We have missed nothing out of the Record and in the end they will be gathered to their Lord".[11]

As theologian İbrahim Özdemir, Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Uskudar University, Istanbul declares: "We must understand that animals are like our fellow men, at least in some respects. Contrary to the prevailing modern views, there is no clear-cut distinction between humans and non-humans; they are creatures of the same Creator".[12]

Over the centuries, some noted Islamic scholars, such as the 20th-century Islamic theologian Said Nursi, have believed that "animal souls are eternal".[13]

Without getting into the details of Sharia law, it is worth quoting the respected Islamic scholar and environmentalist, Othman Abd-ar-Rahman Llewellyn:

> Masālih al-khalq: the universal common good – The ultimate objective of the sharī'ah is defined as the welfare of God's creatures (masālih al-khalq or masālih al-'ibād), encompassing both our immediate welfare in the present and our ultimate welfare in the hereafter. It also encompasses the universal common good, the welfare of the entire creation (masālih al-khalqi kāffah). This is a distinctive characteristic of Islamic law. It means, first, that both material and nonmaterial dimensions must be taken into account, and second, that the welfare of humans and of nonhuman sentient beings must be considered in the course of planning and administration.[14]

The Role of Humanity

Islam teaches that humans have a duty to act as *Khalifah* for the earth and all within it.[15] The word Khalifah is variously translated as "vice-regent", "trustee", "agent" (of God), or "having a sacred duty".

The Islamic scholar and environmentalist Fazlun Khalid explains the concept well:

> We are required to care for and manage the earth in a way that conforms to God's intention in creation: it should be used for our benefit without causing damage to the other inhabitants of planet Earth, who are communities like ourselves….[16]

For centuries, much of humanity has used and abused the earth itself and the creatures who inhabit it – all for their own ends, often for their own power and profit. New technologies have expedited both the exploitation of the earth and its forests for fuels, minerals, food and animal feed. We have ravaged the earth and also poisoned it with an array of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides in order to increase productivity/profits. Pollution of the soil, the waterways, the ocean and the air itself are the result. This is not in accord with Islamic teaching.

Although humanity is accepted as having exceptional qualities and capacities, the Qur'an also firmly puts the creation of the earth itself as even more precious: "The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind, though most people do not know it".[17]

Fazlun Khalid clarifies this verse: "The human community is but an infinitesimal part of the natural world, but we have now lost sight of this through our proclivity for dominating it".[18]

Indeed, humanity is told "Do not strut arrogantly about the earth…".[19] When we face up to the current climate crisis, the pollution, the loss of biodiversity and extinction of species, we have to admit that we humans have indeed been strutting arrogantly on the earth for many decades.

So, what kind of person should a khalifah be? The Qur'an describes them: "The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when aggressive people address them, reply with words of peace".[20]

The Qur'an gives special mention to the animals we farm: "And livestock He created them too. You derive warmth and other benefits from them: you get food from them".[21] In fact, these benefits are mentioned several times: "It is God who provides livestock for you, some for riding and some for food, you have other benefits in them too. You can reach any destination you wish on them".[22] Other verses refer to the use of animal skins for shelter, to the drinking of milk and the use of honey "in which there is healing for people".[23]

This is a utilitarian view of these animals – but the Qur'an goes further: "You find beauty in them when you bring them home to rest and when you drive them out to pasture".[24] So, these animals not only may be used to feed one's hunger, but, through their intrinsic beauty, they can feed the soul, as it were, as well.

It seems obvious that although the Qur'an allows the use of animals for food and as a means of transport, the duty of guardianship and care is not to be forgotten.

Fazlun Khalid sums it up:

> The Quran helps us by describing animals as "communities like us" and they "shall be gathered to their Lord in the end" like we shall be. What separates us is our superior intelligence, our capacity for invention and our penchant for modifying the environment. As we encroach on the spaces of other sentient beings to meet the demands of our exaggerated needs, loss of biodiversity has now become an issue. We are now beginning to realise that we depend on them, from the tiniest microbe upwards, for our survival.[25]

Islamic scholar, Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr, writes;

> A central concept of Islam cited often in the Qur'an is haqq (plural huquq), which means at once truth, reality, right, law, and due… According to Islam, each being exists by virtue of the truth (haqq) and is also owed its due (haqq) according to its nature. The trees have their due, as do animals or even rivers and mountains. In dealing with nature, human beings must respect and pay what is due to each creature, and each creature has its rights accordingly. Islam stands totally against the idea that we human beings have all the rights and other creatures have none except what we decide to give them. The rights of creatures were given by God and not by us, to be taken away when we decide to do so….We cannot take away the haqq of various creatures given to them by God, but must pay each being its due (haqq) in accordance with the nature of that creature.[26]

In the new Islamic document, Al-Mizan (the Balance), leading Islamic authors write about how animals should be treated: "As they are sentient beings and communities like us, we are obliged to treat them with reverence and care (taqwā), compassion (rahmah), and striving to do the utmost good (ihsān)".[27]

The authors go on to state:

> The most essential ethical implication of God's oneness is to serve the one God – the Lord of all beings – by doing the greatest good we can to all His creatures. If we recognise that God is the one and only Lord of every created being, then we must know that devotion to Him requires utmost goodness toward His entire creation – and that we must treat every single creature with taqwā, or reverence toward its Creator. God is the Lord of every species, every generation, and every individual created being.[28]

Our understanding of the Islamic view of our relationship with animals can be deepened by referring to the Hadith literature which contains accounts of what the Prophet Muhammad said and did, recounted by his followers. Often a Hadith can add an extra dimension to a Qur'anic teaching.

Caring for Animals

Several Hadiths refer to the merit of being kind to animals: "The Prophet was asked if acts of charity even to the animals were rewarded by God. He replied: 'Yes, there is a reward for acts of charity to every beast alive'".[29]

One Hadith refers to the use of animals for riding from one place to another. In it, the Prophet is recorded as saying: "Do not use the backs of your beasts as pulpits, for God has only made them subject to you in order that they may bring you to a town you could only otherwise reach by fatigue of the body".[30]

Another Hadith declares: "Do not clip the forelocks of your horses, not their manes nor their tails, for the tail is their fly-whisk, their mane is their covering and the forelock has good fortune bound within it".[31]

One of the Hadiths records that the Prophet Muhammad came across a camel in a very poor state. When he discovered the owner of the camel he said: "Don't you fear God with regard to this animal, whom God has given to you? For the camel complained to me that you starve him and work him endlessly".[32] This is particularly interesting as the passage declares that the camel "complained" to the Prophet. Does this imply that camels can speak, or that they can convey their feelings to humans, or does it suggest that perhaps the Prophet had special powers to understand how animals are feeling?

Another Hadith recounts how a thirsty man dipped his shoe into a well to get water for a dog who was dying of thirst. For this act of kindness to an animal, his sins were forgiven.[33]

Another Hadith recounts how making animals fight each other, as in cock-fights or dog-fights, is unlawful.[34]

Hunting for food is permitted but not for sport/targets.

> Whoever kills a sparrow in jest, it will come on the day of Judgement chirruping to God, saying: 'O Lord, this man killed me in jest and took no benefit from me and did not leave me to eat the fruits of the earth'.[35]

Any kind of hunting is forbidden when one is on the pilgrimage to Mecca.[36]

The Al-Mizan authors remind us that "On the march from Al-Madinah to Makkah with an army of 10,000 men, he came across a mother dog and her litter of new-born pups, and he posted a guard over her to ensure that no one disturbed her".[37]

It is known that hunting for pleasure has been a widespread activity of some Muslim rulers, such as the Mughal rulers of India. Emperor Jahangir reportedly killed over 17,000 animals, including 86 tigers and lions.[38] This type of so-called "sport" hunting cannot be compared to the hunting for survival of the poor and hungry in society.

One Islamic legal expert says that committing a crime against an animal is a double crime – against that creature and against God. It requires that one beg the pardon of God and make restitution to the harmed creature. As the author says: "All creatures are considered an integral part of the inhabitants of our global life".[39]

It is obvious from the references in the Qur'an and Hadiths that Islam teaches that animals are indeed creatures of God and should be treated with compassion. Kindness to them will be rewarded – simply because they are creatures of Divine origin and destiny.

In the past, various schemes have existed within Muslim countries to protect the environment, wildlife or stray animals. There was at one time a charity for stray dogs in the holy pilgrimage city of Mecca. Much of the land around Mecca is also subject to various rules on environmental and wildlife protection.

Scholar Richard Foltz refers to the writings of the French traveller of the 16th century, Michel de Montaigne, who visited Turkey and wrote that "The Turks have alms and hospitals for animals".[40]

Foltz also refers to the 14th-century Indian Sufi Shaykh Ahmad of Ahmedabad, who used to pay for injured birds so that he could nurse them back to health.[41]

Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), a French statesman, diplomat, and traveller visited Istanbul, reporting:

> Muslims have good relations with all creatures, animate and inanimate: trees, birds, dogs, in short, they respect all the things God has created. They extend their compassion and kindness to all the species of wretched animals which in our countries are abandoned or ill-treated.[42]

Dr İbrahim Özdemir has drawn my attention to two of Islam's early saints and animal lovers, Rabiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya and Bayazid Bistami as well as the wonderful Said Nursi.

Rabiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (714/717–801) was a mystic, inspired by ardent love of God. She viewed the whole creation with compassion and was rewarded with the friendship of animals. We are told: "One day Rabia had gone to the mountain, and herds of wild animals gathered around her. Hasan appeared and the animals ran away. He was angry and asked Rabiʿa, 'Why did they run from me but had friendship with you?' Rabiʿa asked him what he had eaten that day, to which he

replied onions fried in fat. 'You have eaten their fat,' she remarked, 'How should they not run away from you?'"[43]

One of the first Sufi thinkers, Bayazid Bistami (d. 875), one day purchased some cardamom seed in the city of Hamadhân, and before departing put a small quantity which was left over into his gaberdine. On reaching his native town, Bistâm, and recollecting what he had done, he took out the seed and found that it contained a number of ants. Saying, "I have carried the poor creatures away from their home," he immediately set off and journeyed back to Hamadhân—a distance of several hundred miles—to return the ants. What stimulated Bayazid was compassion for all creatures based on the love and respect for God.[44]

Dr Özdemir writes of the Islamic theologian Said Nursi (1877–1960) that he

> is said to have shared food with ants, cats, mice, and pigeons, and to have reprimanded a student for killing a lizard, asking him "Did you create it?" When arriving at Barla, his place of exile for seven years, he prevented a gamekeeper who was accompanying him from shooting the partridges, reminding him that it was their nesting time.[45]

Said Nursi was imprisoned for many years as he was out of favour with the new secular regime in Turkey. While imprisoned he wrote a short treatise on flies! He referred to them as "little birds". Earlier, while on a study retreat, Nursi recalled that "in the evening those miniature birds would be lined up in most orderly fashion on the washing line". However, when one of his students needed the washing-line to hang up the washing and tried to move the flies, Nursi immediately reproved him, saying: "Don't disturb those little birds; hang it somewhere else".[46]

In more recent times, the "Daily Sabah" newspaper in Turkey contains reports about Kartepe, a popular ski resort in the northwestern province of Kocaeli. Before the cold winter weather sets in, the town's municipality builds houses for stray cats, with feeding and watering facilities. The town's mayor, Mustafa Kocaman (in October 2021), said that they are also working on the construction of a rehabilitation and treatment centre for stray animals.[47]

It would seem that there is an ongoing line of extraordinarily compassionate people in the history of Islam – and probably many others whom we have not heard about. These exceptional individuals tried to display in their lives the divine compassion of Allah. Nursi quoted Imam Shafi'i (767–820 CE), one of the four great Imams, who said: "'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate' is only one verse, yet it was revealed one hundred and fourteen times in the Qur'an".[48]

Farming Methods

It is clear that the Qur'an permits the eating of meat, the drinking of milk and the use of honey. Equally obvious is the fact that 20th-century developments such as keeping animals in industrial factory farms could not have been envisaged in Prophet Muhammad's lifetime or the lifetime of the Hadith writers. If one had crowded animals together in darkened sheds in the scorching temperatures

of the Middle East, they would quickly have died of suffocation or heat stress, as there would have been no air conditioning, or even the huge electric fans which one sometimes sees today in the chicken sheds of south-east Asia. Neither would there have been antibiotics to treat the likely infections arising from such crowded conditions.

There is no *explicit* disapproval of factory farming within the Islamic holy books, but there is certainly an *implicit* condemnation.

Fazlun Khalid comments: "There is absolutely no evidence in the sacred texts that would in any way support factory farming. The exemplary behaviour of the prophet points to care, concern and compassion. These qualities are palpably absent in factory farming".[49]

Factory farming methods do not allow animals to live in "communities".[50] They are either kept in solitary confinement or in such large groups that natural grouping of families or a "pecking order" is impossible. They are, in effect, imprisoned. Yet one respected Hadith states clearly: "It is a great sin for a man to imprison the animals which are in his power".[51]

If Allah is concerned for each animal and knows "where it lives",[52] then He would surely condemn the zero-grazing dairy farms, where cows are never allowed outside to graze, or the broiler (meat) chicken sheds, where 20–30,000 young birds, bred for fast growth, struggle to keep alive for their short, six-week lives, with many going lame, crippled from their sheer body-weight and others dropping dead from the aptly named Sudden Death Syndrome. What would He think of the laying hens cooped up in cages for most of their lives, never able to fully stretch their wings, never able to fly?

No one could find "beauty"[53] in these poor creatures, nor could their lives allow them to praise God "with wings outstretched".[54] Nor can the animals themselves "enjoy" the pastures, waters and mountains which God has created for both them and for humanity.[55]

Some farm animals have their bodies mutilated to fit them to the system in which they are reared. For example, laying hens often have the tip of their beaks cut off, although the beak is a highly sensitive organ. This mutilation means they can be kept in cages without damaging each other or be kept in massive farms, where, again, the natural pecking order has long broken down and the frustrated and confused animals may attack each other. Mutilating the beak limits the damage they can inflict on each other.

Yet there are two verses in the Qur'an which explicitly condemn the then common practice of slitting the ears of aging female animals and turning them loose. In fact, one verse compares this mutilating of the animals to the work of the Devil.[56]

Sheep often have their tails docked, either by a cut or by application of a tight rubber ring, which deprives the tail of blood, forcing it to wither. The Hadith condemns the cutting off of the tails of horses, so one would assume this applies to other animals too.

Perhaps worse still is the selective breeding of farm animals to increase their productivity and, thereby, the profitability of the enterprise. The modern dairy cow, whose original milk production was sufficient to feed her suckling calf, has now been bred to produce many times as much milk as her calf would ever have

suckled from her. Her calf is taken away from her at a day old and she is then milked to capacity until shortly before her next calf is due a year later (so for six to seven months each year she is both pregnant and being milked). After two to four years of this stressful lifestyle, often interspersed with bouts of lameness or mastitis, she will be culled, worn out with the strains of production.

Such a cow can certainly find little to "enjoy"[57] in her life. Nor can those meat chickens, bred to grow so fast and meaty that their age at slaughter has been more than halved in the last 50 years. At just five to six weeks old, many will already have been "despatched" or have died from metabolic failure or from lameness which renders them unable to get to their food and water outlets. There is no enjoyment in such a life.

Caring pastoralist herding and small-scale farming of chickens etc are being overwhelmed by large-scale factory farming of animals. The world's agriculture has moved from 20 chickens in the backyard, seeking their nourishment from the soil and from household crumbs, to 20,000 chickens in a shed, fed to company order and often reliant on antibiotics for their very survival. God may care for these exploited creatures – it is obvious that humanity does not.

Othman Abd-ar-Rahman Llewellyn writes:

> And taqwa is the attitude of reverence toward the Lord of all beings, coupled with utmost care in our treatment of all His creatures. In this context, the highest manifestation of taqwa in our deeds is ihsan: we are morally obliged to serve the Lord of all beings by doing utmost good to all His creatures. Most destructive, most wasteful by far are industrial farms, industrial livestock production, industrial fisheries that efface the diversity of life on Earth: Industrial farms that bulldoze the natural landscape, poison the soil, air, and water, that replace the diversity of native plants with sterile monocultures; industrial chicken farms, feedlots, slaughterhouses, and dairies; Industrial fisheries – trawlers with vast nets that scrape the seabed; industrial agriculture, as practiced today, is perhaps the single greatest cause of the loss of biodiversity on Earth, and the gravest agent of global climate change.[58]

Llewellyn also writes that if the rights of animals are accepted, there will need to be massive change:

> If these rights of animals are secured, the impact on modern industrial farming and fishing practices will be revolutionary. It will require major changes in the ways that biological and medical research and trade in wildlife are conducted, and in the design and management of abattoirs, livestock markets, zoos, and pet shops.[59]

Teaching and Global Practice

One can only deduce that the Islamic teachings on God's care for His creatures and the implicit teaching that they should live natural lives and be cared for conscientiously by humans, are being transgressed widely, globally. Muslim-majority

countries have adopted these industrial farming methods and many Muslims throughout the world regularly consume the flesh and products of these animals. Sadly, there seems to be a complete disconnect between the teaching and the practice.

However, there are pockets of hope. In the UK, Willowbrook Farm is run on organic farming principles, which the Muslim owners see as the best way for them to farm according to their Khalifah role. They do not produce factory-farmed chickens, but say:

> Unlike most commercial farmers, rearing large numbers of fast-growing hybrid birds, we choose to rear only traditional and natural breeds of chicken. We maintain our flocks at naturally sustainable and manageable stocking levels, providing them with plenty of access to fresh pasture, providing a non-GM diet, using no chemicals, medication or hormones, on our animals or on our land… Unlike modern breeds of chicken, which live an average of 5 weeks, ours will reach full maturity at 12 weeks and have full access to woodland & pasture all year long![60]

The first principle of their farming methods is: "To treat livestock ethically, meeting their physiological and behavioural needs".[61]

Sadly, such principles, which seem to be truly based on Islamic teaching, are totally lacking in the kind of intensive systems which are common in the west and which have been adopted and invested in by many Islamic countries.

For example, the poultry industry is a significant employer in Indonesia. Industry sources state that 3 million people are employed in the industry.[62] Indonesia is of course the world's largest Muslim-majority country. Most of the chicken farming is of the intensive methods already described.

Cobb is one of the world's two largest chicken breeders. In 2020, Cobb Asia set up a new technical school in Bali focusing on broiler chicken management. Referring to their Cobb 500 fast-growing chicken, Dr Youngho Hong, director of technical services at Cobb Asia, declared, "The Cobb 500 is selected on many different traits with an emphasis on feed conversion rate and average daily gain".[63] In other words, the chickens are bred to grow at a very fast rate.

But other, better things are happening in Indonesia too. In 2018 Humane Society International, in conjunction with the Indonesian Veterinary Medical Association, hosted Southeast Asia's first technical workshop on cage-free egg production in Surabaya, Indonesia.[64] In 2020, the multinational consulting firm Global Food Partners (GFP) and Aeres University of Applied Sciences (Aeres) announced a partnership to establish an Indonesia-based training centre and model cage-free egg farm focused on management and production for Asian farmers.[65]

Intensive poultry production is also well-established in Egypt. For example, an Egyptian distributor hosted a Wadi Poultry Academy meeting in March 2020 with around 100 participants, all of whom are involved in using the Ross breed of chicken – one of the other major broiler breed brands in the world.[66] Wadi has

had investment loans from the International Finance Corporation, the private lending arm of the World Bank.[67]

The largest dairy producer in Egypt is Dina Farms, with around 17,000 high-yielding Holstein cattle.[68] Although, from their promotional video, it looks as though the cows do get to go outdoors into mud yards, the calves appear to be in individual outdoor cages and the whole process is highly intensive.[69]

There are pockets of more holistic farming within Egypt, such as the SEKEM farms, which operate on the biodynamic model. Their SEKEM website proclaims that "it treats soil fertility, plant growth, and livestock care as ecologically interrelated tasks".[70] Claiming to respect life, they say that animals "are capable of different patterns of behavior and even show emotional life in their higher stages of development. Like human beings, they are sensitive to pain. Treating animals in a species-appropriate way means to respectfully deal with life itself".[71]

The founder of SEKEM farms saw its methods as combining Islamic teaching with biodynamic methods. After much discussion, the association of Muslim sheiks in Egypt gave the community a plaque verifying that SEKEM is an Islamic initiative.[72]

Even in Saudi Arabia, the homeland of the Prophet Muhammad, intensive poultry production is growing. Just one hatchery, Arab Takamul, produces up to 11 million broiler chickens per year, and we read of involved companies with names like Farming Business Arab Company for Livestock Development (ACOLID).[73] The objectives of ACOLID are to develop and promote livestock resources in the Arab countries and the industries associated with them. ACOLID has established 38 projects, affiliated companies and different shareholdings distributed geographically in 11 Arab States.

It is good to know that there is a Department of Organic Production within the Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (MEWA), although the number of animals being raised to organic standards is still small.[74]

In 2018, the Saudi government launched an enormous (USD$200 million) Organic Action Plan, aiming to increase the country's organic production by 300% within 13 years. The investment in organic farming is partly to conserve water, as organic farming enriches soils, helping them to retain moisture.[75]

In addition to chickens, there has been a huge growth in intensive zero-grazing dairy farming in the Middle East. In Saudi Arabia, one company alone has 105,000 cows in five different farms. They are fed four times a day and milked four times a day. This must put a huge metabolic strain on the animals, and it is not surprising that the cows average only 3.5 lactations before they are culled. Male calves go for veal production.[76] A film showing the scale of the dairy operation is available.[77]

It is unlikely that one would find "beauty"[78] in looking at these animals, who can never graze for themselves but who have to have all their feed brought to them.

A few years ago, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) in liaison with Global One, and with support from Abdalla Mohamed Kamwana, Vice Chairman of the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) launched "Islamic Farming:

A Manual for Conservation Agriculture", as "a new curriculum that integrates Qur'anic scriptures and teachings about caring for the Earth as a religious responsibility with practical training in conservation agriculture".[79] It gives detailed instructions on how to care for the land and soil, grow crops and rear farm animals. It says: "It is important that we look after the livestock that Allah blesses us with. As we provide the care and resources that our animals require, we will be following Allah's commands".[80]

Perhaps that short statement could inform the future of animal farming in Muslim communities and countries.

Eating Animals

"Halal" literally means "acceptable" "permitted" or "sanctified" and applies widely to a multitude of products and actions, not just to food, although that is the narrow interpretation of halal often taken up in the West. In fact, today Muslims debate whether nuclear energy is halal or the use of plastics.[81]

The concept of halal food goes further than the literal meaning and is used in the Quran in conjunction with the word "tayyib", meaning pure, healthy, good or natural. The Qur'an explicitly says: "People, eat what is good (tayyib) and lawful (halal) from the Earth …".[82]

Some animal foods are explicitly forbidden (haram), such as pig-meat, carrion and some other, usually wild, creatures. Flowing blood is also forbidden.[83]

Let us focus on those animal foods which are widely eaten in the global Muslim community: beef cattle, lambs, goats, chickens, camels (mainly in the Middle East), most kinds of fishes, dairy products and eggs.

These foods are definitely halal in themselves, but do they fulfil the requirement to be good (tayyib)? If we consider the short and miserable life of the broiler (meat) chicken, as described earlier, it is hard to argue that there is anything pure, healthy, good or natural in the origin of that meat. The same argument would apply to eggs from laying hens kept for most of their lives in cages.

Another aspect of tayyib is that the Qur'an urges consumers not to be extravagant or to waste food: "…eat and drink but do not be extravagant: God does not like extravagant people"[84] and a similar exhortation: "You who believe, do not forbid the good things God has made lawful to you – do not exceed the limits: God does not love those who exceed the limits".[85] Fazlun Khalid says Muslims haven't given serious consideration to this issue up to the present time.[86]

Prior to the COP 21 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in 2015 at which the Paris Climate Change Agreement was signed by 195 countries, several learned Muslims wrote and submitted the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change. It refers to many of the Qur'anic verses quoted in this chapter, but also adds some descriptions of the Prophet Muhammad, including that he "ate simple, healthy food, which only occasionally included meat".[87] (In fact, this excellent document calls for divestment from fossil fuels, protection of biodiversity, and a circular economy and is well worth reading.)

Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, a leading US-based Muslim academic, argues that historically Muslims ate so little meat they were almost vegetarian. "Meat is not a necessity in sharia, and in the old days most Muslims used to eat meat – if they were wealthy, like middle class – once a week on Friday. If they were poor – on the Eids".[88]

Several individual Muslims have told me that Muslims should eat lightly and should never continue eating until they feel full. They have also told me that eating meat should be moderate and that they feel appalled by the amount of meat consumed by many Muslims today.

This seems to be based on a Hadith which quotes the Prophet Muhammad as saying:

> The human being does not fill any vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat a few mouthfuls, to keep him going. If he must do that (fill his stomach), then let him fill one third with food, one third with drink and one third with air.[89]

Fazlun Khalid agrees with the concept of moderation, pointing out that: "Prophet Muhammad very rarely ate meat. He lived on dates and barley. Excessive meat production is now one of the causes of global warming".[90]

Muslim author Reza Shah-Kazemi corroborates this, writing:

> Let us note that the Prophet and his companions were virtually vegetarians, eating meat most probably not more than a few times each month. In this regard, the following saying of Imam Ali is of great practical import for our times: 'Do not make your stomachs graveyards of animals (maqābir al-ĥayawān)'.[91]

The Islamic teachings would therefore seem to encourage Muslims to eat animal products only in moderation and to eat only those from animals who have been able to "enjoy" their lives. Eating the products originating in industrial factory farms would plainly appear to violate the "tayyib" (good) principle.

To date, in the UK and probably elsewhere, tayyib has been viewed as a food safety standard from the point of slaughter to the processing of the meat products afterwards.[92]

It is surely time for a more ethical and wider understanding of what "tayyib" really means.

Slaughter

The issue of halal slaughter has become extremely contentious, both within the Muslim world but also in the non-Muslim world. In most of the "western" world, the general view is that animals should be stunned (rendered unconscious) before their throats are cut and they bleed to death. In this way they are not aware of the cut and the gradual loss of consciousness that follows. Many Muslims believe that

stunning harms and hurts the animal and that it should not be used. Others say that as the Qur'an does not mention stunning, it should not be used.

It is an important point to note that legislation on the slaughter of animals has been evolving for nearly a hundred years and is still evolving as new and more humane methods become available.

In the European Union (EU), the Regulations for non-religious slaughter require animals to be stunned before the cut or to be killed by a method, such as gas, which causes unconsciousness followed by death.[93]

One of the most common methods of stunning is the use of the captive bolt pistol which fires a retractable bolt into the brain, causing immediate loss of consciousness. This is used for cattle and sometimes for calves and sheep. Many sheep and goats may be stunned by the use of electric tongs placed on either side of the head, which should cause instantaneous unconsciousness when done properly. This kind of stunning is reversible and makes the animals unconscious for a short period of time, long enough for them to be slaughtered and bled to death. However, they should be able to regain consciousness if they are not slaughtered. This is important for Muslims as they believe that animals should still be alive when they are actually slaughtered with the knife.

Poultry have often been stunned by being hung upside down on a conveyor belt which dipped their heads in an electrified water bath, causing a stun. Today most poultry in wealthier countries are stunned using a gas mixture which causes them to lose consciousness.

Once unconscious, all animals should be quickly killed. This is done either by cutting the throat, in the case of birds or, in the case of large animals such as cattle, more often by cutting the chest and severing all the blood vessels leading from the heart.

Animals die from blood loss, whether stunned first or not. It is the cut to the throat or chest which causes the blood to gush out. After some time, lacking oxygen, the brain loses consciousness. There are ways to check that the animal is unconscious before butchering of the carcase begins.

