

The Holy Prophet Muhammad's kindness towards animals and high morals

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 5 November 2021

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَيْرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَّمٌ أَمْثَالُكُمْ^ط

“And there is no animal in the earth, nor a bird that flies on its two wings, but (they are) communities like yourselves.” — ch. 6, v. 38.

In continuation of last Friday's topic, another incident involving the Holy Prophet Muhammad and a creature is reported as follows: “We were with the Prophet in a cave at Mina when *Al-Mursalāt* (ch. 77 of the Quran) was revealed to him. He was reciting it and I was learning it from his mouth and his mouth was fresh with it, when suddenly a snake appeared in front of us. The Prophet said: ‘Kill it.’ We hastened to kill it but it escaped. Then the Prophet said: ‘It escaped harm from you just as you escaped harm from it’.” (Bukhari, book 28: Penalty for Hunting during Pilgrimage, ch. 7, hadith 1830.)

The Holy Prophet felt relief that the snake did not need to be killed as it retreated of its own accord. So, if a dangerous animal needs to be killed because it would attack humans, but then it ceases to be a risk to human life, it should not be killed without reason, just for the sake of killing it.

People sometimes indulge in cruel practices on animals as a form of sport and enjoyment. Such practices were forbidden by the Holy Prophet. It is related in Bukhari that Ibn Umar (son of Hazrat Umar) went to see someone and he came across that man's son who had tied a hen to shoot arrows at it. The report says: “Ibn Umar walked up to the hen and untied it. Then he brought it and the boy (to the father) and said: ‘Prevent your boys from making this bird a target for killing (i.e., by tying it), as I have heard the Prophet forbidding that any cattle or other animal be made a target for killing (by tying it).’” (Bukhari, book 72: Hunting, hadith 5514.) According to the next hadith in Bukhari, Ibn Umar happened to come upon some youngsters who had tied a hen as a target and were shooting arrows at it. Seeing him, they fled. Ibn Umar said:

“Who has done this? The Prophet cursed the person who does this.” Ibn Umar also related that the Holy Prophet forbade the cruel custom of cutting off limbs of live animals and leaving them in that state.

There is a brief report in Hadith as follows: “Whenever we dismounted at a camp, we did not pray until we untied the saddles of the camels.” (Abu Dawud, book 15: Jihad, hadith 2551.) This meant that the animals were left to get fodder freely and to relax. Another translator of Abu Dawud translates the words “until we untied the saddles of the camels” as “until we let the camels graze” and he adds this comment: “Based upon this narration, scholars consider it desirable that when a person halts to camp, he should give fodder to the animal before he himself takes his meal.” So you don’t pray or eat until you have ensured that the animal you were riding is fed and is resting.

The teachings of Islam about the humane treatment of animals that we have been mentioning are not merely our claim as Muslims. These teachings were noted and admired by an English writer, Reginald Bosworth Smith, in 1874 in his book *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*. I came to know of this when I was revising a part of the English translation of Sahih Bukhari that had been produced by Maulana Aftab-ud-Din Ahmad. The Maulana, while translating Maulana Muhammad Ali’s Urdu commentary, had added a quotation from Smith’s book about Islamic teachings on animal welfare. To check the quotation I obtained the book in digital form from a website. I discovered that this book consists of a series of four lectures that Bosworth Smith delivered in London at the Royal Institution. In it I found some more of Smith’s observations. He writes: “Nor does Mohammed omit to lay stress on ... the duties we owe to what we call the lower animals.” Smith says that just as it is a “crucial test of a moral code, and even of a religion” as to what kind of teachings it gives about how to treat the poor and the weak, it is also a crucial test of a moral code and religion as to what it teaches about how to treat animals. He then writes this about Islam: “There is no religion which has taken a higher view in its authoritative documents (meaning Quran and Hadith) of animal life, and none wherein the precept has been so much honoured by its practical observance.” To support this point, Bosworth Smith then

quotes the verse of the Quran that I quoted at the beginning of this *Khutba* about all animals and birds being communities like humans.

