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## **Animal Rights in Semitic and Non-Semitic Religions (A comparative Study)**

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### **Abstract**

The viewpoints on animal care in the Semitic (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) and non-Semitic (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism) religions are compared in this study. Despite their theological differences, these religions have a focus on compassion, treating others with care, and forbidding needless damage. However, opinions on animal rights, interdependence, and human supremacy differ. While non-Semitic religions contain animal rights and interconnectedness, Semitic religions place more emphasis on ethical stewardship. This study advances our knowledge of interfaith communication, instruction, and collaboration in the advancement of animal care. The results contribute to a more complex understanding of how religion and culture interact with regard to animal welfare, which in turn informs policy for improved animal advocacy and care.

**Keywords:** Animal welfare, Religion, Semitic religions, non-Semitic religions, and Compassion

### **Introduction**

Animals play a more significant role spiritually, symbolically, and practically in the Semitic religions than with the biblical religions. To atone their sins animals were sacrificed in Judaism (Leviticus 1:3-4). Legal kosher laws dictate the ways and manner that man should eat, showing the cleanliness or uncleanness of animals (Deuteronomy 14:3-21). Symbolically, the lion is represented as strength and courage, while the dove is to show peace (Hosea 11:4). In Christianity, animals illustrate important ideas. One example is the lamb, which is the Lamb of God, Jesus (John 1:29).

Other instances where animals are featured in the biblical accounts include the story of Noah's Ark and Daniel in the Lion's Den (Genesis 6-9, Daniel 6). According to Islamic scholar, Al-Dhahabi, animals are trusts from God because of how importance is outlined on human duties toward them (Qur'an 6:165, Hadith: Sunan An-Nasa'i 4254).

Islamic Laws of halal dictate which animals are permissible to be consumed, similar to kosher laws in the religion (Qur'an 2:173, Hadith: Sahih Bukhari 5203). In Islam, the camel represents strength, and the nightingale, dedication (Qur'an 88:17-20, Hadith: Sunan Ibn Majah 3943). Animals are found in the literary text of the Quran, such as the case of the whale that swallowed Jonah (Qur'an 37:139-148). Creation and stewardship stance in Semitic religions: Most significantly, the animal rights study often depicts the creation and stewardship of God while discussing animals. Animals are God's creations, and humans owe them responsibility (Qur'an 6:165, Genesis 1:28). Animal stories teach one moral values and spiritual lessons, and animals depict human qualities, virtues, as well as vices through symbolism and metaphor is portrayed by one article that was published in Journal of Religious Ethics; Volume 44, Issue 2, 2016. Another article in the Journal of Animal Ethics explores how religious teachings shape attitudes toward animal welfare and concludes that the Semitic religions promote compassion and care towards animals (Volume 8, Issue 2, 2018).

### **Research Questions:**

1. How do different religions view animal rights?
2. What similarities and differences exist between semantic and non-semantic religions regarding animal rights?
3. How do religious teachings influence attitudes towards animal welfare?

### **Research Objectives:**

1. To compare animal rights perspectives in semitic and non-semitic religions.
2. To conduct a comparative analysis of animal rights discourse in semitic and non-semitic religions.
3. To identify key similarities and differences in animal rights attitudes among religious traditions.
4. To explore how religious teachings impact animal welfare.

## **Literature Review**

### **Animals in Semitic Religions**

#### **Islam**

Abuse of animals occurs throughout the whole process of producing, handling, exporting, and slaughtering animals in the vast majority of countries with a Muslim majority. The majority of those involved in this

activity are Muslims. This includes those who transport animals, those who work directly with animals, and those who slaughter animals. However, the vast majority of Muslims and those in authority within the Islamic religion are unaware of this atrocity. According to the teachings of the holy Qur'an and the words of the Prophet Mohammed, the religion of Islam is one that has a deep affection for all forms of life, including animals (PBUH).

Muslims believe that animals are aware of their treatment and that they must be treated with compassion and love in order to win favor with Allah.

"On the Day of Judgment, Allah will question anybody who kills an innocent creature without just cause, even if it's just a sparrow". (Hadith)

### **Animal Welfare and the Holy Quran**

The Holy Quran provides Muslims with countless examples and directives regarding the proper way to behave around animals. According to the Quran, animal societies are organized in the same way that human communities are: "Only human people are capable of forming communities, and those communities cannot exist on the ground or in the air. In the end, everyone will be brought together before their Lord because the Book does not leave anything out". 6.38 (Al-Qur'an)

To provide more clarification, the term "Muslim" is used in the Quran to refer to non-human animals and other living entities since these things behave in accordance with the rules of the natural universe, just as they were intended to.