The EU Regulation on slaughter gives a derogation to Muslim and Jewish communities on the requirement to stun but now leaves it up to EU Member States to interpret this as a ban on non-stun slaughter or maintaining the derogation. In the UK, Jewish and Muslim communities are exempt from the legal requirement to stun animals before slaughter. However, there are strict procedures regarding the handling of animals about to be slaughtered, in order to minimise the time of stress and suffering which the animal may suffer.[94]

Several European countries do not allow derogations from the general requirement of prior stunning. These include Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Slovenia and two administrative regions of Belgium.[95]

New Zealand banned slaughter without stunning in 2010 and made reversible stunning mandatory.[96] Sheep are stunned with electricity and then slaughtered by Muslim slaughtermen. The meat produced is certified as halal by religious communities within New Zealand, and much of the meat is exported to over 100 countries, including Malaysia, India and countries in the Middle East.[97]

Halal slaughter traditionally involves cutting the animal's throat without stunning the animal first, but also saying a prayer, *Bismillah* (in the name of God), in acknowledgement that one is taking away a God-given life. However, some Muslims accept stunning before slaughter, so it is interesting to note that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) report on slaughter methods in England and Wales 2018 showed that 58% of certified halal meat is from animals stunned before slaughter.[98]

In 2019, Ismailağa Cemaati, the largest Islamic group in Turkey, publicly announced that stunning animals prior to killing them is acceptable and halal.[99]

There is no doubt that slaughtering any animal is an unpleasant business. From the animal's point of view, it usually entails a journey in a truck first, which is undoubtedly stressful, may involve feelings of hunger, thirst and fear and may sometimes cause injury. This is followed by unloading at the slaughterhouse, a strange place with its unfamiliar sounds and smells.

In the UK, the law implementing the 2015 EU Regulations permits a Muslim person to slaughter without stunning if, in the case of bovines, "the animal is individually restrained in an upright position in a restraining pen" and in the case of all large animals, "ensure it is killed by the severance of both its carotid arteries and jugular veins by rapid, uninterrupted movements of a hand-held knife". Once the cut has been made, the law says the animal must not be moved or hoisted for "in the case of a sheep or a goat, a period of not less than 20 seconds; and in the case of a bovine animal, a period of not less than 30 seconds".[100] This time-lapse period is to allow the animal to become unconscious.

In the case of poultry, both carotid arteries must be cut and the time lapse before any further action must be in the case of a turkey or goose, a period of not less than 2 minutes; and in the case of any other bird, a period of not less than 90 seconds.

Some of these time periods seem too short, as research has shown that the time between the cut and unconsciousness can be long. A group of leading scientists, brought together by the European Commission, viewed all the research and concluded:

> Without stunning, the time between cutting through the major blood vessels and insensibility [unconsciousness], as deduced from behavioural and brain response, is up to 20 seconds in sheep, up to 25 seconds in pigs, up to 2 minutes in cattle, up to 2½ or more minutes in poultry, and sometimes 15 minutes or more in fish.[101]

As the science indicates that animals do not lose consciousness instantaneously when their throats are cut, they must endure a period of possible pain and certainly confusion and distress as they bleed to death. Some argue that the pain from the cut is not immediately felt. It can happen (in humans too) that a very traumatic experience can sometimes induce temporary analgesia. Be that as it may, the experience of bleeding out must surely cause suffering.

Is this not incompatible with the recorded words of the Prophet Muhammad? Shaddid b. Aus said: "Two are the things which I remember Allah's Messenger

(pbuh) having said: 'Verily Allah has enjoined goodness to everything; so when you kill, kill in a good way and when you slaughter, slaughter in a good way'".[102]

This reference goes on to enlarge on killing, "So every one of you should sharpen his knife and let the slaughtered animal die comfortably".[103]

In those days, centuries before stunning methods had been developed or used, sharpening the knife for a quick and effective cut was undoubtedly the most compassionate way to slaughter. Can we not deduce that the intention of killing in "a good way" so that the animal can "die comfortably" means that today the best stunning methods should be used – or even better methods developed?

Some Muslims have argued that if the animal is stunned first, then the blood does not drain out so abundantly. Islamic scholar Al-Hafiz Basheer Masri points to the Qur'an, which prohibits "flowing blood".[104] Firstly, it is obvious that any piece of fresh meat will contain residual blood, not flowing blood. Secondly several experiments have taken place to show that blood loss is similar in stunned and non-stunned animals.[105]

Sadly, much evidence has come to light of very cruel practices being used in slaughterhouses in countries such as Egypt, Indonesia and the Lebanon where the meat is being sold on the halal market. Film has been taken, either by veterinary surgeons working in slaughterhouses, or by animal welfare groups.[106] In some cases, cattle had their tendons cut in order to make them fall to the floor, where they would then be held down by a couple of workers while a third worker would perform the cut. Others were winched up by one leg so that the slaughterman could access the throat or chest. This painful injuring and mistreatment of the animal prior to slaughter would surely make the meat unfit to be labelled halal.[107]

Clearly there is a huge need for the authorities to carry out regular unannounced inspections in all slaughterhouses and to insist on proper training, facilities and care for workers.

It seems to me that New Zealand may be leading the way forward for the future. Slaughter for the halal market is performed by Muslim slaughtermen, the prayer is said, and the animal is stunned before the slaughter cut is made. This agreement appears to satisfy both the welfare authorities and the religious requirements of the Muslim communities.

Vivisection

This subject is a matter of real concern to animal welfarists globally. Experimenting on animals is another "use" which was obviously not practised in the days of the Prophet Muhammad.

Today millions of animals spend their lives in laboratories being used to test new medicines and medical or surgical procedures, while others are used for testing of cosmetics, toiletries and household products.

Figures from the anti-vivisection group Cruelty Free International say that 192.1 million animals were used for scientific purposes worldwide in 2015 of which 79.9 million were used in actual experiments, with others used for breeding of genetically modified animals, or killed for their tissues.[108]

Countries vary in the legislation they have (or do not have) regarding vivisection. Some countries keep experimental animals in moderately comfortable, but confined, conditions, while others do not. In the UK, experiments come under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act of 1986.[109] All those conducting experiments must apply for a licence to the government (the Home Office).

Although huge numbers of animals are used by pharmaceutical companies, many experiments globally take place in universities and some universities have Ethics Committees which decide if an experiment is justified.

Obviously for Muslims to decide if they feel experiments are justified, they can turn to the many Qur'anic references to the place of animals in creation and our human responsibilities towards them, as outlined in earlier paragraphs.

In his excellent book *Animal Welfare in Islam*, Al-Hafiz Basheer Masri devotes much thought to the issue of experiments. His conclusion is that if the experiment is truly going to help humans or animals, then it is justifiable, but only if pain relief is used. Trivial experiments for toiletries are not justified.[110]

Nowadays more and more alternatives to animal experiments are being developed. However, some countries still require animals to be used before new products are released on the market. Fortunately, there are an increasing number of companies developing cosmetics which are not tested on animals and which are also halal and tayyib and can be bought by Muslims as well as others who care about animal wellbeing.

Some Muslim-majority countries have taken action in this area. In 2018, Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (MEWA) prohibited several practices that constitute cruelty toward animals in accordance with the GCC Animal Welfare Law which was approved by the Royal Decree No. (M/44) dated 26/7/1434 H. Some of these practices are prohibited except for medical justification, while others are forbidden for any reason whatsoever.[111]

The list of practices that are banned except for medical necessity includes tail docking and ear cropping, declawing, debarking, dehorning and chemical castration. Other practices that are forbidden for any reason whatsoever are dyeing animals, using injectable cosmetic fillers on animals, especially camels, and using animal-growth stimulants or stimulant drugs in racing.

In Indonesia, Law No. 18 of 2009 (Husbandry and Animal Health) defines animal welfare as "all matters relating to animal physical and mental conditions". This is a positive recognition that animals can suffer mentally as well as physically. The law goes on to mention "reasonable treatment and tender care" – the latter not a term usually found in legislation.[112]

In Egypt, the State carries responsibility for animal welfare and while the Agriculture Law (1966) provides some minimal protection for farm animals, there is no law covering scientific procedures.[113]

Perhaps I can do no better than quote the words of a respected Muslim thoracic surgeon, Dr Moneim A. Fadali, who writes:

> Animal models differ from their human counterparts. Conclusions drawn from animal research, when applied to human disease are likely to delay

> progress, mislead and do harm to the patient. The claim that we owe most, if not all of our advances in medicine to animal research is not only untrue, but also preposterous and absurd - an outright lie.[114]

Wildlife and Biodiversity

Knowing of the current dire global situation regarding wildlife and the current onslaught on biodiversity, it is important to see if Islam has anything to contribute to the debate.

Islam teaches that wild animals have their own "communities".[115] Perhaps more than animals kept in farms or laboratories, they have an opportunity to experience "joy" in their lives. The unity of all creatures under one God is known as Tawhid.

Of course, the Qur'anic spirit of care and compassion extends to wild creatures. One Hadith is related by a disciple of the Prophet Muhammad. When they were travelling, the Prophet left the others, who took two young birds away from their mother in the nest. The mother bird hovered above with fluttering wings and when the Prophet returned, he said, "Who has injured this bird by taking its young? Return them to her".[116]

This Hadith makes it clear that people should not interfere in the lives of wild animals but should respect them.

Looking at the modern world and how that principle is being implemented, we see that Indonesia has a Wildlife Crime Unit and acknowledges the Five Freedoms principles of animal welfare. The country participates in regional animal welfare meetings, but regulations are left to regional or local offices to enforce, and this is open to interpretation.[117]

In addition, the Indonesian Council of Ulema issued a fatwa (Muslim religious decree) declaring the illegal wildlife trade forbidden under Islamic law. The fatwa requires the country's Muslims to take an active role in protecting threatened species including tigers, rhinos, elephants and orangutans. Although not binding under Indonesian law, the fatwa is an effective deterrent in a country that is 87% Muslim.[118]

In Saudi Arabia, there is an area called Jabal Aja, which has the greatest concentration of biological diversity in the interior of the Arabian Cape.[119] It is managed by the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD). This initiative aims at applying the provisions of Islamic law to protect this area and to set an example to all Muslim countries for the regeneration of wildlife habitats, as well as safeguarding the main existing wildlife types (e.g., Nubian Ibex, Arabian Wolf, Idmi Gazelle), and dispersion of native plants and animals into the surrounding region.[120]

Aishah Abdallah, Wilderness Leader, IUCN Commission on Education and Communication, questions:

> Should we not expect Muslim ethicists, imbued with the teaching that all created beings are unique signs that glorify the Creator, and that each is

> created in truth and for right, to be foremost in striving to protect the earth's remaining wildlands?[121]

There are pockets of concern for wildlife and preservation of biodiversity within the Muslim world. In view of the teachings within the holy books, it is sad not to see more such projects.

Islam and Animal Use

This whole area of animal use and abuse is understandably a problematic one for Muslims today. If a practice is not mentioned in the Qur'an or the Hadiths, then how should they make their decision?

Respected Islamic scholar Professor Abdullah Saeed writes:

> Contextualists are led by the work of scholars such as Fazlur Rahman. They represent an important step in relating the Qur'anic text to the contemporary needs of Muslim societies. Rahman relies heavily on understanding the historical context of the revelation at the macro level, and then relating it to a particular need of the modern period. In this, he draws on the idea of the 'prophetic spirit' or, in other words, how the Prophet might act were he living today.[122]

That sounds like a pragmatic and sensible way forward. Would the Prophet really have approved of animals kept in laboratory conditions and subject to painful experiments? Would he have approved of massive industrial farms where the animals are unable to experience any joy in their lives? Would he have approved of any of the myriad ways in which animals are abused in so-called entertainment, animal-to-animal fights, sport hunting etc.?

The whole question of the relationship between humans and animals is coming under discussion within the Muslim community. Richard Foltz records the Egyptian animal welfare conference of 2004 hosted by the prestigious Islamic University, Al-Azhar, in Cairo.[123]

The author has also attended and spoken at two other animal welfare conferences held in Egypt in recent years, organised by local animal activists, many of them Muslim, and attended by government representatives and scholars from Al-Azhar University.

There was a very important case in the High Court in Islamabad, Pakistan in 2020. The judge was asked to rule on two cases involving an elephant and a bear and another case involving stray dogs. Justice Athar Minallah, Chief Justice of the Islamabad High Court, said:

> Do the animals have legal rights? The answer to this question, without any hesitation, is in the affirmative…. Like humans, animals also have natural rights which ought to be recognized. It is a right of each animal…to live in an environment that meets the latter's behavioral, social and physiological needs.[124]

These wonderfully strong words will hopefully influence judges around the world, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

In citing verses from the Qur'an, the judge went on to say: "It is inconceivable that, in a society where the majority follow the religion of Islam, that an animal could be harmed or treated in a cruel manner".[125]

Sacrifice

Sacrifice appears to be a truly fundamental part of most faiths and Islam is no exception. Sacrificing something precious to oneself is seen to please or placate the deity.

The main Islamic sacrifice is performed at the festival of Eid ul Adha, which comes at the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj). It commemorates the sacrifice of Ibrahim (Abraham) who was prepared to sacrifice his son but was allowed by God to sacrifice an animal instead. At this time, Muslims around the world sacrifice an animal, not just those taking part in the actual pilgrimage.

An essential aspect of the sacrifice is that the meat of the sacrificial animal should be shared, not just with one's family, but with the poor.

A sacrifice of an animal may also be made when a child (of either gender) is born into a family or an animal may be sacrificed purely for charitable purposes, to feed the hungry.

The Qur'an makes it clear "It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches God, but your piety".[126]

In the past the mass sacrificial slaughter during the Hajj often resulted in dead animals being left to rot on the ground. In recent years the authorities have acted to organise the slaughter and even to fly much of the sacrificial meat to poor countries nearby.[127]

Some Muslims believe that the slaughter of the animal is unnecessary and that a financial donation will suffice. Al-Hafiz Basheer Masri was one such person. He believed that the prime purpose of the Hajj sacrifice was to feed the hungry. In his book he writes: "the Qur'anic approach is not meant to take animal sacrifice as an end in itself; it is meant to be used as a means to serve a social need".[128]

Conclusion

With so many references to the place of animals in creation and so many injunctions to treat them well and not cause them suffering, Islam could be the ideal major faith to lead the way on animal welfare. Looking at current practice in the Muslim world we see the opposite in many cases. There may be huge social or cultural issues as to why this is so. This chapter is not about developing a blame culture stigmatising Islam. On the contrary, what I propose is a challenge to the Muslim community and its leaders.

It is undoubtedly time for a new Masri as it were, for a respected Muslim (or Muslims) to make the theological case for Islam to promote animal welfare. Is it not time for Imams to devote at least one Friday sermon a year to the issue of respect

and care for animals? It is perhaps time for Muslims to forge new Muslim-based organisations which promote and campaign for animal welfare either nationally or internationally. It is surely time for Muslim policymakers and politicians, wherever they may live, to propose and support new animal welfare laws.

The teaching on animals within the Qur'an and Hadiths seems to have been overlooked or neglected. But the important thing is that it is there. Any Muslim wishing to take up the challenge of promoting animal welfare can surely do so in the knowledge that he or she is doing work blessed by God, for, after all, "There is not a creature that moves on earth whose provision is not His concern".[129]

Notes

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5 Qur'an 79:30–33.
6 Qur'an 24:41.
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4 Hinduism

Teaching and Practice regarding Humanity's Relationship with Animals

Introduction

The name Hindu appears to be geographical in origin and was the name given by the Persians, Greeks and others who lived beyond the Indus, who came from the north-west, to those peoples and cultures that existed east of the Indus river. One particular group, the Aryans, entered the north-west of the Indian subcontinent thousands of years ago, probably in the second millennium BCE. No one can put an exact date on it, but it seems they came gradually and assimilated over the centuries.

Already existing in the north-west was a different culture, the Indus Valley civilisation, centred on cities like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Whether by conquest or communication, it seems that the cultures began to mix. Over the centuries, distinctive features became prominent and are now fundamental to what we call Hinduism. It is said that in more recent times, the British rulers of India helped to establish the term Hinduism to apply specifically to a set of religious beliefs and practices. Many Hindus prefer to call their faith Sanatana Dharma (the Eternal Law of Righteousness). With respect and for ease of understanding, I shall use the terms Hinduism and Hindu in this chapter.

Bovines emerge early on in both cultures. Emblems depicting bulls have been found in the Indus Valley excavations, with one seal depicting a godlike figure surrounded by many animals, including elephants, tigers and antelopes. As the script of this civilisation has not yet been deciphered, our knowledge of their beliefs is somewhat limited.

To the Aryans, cows were a source of wealth. Horses were also vital as the Aryans were charioteers as well as horse-riders. Not surprisingly, horses became associated with military might, conquest and power.

It seems that the division of society into four main caste groups also came from Aryan sources. Although not crucial to this chapter, it is useful to understand that the two upper castes, the priests (known as brahmans or brahmins) and the warriors (the kshatriyas) were considered more "advanced" than the traders and farmers (the vaishyas) or the workers (the shudras). Historians generally attribute the beginnings of the caste system to a type of colour prejudice. The invading Aryans had a lighter skin tone than the inhabitants of the Indus Valley areas or other people already living in the Indian subcontinent. Outside the

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caste system were the untouchables, whose very name reveals the very low status they had in society. They performed the jobs that caste Hindus did not want to do, such as making animal skins into leather and dealing with sanitation (read, human excrement). Different names have been attached to these people, such as Dalits (scattered ones), Harijans or children of God, a term favoured by Mahatma Gandhi, and the official term used by the government, Scheduled Castes. Although the Indian Constitution has forbidden discrimination against the Scheduled Castes, and further laws have been enacted to protect them, there is still considerable active discrimination against them, especially in rural areas.

Holy Books

To understand the status of Hindu beliefs regarding animals, it is helpful to know a little about the source texts on which beliefs are based or where they became formulated.

The Aryans developed a large set of materials, later written down in Sanskrit and known as the Vedas or the Knowledge. The earliest is the Rig Veda, followed by the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda and finally the Atharva Veda. All are regarded as divine revelation or "sruti". In this way, they would hold the same status as the Qur'an for Muslims or the Bible for Christians.

The Upanishads were written later, probably around 500–800 BCE and are called the Vedanta or culmination/conclusion of the Veda. They form the essence of Hindu philosophy. They are also usually recognised as "sruti".

Important Hindu literature also includes two major epic tales, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The much-loved Bhagavad Gita forms part of the Mahabharata. Technically the epics are "smriti" (that which is remembered) and they were written down by a person or persons. Most Hindus probably relate more easily to these epic tales than to the rather inscrutable Vedas.

All these revered books, plus several others, are important in forming the principles and practices of Hindus today.

How Many Gods Are There?

Some say that there are 330 million gods in Hinduism, others that there is but one. There are many local deities within Hinduism, often recognised only in that one area and often associated with an historical event or person or with a mountain, a river or a tree. It is not unusual for every local mountain, river or forest to be identified with a deity. This means that much of the natural world is seen as sacred.

As that wonderful philosopher and theologian – and later President of India (1962–1967) – Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan wrote: "If popular deities are worshipped, it must be understood that they are only varied manifestations of the One Supreme".[1]

Most Hindus would recognise about eight main gods/goddesses: Brahma, the creator, with his consort Saraswati, Vishnu the preserver with his consort Lakshmi and Shiva the destroyer (one has to destroy in order for new creation)

and his consort Parvati, who is sometimes revealed as the mighty Durga or the ferocious Kali, who likes blood sacrifice.

Some Hindus are specifically followers of a particular god, such as Shiva for the Shaivites, or Vishnu for the Vaishnavas. They see their own god as the one and ultimate god who created the world and sustains it. Shiva is often portrayed as an ascetic, but wearing a tiger or elephant skin, carrying a human skull as an alms bowl and with his hair tied up with snakes and a snake around his neck. This could be seen as a crude depiction of animals, but each animal represents a legend or a belief. For example, the snake is seen as representing the cycle of birth and death.

To make it more complicated, these main gods are often incarnated in other gods. For example, the very popular god Krishna is seen as an incarnation of Vishnu.

Gods are often associated with animals or are depicted riding on special animal vehicles or vahanas. Shiva's vahana is Nandi, the white bull.

A very popular Hindu god is the elephant-headed Ganesha, son of Shiva. Born of Parvati, Shiva decapitated him in a case of mistaken identity, so an elephant was beheaded and his head was attached to the youngster. Not surprisingly, Ganesha is the god of removing obstacles. During his annual festival, clay statues of him are paraded through crowds in the streets and are finally immersed in the sea or a nearby lake or river. He is much loved.

Hanuman, the monkey god, played a vital role in helping Rama (another incarnation of Vishnu) regain his kidnapped wife, Radha, as recorded in the Ramayana epic. For this reason, monkeys are said to be sacred throughout India and Hanuman is revered.

For some Hindus, the cow is divine in herself and they pray to gau-mata, cow mother. She is both mother and goddess of the earth. Some believe that all the gods live within the cow, which is why she is so revered and has her own festival.

In many of the Upanishads, Brahman is revered as the ultimate reality and power in the whole universe. Brahman is the one god above all the more colourful gods of Hinduism. The respected Hindu scholar Eknath Easwaran (1910–1999) explains the concept of Brahman: "This Reality is the essence of every created thing, and the same Reality is our real Self".[2] Dr Radhakrishnan puts it thus: "Brahman is the supra-cosmic Reality".[3]

Sacrifice

The Vedas reveal to us that sacrifice was an important part of the Aryan belief system. A special drink "soma" was critical to most sacrifices. It may have been juice from a hallucinogenic plant. It was offered to the god, and drunk by the brahmans or priests, who performed the sacrifices and were seen as connecting the ordinary people with the divine.

Sacrifice was seen as essential to appeasing the god and maintaining social order. There were benefits too for the person who sponsored the sacrifice. As only the brahmans could access the Vedic knowledge and perform the sacrificial rituals, they held extraordinary power.

Animal sacrifice, often of a bull or a goat, was common. The Ashvamedha or "horse sacrifice", was an elaborate variant of the soma sacrifice. The chosen

horse would be allowed to roam free, but guarded, for a year and then caught and sacrificed.

A much-revered book, the Bhagavata Purana, dating from the 8th to 9th centuries CE, expresses real understanding of animal feeling, saying: "Seeing someone about to sacrifice with material offerings, beings are filled with dread, fearing 'This self-indulgent (human), having no compassion, will slay me'".[4]

Over centuries, different gods became the recipients of the sacrifice, including the terrifying goddess Kali, who was described in the later epic story, the Mahabharata, as enjoying wine, flesh and animal sacrifice.[5] Until recently, hundreds of animals, usually goats, would be sacrificed to Kali at the Kalighat temple in Kolkata. In 2006, the Kolkata High court banned the practice, perhaps mainly because it upset tourists.[6]

Some Hindus are devotees of the mother goddess, who emanates power as Shakti. Shakti manifests in many other female deities and was often offered animal sacrifice, usually a buffalo. In one of her manifestations as Durga, she defeated the buffalo demon.

Animal sacrifice still persists in some parts of India, often linked to the festival of a local deity. There are occasional voices raised in protest, but they are usually outnumbered.[7]

One particular mass sacrifice which has persisted into the 21st century is the five-yearly sacrifice at the Gadhimai temple in Nepal. Gadhimai is a manifestation of the goddess Kali.

Devotees come from all over Nepal and northern India to bring their animals, usually buffalo, for sacrifice, or just to watch the bloody spectacle – and bloody it is. In 2014, it is estimated that over 200,000 buffalo were cut to death in the open-air massacre.

Many Hindus would agree with Swami Agnivesh, president of the Hindu reform movement, the World Council of Arya Samaj, who said, at the 2014 Gadhimai festival: "India was a pioneer in introducing the principle of ahimsa to the entire world. Rituals like Gadhimai where scores of animals are mercilessly sacrificed only corrode our values of compassion".[8]

In spite of legal action and advice from the Nepalese Supreme Court to end all animal sacrifices in the country and in spite of the actions of Nepalese and Indian animal activists, the slaughter did still occur in the latest festival in 2019. However, the number of animals killed was greatly reduced.

The Teaching

The Vedas must have had many authors over many years. Although sacrifice was so important at that time, there is an interesting verse in the Rig Veda, which says:

> The yatudhana who fills himself with the flesh of man,
> He who fills himself with the flesh of horses or of other animals,
> And he who steals the milk of the cow,
> Lord, cut off their heads with your flame.[9]

A yatudhana was someone regarded as having magical powers or perhaps a sorcerer. It is not clear if this passage applied to ordinary mortals.

Many of the religious books of the Hindu tradition give a very different view of the spiritual life from the sacrificial, ritualistic Vedas.

As the Mundaka Upanishad declares:

> The rituals and the sacrifices described
> In the Vedas deal with lower knowledge.
> The sages ignored these rituals
> And went in search of higher knowledge.[10]

The name "Upanishad" translates roughly as "sitting down near (to a teacher)" and the word conjures up images of a wise person surrounded by disciples, one or more of whom is writing down what the teacher says. Around 700–500 BCE was a time of upheaval in the Indian subcontinent and many sages may have retreated to the forest, living with their followers.

From a theological viewpoint the Upanishads are crucial, as well as being the foundation of Hindu philosophy. The one divine essence behind and within every being, Brahman, is also the Self or Atman. Brahman is "attributeless" and "omnipresent".[11] The Atman or perhaps what we might call the higher Self is distinct from the lower self, which dictates most of our daily thoughts and actions – the "me-mine" self.

The Chandogya Upanishad explains the concept of Brahman:

> This universe comes forth from Brahman, exists in Brahman, and will return to Brahman. Verily, all is Brahman.[12]

The Katha Upanishad explains that Brahman and the Self, Atman, are one:

> As the same fire assumes different shapes,
> When it consumes objects differing in shape,
> So does the one Self take the shape
> Of every creature in whom he is present.[13]

It is only when someone has realised the unity of Brahman/Atman that one can be released from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, samsara.

> If one fails to realise Brahman in this life
> Before the physical sheath is shed,
> He must again put on a body
> In the world of embodied creatures.[14]

One important aspect of seeing not the ego self but the real Self is to see the connection with all beings.

> The Self is hidden in the lotus of the heart. Those who see themselves in all creatures go day by day into the world of Brahman hidden in the heart.[15]

The Isha Upanishad also emphasises the unity of the individual person with all beings:

> Those who see all creatures in themselves
> And themselves in all creatures know no fear.
> Those who see all creatures in themselves
> And themselves in all creatures know no grief.
> How can the multiplicity of life
> Delude the one who sees its unity?[16]

Some of the later Upanishads tend to a more devotional relationship with the Divine, sometimes described as the Lord of Love. This is seen especially in the Shvetashvatara Upanishad:

> On this ever-revolving wheel of life
> The individual self goes round and round
> Through life after life, believing itself
> To be a separate creature, until
> It sees its identity with the Lord of Love
> And attains immortality in the indivisible whole.
> He is the eternal reality, sing
> The scriptures, and the ground of existence.
> Those who perceive him in every creature
> Merge in him and are released from the wheel
> Of birth and death.[17]

So, unless one can realise that the divine permeates all creatures, is immanent in all, one cannot escape being reborn again.

This particular Upanishad is beautifully poetic:

> The Lord dwells in the womb of the cosmos,
> The Creator who is in all creatures…
> The Lord of Love, omnipresent, dwelling
> In the heart of every living creature.[18]

Even more poetically:

> He is the blue bird; he is the green bird
> With red eyes; he is the thundercloud,
> And he is the seasons and the seas.[19]

But what does this realisation of unity mean for a person's daily life? The Mundaka Upanishad provides an answer:

> The Lord of Love shines in the hearts of all.
> Seeing him in all creatures, the wise
> Forget themselves in the service of all…[20]

Here we see the concept of karma or action. Knowledge on its own is not enough, although it is one important way to achieve release from the cycle of rebirth – but one must put one's belief into action, karma. This teaching is attributed to the theologian Yajnavalkya, and it is vital when we come to consider Hindu practice in relation to animals today.

