

Cruelty to Animals

Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi

Partial translation



Cruelty to Animals

*"Burden not an animal with more than it can bear. We, truly, have prohibited such treatment through a most binding interdiction in the Book. Be ye the embodiments of justice and fairness amidst all creation."*¹

*"Say, O assembly of priests and monks, **eat what God has permitted and do not avoid meats.** God has allowed you to eat them except on specific numbered days, a grace from Him; indeed, He is the Mighty, the Generous."*²

*"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 self-same feelings are shared by animal and man."*³

*"Whosoever thou dost examine, through a microscope, the water man drinketh, the air he doth breathe, thou wilt see that with every breath of air, man taketh in an abundance of animal life, and with every draught of water, he also swalloweth down a great variety of animals. How could it ever be possible to put a stop to this process? For all creatures are eaters and eaten, and the very fabric of life is reared upon this fact. Were it not so, the ties that interlace all created things within the universe would be unravelled."*⁴

"The physical sensibilities and instincts are common to animal and man. Man is, however, negligent of this reality and imagines that sensibility is peculiar to mankind, therefore he practices cruelty to the animal. In reality what difference is there in physical sensations! Sensibility is the same whether you harm man or animal: there is no difference. Nay, rather, cruelty to the animal is more painful because man has a tongue and he sighs, complains and groans when he receives an injury and complains to the government and the government protects him from cruelty; but the poor animal cannot speak, it can neither show its suffering

1. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, para 187

2. Baha'u'llah in the Suriy-i-Haykal

3. Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 159

4. Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 157



nor is it able to appeal to the government. If it is harmed a thousand times by man it is not able to defend itself in words nor can it seek justice or retaliate.”⁵

“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.”⁶

“Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. If an animal be sick, let the children 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.”⁷

“Man is generally sinful and the animal is innocent; unquestionably one must be more kind and merciful to the innocent. The harmful animals, such as the bloodthirsty wolf, the poisonous snake and other injurious animals are excepted, because mercy towards these is cruelty to man, and other animals.”⁸

“Whosoever thou dost examine, through a microscope, the water man drinketh, the air he doth breathe, thou wilt see that with every breath of air, man taketh in an abundance of animal life, and with every draught of water, he also swalloweth down a great variety of animals. How could it ever be possible to put a stop to this process? For all creatures are eaters and eaten, and the very fabric of life is reared upon this fact. Were it not so, the ties that interlace all created things within the universe would be unravelled.”⁹

"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." ¹⁰

5. Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith, pp. 373-374

6. Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 160

7. Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 158 – 160

8. Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith, pp. 374

9. Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 157

10. Abdul-Baha, Star of the West, Vol. III, No. 10, pp.29

"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."¹¹

"What will be the food of the future? Fruit and grains. The time will come when meat will no longer be eaten. Medical science is only in its infancy, yet it has shown that our natural diet is that which grows out of the ground. The people will gradually develop up to the condition of this natural food."¹²

"In regard to the question as to whether people ought to kill animals for food or not, there is no explicit statement in the Baha'i Sacred Scriptures (as far as I know) in favour or against it. It is certain, however, that if man can live on a purely vegetarian diet and thus avoid killing animals, it would be much preferable. This is, however, a very controversial question and the Baha'is are free to express their views on it."¹³

"Regarding the eating of animal flesh and abstinence therefrom, know thou of a certainty that, in the beginning of creation, God determined the food of every living being, and to eat contrary to that determination is not approved. For instance, beasts of prey, such as the wolf, lion and leopard, are endowed with ferocious, tearing instruments, such as hooked talons and claws. From this it is evident that the food of such beasts is meat. If they were to attempt to graze, their teeth would not cut the grass, neither could they chew the cud, for they do not have the molars. Likewise, God hath given to the four-footed grazing animals such teeth as reap the grass like sickle, and from this we understand that the food of these species of animal is vegetable. They cannot chase and hunt down other animals. The falcon hath a hooked beak and sharp talons; the hooked beak preventeth him from grazing, therefore his food also is meat. "But now coming to man, we see he hath neither hooked teeth nor sharp nails or claws, nor teeth like iron sickles. From this it becometh evident and manifest that the food of man is cereals and fruit. Some of the teeth of man are like millstones to grind the grain, and some sharp to cut the fruit. Therefore he is not in need of meat, nor is he obliged to eat it. Even without eating meat he would with the utmost vigour and energy. For example, the community of the Brahmins in India do not eat meat; notwithstanding this they are not inferior to other nations in strength, power, vigour, outward senses or intellectual virtues. Truly, the killing of animals and the eating of their meat is somewhat contrary to pity and compassion, and if one can content oneself with cereals, fruit, oil and nuts, such as pistachios, almonds and so on, it would undoubtedly be better and more pleasing."¹⁴

11. Abdu'l-Baha, *Ten Days in the Light of Akka*, pp.8- 9

12. Abdu'l-Baha, cited in Julia M. Grundy. "Ten Days in the Light of 'Akka", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), pp. 8-9; *Health, Healing, and Nutrition*, no. 41

13. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 9, 1931; quoted in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1010

14. Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1006

"Abdu'l-Bahá has indicated that in the future human beings will be vegetarians, but abstention from eating meat is not a law of this Dispensation. The laws of God are attuned to the needs and possibilities of each age." ¹⁵

"Your concern for the prevention of cruelty to animals and for restraint in exploiting them unduly for food and other purposes is indeed praiseworthy. As the laws brought by Bahá'u'lláh become known and operative throughout the world, we believe that humanity will find the proper balance in adjusting itself to nature and to the world of animals. As in so many other areas, the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in this regard follow the golden mean: kindness toward animals is definitely upheld, vegetarianism is encouraged, hunting is regulated, but certain latitude is left to individual conscience and in practical regard to the diversity of circumstances under which human beings live. For example, the indigenous peoples of the Arctic would be hard-pressed to subsist without recourse to animal products." ¹⁶



¹⁵. The Universal House of Justice, 1998 Dec 16, Traditional Aspects of African Culture, no. 26

¹⁶. Universal House of Justice, 29 June 1995, to an individual believer