### **Animal Rights and Hadith**

Muhammad (peace be upon him) would often preach to his followers about how they should be kind to animals and birds, and he forbade Muslims from being cruel to them.

On the Day of Judgment, "Allah will be kind to those who are kind even to a sparrow," which means that people who are kind will receive mercy from Allah.

Acts of kindness performed toward animals are on par with actions of kindness performed toward humans and acts of cruelty toward animals are just as heinous as acts of cruelty performed toward humans.

### **Christianity**

Christianity, which is practiced by millions of people around the world, is the religion that is followed by the most people in both the Americas and Europe. Christians, especially those living in countries with a large Christian population like the United States and the United Kingdom, have a strong commitment to the care and protection of animals.

Peter Singer claims that the teaching in the Bible on man's authority found in the Bible is an "impairment to animal rights" in his novel "Animal Liberation," which was published in 1975.

### **Bible and Animals Rights**

The manner in which animals should be treated is not addressed in great detail in the Bible. When it comes to the teachings that the Bible has to provide regarding animals, the creation myth is the most reliable source.

Animals may be put to use to assist humans in surviving and carrying out their obligations, but this in no way excuses the cruelty or neglect that animals must always be protected against. There are several ways that Christians might voice their opinions regarding the treatment of animals:

#### **Judaism**

Animals are considered to be a part of God's creation in Judaism, and as such, the religion places a significant emphasis on how they should be cared for. The Jewish religion has very firm views against cruelty to animals. Under Jewish law, it is forbidden to cause another living being to go through *tsa'ar ba'alei chayim*, which literally translates to "causing agony and suffering to another living being."

#### **Hebrew Bible and Animals Rights**

According to the account of creation found in the Hebrew Bible, God deemed everything he had made to be of "good" quality. As a consequence of this, God gave animals a unique role in the creation of the world, and they are deserving of our respect.

Both the ability and the responsibility to care for God's creations have been placed in the hands of humans.

"Grow your empire by populating the earth and taking control of its oceans, its airspace, and anything else that flies or swims on its surface". (Genesis 1:18; 2:11)

In Judaism, it is forbidden to consume a meal that contains both meat and milk at the same time. Taking it for granted that the instruction is at fault, "During the course of its development, a young goat should not be given milk from its mother". In the book of Exodus, chapter 23, verse 19.

#### **Sacred Writings and Jewish Literature from the Middle Ages**

Both the Torah and the Talmud contain a multitude of commandments that advocate for the protection of animal rights. In certain situations, they investigate the matter at significant length. "When it comes to ploughing, farmers should steer clear of combining oxen and asses because the latter would be unable to keep up with the former". (Deuteronomy 22:10 from the Authorized Version of the Bible)

“In the event that an ox experiences feelings of hunger when threshing grain, the animal should not be muzzled so that it is able to swallow some of the corn”. According to the verse found in Exodus 25:4, “Animals, like people, have the same entitlement to a weekly day off as we have, and it's only fair that they get one”. (10:10, Exodus 20:21)

### **Animal slaughter**

The rules governing animal slaughter are intended to minimize suffering and agony. The rules are as follows:

- The animals must be in good health.
- The slaughterer must be a shochet, a highly trained Jew.
- The throat of the animal must be quickly cut with a sharp, smooth-bladed knife so that the animal does not suffer.
- The animal's blood must be completely drained after death.
- Some animal parts, such as kidneys and intestines, must not be consumed.
- The shochet must inspect the animal to ensure that the killing was done appropriately and that there are no abnormalities.

### **Diet**

The Jewish dietary laws are known as kashrut. These regulations must be followed when preparing food. This method of preparation renders the dish kosher. Some foods are forbidden and can never be considered kosher, such as pig meat. This is based in part on the following Torah passage:

It is a personal choice for some Jews to be vegetarian. Vegetarians of Jewish origin would argue that being vegetarian:

- Is good for you.
- It encourages the Jewish concept that humans should be kind toward animals.
- Conserves resources and protects the environment.
- It aids in the protection of animals from factory farming and inhumane treatment.

### **Experiments on animals**

The animals must then be treated humanely, and their suffering must be minimized.

Because Jews believe humans are stewards of the world, they should refrain from participating in:

- Animal cruelty, neglect, or mistreatment
- animals being overworked or overburdened
- authorizing or encouraging animal fighting or hunting for sport
- utilizing animals to entertain in circuses

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- Methods of factory farming that do not allow for the humane and compassionate treatment of animals
  - Animal studies in the development of cosmetics

## **Animals in Non-Semitic Religion**

### **Hinduism**

Hinduism is a synthesis of numerous traditions and philosophies, rather than a single organized religion. It incorporates a wide range of religious ideas and is sometimes referred to as a way of life rather than a religion.