Gradually the old Vedic rituals, performed in obeisance to the mighty gods, began to be replaced by the gentler, more mystical teachings of the Upanishads. By the 6th century BCE, the related concepts of rebirth, karma and moksha (release from the rebirth cycle, samsara) replaced or enriched the teachings of the older Vedic period.

Not everyone could live by the mystical concepts of the Upanishads. Over time, books of law and practice began to be written down and these books still govern the lives of most Hindus. The Laws of Manu or Manusmriti were written down, probably around 100 CE, and elucidated the morality of daily life, marriage and funeral rites, pollution and purification, dietary law and the punishments of hell for the transgressor. The Laws tell believers how to live their lives, how to fulfil their dharma or right living. The concept of concern for other creatures is also elucidated:

> He who injures innocent beings with a desire to give himself pleasure never finds happiness neither in life nor in death.[21]

There are so many rules about daily living, many of which may seem to us outdated, that it is good to reveal the laws pertaining to our relationship with other creatures. Here the Laws of Manu can be very clear regarding the duties of a Brahmin caste householder. Agriculture is declared to be Pramrita, that is, it causes many deaths.[22]

This is explained further. The top two castes, the Brahmin priests and the Kshatriya (warriors), "shall carefully avoid (the pursuit of) agriculture, (which causes) injury to many beings and depends on others.

"(Some) declare that agriculture is something excellent, (but) that means of subsistence is blamed by the virtuous; (for) the wooden (implement) with iron point injures the earth and (the beings) living in the earth".[23] So, even to prevent a wooden spike from inadvertently injuring an earthworm, Brahmins should not be farmers.

One must be generous to the hungry, be they fellow humans or animals: "A householder must give (as much food) as he is able (to spare) to those who do not cook for themselves, and to all beings one must distribute (food) without detriment (to one's own interest)".[24]

In view of the modern dairy industry, it is interesting to note the rule: "Let him not interrupt a cow who is suckling (her calf)".[25]

Looking at the long journeys inflicted on animals in modern-day transport, it is good to note: "Let him not travel with untrained beasts of burden, nor with (animals) that are tormented by hunger or disease, or whose horns, eyes, and hoofs have been injured, or whose tails have been disfigured".[26]

The laws of Manu demonstrate the special place of cows in Hindu society: "Dying, without the expectation of a reward, for the sake of Brahmans and of cows, or

in the defence of women and children, secures beatitude to those excluded (from the Aryan community, vahya)".[27]

There are two great epic tales, known to virtually every Hindu, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Ramayana or story of Prince Rama tells of how his wife Sita is kidnapped by the demon king Ravana of Lanka (modern-day Sri Lanka). Rama is only able to get her back with the help of a troop of monkeys, led by their king Hanuman. The monkeys build a bridge across the sea to Lanka, to enable Rama and his allies to retrieve Sita. (In fact, this legend of the monkey army may be based on a real forest-dwelling tribe of people, who perhaps already worshipped monkeys and who were induced to support Rama in his battle in Lanka.) Hanuman is recorded as having amazing abilities, such as flight.

Because of this story, monkeys are still regarded as sacred and roam freely in the countryside and cities throughout India. Many temples are surrounded by troops of monkeys. Worshippers give them food to earn good karma. Re-enactments of the Ramayana, often translated from the original Sanskrit into the local language, are staged frequently throughout India and in countries in south-east Asia where substantial Hindu populations have migrated and settled.

The Mahabharata is an epic tale of a family feud. The story is full of battles and animal sacrifices.

At one point there is a long conversation between Yudhisthira and his dying grandfather Bhisma. The old king tells his grandson:

> The life-breaths of other creatures are as dear to them as one's own breaths are to one's own self. Men endued with intelligence and cleansed souls should always behave towards other creatures after the manner of that behaviour which they like others to observe towards themselves.[28]

This incredibly long epic ends with a wonderful story of a human-animal relationship. King Yudisthira, his wife and brothers set out to climb Mount Meru in northern India, at the summit of which they would enter the celestial world. A dog began to follow them.

During the climb, one after the other, in the cold and snow, his wife and all four brothers dropped down and died. Alone, Yudisthira advanced onward. Looking behind, he saw the faithful dog was still following him. And so the king and the dog went on, through snow and ice, climbing higher and higher, till they reached the summit of Mount Meru; and there they began to hear the chimes of heaven, and celestial flowers were showered upon the virtuous king by the gods. Then the chariot of the gods descended, and the mighty god Indra told Yudisthira, "Ascend in this chariot, greatest of mortals: thou that alone art given to enter heaven without changing the mortal body".

And Yudhishthira looked around and said to the dog, "Get into the chariot, little one". The god stood aghast. "What! the dog?" he cried. "Do thou cast off this dog! The dog goeth not to heaven! Great King, what dost thou mean? Art thou mad? Thou, the most virtuous of the human race, thou only canst go to heaven in thy body".

"But he has been my devoted companion through snow and ice. When all my brothers were dead, my queen dead, he alone never left me. How can I leave him now?"

"There is no place in heaven for men with dogs. He has to be left behind. There is nothing unrighteous in this".

"I do not go to heaven", replied the king, "without the dog. I shall never give up such a one who has taken refuge with me, until my own life is at an end. I shall never swerve from righteousness, nay, not even for the joys of heaven or the urging of a god."

"Then", said Indra, "on one condition the dog goes to heaven. You have been the most virtuous of mortals and he has been a dog, killing and eating animals; he is sinful, hunting, and taking other lives. You can exchange heaven with him."

"Agreed", says Yudisthira. "Let the dog go to heaven".

At once, the scene changed. Hearing these noble words of Yudhishthira, the dog revealed himself as Dharma; the dog was no other than Yama, the Lord of Death and Justice. And Dharma exclaimed,

> Behold, O King, no man was ever so unselfish as thou, willing to exchange heaven with a little dog, and for his sake disclaiming all his virtues and ready to go to hell even for him. Thou art well born, O King of kings. Thou hast compassion for all creatures, of which this is a bright example. Hence, regions of undying happiness are thine.[29]

This is a real tale of morality and compassion and sets a high standard for Hindus and all of us to follow!

The most famous and much-loved part of the Mahabharata is the Bhagavad Gita, in which Prince Arjuna, who is hesitant about killing his cousins in battle, is instructed to do his duty by his charioteer, who turns out to be the god Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu. Krishna gives much spiritual teaching to Arjuna, pointing out that it is Arjuna's caste duty to wage the war. Krishna tells him not to be attached to the outcomes of his actions, for only the physical body is slain. The eternal Self lives on:

> As a man casts off his worn-out clothes
> And takes on other new ones
> So does the embodied soul cast off his worn-out bodies
> And enters others new.[30]

So, one should not grieve, because:

> For sure is the death of all that comes to birth
> Sure is the birth of all that dies
> So in a matter that no one can prevent
> Thou hast no cause to grieve.[31]

Krishna carries on teaching Arjuna about the fact that the divine exists in all beings:

> Wise ones see the self-same thing
> In a brahmin wise and courteous,
> As in a cow or elephant,
> Nay, as in a dog or an outcaste.[32]

As the distinguished theologian Dr S. Radhakrishnan explains: "The Eternal is the same in all, in animals, as in men, in learned Brahmins as in despised outcastes. The light of Brahman shines in all bodies and is not affected by the differences in the bodies it illumines".[33]

Krishna teaches Arjuna about the three paths of Yoga, the paths of knowledge, action and devotion. He explains again that the Yoga practitioner sees "the Self in all beings standing" and "All beings in the Self".[34]

Krishna reiterates the Upanishadic teaching on Brahman, the ultimate reality:

> When once a man can see that the diversity
> Of contingent beings abides in One (alone),
> And from that alone they radiate,
> Then to Brahman he attains.[35]

The Bhagavad Gita firmly aligns with the concept of caste and the duty to behave as one's caste requires. It mentions the importance of sacrifice. But its teaching on the same ultimate reality, Brahman, existing in all beings, relates more to the teaching of the Upanishads. If Hindus follow this teaching, then they must surely be compassionate, realising that Brahman exists also in all animals.

Hindu Teachers

Over the centuries there have been many famous Hindu spiritual teachers, such as Adi Shankara, in the 9th century. Shankara based his advaita, (non-dual) teaching on the Upanishads, and while he always paid respect to the Vedas, he ignored sacrifice and the caste system and was against animal sacrifice. He taught that only knowledge of the truth as revealed by the Upanishads can grant liberation from rebirth. Many Hindus still study and follow his teachings.

Mirabai was a 16th-century teacher who wrote bhajans (devotional songs) about her huge love for the god Krishna, and Sant Dariya Saheb (1674–1780) preached non-violence to all beings. In fact, Hinduism has a multitude of holy people who have been influential in its history.

Looking nearer to our own time it seems that Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) was highly influential in putting Hinduism on the map of world religions. He was invited to speak at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893. He created a sensation there and, in the end, spoke several times. He established a Vedanta Society in New York and over the years many more such societies have been set up in the US.

Back in India he developed a huge following. Speaking in Jaffna in 1897, he said:

> In every man and in every animal, however weak or wicked, great or small, resides the same Omnipresent, Omniscient soul. The difference is not in the soul, but in the manifestation. Between me and the smallest animal, the difference is only in manifestation, but as a principle he is the same as I am, he is my brother, he has the same soul as I have. This is the greatest principle that India has preached. The talk of the brotherhood of man becomes in India the brotherhood of universal life, of animals, and of all life down to the little ants — all these are our bodies.[36]

This is an interesting speech, especially as it is said that the Swami continued to eat the traditional Bengali foods of his childhood, such as fish and mutton. In fact, it appears as an anomaly!

Swami Vivekananda is still a legend and regarded as a saint by many Hindus. He took monastic vows and followed the teachings of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. The Gita and *The Imitation of Christ*, a 15th-century devotional book probably written by Thomas à Kempis, were said to be his favourite books. He worked to help the poor, he opposed the caste system and he favoured education for all.

Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) led a fascinating life before he undertook serious spiritual practice. After education in both India and England, he worked for the Indian Civil Service, but began to organise opposition to British Rule in India and was imprisoned for his efforts.

During his second imprisonment, he underwent a spiritual experience and said that he felt Swami Vivekananda talking to him. This was just a few years after Swami Vivekananda had died.

Being threatened further by the authorities he moved to Pondicherry in south India, then still a French colony. Gradually followers were drawn to his teaching and practice and in 1926 he established his ashram, which still exists today. Handing over practical matters to his spiritual partner, "The Mother", he devoted himself to writing, teaching and spiritual practice.

He wrote prose, poetry and spiritual guidance on his own system of Integral Yoga, such as in his book, *The Life Divine*, published in 1919. Based largely on the Upanishads and the Gita, but with western philosophical influences too, Aurobindo believed that the so-called supermind mediated between the infinite and the finite world.[37]

Sri Aurobindo's writings are said to have inspired a range of other artists and philosophers, from the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen to the modern American writer Ken Wilber. Sri Aurobindo ensured that only vegetarian food was served at the ashram.

Sri Aurobindo explained: "Life is life – whether in a cat, or dog or man. There is no difference there between a cat or a man. The idea of difference is a human conception for man's own advantage".[38]

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950) was a famous yogi who drew thousands of people to come to see him at his ashram on the Arunachala hill in Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu, in southern India. He lived very simply and was credited with saying: "Vegetable food contains all that is necessary for maintaining the body".[39] He was interested only in the spiritual life and lived in almost constant meditation. However, he broke various food taboos as he insisted that beggars should not be given hand-outs but should be invited into the ashram to eat with others. The same welcoming treatment was given to outcastes, causing dismay to some of his higher caste followers. He also abhorred food waste and insisted that leftovers be heated up for breakfast, another taboo broken!

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977) was a Vaishnavite Hindu, who only took up teaching and preaching at the age of 50. He translated many Sanskrit texts but is best known for founding ISKCON, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, known as the Hare Krishna movement. His teaching is in the tradition of bhakti yoga, the way of love and devotion. He taught that by the practice of bhakti yoga, we can develop pure love for all living beings. This in turn creates a peaceful and harmonious society

He wrote: "One should treat animals such as deer, camels, asses, monkeys, mice, snakes, birds and flies exactly like one's own son. How little difference there actually is between children and these innocent animals".[40]

However, ISKCON belief still places humans on a very different level to animals, as this extract from their website makes clear:

> Animals are largely controlled by natural instincts, arising from impulses born of the modes of nature. Due to the fact that their consciousness is less evolved than the soul occupying a human form of life, animals are not held responsible karmically for these actions; they do not incur any new karma. Humans on the other hand have received their life form as a result of naturally occurring evolution of consciousness, including the ability of rational thinking, thus making choices of behaviour beyond the level of animalistic impulse. With this facility of higher consciousness comes responsibility for their actions, thus resulting in karma. By design, human life is ultimately meant for reviving our lost relationship with God by following the instructions of God contained in religious books like the Bhagavad-Gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam, etc. Animals do not have the capacity or developed intelligence by which they can understand the process of self-realization and God realization (including understanding why are we suffering, who am "I", what is the goal of my life, etc.). These are some of the major differences between the animal and the human form of life.[41]

Sadly, in Hinduism pigs are often portrayed as filthy creatures who eat excrement. It is true that in some areas of India such as Goa, one form of sanitation was for a basic lavatory seat to be situated at the edge of the house. Excrement would drop down onto the earth and pigs would indeed come and eat it. From an animal welfare point of view, we know that in hot conditions, pigs will roll in wet mud to

cool themselves, as they do not sweat. This may have contributed to their reputation as dirty animals. Yet we know that in natural conditions, pigs will defecate away from their sleeping quarters, so they are already "house-trained" in the way we teach our "pet" dogs to be.

Swami Prabhupada bought into this description of pigs as revealed in one of his filmed sermons.[42]

At the ISKCON temple near London, Bhaktivedanta Manor, there is a working dairy farm. The cows are known by name and are milked by hand and remain on the farm throughout their lives. Male calves are not sent to slaughter (the usual practice on dairy farms). Bulls are put to work on the farm, pulling carts, although from an animal welfare point of view, their harness looks uncomfortable.[43] The milk is labelled as "slaughter-free" from the "Ahimsa Dairy".

Sri Chinmoy (1931–2007) lost both his parents by the age of 13 and grew up in the ashram set up by Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry and learned meditation from an early age. He felt drawn to working in the west and moved to the US in his thirties, giving talks and leading meditation groups. He advocated self-transcendence, going beyond what one felt capable of and gained many celebrity followers from music and sport, both areas in which he was himself talented. The heart of his teaching was bhakti yoga, the way of devotion.

Based in New York, for many years he regularly led meditation sessions at the United Nations for UN delegates, staff, and NGO representatives. Over the years, he gained many thousands of followers all over the world.

Personally, he loved animals and kept many companion animals. He wrote:

> There are many, many ways animals can help us in our evolution. Again, in the process of evolution, we are higher because we are conscious of God. The poor animals are not conscious of God. Either we pray to God or meditate on God; it is up to us. But we are conscious that there is somebody in Heaven or inside us who is watching us, while animals are not.[44]

This common attitude to animals seems based on the belief in reincarnation. If one leads a bad life as a human, one may be reborn as an animal. Some Hindus believe that one needs to be reborn into the Brahmin priestly caste to be able to proceed to moksha, liberation from rebirth. Others believe that anyone, even someone without the caste system altogether, can achieve moksha. As Professor Nanditha Krishna explained to me: "We have examples of saints such as, Nandanar, Namdev, Ravidas, Arunagirinathar, etc., who belonged to the so-called 'untouchable' caste, yet because of their total devotion to God, they merged with the divine and achieved moksha".[45]

Mahatma (great soul) Gandhi (1869–1948) is surely one of the greatest teachers of the essence of Hinduism. The word Ahimsa or non-violence will always be associated with him. This was a principle he applied to all aspects of his life, politics, campaigning and relations with animals. He based it firmly on the teachings of the holy books of Hinduism, although he may well have been influenced by Jainism (see Chapter 6).

His theory is wonderfully summed up by Nibedita Priyadarshini Jena:

> Mahatma Gandhi's profound theory of Ahimsa or non-violence takes into account both human beings and animals. His fundamental thought on the subject of protecting animals is the outcome of a cluster of theories, including the non-violence of Jainism, the teachings of the Gitā, Sānkhya, Christianity, and Tolstoy…He suggests that non-violence does not merely imply non-hurting in thought and deed, but that it entails an extension of love and compassion… Gandhi demands protection of their lives (rights) and also enhancement of their welfare.[46]

In his inspiring autobiography, Gandhi spends much time on the issue of food. But the teaching is clear:

> To my mind, the life of a lamb is not less precious than that of a human being. I should be unwilling to take the life of a lamb for the sake of the human body. I hold that, the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to protection by man from the cruelty of man.[47]

He goes on to castigate the Hindus of Bengal, many of whom (as we have seen with Aurobindo and Vivekananda) continue to eat fish and sometimes meat: "How is it that Bengal with all its knowledge, intelligence, sacrifice and emotion tolerates this slaughter?"[48]

Gandhi's autobiography ends in the 1920s (although he lived to 1948), long before the powerful events leading up to the independence of India and Pakistan from British rule and the dreadful violence that followed, as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs left their homes to seek residence in another country, violence which Gandhi tried hard to prevent.

In spite of Gandhi's lifelong involvement in politics, workers' rights and seeking independence, his personal spiritual journey was never far from his mind – and his practice. An ardent believer in Ahimsa, non-violence, he felt he must apply this principle in every area of his life. At the end of his autobiography, he declares:

> Identification with everything that lives is impossible without self-purification: without self-purification the observance of the law of *Ahimsa* must remain an empty dream; God can never be realised by one who is not pure of heart… So long as a man does not of his own free will put himself last among his fellow creatures, there is no salvation for him. *Ahimsa* is the farthest limit of humility.[49]

The Role of Humanity

The Sanatana Dharma is deeply concerned with how an individual can achieve moksha or liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Most of its teachings are about the nature of the divine and of the material world and how one should behave in this world (which may or may not be "real"), in order to achieve

oneness with the divine, be that expressed as Brahman or as one of the gods like Vishnu.

The sacred books we have looked at imply that Hindus should live a good life, perform their duties, and act with compassion. Living the good life in this way is aligning with one's dharma, the right way for one to live.

Apart from fulfilling the duties of one's dharma, The Laws of Manu require people to avoid causing harm to other creatures:

> He who injures innoxious beings from a wish to (give) himself pleasure, never finds happiness, neither living nor dead. He who does not seek to cause the sufferings of bonds and death to living creatures, (but) desires the good of all (beings), obtains endless bliss. He who does not injure any (creature), attains without an effort what he thinks of, what he undertakes, and what he fixes his mind on.[50]

In summarising the laws for all believers, the Laws of Manu include: "Abstention from injuring (creatures)".[51]

As Krishna teaches in the Bhagavad Gita:

> Let a man feel hatred for no contingent being
> Let him be friendly, compassionate,
> Let him be done with thoughts of "I" and "mine",
> The same in pleasure as in pain, long-suffering.[52]

Apart from not injuring or harming other creatures, the sacred books do not elucidate in detail how one should relate in practical ways with animals – apart from not eating them.

It is only in relation to cows that there seems to be a duty of active care required. There is a long history of veneration of the cow, who represents the ideal of motherhood. The cow is believed to produce milk and its derivative products like yoghurt and ghee in order to feed people, her urine is used for medicinal products and her dung is dried for use as fuel or for plastering floors and walls. The god Krishna is said to have been a cowherd in his early years. He is seen as the protector of cows. The mother earth goddess Bhumi is often portrayed as a cow.

Do Hindus worship the cow? Some surely do, but more modern Hindus reject this claim:

> Hindus don't worship cows. We respect, honour and adore the cow. By honouring this gentle animal, who gives more than she takes, we honour all creatures. Hindus regard all living creatures as sacred – mammals, fishes, birds and more. We acknowledge this reverence for life in our special affection for the cow. At festivals we decorate and honour her, but we do not worship her in the sense that we worship the Deity.[53]

There is an annual festival of cows, Gaupastami. Cows will be painted and decorated and given extra tasty foods.

In the Vedas, cows represent wealth and happiness. From the Rig Veda, we read

> The cows have come and have brought us good fortune. In our stalls, contented, may they stay! May they bring forth calves for us, many-coloured, giving milk for Indra each day. You make, O cows, the thin man sleek; to the unlovely you bring beauty. Rejoice our homestead with pleasant lowing. In our assemblies we laud your vigour.[54]

Both Sri Prabhupada and Gandhi believed that care for cows is fundamental to a good life.

Killing a cow would be the worst thing a Hindu could do, apart from human murder. As we shall see, this can create a conflict of interest between a believer and a veterinarian, whose job is solely to alleviate suffering in the present moment.

Farming Methods

Over the years, since the time of the Vedas, milking cows has been a part of rural life in India. Most farmers had small herds of cows, producing milk for the family and maybe some left over for sale locally. The poor were lucky if they had just one cow.

India today is not only the leading global milk producer, but it has also become the world's largest consumer of milk. India's 2022 milk production is forecast at 700,000 metric tons.[55]

Around half of India's milk comes from buffaloes. They are not venerated – the goddess Durga fought the buffalo demon. Much buffalo milk is turned into milk powder.

In 1970 the Indian government launched Operation Flood to modernise and increase dairy production in India. This was done with good intent and it helped establish many dairy co-operatives throughout the country.

In 2017, the main Indian animal protection organisation FIAPO (the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations) carried out a survey of dairy farming in ten states in India. *Cattle-ogue: Unveiling the Truth of the Indian Dairy Industry* makes worrying reading.

In 78.8% of the dairies, the cows were tethered, often by short tethers. There was no bedding or soft ground for them to lie on. In over 63% of the dairy farms, the cows were tied by their hind legs. Injuries to the animals were seen in over 64% of the dairies.

Oxytocin is a hormone that assists in "let-down" of milk. Injections of oxytocin have become common in Indian dairies. Its use was banned in 2018, but 46.9% of the dairies used oxytocin illegally.

Male calves were often neglected or sold to beef traders. Of those kept on at the dairies, 25% had died after one month.

The worst farms were not the very small smallholder farms, not even the big modern dairies, but the medium-sized dairies near the cities and towns.

As the report concludes: "This first-of-its-kind investigation in India's largest milk producing states as well as in the national capital has revealed the dark underbelly of the mushrooming and unregulated milk production industry".[56]

With around 80% of the population of India being Hindu, this is surely an unacceptable state of affairs. While FIAPO, with its 80 members and 200 supporter organisations in India can do so much, it is up to the national and state governments to enforce existing laws and implement reforms.

This unsatisfactory state of the dairy industry, coupled with the peripatetic wandering of cows living loose on the land and in the urban streets, often ingesting plastic rubbish, cows who receive no care or veterinary attention, amounts to an animal welfare horror story. If India wants to protect its cows, then it must surely do better.

As Professor Nanditha Krishna explains:

> Today, the dairy industry has become a big business…With the introduction of tractor farming, the male calf which would have been used on the farms is either abandoned or killed. Only the female calf is permitted to live for future milk production. If Hindus want to protect the cow, they must cut down milk production by cows and stop the export of milk and milk products.[57]

What of other farmed animals in India? Broiler (meat) chicken production is the fourth largest in the world, behind the US, Brazil and China. Around 20% of production is small scale, but 80% is the usual indoor housing and use of fast growth genetics, as is common throughout the world. This raises health questions regarding the use of antimicrobials in broiler farms and the spread of antibiotic resistance in the human population.[58]

India raises 460 million egg-laying hens every year, making it the world's third largest egg producer.[59] Until recently, 80% of the hens were kept in battery cages. As this article in Mongabay explains

> These cages pack 8–10 birds per cage, do not allow the hens to even stand up straight, turn around or even spread their wings. They prohibit the hens from expressing any of their natural behaviours, such as perching, nesting, laying their eggs privately in a nest box, roosting, among others.[60]

Fortunately, India seems to be moving towards cage-free systems, which is encouraging.

In 2013, the Animal Welfare Board of India concluded that battery cages were in violation of Section 11 (1)(e) of the 1960 Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and issued an advisory to all state governments stating that battery cages should not be used and existing ones should be phased out by 2017.[61]

This advisory seems to have been largely ignored. In 2019, the organisation Animal Equality carried out an investigation into hen farms in several states in India. This is what they found:

"Four to eight hens crammed in a cage no bigger than two letter size (8.5" × 11") sheets of paper, unable to comfortably move".

"Hens with sore, cracked and deformed feet, injured from the wire floor of cages".

"Overcrowded cages stacked on top of each other, causing urine and faeces to fall onto birds in the lower cages".

"Hens missing their feathers and suffering from abrasions and skin irritations".

"Sick hens left to die slow agonising deaths with little to no veterinary care".

"Litter collected in huge piles underneath the stacked cages, only disposed of once every few weeks, creating high concentrations of ammonia".[62]

If Hindus sincerely follow the teaching in the Upanishads, if they believe that Brahman exists in all creatures, that "the one Self" takes the shape "of every creature in whom he is present"[63] then how can such cruel factory farming systems be allowed to exist in India?

If some Hindus follow a bhakti yoga journey of devotion, how do they equate "The Lord of Love, omnipresent, dwelling in the heart of every living creature"[64] with the hen in the cage?

If the Lord of Love

> is the blue bird; he is the green bird
> With red eyes; he is the thundercloud,
> And he is the seasons and the seas,[65]

is he not also the hen in the cage?

Recently, several state governments, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, have prohibited the use of gestation and farrowing crates for sows. In June 2022, the Delhi government also banned the use of gestation crates (sow stalls) and farrowing crates for pigs.[66] These are very welcome moves and one can only hope that the national government will follow suit.

Professor Nanditha Krishna is clear that Hinduism and factory farming are incompatible:

> I believe Hindu teaching is not consistent with factory farming of animals… Factory farming means ill-treatment of animals as greed and financial benefits become all-important, whereas Hindu teachings are based on Dharma or the law of righteousness. There is no dharma in factory farming.[67]

Wildlife and Biodiversity

With the elephant-headed god Ganesha being so loved by Hindus everywhere, it is interesting to look at the situation of elephants in India. Asian elephants are smaller than African elephants and only the males bear tusks. Prior to recent and rapid population growth and the expansion of agriculture, Asian elephants roamed the forests of India. Now, as their habitat is being decimated, elephants frequently find themselves in opposition to local farmers whose crops they can destroy.

As Professor Nanditha Krishna explains in her lovely book *Sacred Animals of India*, elephants live in groups of females, led by a matriarch, and have an important role to play in forest ecosystems. They clear old vegetation and create space for new growth and light to get through.[68] Males may live on their own or in small groups.

The elephants' gentle nature has resulted in them being forced into labour of all kinds, from giving repetitive tourist rides to working with loggers shifting the trees that have been cut down. Mostly these highly social animals are housed alone, which must cause them deep distress. Training methods are also painful and distressing.

Perhaps most ironic of all, many Hindu temples keep elephants, a practice especially common in Kerala, which is said to hold about one fifth of India's 2,500 captive elephants.[69] Often, they are kept chained by one leg, resulting in sores and infections. On festival days they will be painted, decorated and forced to carry weighty images of gods or musicians such as drummers. As elephants dislike sudden loud noises, this must be a torturous experience for them.