Bosworth Smith also makes a point which I cannot be certain is entirely correct but it is very moving and thought-provoking. He writes: “At the slaughter of an animal, the Prophet ordered that the name of God should always be named, but the words ‘the Compassionate, the Merciful’ (by which he means *Ar-Raḥmān*, *ar-Raḥīm*) were to be omitted.” The reason for this omission, he says, is that it would be unfitting and not appropriate to refer to God as Merciful when slaughtering an animal, and he writes that the Holy Prophet “could not bring himself to believe that the destruction of any life, however necessary, could be altogether pleasing to the All Merciful.” Reading this reminded me of what Maulana Muhammad Ali has written in his English translation and commentary of the Quran. Verse 118 of chapter 6 reads as follows: “Eat, then, from that on which Allah’s name has been mentioned, if you are believers in His messages”. Maulana Muhammad Ali comments as follows:

“Thus it is allowed to Muslims to slaughter animals for food, but the condition is here laid down that Allah’s name must be mentioned when the animal is slaughtered. There is no doubt that the taking of a life, even though it be the life of an animal, shows a kind of disregard for life, and it is allowed by God, only because the full physical development of man requires the use of the flesh of animals. It is, however, allowed subject to the condition that Allah’s name be mentioned at the time of the slaughter, and this is a reminder to man that this act is made lawful only by Divine permission, for the attainment of a necessary purpose. Thus, ... the order [to mention the name of Allah when slaughtering] is based on moral grounds, and as a safeguard against the development of habits of disregard for human life itself, which is a sad aspect of the development of the material civilization of our day.”

Bosworth Smith, whom I was quoting just above, adds that if the teachings of Islam about the treatment of animals are followed then there would be no need to have any of the modern legislation like that in the West which prohibits cruelty to animals, and no need for any animal welfare organisations. He also says: “The sympathy of the Prophet for his domestic animals is well known. There is a great variety of traditions

respecting his horses, his mules, his milch and riding camels, and his goats. It would be easy to write a complete biography of his favourite she-camel, Al Kaswa.” (See pp. 178–180, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, London, 1874.)

Another incident involving a different camel of the Holy Prophet throws light on another aspect of the Holy Prophet’s character. A hadith runs as follows: “The Prophet had a she-camel called Al-Aḍbā which could not be excelled in a race, or could hardly be excelled. Once a Bedouin came riding a camel which surpassed it in the race. The Muslims felt it badly so much that the Prophet noticed their distress. He then said: ‘It is the law of God that He brings down whatever rises high in the world’.” (Bukhari, hadith 2872 and 6501.) The Holy Prophet’s statement is similar to the well-known saying: “Records are set so that they can be broken.” Muslims were upset that the Holy Prophet’s camel was beaten in a race by a camel possessed by an ordinary Bedouin. But the Holy Prophet did not take any offence at this at all. A worldly ruler or any other worldly person would have been most unhappy and angry and would have taken it as a personal insult. But the Holy Prophet explained to his followers that this was a law of God, that something might be much better and much greater than all its competitors, but God can still bring something else which is even better than it. The Holy Prophet accepted the reality, even though it was unpalatable, that his camel was defeated, because the reality was the work of God’s laws, and God’s laws are above anyone’s personal desires.

Leaving aside the treatment of animals, there are other incidents illustrating the Holy Prophet’s humility, tolerance and informality. An incident is reported as follows: “Once, when Abu Bakr asked the permission of the Prophet to come in, he heard Aishah speaking in a loud voice (to the Holy Prophet). So when he entered, he caught hold of her in order to slap her, and said: ‘Do I see you raising your voice to the Messenger of Allah?’ The Prophet began to prevent him and Abu Bakr went out angry. After Abu Bakr went out, the Prophet said (to Aishah): ‘**You see I rescued you from the man.**’ Abu Bakr waited for some days, then asked permission of the Messenger of Allah to enter, and found that they (the Holy Prophet and Aishah) had made peace with each other. He said to them: ‘Bring me into your peace as you

brought me into your war.’ The Prophet said: ‘We have done so, we have done so’.” (Abu Dawud, book 43: *Al-Adab*, ch. 92, hadith 4999). In this incident the Holy Prophet protected his wife Aishah, who was arguing with him loudly, from being slapped by her father Abu Bakr for this disrespectful behaviour.

Another incident is reported as follows: “One day the Messenger of Allah was performing *wudu* (ablution before prayer). His Companions started rubbing the water dropping from his *wudu* on their own bodies. The Messenger of Allah asked: ‘Why are you doing this?’ They replied: ‘Because of love for Allah and His Messenger.’ He said: ‘He who wishes to love Allah and His Messenger, or wishes that Allah and His Messenger love him, should speak the truth when he talks, faithfully return anything that he is entrusted with, and fulfil the rights of his neighbour’.” (Mishkat, *Kitab-ul-Adab*, ch. Love and mercy for the creation). The Holy Prophet did not want to be venerated in this way, that people treat anything which he used, or anything which touched his body, as something holy and sacred. What he wanted from people was that they should behave well and do good to others.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَبَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعْنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-