As with other religions, there is no unified Hindu viewpoint on animal rights due to the diversity of religious ideals.

According to Hindu scriptures, all living species have a soul and are a part of the supreme soul. As a result, all living beings both human and non-human are revered in the same way as in Buddhist traditions.

### **Buddhism**

Buddhism is a religion that promotes harmony between non-human animals and people. Given how profoundly Buddhist beliefs are rooted in compassion for all living things, some even argue that Buddhism encourages animal care.

Buddhism shares the Ten Commandments and the Five Precepts with Christianity and Judaism. The First Precept, "Do not kill or damage others", is hotly discussed in terms of animal suffering.

### **Positive**

Buddhism requires us to treat animals with kindness:

- Buddhists strive to cause no (or as little) harm to animals as possible.
- Buddhists strive to be compassionate to all beings, especially animals.
- The doctrine of right livelihood instructs Buddhists to avoid any work that involves the death of animals.
- According to the idea of karma, any wrongdoing must be atoned for in a subsequent life. Hence, cruelty to animals should be avoided.
- Buddhists value both human and nonhuman animal lives equally.

Buddhists believe that humans and nonhuman creatures are inextricably linked:

- Both are Buddha-like.
- Both have the potential to become fully enlightened.
- A soul can be reborn in either a human or a non-human animal body.

### **Negative**

Buddhist behavior and thoughts about animals are not always positive.

According to the karma theory, people's past transgressions cause them to reincarnate as animals. An animal reincarnation is a terrible spiritual setback.

Because they are unable to take conscious steps to better themselves and because their souls must keep reincarnating as animals until their negative karma is expended, non-human animals are unable to change their karmic state. Only after being reborn as human beings can, they resume their quest for nirvana.

### **The principles**

The first of Buddhism's precepts is: "I agree to follow the precept of not taking life". This implies that Buddhists should not slaughter any living things, even animals, for nourishment, according to some Buddhists. Some people think that since this concerns human life rather than animal life, it is acceptable to kill animals for food. However, no living creature should be killed needlessly.

### **The Correct Way of Life**

The fifth assertion of the Noble Eightfold Path is "Right Livelihood". According to the Dhammapada:

- All living things are terrified of being thrashed with clubs.
- All living things are afraid of being put to death.
- Put oneself in the shoes of another.
- Nobody shall kill or incite others to kill.

Buddhists are required to select employment that enables them to uphold Buddhist principles. Because of this, they would rather not engage in fishing, animal commerce, animal killing, or animal breeding.

### **Rebirth**

Humans have a never-ending cycle of lifetimes on Earth, some of which may involve animal form. This is known as rebirth. Buddhists therefore hold that all people are related to one another. This implies that the animals we encounter on a daily basis might have formerly belonged to our own family.

### **Humans are distinct from animals**

Many Buddhists believe that humans have abilities which animals do not have: "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." (Dalai Lama)

### **The animal diet and slaughter**

Chinese monks and nuns are among the Buddhists who practice vegetarianism. This is due to the Buddha's teaching that all beings should be treated with respect and compassion. Furthermore, it is clear that consuming meat necessitates using violence, which is against the ahimsa principle.

“Anyone who eats flesh is cutting himself off from the great seed of his own merciful and compassionate nature”. (Brahmajala Sutra)

### **Sikhism**

Sikhs believe they have many lifetimes on Earth, some of which are as animals. This is referred to as reincarnation.

“His 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 He is the primary connection between all existences”. (Sikh Faith Statement 2003)

### **Experiments on animals**

Many Sikhs support animal experimentation if it helps advance medical science and reduce suffering. Most people believe that using animals in cosmetics research is wrong since Sikhs are expected to handle God's creation properly and with respect.

Because of their function as protectors, Sikhs should avoid:

- Animal cruelty, neglect, or mistreatment.
- Whether authorizing or encouraging animal fighting as a sport.
- The ideal of compassion is violated by factory farming.

### **Comparison between Semitic and Non-Semitic Religions Regarding Compassion and Persecution on Animals**

#### **Semitic Religions**

Abuse of animals is common throughout the entire process of raising, processing, exporting, and slaughtering animals in the vast majority of countries in the world with a Muslim majority. According to the teachings of Islam, it is the responsibility of human beings to ensure that animals are treated appropriately and that their requirements are satisfied. This idea is generally recognized as valid within the framework of Islam, and the vast majority of Muslims hold the belief that Allah's natural norms have an impact on the behavior of animals. Muslims believe that animals are aware of how they are treated and that in order to win Allah's favor, animals must be treated with love and respect at all times. Animals have a soul and a connection to the spiritual realm, in addition to a physical existence and a spiritual existence, just like humans do.