Professor Nanditha Krishna is strongly opposed to temple elephants:

> Elephants belong to the forest…They were never meant to be tamed and used in temples. Taming elephants is probably the cruellest way to treat any animal. The young elephants are kept in kraals and beaten black and blue till their spirit is broken. They are chained all their lives, sometimes even with spikes. I strongly support the banning of elephants from temples and hope this will happen soon.[70]

In an interview with the BBC in 2020, documentary maker Sangita Iyer told the reporter: "So many elephants had ghastly wounds on their hips, massive tumours and blood oozing out of their ankles, because chains had cut into their flesh and many of them were blind".[71]

In 2009 an investigation into temple elephants in India was undertaken by the Indian animal welfare organisation CUPA (Compassion Unlimited Plus Action) and ANCF (Asian Nature Conservation Foundation). They studied 153 temple elephants. Fifty-six percent were chained using spikes or were hobbled by their forelegs and the mean chaining duration was 17.5 hrs. The report declared:

> The physical space provided to elephants in temples is completely alien to the biology of the animal. All temples have stone flooring on which these elephants stand for long durations, never getting a chance to walk on natural substrates. Due to such unsuitable flooring, over 50% of the elephants suffer from foot rot. The practice of chaining elephants in temples is universal.[72]

In some contrast to this, a veterinary surgeon in India told me how he had been called to the post-mortem of an elephant who had dropped dead in the courtyard of her owner's house. The knackermen who had been called to dismember the elephant and remove her body were all Dalit Hindus, regarded as the lowest of

the low by society. Before they began their unpleasant work, they held a short ceremony. Garlands were placed on the elephant, prayers and hymns were said and sung, incense was lit and purifying fire was swung about. Only when they had done this did the dismemberment begin.[73] These men felt they must revere this elephant before they cut up her body.

There are still over 27,000 wild elephants in India, but that is a huge drop from the million or so who lived there just a decade ago. Since 1986, the Asian elephant has been listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, as the wild population has declined by at least 50% since the 1930s to 1940s. 60% of Asian elephants live in India.[74]

It is ironic and distressing to see that the symbol of elephants everywhere, the much-loved god Ganesha, continues to be worshipped, his image in many Hindu homes, while his blood and flesh siblings are treated so badly – and especially at temples!

If, as the Bhagavad Gita teaches:

> Wise ones see the self-same thing
> In a brahmin wise and courteous,
> As in a cow or elephant,
> Nay, as in a dog or outcaste, [75]

then how can cows be tethered on dairy farms and temple elephants be chained by the leg?

India is rich in biodiversity of all kinds and successive governments have taken action to preserve this. Details can be read on the website of the Convention on Biological Diversity.[76]

More positive news is that in 2013 India made it illegal to use captive dolphins for public entertainment. The Ministry of Forests and Environment announced this policy, referring to dolphins as "highly intelligent and sensitive" creatures.[77]

While the Indian government banned the use of most wild animals in circuses in 1998, the use of elephants was only banned in 2013.[78]

Another positive development is the Bhumi Global organisation. Their mission is "to engage, educate, and empower people and communities to address the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution" and their work "is based on Hindu principles of environmental care".[79] They are active around the world including at the United Nations, seeking to promote care and concern for the environment, including animals.

Hunting and Sport

Other wild animals are also suffering in India. Tigers and wild boar were always hunted by maharajas and other royal figures. During the era of the British Raj, it became good sport for the conquerors to continue indulging in such pastimes, with pig-sticking and tiger hunting particular favourites. Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Scouting movement, loved pig-sticking so much that he wrote a

book on it, declaring: "Yes, hog-hunting is a brutal sport – and yet I loved it, as I loved also the fine old fellow I fought against".[80]

Tiger hunting was also a popular "sport" of the ruling classes and the British Raj. After ascending the throne in 1911, King George V and his retinue travelled north to Nepal, slaying 39 tigers in 10 days.[81] Hunting tigers for sport was only banned in India under the Wildlife (Protection) Act in 1972. Tigers continue to be poached for their skins and have also lost much wild habitat. According to the National Tiger Conservation Authority, there were an estimated 2967 tigers left in India in 2021.[82]

The tiger reserves of India were set up in 1973 and are governed by Project Tiger, which is administrated by the National Tiger Conservation Authority. At the time of writing, 53 protected areas have been designated tiger reserves in India. India is home to 80% of tigers in the world and there are hopes that their numbers will increase due to these reserved areas.[83]

Caring for Animals

There are an estimated 35 million "street" dogs living in India. Keeping dogs as "pets" is still not a very common practice, and these "indie" dogs live on scraps and the occasional hand-out. People are often scared of them, as rabies still kills around 20,000 people every year in India.[84] There are a growing number of shelters and veterinary centres which capture the dogs, neuter them and vaccinate them against rabies before releasing them back into their familiar territory. Sensibly, they make a notch in the dog's ear under anaesthesia, so when they are released, the local people know that the dogs no longer pose a rabies risk.

One such campaign is still being carried out by Help in Suffering Veterinary Centre in Jaipur. Over a few years of the programme the number of rabies infected people locally fell to zero.[85] A similar programme is being carried out in the huge city of Chennai by the Blue Cross.[86] These centres are financially supported by Hindus living locally but also by people, Hindu or non-Hindu, from all over the world.

One way in which Hindus practice cow care is by supporting gaushalas, which are sanctuaries for cows. Most of the cows in gaushalas have been set loose in the streets by farmers, or they may have been victims of road accidents or have eaten rubbish such as plastic bags lying in the road. It is estimated that India has about 5,000 stray cattle.[87] According to a 2014 reply in the Parliament, India has about 3,030 gaushalas.[88]

Because most Indian states forbid cow slaughter, poor farmers cannot afford to keep their worn-out animals and feel it is kinder to let them roam on their own rather than sell them to a trader who may transport them hundreds of miles to states like Kerala or West Bengal, where cow slaughter is allowed.

India has officially banned single-use plastics from July 2022. With poor quality rubbish collection in many areas, plastic bottles and shopping bags tend to get thrown on the streets and it is here that those wandering cows may ingest them. This causes blockages in their digestive system and extreme pain. Often such

cows are taken to gaushalas or veterinary centres. Occasionally operations may be able to save them but often the damage is fatal. The cows are not allowed to be killed, so they can only be treated with medication to ease their dying.

Gaushalas may be financially supported by philanthropists or by small donations or even by governments at the state level. For the last few years India's national government has set aside considerable funds to support them.[89]

One veterinary surgeon, working in an Indian city, told me how she was called by an elderly Hindu couple to see to a cow which had been lying down unable to stand for three weeks on the pavement outside their home. Throughout this time the couple had provided the cow with water and fodder, but they were starting to realise that this unfortunate animal would never walk again. They allowed the cow to be removed to the veterinary centre and continued to turn up every day to feed it. The vets did what they could for the cow, but they knew she was doomed. They also knew that the couple would never give permission for her to be put out of her misery, so they quietly euthanised her when the couple were not present.[90]

So, there can be a conflict between caring for animals in the best interests of their welfare, the dharma of a veterinary surgeon perhaps, and fulfilling one's perceived religious duty.

One contemporary example of a Hindu living a life of service to animals is that of Chinny Krishna. As a schoolboy he was expelled from his school for refusing to dissect a frog in his biology class, as to him biology meant the study of life and he felt it wrong to study life by killing something. Many years later Chinny's engineering company developed computer programmes to replace dissection in schools. He went on to play vital roles in the Animal Welfare Board of India, the Blue Cross and in the Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals (CPCSEA).[91]

There is a Hindu sect called the Bishnois, who exhibit exceptional care for animals. Their founder Guru Jambheshwar (also known as Guru Jambhoji) (1451–1536) taught his followers to protect animals, trees and their local environment. There are estimates of between 600,00 and 1 million Bishnois, mostly based in north-western India in the state of Rajasthan.

In 1730, Maharaja Abhay Singh of Jodhpur decided to build a new wooden palace. He sent his men to cut down the Khejri trees from the Khejari village to build his palace. As Bishnois believe in protecting trees, Amrita Devi Bishnoi and three of her daughters hugged the first tree and stood in protest. The soldiers beheaded all four of them and went on to kill over 350 other villagers. The story goes that when the Maharaja heard this he was upset, apologised to the local people and promised to leave their trees undisturbed.[92]

Bishnois take practical action to protect local wildlife, run animal sanctuaries and clinics, feed migratory birds and many join the local wildlife service in order to work for something they believe in.

Swami Vishudhananda, head priest at a Bishnoi temple in Rajasthan, explains:

> We believe in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam or 'the world is one family.' As God makes all life, animals and plants are also part of this family. Hence, we must

> take care of them. We must also keep our needs within limits to check the wanton destruction of nature. To stay happy and healthy, we must spend more time in natural settings.[93]

A short piece of film about the Bishnois can be seen on a BBC site.[94]

Eating Animals

The Laws of Manu, while allowing the slaughter of animals for sacrifice, are outspoken about meat-eating:

> Meat can never be obtained without injury to living creatures, and injury to sentient beings is detrimental to (the attainment of) heavenly bliss; let him therefore shun (the use of) meat. Having well considered the (disgusting) origin of flesh and the (cruelty of) fettering and slaying corporeal beings, let him entirely abstain from eating flesh.[95]

The text goes further to implicate all those involved in the meat trade, right up to the consumer:

> He who permits (the slaughter of an animal), he who cuts it up, he who kills it, he who buys or sells (meat), he who cooks it, he who serves it up, and he who eats it, (must all be considered as) the slayers (of the animal).[96]

In the Mahabharata, there is a conversation between Yudhisthira (of the dog story) and his grandfather Bhisma about meat-eating. Bhisma declares:

> O monarch, know that the discarding of meat is the highest refuge of religion, of heaven, and of happiness. Abstention from injury is the highest religion. It is, again, the highest penance. It is also the highest truth from which all duty proceeds.[97]

Most of the many gurus and sages of Hinduism have advocated vegetarianism.

Sri Aurobindo said that vegetarian foods bring peace and clarity to the mind. "Vegetarianism is another question altogether; it stands, as you say, on a will not to do harm to the more conscious forms of life for the satisfaction of the belly".[98]

Swami Prabhupada advocated vegetarianism, saying "We do not give the chance to the animals to live properly, rather we are trying to eat the animals… Why should we eat animals?" He advocated keeping cows for their milk, but not eating them.[99] All ISKCON temples and centres serve only vegetarian food.

Sri Chinmoy advocated vegetarianism, but not to spare the animals *per se*, saying:

> If you want to lead a better life, a disciplined life, a pure life, I feel that a vegetarian diet is necessary. Those who eat meat, unconsciously are taking in the

> consciousness of an animal. In addition to their hostile and other undivine qualities, animals have tremendous restlessness… when we eat meat, we take in the restless, destructive consciousness of animals.[100]

So, his view was based more on the concept of physical and psychic purity, rather than concern for animals being slaughtered.

At one time Mahatma Gandhi adopted and continued to advocate a strict vegan diet of "sunbaked fruits and nuts". However, when he later fell ill, he began to drink goat's milk, much as he longed for "a vegetable substitute for milk" (of which we now have many types).

Following his principle of Ahimsa, non-violence, he continued to be a strong advocate of vegetarianism, telling a London audience in 1931: "I have found from my own experience, and the experience of thousands of friends and companions, that they find satisfaction, so far as vegetarianism is concerned, from the moral basis they have chosen for sustaining vegetarianism".[101]

Professor Nanditha Krishna explains: "Hinduism is a very liberal religion. It tells you what is the best way to liberate yourself from your karmas, from birth, death and rebirth. Vegetarianism heads the list and is therefore the highest form of living".[102]

With the holy books teaching so much about human one-ness with other creatures, it is safe to say that if Hindus take these books seriously, then they will avoid eating meat. Perhaps because some parents have forced their children to be vegetarian "because that is what we do", many younger urban Hindus have rejected vegetarianism as old-fashioned, and they have taken to savouring meat and frequenting fast-food outlets. The most-ordered dish on a major Indian food delivery platform in 2021 was chicken biryani.[103]

It is ironic that while this is occurring in India, at the same time in the western urban world there is a big growth in veganism, more interest in reducing meat consumption and much wider availability of vegetarian and vegan products in supermarkets and restaurants.

Other Hindus are promoting the vegetarian diet for both traditional reasons and teachings but also in view of today's concerns about climate change, pollution of the earth and loss of biodiversity. The Hindu Declaration on Climate Change, published prior to the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015, made it clear that dietary change is an important part of the climate debate, saying:

> Adopting a plant-based diet is one of the single most powerful acts that a person can take in reducing environmental impact. In doing all of this, we help maintain the ecological and cosmic order, an order that allows life and existence to flourish.[104]

Slaughter

Slaughter, especially of cows, is a controversial topic in India. So, it is perhaps surprising to discover that, according to a 2016 United States Department of

Agriculture review, India has rapidly grown to become the world's largest beef exporter, accounting for 20% of the world's beef trade.[105]

This trade is not based on exports of beef from cows, but from the slaughter of water buffaloes, many of whom will have been part of the dairy industry.

According to a 2018 article in the *Indian Express*, India has 73 buffalo abattoirs/meat processing plants approved by the Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) under the Union Commerce Ministry.[106] The animals are slaughtered by the halal, non-stun method. There are said to be also many smaller illegal slaughtering places.

Although Hindus may be involved in ownership of slaughterhouses, the actual slaughtering is generally performed by Muslims.[107]

Cow slaughter is banned in most Indian states. It is true to say that to the non-Hindu outsider it may seem an anomaly that buffaloes, so similar to cattle in physiology, can be reared by Hindu farmers and slaughtered, sometimes in abattoirs owned by Hindus, but cows may not be slaughtered. Perhaps it is also anomalous that a country identified with vegetarianism reaps a healthy income from slaughtering animals and exporting their meat.

India also has a huge leather industry, adding up to 13% of the world's total production of skins, with around 10% of the world's footwear production also from India.[108] The leather is usually from buffaloes, goats or from cows who have died of natural causes.

Vivisection

India's first national animal welfare law, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1960), makes cruelty to animals a criminal offence, though exceptions are made for the treatment of animals used for food and animals used in scientific experiments. The 1960 law also created the Animal Welfare Board of India to ensure the anti-cruelty provisions were enforced and to promote the cause of animal welfare.[109]

The Breeding of and Experiments on Animals (Control and Supervision) Rules, 1998, set general requirements for breeding and using animals for research. A 2013 amendment bans the use of live animal experiments in medical education.[110] In 2014, India became the first country in Asia to ban all testing of cosmetics on animals and the import of cosmetics tested on animals.[111]

As the Animal Protection Index points out, the 1998 Breeding of and Experiments on Animals (Control and Supervision) Rules mandate that any establishment carrying out experimentation has to be registered and apply for permission to the Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals or Institutional Animal Ethics Committees. This Committee (CPCSEA) oversees the use of animals for scientific research and is in charge of taking all measures to ensure that animals are not subjected to unnecessary pain or suffering before, during or after the scientific experiment performed on them.[112]

In 2001 a letter published in the respected medical journal *The Lancet* highlighted the poor animal welfare standards in most Indian laboratories at the time, saying: "Although a few private laboratories and government organisations

maintain their animal houses well, fewer than a dozen of the roughly 5000 laboratories in the country have been certified to conform to good laboratory practices requirements".[113]

An investigation into India's laboratories in 2003 revealed appalling conditions for the animals.[114]

We hope sincerely that there has been serious reform since these revelations.

Professor Nanditha Krishna takes a thoughtful view:

> Without animal experimentation, we could not have eliminated polio or coped with Covid-19. However, most experiments using animals are useless or repetitive. Animal experimentation at the student level is unnecessary and for items like beauty products, etc., should be banned. If they are required for human health purposes, they should be done with great compassion towards the animals. Further, random testing on animals is totally unnecessary and neurological tests even more so. When there are alternatives like the use of human cells, etc., we don't need animal experiments.[115]

Teaching and Practice

Because of so much teaching on concern for animals in Hinduism's holy books, it is not surprising that India has a formal animal welfare body. The Animal Welfare Board of India is a statutory advisory body on Animal Welfare Laws and promotes animal welfare in the country. Established in 1962, it was started under the stewardship of the late Rukmini Devi Arundale, a well-known humanitarian and animal welfarist.

The Board aims to ensure that animal welfare laws in the country are followed and provides grants to animal welfare organisations. It also advises the Government of India on animal welfare issues and the need for new legislation. The Board consists of 28 Members, some of whom are from animal welfare organisations.[116] The Board's overarching aim is: "To prevent the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering on animals".[117]

In 2018 the Animal Welfare Board was moved from being under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to now falling under the responsibility of the Ministry for Agriculture.[118]

Although Indian law has not so far officially recognised that animals are sentient beings, it is perhaps implicit. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960 provides a partial recognition of sentience as the purpose of this Act is to 'prevent the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering' to animals.[119] The Act therefore recognises the capacity of animals to suffer. However, the problem with such wording is: How do you interpret "*Unnecessary* suffering"?

They say there is a 15 million strong Hindu diaspora. Around the world, people of Hindu origin or faith could be divided into those who have dropped many of their former religious habits, while others will keep a small shrine in their homes, perform daily puja (worship) and avoid eating meat. Some may belong to associations of Hindus in those countries such as the American Hindu Foundation.[120]

Conclusion

All the sacred books of Hinduism show respect for animals, even when they also require animal sacrifice. Some identify deities with animals. The Upanishads see the one Brahman in all beings. The thread of ahimsa, non-violence, runs through much of the history of Hinduism and has been beautifully expressed by Mahatma Gandhi in fairly recent times.

Visitors to India may see skinny cows wandering the streets or working animals like camels and horses with harness-inflicted injuries. They may be scared of the many dogs living lone lives on the streets. They may feel that a country where the vast majority of people are Hindu should be doing better by its animals.

But you can't ignore poverty and there is no doubt that people struggling to cope with poverty and feed their families, may have little time or energy to devote to animal care.

The positive thing is that there are animal groups in all major urban centres in India. Some will promote animal rights and vegan or vegetarian diets, others run sanctuaries for abandoned or abused animals, the more vehement may campaign to close butchers' shops.

It is important that these groups do not exclude members because of their faith or lack of caste. It would be a shame if that were to happen. Christians and Muslims should feel welcome in these animal groups. As this book shows, their faiths too call for concern for animals. It is also important that animal groups do not identify with any particular political party. Of course, they must lobby politicians and local and national governments on behalf of the animals and call for better laws. But if they identify with one political party, then those who do not support that party will feel excluded. So, they may be "political", but it is best not to be "party political", no matter what their personal voting intentions may be.

There is undoubtedly a conflict between the genuine Hindu belief in preserving animal life (especially the life of the cow) and the welfare or veterinary view that when an animal is facing extreme, incurable injury or disease or is in terminal and miserable decline, the kindest thing to do is to euthanise the creature to end its suffering.

One can only hope that respectful dialogue and progressive legislation will help to resolve this conflict.

It is hard to see how some practices like factory farming of chickens and cows can be supported in India. It seems almost blasphemous for Hindu temples to chain their elephants and train them to perform "tricks", such as bowing to the faithful.

As Professor Nanditha Krishna sadly reflects: "I think materialism has come with globalization and, seeing the very attractive lifestyles of the West, has made modern Hindus put aside compassion and become materialistic and greedy".[121]

Could India's Hindus be awaiting the arrival of a new Gandhi, who sees the divine in all beings and who will once again lead the Hindu faith and its millions of adherents to a more compassionate, non-violent future?

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5 Buddhism

Teaching and Practice regarding Humanity's Relationship with Animals

Introduction

Many have argued that Buddhism is not a religion at all as it does not call for belief in a God. That is true, but Buddhism absolutely fills the space in many people's spiritual lives that the theistic religions inhabit. It is sometimes described as a philosophy, a code of ethics or, simply, a way of life.

A 2020 review estimated there to be 535 million Buddhists worldwide – between 8% and 10% of the world's population.[1]

The founder of historical Buddhism is Siddhartha Gautama (c. 563–483 BCE), a prince from what is now Nepal, who became deeply disturbed on discovering the depth and spread of suffering in the world. One relevant story of the young Prince Gautama's growing realisation of the reality of suffering describes how he went into the countryside and came upon some recently ploughed land. He saw all the little creatures, the worms and the insects killed by the plough, saw the hard life of the ploughmen and the exhaustion of the oxen pulling the plough. The scriptures say that he dismounted from his horse, "and walked gently and slowly over the ground, overcome with grief. He reflected on the generation and the passing of all living things, and in his distress, he said to himself: 'How pitiful all this!'" This experience led him into deep meditation on the suffering of the world and to his departure from the palace.[2]

This story shows that the Buddha's concern was not just for other humans, but also for all creatures and for the earth itself.

He set out on a spiritual quest to find an answer to suffering and it is believed that after a prolonged meditation under a Bodhi tree (tree of awakening), he found the answer and became the Buddha (the Enlightened One). He is sometimes referred to as the Buddha Shakyamuni, or the sage from the Shakya tribe. Following his enlightenment, he gathered followers and established the Sangha or monastic order, around him. The teachings were originally disseminated in India, but in later centuries they spread more widely to southeast Asia and then to China, Japan, and Korea, and northwards to Tibet and elsewhere in the Himalayas.

Did this particular fig tree, the Bodhi tree, play a role in his enlightenment? The respected writer Amitav Ghosh says that many Buddhists regard the enlightenment as being a "trans-species encounter" and that "the Buddha himself

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believed the tree to be essential to his attaining Enlightenment, which is why millions of Buddhists consider the Bodhi tree sacred to this day".[3]

The Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha, written in the 1st century, say that when Siddhartha Gautama went into a state of deep meditation: "At that moment the birds uttered no sound, and, as if in trance, they sat with their bodies all relaxed". At that time too, "All living beings rejoiced and sensed that things went well".[4] So, we see that nature and all creatures seem to have sensed that something incredible was happening – a true trans-species event.

Although the Buddha has a 6th to 5th century BCE lifetime, a series of stories about his previous lifetimes also grew up, commonly known as the Jataka Tales. Many of these stories also contain what one might term "trans-species encounters". One of these tales, said to have been told by the Buddha to his personal attendant Ananda, describes how he, then living as Prince Mahasattva, and his two brothers came across a tigress in a bamboo forest. She was weak and starving and had five cubs with her. They realised she was too weak to hunt for food for herself and her cubs. Mahasattva decided to feed her with his own body, which would be "a sublime deed". He declared, "for the weal of the world I wish to win enlightenment, incomparably wonderful. From deep compassion I now give away my body, so hard to quit, unshaken in my mind". He lay down in front of the tigress, cut his throat with a bamboo shard and allowed himself to be eaten by her.[5]

This story is important as it emphasises the quality most associated with Buddhism, compassion or loving kindness, not just for other humans, but for all sentient beings.

Some of the Jataka Tales describe the Buddha as an animal in a particular past lifetime. During each of these lifetimes, whether human or animal, he perfected an important virtue, such as loving kindness or patience. Finally, he mastered the ten paramis (perfections or moral virtues), which laid the foundation for his ultimate awakening under the Bodhi tree.

The paramis are the moral virtues of giving, morality, renunciation, discerning wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving kindness and equanimity. Having mastered these, Siddhartha was ready for his complete enlightenment and realisation of Buddhahood.

Holy Books and Schools

There are different "schools" of Buddhism, the main ones being the Mahayana (Great Vehicle), found mostly in China, Tibet, Japan and Vietnam, and the Theravada (The Way of the Elders) which prevails in Sri Lanka and southeast Asia. As with the other faiths described in this book, there are many sub-divisions within the schools. I shall not dwell on these, unless there is a specific reason to mention something relevant to attitudes or practices involving animals.

The oldest form of Buddhism appears to be the Theravada school. From this school, some of the leading Buddhist forms of practice popular in the West have sprung, such as the Vipassana tradition and the Thai Forest Tradition.

The oldest Buddhist written teachings are contained in the Pali canon (which was committed to writing in the 1st c. BCE), also called Tipitaka ("Triple Basket"),

the teachings of the historical Buddha, as remembered by his monks. Pali is a Middle Indian literary language closely related to the vernaculars of the Buddha's time. The Pali canon contains the popular Dhammapada, an anthology of 423 verses, assembled by the Buddha's followers soon after his death. Dhamma can mean law, discipline, justice, virtue, truth – that which holds things together. Pada means way, path, step, foot. So, The Dhammapada is the path of virtue, or the way of truth.

In one tale the Buddha's teaching is spread by the holy Lord Avolakita, who transforms himself into a cuckoo, a Great Bird, in order to communicate with the other birds, who come to him, one by one. Talking to the parrot, Great Bird, who has meditated for a year, speaks of "this ocean of samsara" (cycle of rebirth) where he has found nothing substantial: "Down to the very last, I saw the generations die, they killed for food and drink – how pitiful!" Gradually the birds spread the teaching throughout the community of birds.[6]

One aspect which differs between the two main schools is that a Theravadan Buddhist emphasises the attainment of arhantship, the attainment of nirvana and release from the cycle of rebirth in this very life itself. Choosing a monastic life is very common within the Theravadan tradition.

A Mahayana Buddhist will also follow the teaching with a huge emphasis on the cultivation of compassion (karuna), so much so that one may strive to become a bodhisattva, one who foregoes nirvana in order to be reborn and help others to achieve enlightenment.

The Teaching

The existence of the soul or self, which is accepted in the other major faiths, is not accepted within Buddhism. But, as the Dalai Lama has pointed out, even the Buddha himself sometimes referred to our burden of the body/mind, but at other times "the Buddha refutes any objective existence at all".[7]

Anatta or an-atman is the concept of non-self and is in contrast to the Hindu concept of Atman, the permanent soul or self which reincarnates. It is linked to the concept of anicca, impermanence – everything is constantly changing.

This impermanence is shared by every other being or part of the world, from a tiger to a tortoise to a mountain or a river or a drop of water or a blade of grass. Everything changes, all the time. Therefore, there is no permanent self. By recognising our impermanence, we can, through meditation and the cultivation of wisdom and an ethical life, finally reach the state of ultimate peace or nirvana. Meanwhile we are all caught up in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, samsara.

This impermanence may seem hard to reconcile with the idea of rebirth. If there is no permanent self, then what is reborn? One distinguished modern Buddhist scholar, Roger Jackson (author of *Rebirth: A Guide to Mind, Karma, and Cosmos in the Buddhist World*, Shambala Publications, 2022) explains it thus:

> If you light a torch at sundown and then every hour, from that torch, you light another torch, and an hour later, you light another torch from that, and

> at the end of 12 hours, there is a final torch, the question arises: Is the flame of that final torch the same as or different from the flame of the original torch at sundown? There's not exactly an answer to that. There are some ways in which it is the same and some ways in which it's different. So, there is continuity without stasis, I suppose, would be a way of putting it.[8]

American Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield tells a good story about this issue: "The more solidly we grasp our identity, the more solid our problems become. Once I asked a delightful old Sri Lankan meditation master to teach me the essence of Buddhism. He just laughed and said three times, 'No self, no problem'".[9]

To simplify the teaching, Buddhists have many lists of virtues to follow in daily life. Buddhist monks have many more rules to adhere to than lay people.

The Buddha's teaching is summed up in the four Noble Truths:

1. Suffering (dukkha) is real and can be seen everywhere. We all suffer.
2. There are causes of suffering, mainly our own selfishness and our attachments.
3. These causes can be transformed and our suffering terminated.
4. The way to transform and terminate the causes of suffering is through cultivating the right path.

The last Truth is divided into a system called the Noble Eightfold Path: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

The Five Precepts are the basic rules by which all Buddhists should live, both lay people and monks. The precepts are:

Refrain from taking life. Not killing any living being.

Refrain from taking what is not given. Not stealing from anyone.

Refrain from sexual misconduct

Refrain from wrong speech.

Refrain from intoxicants that cloud the mind.

Buddhism recognises five Cardinal Virtues: Faith, Vigour, Mindfulness, Concentration and Wisdom. Under Vigour the teaching says: "However numerous sentient beings are, I vow to save them", presumably meaning to help them on their path towards enlightenment.[10]

The "vow to save all beings" is something specific to East Asian Mahayana Buddhism.

