

Kindness to Animals: Warwick Leaflet

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The Bahá'í Faith teaches that animals should be treated with kindness, and that this is a matter of great importance. Bahá'u'lláh listed kindness to animals as one of the qualities which must be acquired by anyone searching for God. In other words spiritual development requires that we love and respect all of our fellow-creatures human or otherwise.

All of creation is inter-related, and the realisation of the oneness of all life is fundamental to the Bahá'í view. 'Abdu'l-Bahá the son of Bahá'u'lláh, said:

"Unless ye must,
Bruise not the serpent in the dust,
How much less wound a man,
And if ye can,
No ant should ye alarm,
Much less a brother harm."

The need for mankind to change its attitudes towards animals could hardly be put more strongly than it is in the Bahá'í writings:

"To blessed animals the utmost kindness must be shown, the more the better. Tenderness and loving-kindness are basic principles of God's heavenly Kingdom. Ye should most carefully bear this matter in mind."

Measure against this standard the way live animals are transported in inhumane conditions on their way to be killed, or in crates from tropical countries to our pet shops; caught or hunted for pleasure; used in laboratories to test drugs or cosmetics; or bred to be used for status symbol items of clothing.

STATION OF ANIMALS

The Bahá'í Scriptures classify the world of creation into four categories: mineral, vegetable, animal and human, with regard to inherent qualities:

"First - mineral - that is to say matter or substance appearing in various forms of composition. Second - vegetable - possessing the virtues of the mineral plus the power of augmentation or growth, indicating a degree higher and more specialized than the mineral. Third - animal - possessing the attributes of the mineral and vegetable plus the power of sense perception. Forth - human - the highest specialized organism of visible creation, embodying the qualities of the mineral, vegetable and animal plus an ideal endowment absolutely absent in the lower kingdoms - the power of intellectual investigation into the mysteries of outer phenomena."

This power of investigation gives man control, to some degree, over nature.

Certainly mankind has the capacity to build and the capacity to destroy. He can be kind and gentle or he can be cruel and selfish. Mankind therefore has a responsibility towards the rest of nature which he could be expected to use wisely and considerately. Because animals do not have this capacity they do not have such responsibility. Man therefore has aspects to his life which the animal does not possess:

"Just as the animal is more noble than the vegetable and mineral so man is superior to the animal. The animal is bereft of ideality; that is to say, it is a captive of the world of nature and not in touch with that which lies within and beyond nature; it is without spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the attractions of consciousness, unconscious of the world of God and incapable of deviating from the law of nature. It is different with man. Man is possessed of the emanations of consciousness; he has perception, ideality and capable of discovering the mysteries of the universe."

CAPACITY OF ANIMALS

While animals do not have man's potential for spiritual development or for conscious destruction, like man they do have senses - sometimes more acute than those of man, as for instance a dog's sense of hearing or a bird of prey's sight; they have emotions, such as love, fear, and often highly developed strong social bonds:

"In what concerns the outer senses, such as hearing, sight, taste, smell, touch and even in some interior powers like memory, the animal is more richly endowed than man."

"For example, let us take the power of memory. If you carry a pigeon from here to a distant country, and there set it free, it will return, for it remembers the way. Take a dog from here (the Middle East) to the centre of Asia, set him free, and he will come back here and never once lose the road. So it is with the other powers such as hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch."

"The animal kingdom ... possesses the qualities of the mineral and vegetable plus the five senses of perception whereof the kingdoms below it are lacking. Likewise the power of memory inherent in the animal does not exist in the lower kingdoms."

"Observe how an animal will graze in a field where there are a hundred thousand kind of herbs and grasses, and how, with its sense of smell, it sniffeth up the odours of the plants, and tasteth them with its sense of taste; then it consumeth whatever herb is pleasurable to these senses, and benefiteth therefrom. Were it not for this power of selectivity, the animals would all be dead in a single day; for there are great many poisonous plants, and animals know nothing of the pharmacopoeia. And yet, observe what a reliable set of scales they have, by means of which to differentiate the good from the injurious."

ANIMALS AS FOOD

In some of the more industrialised societies, farming is big business, intent on supplying the market with maximum efficiency and profit. Animals are part of the production line and factory farms are the norm. Chickens and turkeys, which never see the light of day, are unnaturally fattened for the market. Eggs are produced in houses where hens are packed into tiny cages with mesh floors, with all natural movement constrained. Animals are tightly packed into transporters, sometimes three stories high, travelling many hours, without food and water. These practices would seem to be at odds with the Bahá'í teachings on the treatment of animals.

The Bahá'í writings make it clear that keeping animals for food is ultimately unnecessary:

"As humanity progresses, meat will be used less and less, for the teeth of man are not carnivorous. For example, the lion is endowed with carnivorous teeth which are intended for meat and if meat be not found, the lion starves. The digestive system of the lion is such that it cannot receive nourishment save through meat. The eagle has a crooked beak; the lower part is shorter than the upper. It cannot pick up grain; it cannot graze; therefore it is compelled to partake of meat. The domestic animals have herbivorous teeth formed to cut grass which is their fodder. The human teeth, the molars, are formed to grind grain. The front teeth, the incisors, are for fruits, etc. It is therefore quite apparent according to the implements for eating, man's food is intended to be grain and not meat. When mankind is more fully developed, the eating of meat will gradually cease."

"The food of the future will be fruit and grains. The time will come when meat will no longer be eaten ... our natural food is that which grows out of the ground. The people will gradually develop up to the condition of this natural food."

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANIMALS

"It is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature. For in all physical respects, and where the animal spirit is concerned, the selfsame feelings are shared by animal and man ... The feelings are one and the same, whether ye inflict pain on man or on beast. There is no difference here whatever. And indeed ye do worse to harm an animal, for man hath a language, he can lodge a complaint, he can cry out and moan; if injured he can have recourse to the authorities and these will protect him from his aggressor. But the hapless beast is mute, able neither to express its hurt nor take its case to the authorities ... Therefore it is essential that ye show forth the utmost consideration to the animal, and that ye be even kinder to him than to your fellow man. Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. If an animal be sick, let them try to heal it, if it be hungry, let them feed it, if thirsty, let them quench its thirst, if weary, let them see that it rests."

If our children are brought up in this way, there will be an end to cruelty to

animals.

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All quotations are from the Bahá'í writings.

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