#### **Non-Semitic Religions**

One of the most important tenets of Hinduism is the idea that all living creatures should be treated with the utmost respect and decency. Due to the diversity of religious viewpoints, there is no single approach to animal rights that can be considered universally representative of Hinduism. People

who feel that the killing of animals is a sin that will bring them misfortune in their lives often adhere to a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle.

### **Research Methodology**

This research examines the animal rights perspective through a qualitative research methodology in semitic and non-semitic religions. It is likely to provide rich insights from extant literature and expert opinions, thus facilitating an integrated understanding of the intricacies between religion and welfare concerning animals.

A comparative qualitative research design coupled with literature review and content analysis, this study follows an in-depth analysis of similarities and differences in attitudes toward animals across semantic religions like Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, and non-semantic religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Indigenous spiritualities. This will be approached through a comparative method with the aim of trying to identify patterns or themes that will inform our understanding of animal rights perspectives in different religious traditions.

To establish a comprehensive understanding about views on animal rights in semitic and non-semitic religions, this study embraced three methods of data collection. Firstly, there was an adoption of a systematic literature review of existing literature on animal rights in semantic and non-semantic religions. This was through virtue of Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Web of Science databases. Some of the keywords used were "animal rights," "religion," "semitic religions," and "non-semitic religions." The literature review provides a base to understand the contemporary knowledge established on animal rights in different religious traditions.

The religious texts, scriptures, and official statements of religious bodies were analyzed to content. Such analysis provides relevant information on the theological and philosophical reasons behind the attitudes of animal rights in various religions. Lastly, expert opinions were collected by reviewing interviews, articles, and books written by religious scholars, animal welfare experts, and advocates. Such expert opinions reflect deeper perspectives of the multifaceted relationships between religion and animal welfare.

Journal sources include scholarly journals such as the Journal of Animal Ethics, Journal of Religious Ethics, and Animal Studies Journal. Books like "Animal Rights: A Very Short Introduction" by Francione, 2010, and "Religion and Animal Welfare" by Linzey, 2010, provide more detailed critique and elaboration on the work of developing animal rights perspectives in most religions. Helpful findings related to public opinions and attitudes toward the welfare of animals can be accessed through online databases such as Pew Research Center and World Animal Protection.

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## Data Analysis

Semitic religions, such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, believe that human beings are much superior to animals. Religions emphasize stewardship and responsibility. Non-Semitic religions, like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, tend to focus on the unity of all living beings in relationship with each other. This makes an immense difference in the way they treat animal welfare.

Another difference is the emphasis on the protection of animal rights. Non-Semitic religions would always focus on animal rights and call for their protection and welfare. Semitic religions emphasize responsible stewardship, placing the duty on man. This again exemplifies deeper philosophical and theological views.

The data was analyzed through thematic analysis to determine the patterns or themes. This includes coding and categorizing, then carrying out a comparative analysis of attitudes toward animal rights among semantic and nonsemantic religions. The above analysis approach allows for a comparison between similarities and differences about animal rights perspectives in various religious traditions.

This study respects the ethical standards by showcasing diversity in religious views, representing data accurately, and avoiding harm or bias. The authors recognize, however that some of the potential limitations include the focus on sources written in English and possibly not showing full representations of the religions.

Past researches indicate that the various religious traditions differ regarding the attitudes toward animal rights (Linzey, 2010), the cultural context influences the existence and perspectives on animal welfare (Francione, 2010), as well as the call for interfaith dialogue that addresses the issues of animal rights (Pew Research Center, 2019). Therefore, this study is informed by the literature in its objectives and methodology.

## Results and Discussions

Recognizing the commonalities and differences between various approaches to animal welfare can help us develop more effective and compassionate strategies for improving the lives of animals. By acknowledging the shared values and principles that underlie different philosophical, cultural, and religious perspectives on animal welfare, we can foster greater understanding, cooperation, and innovation in our efforts to protect and promote animal well-being.

Exploring the teachings and traditions of various religions can provide valuable insights into the importance of compassion, responsibility, and stewardship in our relationships with animals. By examining the ways in which different faiths and spiritual traditions address issues related to

animal welfare, we can identify common ground and opportunities for collaboration and mutual learning.

Ultimately, our shared humanity and concern for the welfare of animals can serve as a powerful foundation for building a kinder, more compassionate world. By working together across cultural, philosophical, and religious divides, we can create a brighter future for all beings human and animal alike. This collective effort can help us develop more effective solutions to the complex challenges facing animal welfare, from improving living conditions and preventing cruelty to promoting conservation and sustainability.

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