The monks have many other rules, listed in the Pratimoksha, some of which demonstrate concern for animals. For example, they are not allowed to build a hut if "it involves the destruction of living beings" nor are they allowed "deliberately to deprive an animal of life".[11]

Metta is loving kindness, bringing joy to others. There is a well-known Buddhist prayer, the Karaniya Metta Sutta, part of which reads:

> Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child,
> So with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings;
> Radiating kindness over the entire world.[12]

Part of this prayer is also translated as: "May all beings everywhere be happy. May they be healthy. May they be at peace. May they be free".[13]

Many Buddhists believe that humans have abilities which animals do not have. The Dalai Lama says:

> Generally speaking, human beings are superior to animals. We are equipped with the ability to judge between right and wrong and to think in terms of the future and so on. However, one could also argue that in other respects human beings are inferior to animals. For example, animals may not have the ability to judge between right and wrong in a moral sense, and they might not have the ability to see the long-term consequences of their actions, but within the animal realm there is at least a certain sense of order. If you look at the African savannah, for example, predators prey on other animals only out of necessity when they are hungry. When they are not hungry, you can see them coexisting quite peacefully.[14]

There is a kind of anomaly to overcome in Buddhism. Animals are said to live in a lower realm and, not having human capacity for spiritual learning and practice, it is hard for them to progress to a human incarnation. Buddhist scholar Reiko Ohnuma goes so far as to write

> to be an animal in a Buddhist cosmos is to live a miserable and pathetic existence, to suffer intensely, to lack the intelligence that makes spiritual progress possible, and to die in a state of abject terror, with little hope of ever attaining a higher rebirth (let alone nirvana).[15]

Buddhism generally accepts that there are five realms of existence or destiny: hell, then the animal realm, then ghosts/human spirits, moving on to human beings and then the gods.[16] It is hard for animals to move up to the human state and probably more likely that sinful humans will descend to the animal state.

Although it seems impossible for most animals to break free of their animal state, in some forms of Mahayana Buddhism, animals are seen as capable, like humans, of possessing "Buddha nature", the ability to become an enlightened being.

Human superiority does not mean that animals cannot feel and suffer as humans do, and it is clear that they must be treated with equal respect. In many of the Jataka Tales, it is the animal (usually a bodhisattva in an earlier life) who preaches the Buddhist virtues of compassion for all beings. By putting the teaching into the mouths of animals, there may be a lesson in humility for all humans.

The Dalai Lama explains: "So all beings form a single whole, for we all have in common the same suffering and happiness, and all the parts of this whole should be treated in the same way".[17]

In Mahayana Buddhism, one aims to develop bodhicitta, a mind which aspires to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. The arising of bodhicitta is the first step to becoming a bodhisattva, one who aspires to attain enlightenment as a Buddha in order to help others achieve enlightenment and

nirvana. Bodhisattvas may have attained some levels of realisation or insight, but not yet enlightenment, which marks the attainment of Buddhahood.

The Role of Humanity

Buddhism embraces all beings and the natural world as part of one constantly changing whole. Yet there is no doubt that humans have a special role to play during their earthly existence. Not only can they achieve enlightenment but, by practising wisdom and compassion in their lives, they can relieve the suffering of other sentient beings. So, the purpose of one's life is not to become wealthy or famous but to be of service to all other sentient beings.

Dharma (dhamma) is both the essential nature of reality and also the teachings and practices that enable the realisation of that essential nature.[18] It is the way things are and the way of living that enables one to become enlightened. In Buddhism it has a slightly different meaning to the Hindu meaning which is more associated with the concept of duty.

Karuna or compassion means the intention to relieve the suffering of others. One doesn't just send loving feelings to other beings, who are suffering, be they human or animal, but one "takes on" their suffering. This is a big challenge for ordinary people, but it appears to be a requirement for those who are aspiring to be bodhisattvas.

In the Vajrayana tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, this taking-and-sending practice is called tonglen. Through deep meditation, one vows to awaken for the benefit of all and strive to skilfully develop one's own wisdom and compassion in order to benefit all beings everywhere.[19]

The Tibetan Buddhist monk Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche explains simply that as one strives for bodhicitta, one can "send all one's happiness to all sentient beings and absorb their suffering", in other words, tonglen. He suggests that at the end of a meditation session one can dedicate the merit one may have gained by saying this prayer:

> By this power may all beings,
> Having accumulated strength and wisdom,
> Achieve the two clear states
> That arise from strength and wisdom.[20]

This practice must be really challenging. One takes on the suffering of all sentient beings and then radiates loving kindness out to them all. For most people radiating loving kindness to all may seem feasible, but to take on the world's suffering may seem too great a challenge. Yet that is what the practice requires at its deepest level. One Lama suggests that one can breathe in the suffering as darkness and breathe out lovingkindness as the healing white light.[21]

The Dalai Lama describes tonglen as: "The practice of giving and taking" and it is by means of the visualisation of giving and taking that we practice equalising and exchanging ourselves with others. "The practice of tonglen, giving and taking, encapsulates the practices of loving kindness and compassion: the practice of giving emphasizes the practice of loving kindness, whereas the practice of taking emphasizes the practice of compassion".[22]

The Dalai Lama teaches that by meditating in this way you:

> Train your mind to cultivate the altruistic aspiration to help other sentient beings. When this arises together with the aspiration to attain full enlightenment, then you have realized bodhichitta, that is, the altruistic intention to become fully enlightened for the sake of all sentient beings.[23]

In one of his books, the Dalai Lama writes "The essence of mind training is the cultivation of bodhicitta, the altruistic mind seeking to attain the full enlightenment of a Buddha in order to most effectively benefit all sentient beings".[24]

He goes on to quote the verse written by Shantideva, a revered 8th-century Mahayana monk and teacher:

> For as long as space remains
> As long as sentient beings remain
> May I too remain
> To dispel their misery.[25]

Buddhist teacher Thích Nhất Hạnh says that compassion is an energy that empowers us. "Compassion is very mighty and powerful".[26]

He also declares in the first of his Five Mindfulness Trainings:

> Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.[27]

Buddhist Teachers and Leaders

One of the most extraordinary leaders of Buddhism came from an unexpected place. King Asoka lived in India around 304–233 BCE and was king of the Mauryan Empire. He was known for engaging in bloody battles with neighbouring states. It was after one of these massacres, at the battle of Kalinga, that he seems to have had a sudden conversion to Buddhist teachings. He changed his way of life, became a peace-loving person and tried to spread Buddhist teaching, the Dhamma, far and wide.

We only know most of this as he had mighty pillars erected throughout his empire and beyond. Fragments of these pillars have been found as far away as in modern Afghanistan and scholars have been able to translate them. They tell an amazing story.

Here are some examples:

> Here (in my domain) no living beings are to be slaughtered or offered in sacrifice…Twenty-six years after my coronation various animals were declared

> to be protected -- parrots, mainas, ruddy geese, wild ducks, bats, queen ants, terrapins, boneless fish, fish, tortoises, porcupines, squirrels, deer, bulls, wild asses, wild pigeons, domestic pigeons and all four-footed creatures that are neither useful nor edible. Those nanny goats, ewes and sows which are with young or giving milk to their young are protected, and so are young ones less than six months old. Cocks are not to be caponized (castrated), husks hiding living beings are not to be burnt and forests are not to be burnt either without reason or to kill creatures. One animal is not to be fed to another.[28]

So, animal sacrifice is banned, many wild creatures are protected from killing and protection is given to both mother and young offspring of farmed animals. (This is much more than such animals receive today throughout the world!) Was he the first religious leader to give protection to fishes? If the teaching on not feeding one animal to another had been followed in the 20th century, we might have been spared the horrors of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), so-called mad cow disease.

All this is set within the context of Buddhist teachings: "There is no gift like the gift of the Dhamma…And it consists of this: proper behaviour towards servants and employees, respect for mother and father, generosity to friends, companions, relations, Brahmans and ascetics, and not killing living beings".[29] Yet although Asoka clearly followed the teachings of the Buddha, he did not see that as precluding respect for the Brahmans, the priests of Hinduism.

Asoka also set up medical centres for both humans and animals and

> Along roads I have had banyan trees planted so that they can give shade to animals and men…I have had wells dug, rest-houses built, and in various places, I have had watering-places made for the use of animals and men.[30]

Asoka also declared that although thousands of animals used to be killed every day in his royal kitchens, now only three are to be killed, "And in time not even these three creatures will be killed".[31]

The Dalai Lamas are believed by Tibetan Buddhists to be manifestations of Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and the patron saint of Tibet. Bodhisattvas have vowed to forego the attainment of nirvana in order to be reborn in the world to help all living beings to attain enlightenment.

The Dalai Lama describes himself as follows: "I'm a practitioner of the Buddhadharma, a follower of the Nalanda tradition, and our main practice is to focus on the welfare of all sentient beings—bodhichitta", His Holiness said.

> We pray for the benefit of all sentient beings… there are limitless insects, birds, and animals, but there's little we can do to teach them. In practical terms the beings we can help are human beings because we have language and we can communicate and share our experiences.[32]

The Dalai Lama says that it is helpful to recite the following verses for generating a mind ready for enlightenment:

> With a wish to free all beings
> I shall always go for refuge
> to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha
> until I reach full enlightenment.
> Enthused by wisdom and compassion,
> today in the Buddha's presence
> I generate the Mind for Full Awakening
> for the benefit of all sentient beings.
> As long as space endures,
> as long as sentient beings remain,
> until then, may I too remain
> and dispel the miseries of the world.[33]

Matthieu Ricard is a modern Buddhist monk originally from France but attached to the Shechen Tennyi Dargyeling Monastery in Nepal. He is a vegan and a passionate advocate for animals. In his brilliant book, "A Plea for the Animals", he concludes: "Kindness, altruistic love and compassion are qualities that do not harmonize well with bias…Applying our compassion only to certain beings, human beings in this case, makes it a lesser and a poorer thing". He goes on to declare that the world "cannot pretend to uphold decent and coherent moral values and at the same time exclude from the ethical field the majority of the sentient beings who populate the earth".[34]

Thích Nhất Hạnh (1926–2022) has been a hugely influential icon of Buddhism in the western world. His early years in Vietnam were devoted to his monastic life but also to engaging with communities. In 1966 he established the Order of Interbeing, based on the traditional Buddhist bodhisattva precepts. Because of his travel to the US and his call for peace, he was exiled from his homeland for 39 years. Finally, he settled in France and his "Plum Village" in the south of the country attracts thousands of visitors every year. In the last 20 years over 100,000 people have made a commitment to follow Thích Nhất Hạnh's modernised code of universal global ethics in their daily life, known as "The Five Mindfulness Trainings". Much of his teaching is relevant to how we relate to animals.

In his beautiful book on peace, he tells us that global and personal peace are "based on respect for life, the spirit of reverence for life. Not only do we have to respect the lives of human beings, but we have to respect the lives of animals, vegetables and minerals".[35]

Bhikkhu Bodhi is a Theravada bhikkhu (monk) and President of the Buddhist Association of America. He has also founded Buddhist Global Relief, an aid and educational organisation. He strongly urges people to have empathy with all humanity and with all sentient beings.

Speaking on Vesak Day, (which marks the birth, enlightenment, and the ultimate passing away of the Buddha) in 2021, he encouraged humans to "be a

light in the darkness" by "living a life of loving kindness and compassion for all sentient beings".[36]

Buddhist environmentalist Paul Hawken takes a positive attitude: "Reverence is the process of awakening to being alive. It's the realisation that life is amazing, and every living being is our sibling".[37]

Farming Methods

With around 93% of Thailand's population claiming to be Buddhist, in the Theravada tradition, it is interesting to see if Buddhist teaching has affected how animals are farmed there.

Farming of meat chickens is both a small business and a big business in Thailand. In 2020, the production volume of chicken meat in Thailand amounted to around 1.8 million tons, slightly increasing from the previous year.[38] This equates to over 315 million actual broiler (meat) chickens raised.[39]

In 2021, Thailand exported 900,000 tonnes of chicken products, bringing in 100 billion baht (nearly $3,000,000,000) into the country.[40] This is an important business without a doubt.

Interestingly, in 2010, the RSPCA said that Thai poultry had higher welfare living conditions than chickens reared in the UK. For example, they had more space – around 13 chickens per square metre compared with 20 per square metre in basic UK production – and were allowed to grow for longer, 42 days, compared to as little as 35 days in the UK. They were also allowed more rest; six hours of continuous darkness rather than the four they have in the UK. The birds are also of a genotype that would be marketed in the UK as "slower growing".[41]

It is good to hear of a company called Hilltribe Organics, established in 2013, where people living in the remote hill country of Thailand have been encouraged to rear organic, free-range hens and make money from selling their eggs. Most of the hen's feed is also grown by local farmers.[42] The award-winning project appears to be achieving its purpose.[43]

Some of the world's big agribusiness companies now operate in Thailand. Cargill Meats Thailand produces and exports ready-to-eat chicken to more than 19 countries around the world and is one of the largest exporters of cooked chicken products in Thailand. It employs more than 14,000 people across two locations in Korat and Sarabur.[44]

In Thailand, Cargill Meats have supply chain feed mills, hatcheries, farms and processing plants as well as a poultry health centre, R&D centre and a central food safety lab. In late 2016, they announced a $50 million expansion of their operations to meet growing demand. More recently, they have introduced Sun Valley, a premium chicken consumer brand in Thailand.[45]

Although 90% of chicken farmers in Thailand are the small-scale type, 70% of actual chicken production is from the integrated commercial farms – in other words, intensive factory farms. There are also Thai-owned companies involved in large-scale chicken production, such as Charoen Pokphand Foods. One business website proclaims: "The Thai broiler industry is aggressively industrialising and

moving towards more vertical integration … It is now commonplace for medium- to large-scale companies to own feed mills". In 2018, the mills produced some 8 million tonnes of feed for broilers and laying hens, comprising 4.8 million tonnes of maize and 2.2 million tonnes of soybeans.[46]

In 2021, Prasit Boondoungprasert, Chief Executive Officer of Charoen Pokphand Foods Public Company Limited (CPF) was reported in the Bangkok Post as saying:

> We need to take everything into account, from the places animals live and their well-being to manufacturing safety and standards, as well as sustainability, energy consumption, and environmental impacts…we need technology that reduces human contact with animals, to reduce possible spread of diseases.[47]

That does sound as though the company has taken some consideration for the welfare of the animals they farm. Reducing human contact with the animals might or might not be a welfare improvement and of course it might minimise disease transfer. Could CCTV really compensate for a human inspecting the 20,000 chickens in each shed every day to ensure that none are in pain or dying?

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) says there is a separate chicken market in Thailand, with over 50% of households keeping small flocks of Thai Indigenous Chickens (TICs). Overall, around 112 million TICs were raised in 2021. They are usually kept free range and their meat and eggs are consumed by the family or sold locally. Apparently, farmers are often very attached to their chickens and treat them almost as people elsewhere might treat their companion animals.[48]

But there is another side to the raising of these colourful Thai Indigenous Chickens: Cockfighting (see the below section on Hunting and Sport).

As with chickens, so with pigs. Many rural people in Thailand used to keep a few indigenous native pigs for home or local consumption. But since the 1960s when the first commercial pig breeds were imported from the United Kingdom and the United States, pig breeding has become intensive and commercialised.

Intensive, often barren living conditions for pigs are completely unsuited to their natural way of life, which is to live in family groups and spend most of their daylight hours exploring and finding their own food in the earth. A BASF film from 2014 shows young pigs being reared on metal flooring.[49]

It is good to hear that in 2019 Charoen Pokphand Foods announced switching to group housing for gestating sows in its pig farms, driven by the global tendency to move away from gestation crates.[50] Might Buddhist teaching also have been a factor in this decision?

Another country with a large Buddhist population is Japan, with most being followers of the Mahayana tradition in one form or other. Buddhism only reached Japan in the 6th century CE, firstly from Korea and then from China. In Japan, Buddhism and its predecessor Shinto seem to exist side by side and even sometimes share temple space! There are many schools of Buddhism in Japan, the

best-known one being Zen, but many others have huge followings such as Shin Buddhism – the largest Buddhist sect in Japan – which teaches the practice and realisation of the "heart of great compassion". New Buddhist schools, usually based on the teachings of one person, are still arising in the modern era. For example, Nichiren Buddhism dates from the 13th century but one of its offshoots is the 20th-century school of Soka Gakkai which now has 12 million followers globally. Both believe in instant enlightenment and in the value of chanting. Both demonstrate the values of altruism and seeking peace in the world.[51]

So, it is interesting to see if Buddhist teachings on compassion to animals have influenced farming methods in Japan. Sadly, this seems, as yet, not to be the case.

Although the traditional Japanese diet was based on rice, vegetables (including sea-vegetables) and fish, meat became popular after the Second World War and the seven-year American occupation. But the Americans did not bring small-scale or organic-type farming with them; they brought their intensive practices.

In 2020, over 743 million broiler chickens were produced in Japan, where poultry is now considered a staple meat product in Japanese food culture.[52] Japan's stocking densities for the chickens are very high and their growth rate speedy, with the birds achieving 3 kg in weight by 50 days. Although Europe and even the US are moving towards slightly higher welfare standards for their chickens, so far this has not happened in Japan.[53]

Pig farming is also common, with around 16 million pigs being slaughtered in 2021.[54] The usual intensive methods are common, with sows kept in gestation crates, piglets removed from their mothers at 22 days old, when their natural weaning time would be at several months! In 2021 the animal rights organisation PETA carried out a filmed investigation at Nippon Ham, Japan's leading pork producer. Apart from some workers inflicting unnecessary cruelty on some pigs, the situation of all the pigs was as bad as it always is in factory farms worldwide.[55] Japan also imports breeding pigs from both the European Union and the United States.

A 2021 study into the use of antimicrobials on Japanese pig farms found that "a large proportion of antimicrobials are used for prophylactic and metaphylactic purposes", which means to prevent disease rather than for treating illness.[56]

Japan has had an Act on the promotion of Organic Agriculture since 2006 and a Japanese Agricultural Standard for Organic Livestock since 2018.[57] This is encouraging but, sadly, the area of land devoted to organic farming is still less than 0.5%.[58]

One cannot speak of agriculture in Japan without mentioning Masunobu Fukuoka (1913–2008) a Japanese farmer and philosopher, who pioneered a school of farming called 'natural farming' which incorporates a lack of trust in chemical farming. Fukuoka became well known within the global sustainable farming movement, with his book "The One-Straw Revolution" selling millions of copies in various languages. The book, first published in 1978 in the US, became such a phenomenon that in June 2009, The New York Review of Books republished the English language translation to celebrate its 30th anniversary.[59]

The Permaculture Research Institute writes of the Buddhist influences which inspired him:

> Fukuoka took nature as the inspiration for his spirituality, philosophy, and practice. Nonetheless, one of the most striking features of Fukuoka's texts is the manner in which they incorporate many Buddhist elements, particularly those derived from the Taoist-inspired Zen school. With this Zen Buddhist influence, Fukuoka beautifully articulates natural farming as a form of spiritual practice that ultimately overcomes the sense of alienation, dissatisfaction and disenchantment that are characteristic of modern life.[60]

Sometimes Fukuoka referred to his way of farming as Mahayana farming, comparing it with modern scientific (chemical) farming:

> Philosophically, however, scientific farming cannot be superior to Mahāyāna natural farming because, while scientific farming is the sum of knowledge and forces extracted from nature by the human intellect, this still amounts to finite human knowledge. No matter how one totals it up, human knowledge is but a tiny, closely circumscribed fraction of the infinitude of the natural world. In contrast to the vast, boundless, perfect knowledge and power of nature, the finite knowledge of man is always limited to small pockets of time and space. Inherently imperfect as it is, human knowledge can never be collected together to form perfect knowledge.[61]

Neither organic nor "natural" farming are prevalent in Japan, although there are many farmers rearing native chickens, who are allowed to grow to 75 days old before slaughter. In 2020, a new label for humanely, sustainably produced chicken and eggs was promised by the Japanese government.[62]

Most chicken farming for meat appears to follow the western industrial model, with thousands of fast-growing birds packed into sheds, with little concern for their needs or welfare. In 2020 the Animal Rights Center in Japan filmed one such farm and placed its film on YouTube. It does not make for pleasant viewing.[63]

Despite the global shift towards abolishing battery cages, 94% of poultry farmers in Japan continue to use them to house hens, according to a 2019 report by the International Egg Commission, cited in the Japan Times. The Japanese government has opposed moves to adopting more humane systems.[64]

Not only does Japan produce its own intensively reared chicken, but since a 2021 Trade Agreement with the UK, British intensive chicken producers can also export their products to Japan! Dr Richard Irvine, UK Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, is quoted as saying: "This is another positive step towards strengthening the UK's trade relationship with Japan, in addition to the existing agreements which enable export of pork, beef and lamb from the UK".[65]

In Japan, the Act on Welfare and Management of Animals (1973) was amended in 2014. It states in the fundamental principle of the Act that 'no person shall destroy, injure or inflict cruelty on animals' as they are living beings. However,

although farm animals are included in this law, there are no specific laws for the different species of farmed animals.[66]

It does seem that Buddhist teaching has yet to have much influence on big farming business in Japan.

Wildlife and Biodiversity

Thailand used to be largely forested. But a combination of the teak logging trade and agricultural expansion has seen a huge amount of forest destroyed over the last century. The FAO reports that Thailand's forest cover was stripped back to a mere 28% of its former size before logging was banned in 1989. Because of this, the elephants of Thailand have lost much of their territory. Today only 3,000–4,000 elephants remain in the country, with around half living in the wild and the other half domesticated. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies Asian elephants as endangered.[67]

Yet Thai Buddhists regard the elephant as sacred as it is said that the day before his birth, the Buddha's mother had a dream where a white elephant came to her and gave her a lotus flower. The elephant is the national symbol of Thailand too.

With elephants no longer allowed to be used for logging, they have become victims of the tourist trade, with thousands of people willing to pay money for elephant rides, trekking and shows. When not working, many of these elephants are kept chained.

The captive elephants are often replaced by captured wild elephants who may have to undergo a cruel training period, called Phajaan, or elephant crushing. Young elephants are taken from their mothers and confined to a small space, then "trained" with bullhooks and bamboo sticks spiked with nails.[68]

Animal welfare and environmental campaigners ask tourists not to ride elephants and instead to visit one of the genuine elephant sanctuaries, where rides are not allowed, such as Elephant Nature Park, founded by Sangdeaun Lek Chailert. She also looks after hundreds of street dogs, and sees that they are neutered, vaccinated and given veterinary care.[69] Other sanctuaries include Phang Nga Elephant Park and the Thai Elephant Conservation Centre (TECC) near Chiang Mai.

In spite of the dire situation of the unfortunate elephants in the tourist trade, it is good to see many efforts to help distressed animals by Thai people, such as the Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand (WFFT), founded in 2001, The Bird Conservation Society of Thailand, founded in 1953 and The Soi Dog Foundation started in Phuket in 2003 to help the stray dogs.[70] WFFT is a partner in a regional project with EIA and Education for Nature Vietnam. The WFFT has documented the 54 facilities across Thailand that between them house over 1900 tigers. When Phuket Zoo closed in 2022 the organisation stepped in to rehouse their 11 tigers.[71]

In 2022 the BBC showed a series of films made at an elephant hospital in MaeYao National Reserve in Lampang. Founded in 1993, the hospital treats over 100 elephants a year. The films show Thai vets and assistants treating the sick elephants with real care and sensitivity.[72]

In spite of these positive examples of elephant care, Thailand has had a large trade in elephant ivory tusks, with most being traded to China. However, the

2015 Elephant Ivory Tusks Act makes trading in tusks from wild elephants illegal. Tusks from captive elephants can still be traded.[73]

With the growing global popularity of coconut milk, it is reported that, in Thailand, monkeys, in this case pig-tailed macaques, are trained to climb trees to get the coconuts and that when they are not working, they are kept caged or chained in poor conditions. Some major retailers of coconut milk have withdrawn their products after protests from consumers.[74]

One interesting development in Thailand has been the growth of Buddhist "ecology monks", who teach farmers ecological methods and work to save the forest. Sometimes their work may take them into conflict with the authorities or with exploitative businesses. They appeal to the people through Buddhist teachings on ending suffering and through rituals such as "ordaining" trees.[75] Buddhist writer Christopher Ives points out that "This practice, originating in the 1980s, immediately caused backlash from developers and government officials whose profits, power, and agendas were threatened by the practice".[76]

Japan has a worrying reputation regarding some wild animals. From September to March or April each year, dolphins may be driven into small narrow coves where they are slaughtered for meat or captured for entertainment shows. The "fishermen" go out to sea where they bang on metal poles to herd the disoriented dolphins into the coves. Once enough dolphins are in the cove the exit back to the ocean is sealed off, the youngest dolphins may be captured for sale and then the killing begins. The most notorious of these cove hunts is at Taiji.

Over 500 dolphins were slaughtered in the 2021 hunt, while over 180 were taken from the sea for use in theme parks.[77]

There are activists campaigning within Japan for an end to this practice. Ren Yabuki, Director of the Life Investigation Agency (LIA), said

> We have never seen crueller treatment of dolphins than what LIA volunteers witnessed these past six months. We documented every drive, slaughter and captive selection during the 2021/22 dolphin hunting season. This documentation will be used to help educate and share the truth about what is behind these hunts.[78]

When Ren Yabuki first witnessed the dolphin killing at Taiji, he recalled:

> What I can say is I felt sadness, despair, anger and helplessness as I was unable to stop or do anything but watch at my horror as the events unfolded in front of me. At the end of the day, I was completely exhausted and drained from what I saw at the dolphin hunt.

His Association is campaigning to ban the Taiji dolphin killing.[79]

In 2009 an award-winning documentary was made about the Taiji dolphin killing, called "The Cove". It was a revelation to many Japanese citizens. Sadly, the practice continues.[80]

It is hard to see how this kind of indiscriminate killing of these sentient, intelligent creatures can be compatible with Buddhist teaching. It is encouraging to see Japanese people campaigning to end this dolphin capture and massacre.

It is only fair to note that a similar planned slaughter of dolphins takes place annually in the Faroe Islands, where the vast majority of the islanders belong to the Faroese Evangelical Lutheran Church.[81]

Japan has a history of whaling and has, up to now not wanted any restrictions on this practice. As of 2013 Japan was still permitting whaling annually under the auspices of science. In March 2014, the United Nations International Court of Justice ruled that the whaling taking place in the Antarctic was not for scientific research and that the Japanese government should withdraw existing licences for whaling in the Antarctic and refrain from issuing new ones. The Japanese government has accepted the decision but retains its whaling programme in the North Pacific.[82]

Hunting and Sport

The Dalai Lama refers to hunting, saying: "Sometimes we engage in actions purely out of indulgence – we kill out of a sense of "sport," say, when we go hunting or fishing. So, in a sense, one could argue that human beings have proven to be inferior to animals".[83]

In one of the Jataka Tales, the bodhisattva is a deer who gets trapped in a snare.

> Thinking that he would cut himself free, he pulled, and his skin was cut. He pulled again, and his flesh was cut. He pulled a third time, and his tendon was cut, until the snare penetrated through to the bone.[84]

This graphic description corroborates what many hunters and trappers have found when they locate the creatures they have trapped and who have fought vainly to free themselves. It is not surprising that the Dalai Lama would therefore condemn such "indulgence" on the part of humans.

In Thailand, cockfighting is the national sport. It has links to the farming of Thai Indigenous Chickens as described in the Farming Methods section above. Farmers also involved in supplying cockerels for fighting pay great attention to their genetics. Often birds who lose fights are returned to the farm to be used for breeding more chickens for meat, as they will have larger, stronger, more profitable bodies than non-fighting chickens.

Cockfighting is seen as part of traditional Thai culture, having originated in a very ancient ceremony of 'faun phi', a north-eastern tradition which honours ancestral spirits and encompasses cockfighting in a religious and symbolic context. Today cockfighting may be small-scale and local or national and involve big money. Champion birds may be sold for millions of baht (the Thai currency) and all birds have to be registered and issued with an ID card. A whole industry has risen around it; from the feed supplements and hormones used to plump the birds, to the special wicker baskets they are reared in. Bangkok has the nation's biggest cockfighting arena, holding up to 5,000 spectators. Although gambling is illegal in Thailand, the 100 or so registered cockfighting venues are exempt. Local gambling still occurs even though it is known to be unlawful.[85]

Dhanin Chearavanont, the former chairman of Charoen Pokphand Foods was a huge supporter of cockfighting, sponsoring a major arena and a cockfighting research centre.[86] He is credited with bringing in legislation in 1998 to protect the birds from serious injury or death. In Thailand, the fighting cocks have their natural leg spurs covered so they cannot cause too much damage to each other. In the Philippines, cocks have blades attached to their spurs and usually fight to the death.[87]

Cockfighting seems incompatible with the Buddhist belief in compassion for all sentient beings. It is true that the Thai fighting cocks have their natural weapons covered to prevent inflicting too much pain or injury on their opponent. However, after two or three hours of fighting, both birds will be bruised, cut and exhausted.

The Buddha said that monks and nuns should not watch animal fights because they were considered a vulgar entertainment and because they involved cruelty. For monastics and lay people, participation in blood sports would seem to be against the first Precept which requires that we have 'care, kindness and compassion to all living beings'.[88]

Apparently, cockfighting takes place illegally in Japan. Gambling is illegal also. In April 2022, Director Okuda of the Ministry of the Environment said:

> Cockfighting that is socially accepted as a traditional event may be acceptable if it does not use means or methods that exceed the required limits and cause distress to the animal. Cockfighting for the purpose of entertainment is not justified and likely falls under cruelty.[89]

It is hard to understand why just because an event is "traditional", that it is legal. Cruelty and suffering are the same whatever the purpose or historical roots of the event.

Sacrifice

Sacrificing animals, as was common in the Vedic religion of the Buddha's era, was completely condemned by Buddhist teaching. In some of the Pali suttas (discourses), the Buddha condemns animal sacrifice, pointing out that a better way to perform sacrifice is to support the Buddhist teaching, especially the Five Moral Precepts, which of course include the ban on killing.

One of the Jataka Tales records how a brahmin prepared a goat for sacrifice. The goat laughed and then wept. The brahmin asks the goat why he laughed, and then cried. The goat replies that he had been a brahmin in a previous existence and because he himself had sacrificed a goat, as a result, he had had his own head cut off in the following 499 existences. As this is his 500th existence, he knows that it will be the last time he will be sacrificed, so he laughed. But why did he cry? The goat replies: "Just as I have endured the suffering of having my head cut off in 500 existences because I killed a single goat…this brahmin, having killed me, will likewise endure the (same) suffering…And feeling pity for you, I cried".[90]

The Buddhist rejection of animal sacrifice was a notable marker in distinguishing it from Vedic (Hindu) belief and practice at that time.

Caring for Animals

Venerable Ajahn Sumedho, a follower of the venerable Ajahn Chah from a famous forest monastery in Thailand, has written that our society is one that likes to get rid of pests, both inward and outward ones. He writes,

> I hear monks say, 'I can't meditate because there are too many mosquitos, if only we could get rid of them.' Even though you can never really like mosquitos, you can have Metta for them, respecting their right to exist and not getting caught up in resentment at their presence.[91]

Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard declares strongly that we need to change our attitude to animals, pointing out that "we ascribe infinite value to human life but at the same time the value of animals is almost zero… We love dogs, but we eat pigs and wear cows". He adds: "It's completely clear that animals do have emotions, they feel pain – fishes feel pain a lot". In a video talk, he points out that we behave as if "eight million other species are absolutely just for us…we use our immense power to abuse other animals…we cannot defend that ethically".[92]

In another video Ricard makes a plea to everyone: "Please make your heart big enough to include all sentient beings without exception".[93]

Life Release

One Buddhist practice which is very common, especially in south-east Asia, is Life Release. Buddhists buy a captive bird or fish – or even an animal from a slaughterhouse – and release the animal from its cage or container. This simple act of compassion is widely seen as earning one merit. The birds fly away, the fishes are dropped into a river or into the sea. Sadly, there may be downsides to this well-meaning practice.

There are some warnings from conservationists about the danger of releasing these creatures into unsuitable environments. For example, Dr Imogen Bassett, biosecurity principal advisor for Auckland Council, has pointed out to Buddhists engaging in this practice in New Zealand that: "Animals such as turtles or koi carp that are not native to New Zealand can have a devastating impact on our native species and put an additional stress on our already fragile freshwater ecosystems".[94]

In response, the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist temple in South Auckland issued a statement clarifying that acts of releasing animals were not something propagated at the temple and urging members of society to apply wisdom when desiring to act on compassion. The statement included a quote from Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order founder, Venerable Master Hsing Yun: "Compassion and tolerance alone are not enough. They need to be supplemented by wisdom…For instance, the common practice of freeing live animals actually causes harm to more animal lives".[95]

The whole practice raises another ethical question, which does not yet seem to have been addressed by Buddhist leaders. Is it not strange to spend money purchasing a bird in a cage, to release it and then to go home and perhaps eat a meal that includes eggs from hens who have been kept in cages? Might it not be preferable to campaign for a ban on keeping all hens and all birds in cages? In this way one would be helping to release thousands, probably millions of birds from cages. Might this be not even more meritorious?

Eating Animals

There is an expectation among many non-Buddhists that all Buddhists must be vegetarian. After all, is this not the faith that teaches compassion for all sentient beings? But the fact is that probably the majority of practising Buddhists still eat meat, fish and other animal products.

Looking back to the Jataka Tales, there is one tale which demonstrates that humans cannot be trusted as they like to eat animals. Two oxen, who are brothers, are overworked and underfed by their farming family owners. One is envious of the family's pig which is given lots of food and sleeps under the bed. The older ox is in fact a bodhisattva (enlightened being) and explains to his brother, "Don't covet his food – that pig is eating the food of death!" It turns out that the pig is being fattened for the wedding feast of the family's daughter. As the older ox says, "In a few days, the guests will come, and then you will see them grabbing the pig by the feet, dragging him, driving him out from underneath the bed, killing him, and turning him into curry for their guests". And that is exactly what happens.[96]

In the Dhammapada, it states:

> All living things fear being beaten with clubs
> all living things fear being put to death
> put oneself in the place of the other
> let no one kill nor cause another to kill.[97]

The Dhammapada also states:

> The person who has lain down violence
> Towards sentient beings
> Who neither kills nor causes to kill,
> That one I call superior.[98]

Right Livelihood is the fifth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path. Buddhists must choose work which enables them to follow Buddhist principles. Buddhists should definitely have respect for all life. Therefore, they prefer not to take part in the trading or slaughter of animals, although some are obviously involved in the rearing of animals who will ultimately be slaughtered. You will rarely find Buddhist slaughtermen; the act is performed by Muslim or Christian workers.

Life is involved in that continual cycle of birth and death known as samsara and freedom from this cycle comes through enlightenment. Buddhists believe in karma or 'intentional action'. Taking the life of an animal unnecessarily is a bad action and this will have an effect on the quality of the next life. The outcome might be rebirth in animal form where one experiences the same kind of mistreatment.[99]

In the Vinaya rules for monastic life, there is no prohibition on eating meat.[100] The Dalai Lama describes how he had discussed this subject with a monk from Sri Lanka who said Buddhist monks are neither vegetarian nor non-vegetarian. The principle is that a monk should accept whatever food he is given. He added: "But the Vinaya clearly mentions that meat which was purposely killed for you was not to be eaten, but in general was not prohibited". He pointed out that some texts like the Lankavatara Sutra prohibited any kind of meat, including fish, etc., but some other texts do not prohibit meat, so really it is up to each person to decide.

The Lankavatara Sutra, which is an important, but later, text in Mahayana Buddhism, is said to be one of the Buddha's sermons. In it he says: "Practitioners of the Way should abstain from meat, because eating it is a source of terror for beings".[101]

In the Lankavatara Sutra, the "Blessed One" speaks to Mahamati, saying that

> the Bodhisattva, whose nature is compassion, is not to eat any meat; I will explain them: Mahāmati, in this long course of transmigration here, there is not one living being that, having assumed the form of a living being, has not been your mother, or father, or brother, or sister, or son, or daughter, or the one or the other, in various degrees of kinship; and when acquiring another form of life may live as a beast, as a domestic animal, as a bird, or as a womb-born, or as something standing in some relationship to you; [this being so] how can the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva who desires to approach all living beings as if they were himself and to practise the Buddha-truths, eat the flesh of any living being that is of the same nature as himself?... Thus, Mahāmati, wherever there is the evolution of living beings, let people cherish the thought of kinship with them, and, thinking that all beings are [to be loved as if they were] an only child, let them refrain from eating meat.[102]

It is not quite clear if refraining from meat eating is because of samsara and the possibility that one might be eating one's ancestor or relative, or because of one's kinship with all beings. Perhaps it is both?

Unlike vegetarian Hindus, who may view meat as polluted in itself, Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard states that in principle, Buddhists "would find nothing wrong with eating the flesh of an animal that had died from natural causes".[103] Meat is not disgusting in itself. If no intentional suffering has been inflicted on the dead animal, then (provided it is hygienic – Ed) no bad karma would result from eating it.

Regarding the Dalai Lama's personal diet, his kitchen in his base in Dharamsala is vegetarian. However, during visits outside of Dharamsala, he is not necessarily vegetarian.[104]

In a recorded message for World Animal Day in 2020, the Dalai Lama urged people around the world to move toward more compassionate and sustainable ways of living that rely less on the exploitation of animals. "It is very useful to promote vegetarianism", His Holiness said. "We should pay more attention toward developing more vegetables [in our diet]".

He lamented the extreme exploitation of animals and the growing consumption of meat from industrial-scale livestock farms in countries such as the United States, which are "environmentally very harmful", although he also noted that "in modern times, some people are really showing concern about animal rights. This is very, very encouraging".

However, His Holiness said that it would be impractical to suggest that everyone become vegetarian,

> especially in cold climate regions like northern Tibet and Mongolia, whose primary source of livelihood through generations has depended on animals… Whereas countries like India have a rich supply of vegetables and is known for vegetarianism, which should be encouraged in other parts of the world.

The Dalai Lama explained that in recent years he had been actively encouraging Buddhist monasteries and Tibetan schools to serve more vegetarian meals and added that more fruits and vegetables should be cultivated for them.[105]

At another meeting in India in 2018, he said "We are consuming too much meat". He went on to underscore the need to be sensitive to the suffering of all living beings. "However small they are, they too experience pain and pleasure", he said.[106]

Thích Nhất Hạnh has said that if we want to stop animal suffering, "we should stop eating animals". In a lovely short video, he points out that in the Sutra of the Son's flesh, the Buddha says that "we should eat in such a way to preserve compassion in our hearts, otherwise you'll be eating the flesh of our own sons and daughters". That's a strong statement and he explains it by pointing out that children are dying of hunger and malnutrition and "because the amount of grain used for feeding animals and making alcohol is huge", if we eat meat and drink alcohol "it is like we are eating their flesh and blood". He advises us to eat in ways "that can preserve compassion and preserve our beautiful planet and help beings suffer less". [107]

That is an extraordinarily wise and radical teaching. Because animal farming uses so much of the world's cereals (about 40%) and so much of the world's soya – much of which could have been used for human consumption – by eating the meat from these animals, we are, in reality, taking food from the mouths of hungry humans and eating *them*!

In a further teaching film, Thích Nhất Hạnh declares "to be vegan is not perfect, but it helps reduce the suffering of animals". He has obviously seen some films about factory farming because he says that if you watch these films "you will see the suffering of the chicken, the suffering of the cows and so on. You would not like to eat chicken, drink milk or eat cheese any more".[108]

The Dharma Voices for Animals organisation was started by Buddhists in the US but now works in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. They aim to persuade Buddhist monasteries and institutes to adopt plant-based eating. Through their Thai colleagues, they are currently working with 3,000 monastics in Thailand where most monasteries still accept meat eating.[109]

California-based Andrew Bear, a chapter leader for the Silicon Valley Chapter of Dharma Voices for Animals since 2015 and a committed vegan, explains:

> In the Buddhist traditions of China and Vietnam, for example, vegetarianism and veganism are the norm. In other Buddhist traditions, people do consume animal "products," and may not find any contradiction. This is why Dharma Voices for Animals is so important. As the only international Buddhist animal rights organization, Dharma Voices for Animals (DVA) raises awareness of the suffering of animals in the Buddhist community.[110]

The first female Bhikkuni (nun) in Thailand, Dhammananda Bikkhuni (formerly a university philosophy teacher under the name of Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh), says "To eat meat supports taking life. How can I live my life depending on others' lives? That would be an injustice".[111]

Consumption of beef, pork and chicken meat is increasing in Japan.[112] However, Buddhist monks in Japan still follow a shojin-ryori totally vegan diet, which is based on tofu, soya beans and seasonal vegetables, balancing flavours and colours. Apparently, this way of eating was brought to Japan from China by the monk Dogen, who founded the Soto school of Zen Buddhism.

In 675 CE, the Japanese Emperor Tenmu issued a decree banning the consumption of beef, horse, dog, chicken, and monkey during the height of the farming season from April to September. As time went on, the practice expanded into a year-round taboo against all meat eating.

Most Japanese continued to eat their traditional diet with protein coming mainly from rice and fish. Portuguese missionaries came to China in the 16th century and their presence and a more general contact with other cultures and diets may have been behind the decision of the Emperor Meiji to begin eating meat again, in this case, beef. In 1872, a group of Japanese Buddhist monks broke into the Imperial Palace to seek an audience with the emperor to beg him to desist from this practice. In the ensuing fight with the guards, half of them were killed. The monks believed the new trend of eating meat was "destroying the soul of the Japanese people".[113]

Today the Japanese are known for eating not just fish but whale and dolphin meat, as well as chicken, pork and, increasingly, beef.[114]

Slaughter

Buddhists do not like to work in slaughterhouses, although they may eat the flesh that comes from them. Even in predominantly Buddhist countries, most workers in slaughterhouses are not Buddhists.

Many Thais enjoy eating pork as well as chicken, and there are many pig slaughterhouses. Rules regarding pig slaughter were brought in in 2006 and state that they are based on recommendations from the World Organization for Animal Health and the FAO. The rules specifically state that pigs must be rendered completely unconscious prior to slaughtering.[115]

An article in The Guardian newspaper in 2019 reports that in many small and medium-sized pig abattoirs in Thailand, the rules are ignored. Pigs are hit with bats before being cut with the slaughter knife. Sometimes home-made electrical stunning equipment is used to subdue the pigs. This may paralyse them but will not render them unconscious.[116]

It seems strange that a country so devoted to Buddhism ignores the horrendous suffering of the pigs in its slaughterhouses. Thankfully there are animal welfare groups in Thailand such as the Thai Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (TSPCA) and the Animal Activist Alliance of Thailand. Thanks to pressure from these groups the "Prevention of Animal Cruelty and Provision of Animal Welfare Act 2014" was passed. Animal owners are meant to follow the Five Freedoms principles of animal welfare, namely freedom from hunger or thirst, from discomfort, from pain, injury or disease, from fear and distress, and have freedom to express normal behaviour.[117] One can only hope they may be able to bring about slaughterhouse reform too.

Vivisection

Animal experimentation did not exist at the time of the Buddha and Buddhism does not have specific rules about this. Buddhists can remember the first Precept, the principle of ahimsa and the idea of Right Livelihood and use these beliefs to help them to decide what is right regarding animal experiments.

If it is considered that an animal experiment is justified and there is no alternative, then Buddhists who work out the principle of ahimsa would still expect the animals involved to be treated with kindness, be harmed as little as possible and not be killed if this can be avoided.[118]

The Animals for Scientific Purposes Act BE 2558 became law in Thailand in 2015. This Act defines procedures on the use of animals for scientific purposes to bring Thai practices in line with international animal welfare standards and requires institutions to obtain licences before carrying out experiments on live animals.[119]

Cruelty Free Soul estimates that Japan ranks third in the world (behind the United States and China) in the number of animals used in experiments.[120] The Japanese government has produced many guidance documents relating to the use of animals in scientific research, such as the Guidelines for Proper Conduct of Animal Experiments (2006), which calls for minimising stress to the animals and refers to the widely approved Three Rs principles of refinement, replacement and reduction in animal experimentation.[121] However, more detailed legislation is necessary.

Teaching and Practice

There is no doubt that animals are included in the Buddhist concern for all "sentient beings". Scientists will continue to debate where exactly sentience begins in biological terms. For ease of understanding, I think Buddhists would agree that sentience of some kind exists in all mammals, birds, fishes and insects.

Concern for sentient beings seems to be fundamental to Buddhist meditative practices and to daily living. One should be kind to all beings; one should not kill, at least not on purpose.

It seems to me that really serious Buddhist practice goes far deeper than a general ethic of care for other creatures. If one embraces the tonglen style of meditation one has to be brave enough to accept all the suffering of sentient beings everywhere – and that is possibly an overwhelming amount of suffering. It is much easier to send feelings of loving kindness to all beings than to accept their suffering.

In the Buddhist way, compassion becomes something far greater than having a general attitude of love and kindness towards other beings. Its root lies in action, in this case the action of absorbing the suffering of others – taking their burden on to your own shoulders.

There is no way of knowing how many Buddhists practice this kind of meditation. Some may not even have heard of it. But all Buddhists will be aware that one should be kind to animals.

Is that caring demonstrated in the laws and practices of mainly Buddhist countries? From my research I would say that some lip service is paid to it – the fighting cocks in Thailand have their sharp leg spurs covered, in order to limit damage to their opponent, the huge Thai chicken producer CP Foods says it takes animal welfare into account and seems to do so to a limited extent. It is still responsible for sending umpteen chickens to their deaths daily.

How can a Buddhist reconcile commercial – or even "scientific" – whaling or the dolphin capture and slaughter in Taiji with loving kindness for all sentient beings?

What of the anomaly of "Life Release" of caged birds and the keeping of hens in battery cages?

Of course, there are countless Buddhists practising care for animals, in their own way or by helping to run or support animal sanctuaries, by educating the young or their friends about the compassionate way or by campaigning for reform.

Conclusion

The Buddhist way is a difficult one, not least as it is so difficult for us self-centred "me" beings to accept firstly that there is no "self" as such. Buddhism says there is only movement, change and impermanence. Yet one's way of life on this earth is full of meaning and implication for "your" future. Compassion and loving kindness need to be at the core of everyday living.

Buddhists are probably no better than the followers of any of the major faiths at putting its teachings into practice, as this chapter has shown.

Perhaps Buddhist monks and leaders need to be more prominent and persistent in calling for more compassionate practices, for putting the beautiful teaching into the minds of all Buddhists. That would be a really beautiful thing!

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6 Beyond the Major World Religions

Teaching and Practice regarding Humanity's Relationship with Animals

The Abrahamic faiths may recognise animals as creatures of God, they may call on humanity to care for animals and avoid causing them suffering, but they still place humans at the centre of creation. We can be careful stewards of animals, but it is WE who are in charge.

Hinduism and Buddhism take different and differing approaches. In the cycle of birth and rebirth, both faiths believe that an animal incarnation is lesser than a human incarnation. Many in both faiths believe that it is only possible to gain liberation, moksha, nirvana, by being born into at least one human incarnation, probably many, many human incarnations. Once again humanity is placed at the epicentre of the story.

In this chapter, I would like to give attention to some apparently different ways of viewing the human-animal relationship, as well as including some important faiths which are not usually considered under the title "The Five Major Faiths".

Indigenous Beliefs and Practices

The United Nations tells us that Indigenous peoples represent only 5% of the world's population, but their lands cover 22% of its surface and 80% of the world's biodiversity is found within Indigenous lands.[1] These facts alone imply that the future of life on earth may rely on these peoples and their beliefs and practices.

There are thousands of Indigenous peoples, many of whom self-identify with their land and the environment in which they live and this stems from having specific cultural and ancestral ties to place. Their beliefs seem to share a very different approach to animals and to the natural world.

Whereas in the modern, scientific world of global economics we tend to see the natural world and its creatures as there for us to use, Indigenous beliefs seem to see a togetherness, a joined-up community of beings. How many worthy papers on sustainability have I read which speak of "ecosystem services", which of course the authors want us to protect. Are ecosystems only to be viewed as providing "services" for us?

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To my surprise therefore, in July 2022, I read from a Report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), that:

> the authors present four general perspectives. These are: living from, with, in and as nature. Living from nature emphasizes nature's capacity to provide resources for sustaining livelihoods, needs and wants of people, such as food and material goods. Living with nature has a focus on life 'other than human' such as the intrinsic right of fish in a river to thrive independently of human needs. Living in nature refers to the importance of nature as the setting for people's sense of place and identity. Living as nature sees the natural world as a physical, mental and spiritual part of oneself.[2]

While most Indigenous peoples would of course understand that one needs to take from nature to feed oneself and survive, they would see themselves as living with nature, living in nature but perhaps most of all as living AS nature, seeing "the natural world as a physical, mental and spiritual part of oneself" (as above).

First Nations Living in North America

In her lovely book "Braiding Sweetgrass", Robin Wall Kimmerer, member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, quotes from the Thanksgiving Address which is declared in schools in the Onondaga sovereign territory (situated within New York State) before the school week begins.

The Address gives greeting and thanks to all aspects of nature including animals. The children give thanks to

> all the beautiful animal life of the world, who walk about with us. They have many things to teach us as people. We are grateful that they continue to share their lives with us and hope that it always will be so. Let us put our minds together as one and send our thanks to the Animals. Now our minds are one.[3]

This is surely a lovely example of seeing oneself living "as nature".

How different life can be for these children from the fate of so many of their ancestors. Kimmerer's own grandfather was one of many children who were taken from their families and sent to schools where speaking their own language was an offence and she says that the general rule was "Kill the Indian to Save the Man".

In recent years, political controversy has plagued the Onondaga people, who form part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy established several centuries ago. Although George Washington destroyed most of the lands and Onondaga people, their descendants live on and their claims to their land were agreed by the US Supreme Court in 2005. However, in 2010 the Federal court dismissed their claims for restitution of their lake which has been polluted by chemical companies. At that time Clan mother Audrey Shenandoah, said, "In this action we seek justice.

Justice for the waters. Justice for the four-leggeds and the wingeds, whose habitats have been taken. We seek justice, not just for ourselves, but justice for the whole of Creation".[4] This is another example of how the original inhabitants of North America view animals as of equal importance to humans.

Generally, although each group will have their own beliefs, many of the native tribes living in northern America recognised a Sky Father deity, who controlled the planets, stars and the wind and rain and an Earth Mother, who nourished her children by helping crops to grow.

Different peoples have their own stories of creation, but in the Indigenous belief systems of North America humans are not necessarily the centre of the story or they may even be regarded as the younger brothers of creation. They may learn from the animals, who preceded them and with whom they co-exist. Some peoples may see themselves as descended from a particular animal, such as a raven or a coyote, or from the soil.

Another important Indigenous woman, Jenny Leading Cloud of the White River Sioux, is recorded as saying in 1967: "Man is just another animal. The buffalo and the coyote are our brothers; the birds our cousins. Even the tiniest ant, even a louse, even the smallest flower you can find – they are all relatives".[5]

Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan, explains, "the animals are understood to be our equals. They are still our teachers. They are our helpers and healers. They have been our guardians and we have been theirs".[6]

It would seem odd to the Indigenous peoples of North America to have to lobby governments to have animals recognised as "sentient beings". They already see animals as kin, as "someones" not "somethings", as "who" and not "which" or "it".

Hunting and Trapping

The peoples of the Plains survived primarily by hunting the buffalo (more accurately, the "bison"). Some say that the relationship with bison goes much deeper and that in Amerindian cosmologies, this meant that the bison existed for more than just providing resources. One author comments:

> They were also there to teach humans how to live. A great number of common cultural motifs amongst Great Plains societies can be traced back to watching bison interact and modelling social behaviour upon them. For example, many Amerindian nations of the Great Plains have very strict rules about treating the elderly with respect, raising young children as a community, using resources responsibly, maintaining healthy diets, staying physically active, and promoting gender equality. These ideas were all modelled on the interactions of bison within their herds.[7]

One Oglala tribal Elder, John (Fire) Lame Deer, put it thus:

> The Buffalo was part of us, his flesh and blood being absorbed by us until it became our own flesh and blood. Our clothing, our tipis, everything we

> needed for life came from the buffalo's body. It was hard to say where the animals ended, and the human began.[8]

University of Montana anthropology professor S. Neyooxet Greymorning stated:

> The creation stories of where buffalo came from put them in a very spiritual place among many tribes. The buffalo crossed many different areas and functions, and it was utilized in many ways. It was used in ceremonies, as well as to make tipi covers that provide homes for people, utensils, shields, weapons, and parts were used for sewing with the sinew.[9]

Because the buffalo is one of the most sacred animals, they are regarded with respect. Many Indigenous peoples generally believed that successful hunts required certain rituals. The Omaha Tribe had to approach a herd in four stages. At each stop the chiefs and the leader of the hunt would sit down, smoke the pipe and offer prayers for success. The Pawnee performed the purifying Big Washing Ceremony before each tribal summer hunt to avoid scaring the bison.[10]

Before the introduction of horses, bison were herded into large chutes made of rocks and willow branches and trapped in a corral called a buffalo pound and then slaughtered with bows and arrows. Alternatively, the bison were stampeded over cliffs, called buffalo jumps. Both pound and jump archaeological sites are found in several places in the US and Canada. In the case of a jump, large groups of people would herd the bison for several miles, forcing them into a stampede that drove the herd over a cliff.[11]

In animal welfare terms, the fear of the chase would be frightening for the bison, but the actual death might well have been instantaneous. Bows and arrows were probably an inadequate method of achieving a quick death. So, when the westerners arrived with guns and horses, the Plains peoples adopted them too.

"The Indian was frugal in the midst of plenty," says Luther Standing Bear, a member of the Lakota tribe. "When the buffalo roamed the plains in multitudes, he slaughtered only what he could eat and these he used to the hair and bones". Indeed, for thousands of years the huge bison herds were able to accommodate the loss of the relatively few animals taken by native Americans.[12]

Kimmerer describes the ethics behind the buffalo hunting:

> The taking of another life to support your own is far more significant when you recognize the beings who are being harvested as persons, nonhuman persons vested with awareness, intelligence, spirit – and who have families waiting for them at home. Killing a who demands something different from killing an it. When you regard those nonhuman persons as kinfolk, another set of harvesting regulations extends beyond bag limits and legal seasons.[13]

She calls it the honourable harvest.

It may seem an anomaly to western minds that those who recognised the animals as beings, as persons with spirit, should then kill them on a regular basis.

But there seems to have been a realisation that for the humans to survive, some of the animals must be killed. The hunt could not be done gently – no hunt ever has been – but the victim creatures were still respected by their killers.

Black Elk, an ageing Oglala Sioux holy man, told his story to John G. Neihardt in the early 1930s and describes how he and his father went to look for deer to hunt and his father killed two of them. As they were butchering the animals Black Elk says, "I felt sorry that we had killed these animals" so he asked his father "should we not offer one of these to the wild things?"

His father takes one of the deer and cries out "Grandfather, the Great Spirit, behold me! To all the wild things that may eat this flesh, this I have offered that my people may live and the children grow up with plenty".[14]

Millions of bison once roamed the US, but they were hunted nearly to extinction in the 19th century, when Indigenous Americans were forced on to reservations, damaging their sacred bond with the land and its creatures. A wholesale slaughter of bison by the newcomers began. Some were hunted for their skins and tongues with the rest of the animals left behind to decay on the ground. After the animals rotted, their bones were collected and shipped back east in large quantities.[15]

Among the earliest waves of settlers were trappers and traders, people who made their living selling meat and hides. By the 1870s, they were shipping hundreds of thousands of buffalo hides eastward each year. More than 1.5 million were packed aboard trains and wagons in the winter of 1872–1873 alone. Some US government officials even promoted the destruction of the bison herds as a way to defeat their Native American enemies, who were resisting the takeover of their lands by white settlers. One Congressman, James Throckmorton of Texas, believed that "it would be a great step forward in the civilization of the Indians and the preservation of peace on the border if there was not a buffalo in existence".[13]

Though buffalo were being slaughtered in masses, many tribes perceived the buffalo as part of the natural world—something guaranteed to them by the Creator. In fact, for some Plains Indigenous peoples, buffalo are known as the first people.[16]

Although the bison had been hunted, they had never been hunted in numbers that would lead to their extinction. Many tribes did not grasp the concept of species extinction. Thus, when the buffalo began to disappear in great numbers, it was particularly harrowing to the tribes. As Crow Chief Plenty Coups described it: "When the buffalo went away, the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened. There was little singing anywhere".[17]

The cattle that largely replaced the buffalo often killed off native vegetation. Agricultural and residential development of the prairie is estimated to have reduced the prairie to 0.1% of its former area. The plains region has lost nearly one-third of its prime topsoil since the onset of the buffalo slaughter. Cattle are also causing water to be pillaged at rates that are depleting many aquifers of their resources. Research also suggests that the absence of native grasses leads to topsoil erosion – a main contributor of the dust bowl and black blizzards of the 1930s.[18]

Today, Native people and Nations on the Northern Plains are working to restore bison populations and protect them from threats such as commercial hunting and disease. The InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC) believes that reintroduction of the buffalo to tribal lands can help to heal the spirit of the peoples and protect the traditional relationships between the people and the buffalo. The ITBC includes 58 tribes from 19 states and a collective herd of over 15,000 buffalo.[19]

The Rosebud Sioux Nation in South Dakota have begun collecting bison on the Wolakota Buffalo Range. They hope to reach 1,200 buffalo by 2023 – they want it to be the largest Indigenous-owned bison herd in the country. Clay Colombe, CEO of the Rosebud Tribe's economic development agency, said: "Buffalo are central to who we are as Lakota. When we bring them back on to our land and into our lives, it heals and strengthens us". The meat from the first animal slaughtered by Wolakota was given to homeless members of the Rosebud Sioux reservation community.[20]

US Indigenous leaders hope Congress will help tribes return bison to their lands: the Indian Buffalo Management Act was passed by the House of Representatives in December 2021 and is, at the time of writing, awaiting Senate approval.[21]

It is unlikely that these buffalo will be hunted. Will they in fact have to endure frightening animal transport to slaughterhouses, like the cattle who for so many years replaced them on the land?

One spokesperson said:

> We're trying to strike a balance of letting the buffalo express their natural behaviors, making sure they have plenty of room to roam, and being able to manage where they're grazing so we can make sure we're still improving the range health and habitat quality for other wildlife.[22]

As with the buffalo hunting, so with the fishing for salmon. Kimmerer describes how the coastal peoples would await the annual return of the salmon to their birth rivers. Once the salmon were seen to be swimming in great numbers upstream, the people would wait for four days before they began to fish. The First Salmon was fished by the most revered person and once the salmon had been feasted on, the head and bones were replaced in the water, facing upstream, so that the spirit could follow the other salmon.[4] The honourable harvest principle still applied. That principle has now been violated by modern fishing methods, damming of the rivers and industrial fish farms, where these migratory beings are kept caged until slaughter.

Dietary Principles

Many Indigenous peoples of North America did not live close to the bison plains. They may never have seen a bison in their lives. For the Potawatomi peoples and others in the more eastern parts of the land their staple foods were what Kimmerer calls the Three Sisters of beans, corn and squash.[23] These crops have a

mythical origin, having been presented to the ancestors by three strange women (the sisters) at a time of hunger.

The three crops worked well in a kind of symbiosis. Corn draws nitrogen from the soil, while beans replenish it. Corn stalks provide climbing poles for the bean tendrils, and the broad leaves of squashes grow low to the ground, shading the soil, keeping it moist, and deterring the growth of weeds.[24]

Rita (Hina Hanta or "Bright Path of Peace") Laws, who is of Choctaw and Cherokee descent, says the Choctaw people believed that corn was a gift from Hashtali, the Great Spirit. (Hashtali is literally "Noon Day Sun". Choctaws believe the Great Spirit resides within the sun, for it is the sun that allows the corn to grow.) Their traditional homes were constructed not of skins, but of wood, mud, bark and cane. The principal food, eaten daily from earthen pots, was a vegetarian stew containing corn, pumpkin and beans. The bread was made from corn and acorns.[25]

Laws recounts that a Cherokee legend describes humans, plants, and animals as having lived in the beginning in "equality and mutual helpfulness". The needs of all were met without killing one another. When man became aggressive and ate some of the animals, the animals invented diseases to keep the human population in check. The plants remained friendly, however, and offered themselves not only as food to man, but also as medicine, to combat the new diseases.[26]

In the mid-19th century, under the Indian Removal Act, the Choctaws and other tribes were forcibly moved from the Mississippi and other fertile regions to what became the state of Oklahoma, on the disastrous "Trail of Tears". Thousands died on the long journey. The survivors settled and continued to farm and eat from the land, with the government supplying rations of new (often unhealthy) foods. However, even these allocated lands were absorbed into the new state of Oklahoma in 1907.[27] Laws says that many of the Choctaw foods cooked at celebrations even today are vegetarian.[28]

However, many descendants of these survivors have been drawn into eating processed foods and their health has deteriorated as a result. Amanda Fretts, Ph.D., M.P.H., an epidemiologist at the University of Washington and a member of Mi'kmaq tribe, points to rates of heart disease doubling in these communities, saying: "Several studies have shown that unhealthy, non-traditional foods like canned meats and fast-food, are a large part of the problem. Many of these processed foods contribute to diabetes, which is a risk factor for heart disease".[29]

In both cases, the loss of the buffalo by the plains people and the loss of their traditional growing fields by the Choctaws, Cherokees and others, have broken the bonds between the people, their environment and their fellow creatures and fellow plants. It seems that there was a deliberate attempt to "break their spirit". In this volume, there is not space to delve deeper into this history, but it is good to see the descendants of these peoples making strong efforts to restore the equilibrium and relationship they used to enjoy with the land and with the other beings who shared it with them, perhaps truly "living as nature".

The First Nations Peoples living in Australia

Introduction

Like many other people, I have heard the terms "Indigenous peoples" and "Aboriginal people" used to describe the First Nations Peoples who have lived in the land we now call Australia for many thousands of years, probably for over 60,000 years. I shall use the term First Nations People(s) in this chapter, using the word "Aboriginal" only as an adjective, for ease of reading. With around 250 distinct groupings, beliefs between each First Nations group may vary.

Even though no official figures exist, estimates of the Aboriginal population in 1788, when white people first claimed part of Australia, range between 250,000 and 750,000. By 1911, the number was 31,000.[30]

Numbers have since been recovering to about half that original number, but only in 1967 did Australians vote that federal laws also would apply to First Nations Peoples and most did not have full voting and citizenship rights until 1967.[31]

The appalling treatment of the First Nations Peoples is well documented and makes shocking reading. Thousands were massacred, others had the land they lived on taken away and, as with some First Nations Peoples in America, children were sometimes taken away from families and sent to (often abusive) schools for cultural "re-education", where girls were groomed to become domestic servants and boys often trained to work as stockmen for white farmers. In all cases, they worked for very low or no wages at all. Their lives were in effect, "stolen".

First Nations Peoples have only been included in the National Census since 1971. In 1996 the National Census recorded that 352,970 or 1.97% of the population were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Melanesian) descent.[32]

It was not until 2008 that the then Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, issued a national apology for the country's actions toward Aboriginal Australians of the Stolen Generations.[33]

Beliefs about Animals

The Dreaming (formerly often called the Dreamtime) is not a historical concept for First Nations Peoples. It encompasses the past, present, and future; it is non-linear.

The Dreaming includes many stories of the Ancestral Beings, who created everything – animals, plants, rocks, and land formations – as they moved through the land, often in human form. They also created a system of relationships between the individual, the land, animals, and other people.[34]

The Ancestral Beings were not models of sanctity like gods or saints. Many behaved badly and faced the consequences. So, their stories are in many ways

morality tales too. Many First Nations Peoples believe in and live by the stories and teachings of the Dreaming today, maintaining a deep interconnectedness with all aspects of their particular Country and its Dreaming. Law is also integral to the Dreaming and the rules by which the various nations lived.

The Dreaming stories often include animals. Koalas feature in many of these stories. One common theme is the association of koalas with drought, perhaps because they can survive on very little water. Some believe that koalas have power over the rain, and it is when people behave badly that the koalas send drought. One Dreaming story tells of the origin of koalas when a boy, Koobor, who was neglected by his family, learned to live on the leaves of the gum tree.[35]

First Nations People usually have totems, which are often totem animals. They feel close to this animal and responsible for its wellbeing. So, if someone has a koala totem, they would try to protect koalas; if they have a kangaroo totem, they would try to protect kangaroos for future generations. Although other people might hunt and eat koalas, they might not join in. Having a particular totem may prescribe a responsibility to learn particular songs, dances and stories.

Another important belief is about Country. This does not mean just the countryside. Country includes the physical land, its hills and valleys and rock formations, but it is much more than that. Country includes one's relationships with other beings, human and animal, and with the Ancestors and with the earth too.

If any aspect of Country is under attack, a First Nations person will feel under attack themselves. This is a relationship with one's environment which is incredibly close and one that may be hard to understand for a westernised urban dweller.

One respected First Nations website, Common Ground, explains: "Each First Nations individual has a unique and spiritual relationship with animals on their Country and holds storylines that ensure they live sustainably with the environment". The site quotes Worimi Elder, Uncle Steve Brereton, "Healing Country is healing us. We are Country and Country is us. We are all one".[36]

Sissy Pettit, Deputy Chairperson of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, explains the huge sadness that is felt when one's totem animal dies:

> When our totem dies, our connection with the spirit is compromised. The spirit and totem are as one and once our totem dies, a bit of our spirit dies as well. We feel the whole of Country in ourselves and its loss is felt in our whole spirit, not just the body that carries the spirit.[37]

Palyku woman, Ambelin Kwaymullina, explains the relationship to Country:

> For Aboriginal peoples, Country is much more than a place. Rock, tree, river, hill, animal, human – all were formed of the same substance by the Ancestors who continue to live in land, water, sky. Country is filled with relations speaking language and following Law, no matter whether the shape of that relation is human, rock, crow, wattle. Country is loved, needed, and cared for, and Country loves, needs, and cares for her peoples in turn. Country is family, culture, identity. Country is self.[38]

This kind of understanding and relationship with the natural world, with Country, is both "Living in Nature" and "Living as Nature" as mentioned previously.[39]

These First Nations Peoples believe that to keep the land alive and well, they must sing to it. They can navigate the landscape from place to place by singing songs about the sacred landmarks that traverse it. The tradition of singing songs as a map or guide is known as Songlines.[40]

The Songlines represent the journey that the Ancestors (some of whom were animals) took through the land. This again is a different way of "seeing" one's environment, as all the significance in that landscape comes from what the Ancestors did and then handed down to the people through the Songline ceremonies.[41] Songlines connect people to the earth. Songlines may include information about animal behaviour or about a particular place or the best plant medicine for an ailment.

In an interesting article in the Guardian, Paul Daley, who spent much time in Australia, interpreted Songlines thus:

> At the most basic conceptual level, perhaps think of the Songlines as the oral archives of Indigenous history that chart the very creation of the land and sea by the Dreaming totems (animals), and the various marks – trees, waterholes, rocky outcrops and creatures – along them. The Songlines also hold the stories of the people and the eternal spirits who inhabit them. Because melodic variance is used to describe the land, the Songlines – which also manifest in artworks, dance, the yirdaki (special didgeridoos – Ed) and clapsticks – transcend language. The Songlines or tracks transcend the language groups. If you know the song, you can navigate.[42]

Hunting and Food

The First Nations Peoples believe in taking from the earth only what they need. In this way the earth, its creatures and plants can continue to flourish. As the Common Ground writers explain: "Each First Nations individual has a unique and spiritual relationship with animals on their Country and holds storylines that ensure they live sustainably with the environment".[43]

One Aboriginal elder, Tom Dystra, explained: "We cultivated our land, but in a way different from the white man. We endeavour to live with the land; they seemed to live off it".[44]

Traditionally, First Nations Peoples managed the land, often using fire, and cultivated a wide range of plant foods like yams and spinach and many seasonal fruits like bush bananas and tomatoes. They also ate the large moth larvae, known as witchetty grubs, and hunted animals such as kangaroos, wild turkeys, possums, emus, lizards and snakes. The animals were hunted using tools like small daggers and spears made from sharpened stone.[45] Fish traps were built on rivers and coastal communities ate fish and shellfish and some seabirds.[46]

This kind of hunting comes into the subsistence category and cannot be compared to so-called "sport" hunting of foxes, hares and deer in western countries,

nor to the so-called "trophy hunting" of westerners who pose happily beside the lions, elephants or giraffes they have killed. Subsistence fishing bears no relation to today's huge commercial fishing operations and large-scale fish farms.

While the actual death of these animals may have been, on occasion, prolonged and painful, the creatures themselves enjoyed their natural lives until that point, unlike the billions of animals kept confined and cramped for most of their lives in industrial farms across the globe today.

Today there are several state and national laws in Australia, which allow continued hunting of traditional species by First Nations Peoples, such as the Native Title Act of 1993. However, in 2012 the state of Queensland withdrew its exemption for Indigenous hunting from its animal welfare legislation.[47]

The First Nations Peoples of Australia have this extraordinary feeling of oneness with their environment and all its beings, human and animal. This feeling of living on Country, being an intrinsic part of Country, feeling connected to the land through a multitude of cultural practices such as Songlines, is an experiential state which is missing in modern societies. Perhaps we are the poorer for it.

Jainism

Introduction

Jainism arose in northern India at around the same time as Buddhism. Both rejected the animal sacrifice of the earlier Vedas and both influenced Hinduism. Jains believe that their faith began many thousands of years ago, and that it has had 24 Tirthankaras or enlightened teachers, the last of whom was Vardhamana, known as Mahavira, (the "Great Hero"), who lived around 500 BCE. A Tirthankara is literally a "ford-maker" – in this case one who creates a fordable passage through the cycle of endless rebirths (samsara) to kevala or liberation.

A story is told of how, in a previous life, Mahavira had been born as a lion. Two monks taught him about non-violence and not killing others, whereupon the lion stopped eating meat and starved to death only to be reborn in heaven and eventually becoming Mahavira.[48]

This story reflects the outstanding principle of Jain teaching: ahimsa, non-violence towards all beings. Of all the faiths considered in this book, the Jain code of behaviour towards all kinds of animals is the strictest, the most uncompromising.

That respected Jain, Satish Kumar, recounts a well-known story of the life of the 23rd Tirthankara, Parshwanath, who was born a prince. On the way to his wedding to a princess, Parshwanath saw many animals cooped up outside her palace and to his horror found that they were being kept to be slaughtered for his wedding feast.

He told his future father-in-law:

> Animals have souls, they have consciousness, they are our kith and kin, they are our ancestors. They wish to live as much as we do; they have feelings and emotions…Their right to live is as fundamental as our own. I cannot marry, I cannot love and I cannot enjoy life if animals are enslaved and killed.

Whereupon he left, became a monk and devoted his life to informing everyone that they must be compassionate to animals. He made such an impression that his bride-to-be also renounced her comfortable life, became a nun and devoted herself to animal welfare and her father ordered that there would be no hunting, no shooting, no caging and no pets in his lands.[49]

Those few individuals who have achieved kevala or enlightenment are called Jina (literally, "Conqueror"), and the monastic and lay adherents are called Jains ("Follower of the Conquerors"), or Jaina.[50]

Today, most followers of Jainism live in India, with estimates of upwards of 4 million adherents.[51] Jains have travelled throughout the world and there are substantial communities of Jains in North America, the UK and other countries,

some settling in these "western" nations as a result of forcible expulsion from Uganda or political unrest in other east African countries in the late 20th century.

Teaching and Holy Books

There are no Gods in Jainism. Jains revere all 24 of the Tirthankaras. Mahavira's predecessors are all venerated and are the source of authority within Jainism. Their existence lays emphasis on the idea of lineage and continuity.[52]

Jains believe that all living things, even the tiniest insects, plants and aspects of nature such as water, have a jiva or soul. Jains believe in reincarnation, with the soul having a better or worse rebirth as a result of karma. The destiny of the soul is kevala, full enlightenment. Then one can achieve moksha, liberation from samsara, which can only be achieved through getting rid of one's karma. Harming living beings creates bad karma, sometimes described as like dust settling on one's karma. The best birth is to be born a human, as only a human birth allows the possibility of achieving liberation.

Souls are believed to be a unique substance in the universe, taking different living forms in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This cycle has been going on forever as the universe has no beginning or end; it has always been and always will be.[53]

In a similar way to the Buddha, Mahavira, who was born into the kshatriya or warrior caste, left his home and lived for many years as an ascetic until he became enlightened. He came to the conclusion that there are three essential elements which bring true liberation of the soul. He called them ahimsa (non-violence), sanyama (simplicity) and tapas (the practice of austerity).[54]

Ahimsa is the most fundamental principle of Jainism. No living being has the right to injure or kill any other living being. There are four forms of existence in Jainism – gods humans, hell beings, and animals and plants. This last group is further divided into beings having a different number of senses. The general laity should avoid harming organisms with two or more senses while monks/renunciants are supposed to refrain from harming any living beings at all, which would include plants.[55]

Sanyama is the second principle and calls for simple living, self-restraint and frugality. This is in direct contrast to today's consumerist culture of having more and more "stuff" and more and more "experiences", forever acquiring.

Tapas, the spiritual practice of purification, austerity, self-sacrifice and fasting is the third important Jain principle. It refers not only to purifying the physical body but also purifying the soul by practices like fasting, meditation, restraint, pilgrimage and service to others.

There are four practices to which every Jain aspires, in order to attain inner liberation. The first is satya (truth), which means understanding and realising the true nature of existence. The others include non-stealing, which means refraining from acquiring goods or services beyond one's essential needs and non-possessiveness, such as not accumulating stuff or displaying wealth. Jains should

also follow bramacharya. For monks, bramacharya means total abstinence from sexual activity and for lay people it means fidelity in marriage.[56]

The greatest good a Jain can do is give someone protection from fear of death. It is called Abhaydaan. This is translated into avoiding harm to the smallest form of life to the biggest.[57]

There are two main divisions within Jainism and these emerged quite early on in its history: the Swetambar (white-clad) sect and the Digambar (sky-clad) sect. The Digambar monks favour not wearing clothes – as even these are possessions. In their temples, the holy figures are depicted as nude. Both sects have further subdivisions. Whereas the Swetambars believe that Mali, the 19th Tirthanka, was a woman and that other women are capable of achieving kevala, the Digambars disagree and do not believe that one can attain enlightenment until one has a male human incarnation.

The Sacred Books of Jainism are collectively known as Agam literature. It consists of Lord Mahavir's teachings that were compiled by his disciples.

The Agam Sutras show great reverence for all forms of life and contain strict codes of vegetarianism, asceticism, non-violence, and opposition to war. The existing Agam Sutras are accepted as the authentic preaching of Lord Mahavira by the Swetambar sects, but the Digambar sect does not accept them as authentic. Digambars follow two other main texts written by great Acharyas (scholars) from 100 to 800 CE.[58]

The Acaranga sutra says: "All breathing, existing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away. This is the pure, unchangeable, eternal law, which the enlightened ones who know have proclaimed…".[59]

Not only do Jains respect the contents of sacred texts. They also venerate them as holy objects in themselves. Both Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras have a festival in honour of scriptural knowledge which is the occasion to clean and restore manuscripts or books and to worship them as embodiments of knowledge.[60]

Jains and Diet

Jains follow a restricted vegetarian diet. They avoid all meat, fish and eggs, but they also avoid eating vegetables that grow under the soil because insects and worms would be harmed or even destroyed as these vegetables were harvested. Each of these little, possibly microscopic beings has its own jiva (soul) and must not be harmed. Each carrot or potato would also be killed by being uprooted. So, potatoes, carrots, garlic, onions and other root vegetables and tubers are avoided. Onions and garlic also come under the 'tamasic' category which means they have the quality of darkness.[61]

Jains are lacto-vegetarians as they do consume dairy products. They do not usually consume yoghurt or any food which has been kept overnight, as in both cases, microorganisms may have developed.

In 2021, the Pew Research Center published its research on diet in the Jain community. Roughly nine in ten Indian Jains (92%) identify as vegetarian, and two-thirds

of Jains (67%) abstain from root vegetables. More than eight-in-ten Jain vegetarians also say they would not eat food in the home of a friend or neighbour who was non-vegetarian (84%) or in a restaurant that served non-vegetarian food (91%).[62]

Jains do not worship the cow as sacred, as many Hindus do. The cow is regarded as a being with all five senses and must be treated with gentle care. In the past, in India, it was easy for Jains to get milk from cows living locally and who were allowed to rear their calves. Modern, urban life and the intensification of the dairy industry have made this harder to achieve. There are movements among Jains to support a move towards a vegan diet, using plant-based milk instead of milk from cows. For example, there is an international Jain Vegans e-group, in the UK, there is the Jain Vegans Working Group (JVWG), and in the US, there is a vegan Jain awareness-raising group called "The JAINA Eco-Vegan Committee of Jaina", as well as an informative blog site called "veganjains.com".[63]

Looking after Animals

The Jain concept of jiv-daya – jiv meaning life and daya meaning compassion – runs parallel to ahimsa. It is the desire to alleviate the suffering of others, and it is also an established form of charity. In every Jain temple and at many pilgrimage sites, there are a variety of donation boxes, each designated for a specific purpose. One of these is always marked "jiv-daya".

This compassion may extend to many "human" causes such as care of orphans or widows, but some often goes to taking care of animals. There are an estimated 3,000 animal sanctuaries, called pinjrapoles, in India, the majority associated with the Jains. Most are in Gujarat, the state in northwestern India with the highest population of Jains, who provide the necessary funds and impetus to establish and maintain them.[64]

There are also homes for unwanted cows, called gaushalas (gau means cow and shala is a place of protection). Both Jains and Hindus may set up these cow sanctuaries and sometimes co-operate in their management.

Animal welfare-minded veterinary surgeons and some western campaigners criticise these cow sanctuaries, as sick and dying animals are not euthanised.[65] Hindus will not allow the sacred cow to be killed.

Jains will not allow the taking of life, and although a sick animal will be cared for, he or she will not be killed, humanely or otherwise. Outsiders see an animal suffering unnecessarily; a Jain believes that it is the karma of that animal to die in their own time. Meanwhile the animal will be looked after and kept as comfortable as possible, as that is showing compassion.

Jain monks and some committed lay Jains used not to brush their teeth because they would harm the microorganisms living in the mouth. Unfortunately, this has had a bad effect on their dental health.[66] Nowadays modern Jains do brush their teeth. [67]

For the same reasons, Jain monks and nuns can be seen walking down the streets in towns in India, wearing their white robes, covering their noses and mouths with white face masks, to avoid breathing in airborne insects, and

sweeping the ground in front of them as they go to avoid stepping on any little creatures on the road ahead. If possible, Jain monks do not use any form of transport. They only walk from town to town as part of their belief in ecology and not using animals as a form of transport. The Jain laity or householders have a duty to provide food and look after the needs of the monks and nuns.

It may come as a surprise then to find that the Jain community is well represented in India's pharmaceutical industry, with many companies under Jain ownership. How the company owners can reconcile the inevitable animal experimentation involved in the pharmaceutical industry with their Jain beliefs, is a question for them to reflect on.

Some Jains living in the UK are also involved in this industry. In a debate in the Westminster Parliament on 1 May 2019, Gareth Thomas MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Jains, drew attention to one such:

> An important example is Sigma Pharmaceuticals... It is the largest independent pharmaceutical wholesaler in the UK and was a national champion in the European Business Awards back in 2017. It is a family-run company with Jain principles at its heart, and for almost 40 years it has served independent pharmacies, dispensing to doctors and hospitals across the UK.[68]

In general, Jains seem to have prospered and they value education highly. In India, roughly a third (34%) of Jain adults have at least a college degree, compared with 9% of the general public, according to India's 2011 census.[69]

Conclusion

The Jain belief and practice of ahimsa, non-violence, and its commitment to compassionate action, jiv-daya, is exemplary. Historically, these Jain beliefs have been an influence on many Hindus and may have helped the Hindus move towards abandoning animal sacrifice and adopting vegetarianism.[70]

The great leader Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu himself, admitted his admiration for Jainism and he always attempted to put ahimsa into action in his personal and political life.[71]

Nitin Mehta, a committed Jain, explains another important concept in Jainism:

> To put this concept of Ahimsa or non-violence into practice, Jainism advocates an idea called Anekantwad. It means that truth can be arrived at from different angles. In practice this means that you respect another way of looking at things. Different religions and ideologies are different ways of looking at things and there is no need to fight over that. If we look at history, we see that tens of millions of people have been killed by people claiming their religion is the only right one and that the others should not exist. Tens of millions of people have died in the name of Communism, Capitalism and

> in the name of a superior race looking down on those who are perceived to be inferior. All this would have been avoided if the Jain idea of accommodating differences had been practiced.[72]

One Jain scholar, Hampa Nagarajaiah, is quoted in "The Hindu" newspaper: "The contribution of Jainism to the overall glory of Indian culture, art and architecture, sculpture and literature is enormous. The Jain community has always been in the mainstream strengthening the Indian culture".[73]

In the state of Gujarat in a place called Palitana there are 700 Jain temples on the hills of Shatrunjaya. Pilgrims have to climb 3,700 steps, preferably without taking any food or water. The intricate workmanship on the temple walls is fascinating.[74]

Apart from such wonders, at the everyday level, the Jain diet displays extraordinary concern for living beings.

From the outside, looking in, it does seem to be an anomaly that most Jains continue to drink cow's milk. Today's dairy industry is ruthless in its exploitation of the cow for maximum yield and profit, and insensitive to the needs of cow and calf after the calf is born. It is good to know that increasing numbers of Jains are moving towards a vegan, non-dairy diet.

While Jainism requires a Jain to have a non-violent lifestyle, it is a further anomaly to see so many Jain-owned and managed pharmaceutical companies. Safety-testing of most pharmaceuticals still requires animal-testing, although more and more alternatives are being developed. It would be good to see Jains in the pharmaceutical industry leading the way towards adopting non-animal alternatives.

Sikhism

Introduction

Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of the Sikh faith, grew up in a Hindu family in India at a time when relations between Hindus and Muslims were antagonistic. He underwent a deep spiritual experience, as so many religious founders have done, and came to the conclusion that there is no Hindu, no Muslim. He declared that we are all children of the one God, often named "Waheguru" or the "wondrous enlightener". So, Sikhism is a monotheistic faith. Guru Nanak rejected the caste system of Hinduism and declared all humans equal. He also recognised women as equal to men.

Nine Gurus followed Nanak and developed the Sikh faith and community over the next centuries. Two of these gurus were executed by the Mughal rulers of India. The last Guru was Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), who continued to militarise the Sikh community in order that it could defend itself from attacks which came sometimes from invaders who came from what is now Afghanistan. Horses became a vital part of the fighting force.

Before he died, Guru Gobind Singh said there would be no more human gurus, but that the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), would be the Eternal Guru. Every Sikh gurdwara (temple) has a copy which is kept on a raised platform under a canopy, out of respect. The Guru Granth Sahib consists of 5,894 verses in which the works of the gurus are preserved, as well as works from some Muslim Sufis and Hindu saints.

There are an estimated 25–30 million Sikhs in the world. The vast majority live in India, centred on the Punjab area, but there are significant Sikh communities in other countries from the UK to Canada, the USA and Australia. The city of Amritsar in Punjab is home to the prestigious Golden Temple (Sri Harmandir Sahib), of the Sikhs, where the Guru Granth Sahib is recited every day.

Guru Nanak said religion should be based on selfless service and meditation. This can be achieved by following the three principles of Naam Japna (focus on God), Kirat Karni (honest living) and Vand Chakna (sharing with others). Sikhs should adhere to the following virtues – Sat (Truth), Santokh (Contentment), Daya (Compassion and kindness), Nimrata (Humility) and Pyare (Love). He said Sikhs should shun various negative human vices, one of which is cruelty to others.[75]

Guru Gobind Singh modified this, teaching that the five qualities/virtues which the Sikhs should emulate are: Daya (Compassion), Dharam (Righteousness), Himmat (Courage), Mohkam (detachment) and Sahib (Majesty/Dignity).[76]

Sikh Beliefs about Animals

Charanjit Ajit Singh, a Sikh author and animal welfarist, reminds us that every prayer said by Sikhs individually or in a congregational setting, ends with "O God, may your will prevail and may the whole creation benefit".[77]

Sikhs believe in reincarnation and that the soul may be reborn as a human, an animal or a plant. As with Hinduism and Buddhism, humans are the highest level to be born into.

Brandon Foreman writes: "Thus, not only do Sikhs place the highest value on humans whereby they are the closest beings to holiness, but they give a clear separation between humans and other animals".[78]

The concept of "Mukti" or Liberation in Sikhism includes both freedom from the cycle of birth and death but also absorption or surrender into a state of merger with the divine. In the world at large this is often referred to by other words; such as nirvana.[79] Sikhs may aim to attain Liberation in this life (Jivanmukti) by their devotional activities and selfless service to the community.

Sikhs pray three times a day for the wellbeing of all of humanity, prosperity for everyone in the worldwide community and global peace for the entire planet.[80]

There are some texts in the Guru Granth Sahib which show real concern for the wellbeing of animals. Guru Nanak wrote: "There are beings and creatures in the water and on the land, in the worlds and universes, form upon form. Whatever they say, You know; You care for them all".[81]

There are many animal analogies within the Guru Granth Sahib, such as this from Guru Tegh Bahadur:

> Those who make pilgrimages to sacred shrines, observe ritualistic fasts and make donations to charity while still taking pride in their minds - O Nanak, their actions are useless, like the elephant, who takes a bath, and then rolls in the dust.[82]

Animals, along with nature, are viewed as meditating on the Divine: "Mortals, forests, blades of grass, animals and birds all meditate on the Divine".[83] Therefore, animals are in relationship with God.

Another beautiful verse from the Guru Granth Sahib demonstrates concern for animals and those humans who are suffering:

> Always cognize the near presence of God, through the practice of the Name,
> Avoid hurt or injury to any sentient being so that peace may come to your mind,
> Be humble by helping and serving those afflicted with misery and want, so as to achieve God-consciousness.
> Nanak testifies that God is the exalter of the fallen and lowly.[84]

The verse in the Guru Granth Sahib which puts concern for animals in the strongest light is:

> The merit of pilgrimages to the sixty-eight holy places, and that of other virtues besides, do not equal having compassion for other living beings.[85]

So, compassion for other living beings is clearly seen as the highest quality which humans can demonstrate.

In modern times Sikhs have issued statements concerning the Sikh relationship with animals. At the major meeting of the faiths in Assisi in 1986, the Sikhs issued a statement on our relations with animals. It reads:

> Humans should conduct themselves through life with love, compassion, and justice. Becoming one and being in harmony with God implies that humans endeavour to live in harmony with all of God's creation.[86]

A further statement was made in 2003:

> The world, like all creation, is a manifestation of God. Every creature in this world, every plant, every form is a manifestation of the Creator. Each is part of God and God is within each element of creation. God is the cause of all and the primary connection between all existences.[87]

Hunting

What was the example of the gurus of Sikhism? Guru Har Rai (1630–1661) was known as an animal lover and kept many animals himself. Two of the gurus were known as hunters. Guru Hargobind (1595–1644) was an avid hunter who enjoyed falconry, although he also said that Sikhs should not eat meat or fish.[88] Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708) was also a keen hunter who said: "Through various sports I hunted in the forest and killed bear, nylgao and stags. Witnessing many a wonderous feat there we camped on the bank of the Yamuna river. Selectively we killed many lions, bears and nylgao". This Guru was often portrayed with one of his hunting dogs or with his pet hunting falcon perched on his arm.[89]

The scale of this hunting seems to go far beyond subsistence hunting for food and seems more akin to the western so-called "sport" hunting of foxes, deer and hares.

Of course, we recognise that hunting was taken for granted in many parts of society at that time and long before we knew that many wild animals are becoming threatened with extinction. However, hunting does not seem to sit easily with the teaching that all creatures are created by God and should be cared for. Nowadays few Sikhs are associated with hunting.

Farm Animals

Sikhism is the majority faith in Punjab, practised by 16 million people representing 57.69% of the population of Punjab, making it the only Sikh-majority state in India.[90] So, it seems fair to see what kind of animal farming is practised in Punjab.

There are many small-scale farmers in Punjab, who may keep a cow or two and some chickens. They may be devoted to their animals and keep them as best as they can.

Dairy farming is widespread within Punjab and dairy consumption is an intrinsic part of the local diet. (See Hinduism chapter for a description of dairy farming in India.)

So-called "modern" intensive farming practices have also been adopted. These pay scant regard to the wellbeing of the animals whom they farm.

It seems that poultry farming follows the usual pattern in the state. Punjab has 500 laying hen farms with a capacity of nearly 30 million birds producing around 25 million eggs daily.[91]

This equates to about 60,000 birds per farm. It is likely that such huge numbers of birds are not kept in free-range conditions but in cages or intensive indoor units.

There are around 400 broiler (meat) chicken farms in Punjab. It appears that the government of India is encouraging the growth of the chicken industry as stated in the National Action Plan for Egg and Poultry, 2022.[92]

While there are small-scale backyard farms rearing chickens, and these provide for household consumption and some local sales, the vast majority of poultry farms in Punjab and elsewhere in India appear to be intensive. Some of the big poultry farms are even named after the Sikh gurus, such as "Guru Nanak Poultry Farm".

The intensive farming of poultry by Sikhs does raise the question asked in the Guru Granth Sahib: "You say that the One Lord is in all, so why do you kill chickens?"[93]

Food and Diet

Sikhs are divided on the subject of meat-eating. Sikhs living in India will not eat beef, possibly out of respect for their Hindu neighbours.

Guru Gobind Singh prohibited Sikhs from the consumption of Kutha, which is meat slaughtered by Muslims or Jews, because of the Sikh belief that sacrificing an animal in the name of God is not correct. Some Sikhs who have committed to their faith through Amrit or baptism, will become vegetarian.[94] Baptised Sikhs become Khalsas (Pure ones) and are devoted to their guru, even being prepared to die for the faith.

However, several sects within Sikhism advocate a vegetarian diet, possibly because in the early days of Sikhism, they attracted many followers who were Vaishnavite Hindus and were opposed to meat-eating. Some Sikhs are strongly vegetarian and quote many edicts about this.[95]

Nearly all Sikh gurdwaras (temples) run langars, community kitchens, which cook only vegetarian food and distribute it free to everyone, regardless of caste, religion, social status etc. The food is often rice, chappati and dahl (lentils) with vegetables. Everyone sits on the floor, be they royalty or homeless (of course facilities exist for those who physically cannot manage such sitting). The langars are run by Sikh volunteers.

The langar attached to the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Sri Harmandir Sahib, is said to feed 65,000 people a day. In 2011, Amritsar became one of the founding cities of the Green Pilgrimage Network and committed to providing organic and pesticide-free food. Plastic water bottles and bags have been banned and solar panels are being installed in order to cook the langar food.[96]

The first three gurus established the langars and they really were – perhaps still are – revolutionary. Hitherto, people of different faiths, such as Muslims and Hindus, would not eat together and high-caste Hindus would not eat with lower castes or "outcastes". Now the langars have demonstrated that "…the Light of God is in all hearts".[97]

It is recorded that the great Emperor Akbar came to visit the Golden Temple and was told that he too must sit on the floor with everyone else in the langar. [98]

Some modern Sikh spiritual guides are sympathetic to vegetarianism. For example, Sant Rajinder Singh writes:

> Many also find such plant-based diets are beneficial for spiritual growth. Those who meditate and connect with the Light within them see that same Light also shining in all other human beings and all living things. Thus, they choose to treat other forms of creation as younger brothers and sisters in one family of God. Such people often choose a plant-based diet as consistent with their spiritual values.[99]

He goes on to explain the spiritual reasons for caring for all creatures:

> This Light (of God) exists as much in the humble ant as in the powerful lion. It shines in the snake as well as the cow. It shimmers in the fish, as well as the birds. When we look at life through the eyes of the soul, we witness God in even the humblest and most grotesque of creatures. With that angle of vision, we develop love for all that exists.[100]

Slaughter

The preferred method of slaughter for those Sikhs who eat meat is called Jhatka and consists of beheading the animal with one stroke. Sikhs believe this to be the most painless method for killing an animal.

Jhatka carries no religious meaning or symbolism. Sikhs have always opposed the attachment of religious rituals to the slaughter of animals.

In Jhatka, the head of the animal is attached to a stable column and the posterior legs are stretched out in the opposite direction. The animal is beheaded from the backbone side with a single stroke of a sword or axe.[101]

Some slaughter experts say that this will cause the sudden death of the animal because the spinal cord is cut, and the circulation of blood to the brain has been immediately stopped, resulting in brain failure within seconds.[102] Other experts estimate that decapitation may not induce total unconsciousness for about half a minute.[103]

In the European Union, decapitation without prior stunning is not permitted.[104] In countries where Jhatka meat is not widely available, Sikhs may often eat meat slaughtered in the modern, western way, where the animal is stunned and then cut. They will not eat halal or Kosher meat, because religious beliefs and practices are involved in the slaughter.

Conclusion

Sikhs regard animals as creatures of God and respect them. The Guru Granth Sahib contains some beautiful verses about compassion for all beings.

Many Sikhs follow a vegetarian diet, while others eat meat.

There does seem to be some inconsistency regarding intensive farming and compassion for all creatures.

The Sikh langars are a wonderful demonstration of community action, concern for all humanity and respect for animal life.

References

The Sikh holy book is the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS). The abbreviation GGS with the relevant verse number is used in these references. The GGS can be accessed online at www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani.

Rastafarianism

Introduction

Most of the faiths considered in this book began hundreds or thousands of years ago. Rastafarianism is a 20th-century faith, which started in Jamaica, has spread globally and has around 1 million adherents. However, Rastafarians, or Rastafari, believe in the Biblical God Jehovah, referred to as Jah, and many of their beliefs and practices are rooted in Biblical references.

The black inhabitants of Jamaica were the descendants of slaves, brought to Jamaica during the notorious slave trade and subjugated by the white ruling and land-owning elite and by many of the white Christian missionaries.

Marcus Garvey was a political activist and promoted black self-empowerment in the early 20th century. Many Rastafari think that he was a prophet, akin to John the Baptist's role in Christianity. Garvey urged those of the African diaspora to not only return to Africa, but to also "look to Africa, when a black king shall be crowned". That prophecy was realised in 1930, when Haile Selassie I was crowned the Emperor of Ethiopia. Rastafarians consider the Emperor their messiah, naming the movement after his birth name, Ras Tafari Makonnen.[105] Many regard him as the Second Coming of Jesus and Jah incarnate, while others see him as a human prophet. Among the titles the emperor took for himself was "King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and Conquering Lion of the Tribe Judah". In doing this, he claimed descent from the Biblical King David and many Rastafari saw a reference to the Book of Revelation 5:2–5, where only the Lion of the tribe of Judah can open the sacred scroll.

On 21st April 1966, Haile Selassie visited Jamaica and although he is said to have denied his personal divinity (he was a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church), the Jamaican Rastafarians gave him a massive and vociferous welcome. The date is now considered holy and is celebrated as Grounation Day.

Other Rastafari practices are also biblically referenced. Smoking ganja, marijuana, is regarded as a sacrament and they believe that this "herb" is the tree spoken of in Revelations 22:2: "In the midst of the street there was the tree of life, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations". Usually, Rastafarians refer to marijuana as the "wisdom weed" or the "holy herb".

When Rastafari men gather together for their "Reasoning" sessions, they may pray, chant, sing and smoke ganja in a serious way, believing that it heightens their meditation and brings them closer to Jah. Before it is used, a prayer is uttered by all: "Glory be to the father and to the maker of creation. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be World without end: Jah Rastafari: Eternal God Selassie I".[106]

Many Rastafari do not cut their hair and the men's dreadlocks are said to resemble a lion's mane – a sign of strength and a tribute to the Lion of Judah, Haille Selassie. It is seen as more natural to let one's hair grow. Women often cover their hair too.

Jah is regarded not just as god out there, but as dwelling in each person. Rastafarians therefore say they don't "believe" in God, they "know" him. He is immanent within them.[107]

Political and Cultural Aspects

While Rastafarianism is undoubtedly a faith, it has strong political aspects too. Many Rastafari believe that they should return to Africa, the homeland of their ancestors. They often call Africa, or specifically Ethiopia, "Zion". Some Rastafari people have returned to Africa, often to Ghana, from where many of the slaves were captured and transported. Others have taken up Haile Selassie's offer, in 1963, of 500 hectares of land near the small southern Ethiopian town of Shasemene. The believers who have settled there are from a particular Rastafari sect, the Twelve Tribes of Israel.[108]

Western consumerist culture is derided as "Babylon". Rastas' economic beliefs are anti-capitalism. Capitalism is part of Babylon, the way the white world rulers enrich themselves and enslave others. Rastas believe that possessions should be shared. This is not Communism as Rastafarianism rejects all rules and everyone finds their own way within the faith.

This strong mixture of faith and community is demonstrated in the way Rastas never use the words "I", "we" or "us". They say, "I and I". Rastas use the word to connect themselves to God, to show that that God is always part of them. A Rasta will never say "I am going there"; instead, it would be "I and I am going there". The Rasta does this to show that God is part of him, and that he is not separate from any other person.[5]

Rastafari believe in being close to the earth and living in harmony with their environment. They do not believe in plundering the earth for profit. They see Babylon destroying the planet and living greedily off the earth's so-called "resources". In this belief, they have been ahead of the Babylon world, which is only beginning to see that its resource-intensive lifestyles cannot go on forever.

Rastafari see Babylon in the neocolonialism of foreign aid and structural adjustments. These programmes, sponsored by institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, are supposed to be aimed at reducing debt within developing nations. The reality is that they have often ended communal control of land, seized land for debt, and forced upon developing nations new agricultural programmes aimed at increasing capital. With these programmes cash crops have replaced traditional farming and subsistence agriculture. The drive towards industrialisation and large-scale agriculture has been relentless.[109]

Health and Diet

Rastafarians believe their body is a temple, so they should only eat pure foods. They follow the "ital" diet (the word being derived from "vital" and vitality), eating organic, preferably home-grown or organic plant foods, preferably in season. They do not eat meat or eggs, and many do not eat fish, especially shellfish, as they

are scavengers. They believe such a diet will promote "livity" or life energy. Livity is a contraction of "live" and Leviticus. They believe that eating dead animals turns their bodies into cemeteries. Some will eat small fish, shorter than 12 inches in length, to avoid the Babylonian sin of greed.

Some Rastas avoid salt, which is believed to harm the kidneys and liver, and many adhere to a vegan diet, considering dairy to be harmful or not strictly ital. Others avoid any food that has been preserved or has been prepared using metal instruments. Clay pots and wooden bowls and spoons are often used in the preparation of ital food. Many adherents avoid alcohol and stimulants like tea and coffee, but this is less strictly followed. Herbal tea is the exception due to its low caffeine content and natural herbal properties.[110]

A label is being developed in the United States for official recognition of this increasingly popular ital diet.[111]

The BBC ran an article in 2016 about a young Rasta couple who have established an ital food truck cafe in Liverpool. The young man, Dan, was asked if the reason for this was animal protection. He replied:

> Well, that's probably not the primary idea behind the movement, but it plays a big part. If an animal has been bred for slaughter and kept in a space where it's not allowed to move freely or live a happy life and then you eat that animal, you take all of that history on. It's all about being mindful of what you're putting into your body, as well as where your food comes from.[112]

In an interesting interview, the well-known Rastafari dub poet, musician, actor, educator, and radio host, Mutabaruka, declares, "I think we should respect the lives of all creatures on earth".[113]

In spite of the Rastafarian respect for animals and the earth, at first it was quite a male-dominated faith. Although Rasta women were called "queens" they were meant to do as they were told. Now more Rasta women are declaring their independence and confidence.

Sheeba Levi Stewart, a member of Rastafari Movement UK, told "The Voice" magazine about how she saw Haile Selassie on his visit to Jamaica when she was just eight years old. "I remember looking at His Majesty and just feeling this like an electric charge," she said. Her family moved to Britain and did not share her enthusiasm for Rastafarianism. She said:

> But then once I realised the spirituality of His Majesty and the dynasty back to Solomon and Sheba, and the Bible and Ethiopia as the world history that just gave me that confidence and that push where I couldn't be anything else, but a Rasta.

She added: "I've always been independent, and I've always felt it's important to be independent".[114]

Outspoken Rastas

Two of the best-known Rastafarians are the late Bob Marley, whose songs touched so many people both in Jamaica and around the world (and whom I have quoted at the top of this chapter) and the famous writer and poet Benjamin Zephaniah.[115]

Conclusion

The Rastafarian ital diet, with its emphasis on home-grown, organic plants, is undoubtedly a planet-friendly, healthy way to eat. Many health, animal welfare and environmental groups are now proposing diets that are more akin to this way of eating.

Rastafarians respect the earth and all its creatures. Their scorn for the western capitalist system of food production with its industrial farms and lack of concern for the marginalised is understandable. "Babylon" has indeed been destructive of the environment and negligent in caring for the earth and its creatures. Rastafarian farming is naturally agro-ecological and regenerative.

Rastafarianism offers an attractive alternative lifestyle.

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Conclusion

There are around 8 billion humans on the earth.[1]

For our food alone we slaughter ten times that many other sentient beings each year. Over 80 billion individual land-based animals[2] – and well over a trillion of wild-caught fishes – are eaten by us on an annual basis.[3] Figures for consumption of farmed fishes range from half a billion to well over a billion a year.[4]

Over 100 million animals are used in animal testing each year.[5]

Many thousands of animals are shot or hunted for "sport", others used for our entertainment in films, circuses and zoos (which is not to deny that many zoos are involved in breeding animals for release back into their original environment).

We humans appear to be a highly predatory species.

Many people look to the teachings of their faith and to its current leaders to guide them in making ethical decisions as to how they should lead their lives. From the Ten Commandments to the Five Pillars of Islam, from the Laws of Manu to the Five Paramis of Buddhism, the faiths have indeed given guidance and sometimes absolute instruction as to how one's life should be led.

So, it is a bit surprising to see so little guidance overall in determining how we should relate to animals. There are calls for compassion but, on the whole, human interests come first. Could it be that we are so afraid of death and the possibility of an eternal afterlife or continual rebirths, that we always put our personal interests first?

I know many sincere and kind people who do much good in the world, but who sit down to factory-farmed meat for supper without a second thought. Some of them are deeply religious people.

Is this not a sign of a fundamental failure of the world's faiths?

If we added up all the sermons and talks given by the priests, bishops, imams, rabbis and gurus of the world, I wonder what proportion would have addressed the issue of our relationship with other creatures on this planet? I fear that the answer would be in very low numbers. At least in this book I have been able to give some encouraging examples.

So, here's the challenge: animals globally are suffering at our hands. We can act to change this. If you are a faith leader, please talk about this. If you are just an ordinary believer, please ask or challenge your faith leaders to investigate the issue and to talk about it publicly. If you are an unbeliever, then please question your

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faith friends or faith leaders locally or nationally and ask them to do something about this.

My research into the faiths' teachings has encouraged me. I hope it has encouraged you too! Let's find creative ways to make the teachings and exemplars known in our communities.

We can be sure that trillions of creatures will be spared immense suffering if we take up this challenge.

Surely that can only be A VERY GOOD THING?

Notes

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Glossary

Judaism

Chalaf	A knife used for animal slaughter.
Halacha	The body of Jewish law supplementing the scriptural law and forming especially the legal part of the Talmud.
Korban(ot)	Sacrifice(s).
Kosher	Fit or proper. Usually refers to food which is fit to be eaten according to Jewish law.
Nefesh	Life force, urge for survival.
Neshama	A spiritual soul, which seeks fulfilment in God, said to be only possessed by humans.
Rabbi	A teacher of Judaism.
Sabbath (shabbat)	Day of rest, ordained in the scriptures. From Friday evening to Saturday evening.
Shechita	Slaughter according to Jewish rules.
Shochet (-im)	The person/people who carry out Jewish slaughter.
Shtreimel	Fur hat worn by some Ashkenazi Jewish men, mainly members of Hasidic Judaism, on Shabbat and other Jewish holidays.
The Tenakh	The Hebrew Bible.
Torah	The five books of Moses at the beginning of the Hebrew Bible.
Tsa'ar ba-alei chayim	The pain or suffering of living things; a fundamental Jewish teaching is that human beings must avoid tsa'ar ba-alei chayim.

Christianity

Catechism	A manual of religious instruction in the form of questions and answers.
Encyclical	A circular letter from the Pope to all Catholics (sometimes to all people).
The Evangelists	The four authors of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
The Trinity	Three persons in One God: Father, Son (incarnated as Jesus) and the Holy Spirit.

Islam

Allah	The one God, probably a contraction of al-ilah, the god in Arabic. Used by Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews as well as by Muslims.
Bismillah	Saying meaning "In the name of God".
Hadith	Collections of the sayings and actions of the prophet Muhammad and his companions, next most important to the Qur'an.
Halal	"Acceptable" "permitted" or "sanctified", applies widely to a multitude of products and actions, not just to food.
Insha allah	Saying meaning "God willing".
Khalifah	The role of humans in relation to the world, variously translated as "vice-regent", "trustee", "agent" (of God), "having a sacred duty".
Qur'an	Islam's most sacred book, believed to be the word of God revealed to Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel and written down in Arabic.
Sharia	Divine law, based on teachings in the Qur'an and Hadith.
Taqwa	Having reverence towards God and caring for his creatures.
Tayyib	Pure, healthy, good or natural food.

Hinduism

Advaita	Non-dualism. Brahman and Atman are one. Sometimes referred to as Advaita Vedanta.
Ahimsa	Non-violence.
Atman	The "higher self", identified with Brahman.
Bhagavad gita	Dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and his charioteer, the god Krishna.
Bhagavata purana	Holy book from 8th to 9th CE, smriti.
Bhajan	Devotional song.
Brahman	The one divine essence behind and within every being.
Brahmins (Brahmans)	The traditional priestly caste.
Dharma	One's duty in life, how to live.
Gaushala	Sanctuary for cows.
Karma	Action and the results of action, can determine one's rebirth.
Kshatriyas	The warrior caste.
The Laws of Manu or Manusmriti	Books of religious and moral teaching from 100 CE approximately, smriti.
Mahabharata	Epic tale, includes the Bhagavad Gita, smriti.
Moksha	Release from samsara, eternal bliss.
Ramayana	Epic tale of the god Rama and his wife Sita, smriti.
Samsara	The cycle of rebirths.
Sanatana Dharma	The Eternal Law of Righteousness, the words many Hindus prefer to use, rather than "Hinduism".
Scheduled castes	Official term for those outside the main caste system, previously called untouchables, Dalits (scattered ones) or Harijans (children of God).
Shudras	The worker caste.
Smriti	Holy books accepted as being written by people, literally "that which is remembered".
Sruti	Divinely revealed teachings given to the sages, e.g., the Vedas.
The Upanishads	Later sacred books, more philosophical, also sruti.
Vaishyas	Traders, farmers and business people caste.
The Vedas	Ancient holy books: Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda, all sruti.

Buddhism

Anatta or an-atman	The concept of non-self or no-self. It is linked to the concept of anicca, impermanence – everything is constantly changing.
Arhat	In Theravadan Buddhism, one who fully realises the teaching and can thus attain nirvana (nibbana) or enlightenment and freedom from the cycle of rebirth (samsara).
Bodhi tree (tree of awakening)	Usually refers to the tree under which Gautama meditated until he became the Buddha or enlightened one.
Bodhisattva	One who foregoes nirvana in order to be reborn and help others to achieve enlightenment.
Buddha	The Enlightened One.
Dhammapada	An anthology of 423 verses mostly contained within the Pali canon. Dhamma can mean law, discipline, justice, virtue, truth - that which holds things together. Pada means way, path, step, foot. So, The Dhammapada is the path of virtue, or the way of truth.
Karuna	Compassion.
Mahayana	One of the two main divisions within Buddhism: the Great Vehicle, found mostly in China, Tibet, Japan and Vietnam.
Paramis	Perfections or moral virtues of giving, morality, renunciation, discerning wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving kindness and equanimity.
Samsara	Cycle of birth, death and rebirth.
Sangha	The community of monks and nuns, sometimes refers to the wider Buddhist community.
Theravada	One of the two main divisions within Buddhism: The Way of the Elders, found in India, Sri Lanka and other south-east Asian countries such as Thailand and Myanmar, sometimes referred to as the Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle).
Tripitaka or Pali canon (1st c BCE), also called Tipitaka ("Triple Basket")	The oldest Buddhist written teachings.

First Nations Australia

Country	The land, its formations, includes one's relationships with other beings, human and animal, and with the earth.
The Dreaming	Stories of the Ancestral Beings, who created the land, the creatures and the relationships between them.
Songlines	These songs represent the journey of the ancestors. The songs act as a map or guide across the land and include knowledge about animals and plants.
Totem	Usually an animal, unique to that person, who feels a strong affiliation with that totem.

Jainism

Agam literature	Holy book accepted by Swetambra Jains.
Ahimsa	Non-violence, key teaching in Jainism.
Gaushala	Sanctuary for cows.
Jiva	Soul. All beings have a soul.
Jiv-daya	A life of compassion (daya), relieving suffering, compassionate action.
Karma	Action and the results of action, can determine one's rebirth.
Kevala	Full enlightenment, liberation.
Moksha	Liberation from samsara.
Pinjraproles	Animal sancutaries.
Samsara	Cycle of rebirths.
Tirthankara	Enlightened teacher, lit. "ford-maker" – in this case one who creates a fordable passage through the cycle of endless rebirths (samsara) to kevala or liberation.

Sikhism

Gurdwara	Sikh temple.
Guru Granth Sahib (GGS)	The ultimate teacher or "Eternal Guru", book containing teachings from the Sikh gurus and others. Regarded as the highest authority in Sikhism. A copy is kept in each gurdwara.
Jivanmukti	Realisation of mukti whilst still living.
Jhatka	Preferred Sikh method of slaughter. The animal is beheaded in one stroke.
Langar	Community kitchen/feeding place in a gurdwara, distributes free vegetarian food daily to all-comers.
Mukti	Liberation from samsara, the cycle of rebirths, and merging with the divine. Similar to Moksha.

Rastafarianism

Babylon	Western consumerist culture, neo-colonialism.
Ital (diet)	Diet based on plant foods.
Jah	God (from Jehovah).
Livity	Life energy, increases through eating an ital diet.

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