

8. Protecting the Animal Environment

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيَّاحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

“Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the Night and the Day; in the sailing of the ships through the Ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth; (here) indeed are signs for a people that are wise.” (2: 164)

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَمٌ أَمْثَالُكُمْ ۚ مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يُحْشَرُونَ

“There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth nor a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you. Nothing have we omitted from the Book, and they (all) shall be gathered to their Lord in the end.” (6:38)

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا وَيَعْلَمُ مُسْتَقَرَّهَا وَمُسْتَوْدَعَهَا ۚ كُلٌّ فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ

“There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance depends on Allah: He knows the time and place of its definite abode and its temporary deposit: All is in a clear Record.” (11:6)

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَسْجُدُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ وَالنُّجُومُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَالشَّجَرُ وَالْدَّوَابُّ ۚ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ ۚ وَكَثِيرٌ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِ الْعَذَابُ ۚ وَمَنْ يُهِنِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُكْرِمٍ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ

“See you not that to Allah bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on earth,-- the sun, the moon, the stars; the hills, the trees, the animals; and a great number among mankind?” (22: 18)

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالطَّيْرِ صَافَّاتٍ ۖ كُلٌّ قَدْ عَلِمَ صَلَاتَهُ وَتَسْبِيحَهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ

“See you not that it is Allah whose praises all beings in the heavens and on the earth do celebrate, and the birds (of the air) with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise.” (24:41)

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ ۗ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا

“... There is not a thing but celebrates His praise; and yet you understand not how they declare His glory!” (17:44)

وَالْأَنْعَامَ خَلَقَهَا ۗ لَكُمْ فِيهَا دِفْءٌ وَمَنَافِعُ وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ

وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا جَمَالٌ حِينَ تُرِيحُونَ وَحِينَ تَسْرَحُونَ

“And cattle He has created for you (men): From them you derive warmth, and numerous benefits, and of their (meat) you eat. And you have a sense of pride and beauty in them as you drive them home in the evening, and as you lead them forth to pasture in the morning.” (16:5-6)

وَالْخَيْلَ وَالْبِغَالَ وَالْحَمِيرَ لِتَرْكَبُوهَا وَزِينَةً ۗ وَيَخْلُقُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“And (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and use for show; and he has created (other) things of which ye have no knowledge.” (16:8)

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً ۗ لَكُمْ مِنْهُ شَرَابٌ وَمِنْهُ شَجَرٌ فِيهِ تُسِيمُونَ

يُنْبِتُ لَكُمْ بِهِ الزَّرْعَ وَالزَّيْتُونَ وَالنَّخِيلَ وَالْأَعْنَابَ وَمِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“It is He Who sends down rain from the sky: From it ye drink, and out of it (grows) the vegetation on which ye feed your cattle. With it He produces for you corn, olives, date-palms, grapes, and every kind of fruit: Verily in this is a sign for those who give thought.” (16: 10–11)

وَأَلْقَى فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ وَأَنْهَارًا وَسُبُلًا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

“And He has set up on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with you; and rivers and roads; that you may guide yourselves;” (16: 15)

وَمَا ذَرَأَ لَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهُ ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِقَوْمٍ يَذْكُرُونَ

“And the things on this earth which He has multiplied in varying colors (and qualities): Verily in this is a Sign for men who celebrate the praises of Allah (in gratitude).” (16: 13)

وَهُوَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ الْبَحْرَ لِتَأْكُلُوا مِنْهُ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُوا مِنْهُ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ مَوَازِرَ فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

“It is He Who has made the sea subject, that you may eat thereof flesh that is fresh and tender, and that you may extract therefrom ornaments to wear; and you see the ships therein that plough the waves, that you may seek (thus) of the bounty of Allah and that you may be grateful.” (16: 14)

وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

“If you would count up the favours of Allah, never would you be able to number them: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (16: 18)

In this collection of verses, the Holy Qur’an describes the environment in a marvelous way, and joins its different components; viz., man, earth, air, atmosphere, rivers, seas, rain, clouds, plants, animals, birds, fishes, etc., in one circumstance and a perfect, as well as, complex formation serving a particular and interrelated purpose. Hence, all this is meant for the interest and welfare of man, and for the protection of the environment.

In this connection, the Holy Qur’an warns and cautions those who destroy and pollute the environment, thus:

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا وَادْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا ۗ إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“And do no mischief on the earth, after it has been set in order...”(7:56)

In another instance, the Holy Qur’an describes those who spread corruption on the earth and play with the life system on land, as well as in the sea, as wicked and evil people; the Holy Qur’an states:

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

“Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of men have wrought...”(30.41)

وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَى فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ

“When he turns his back, his aim everywhere is to spread mischief through the earth and destroy crops and cattle...”(2:205)

Indeed, from these above verses, we will be able to understand Islam’s concern towards the animal world, as well as for all the living environment. It addresses man and presents him with major formula on how to live with the other creatures who live in the same environment as himself in order to be able to put them at his service and disposal; however, by Allah’s permission. The Holy Qur’an describes this issue by saying,

لِتَسْتَوُوا عَلَى ظُهُورِهِ ثُمَّ تَذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ رَبِّكُمْ إِذَا اسْتَوَيْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ وَتَقُولُوا سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ لَنَا هَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لَهُ مُقْرِنِينَ

“In order that you may sit firm and square on their backs, and when so seated, you may celebrate the (kind) favour of your Lord, and say, ‘Glory to Him Who has subjected these to our (use), for we could never have accomplished this (by ourselves).’” (43: 13)

In the same light, though, the Holy Qur’an describes the animal world as an independent world, which has its own system, laws, social formations and relationship between its subject, as well as its Lord, as its also has its system of relation with man, plants and the material world. The Holy Qur’an describes this by saying,

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَمٌ أَمْثَالُكُمْ ۗ مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۗ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يُحْشَرُونَ

“There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you.” (6:38)

Therefore, animals are also creatures like us, which have their own special animalistic systems and until now, man has been unable to discover from them but only a little knowledge. The Holy Qur'an portrays animals as creatures who know their Lord, go toward Him and have their own prayers, Tasbeeh, and prostration that correspond with their existence, although man has been unable, for the most part, to detect this.

And like man, animals have their own wealth in the natural world, which is only meant for them by the Almighty Allah. In addition, Allah, through His grace and blessings, has created animals for the service of man, where he gets food from their meat and by-products, uses their hair and waste products (for clothing and agricultural purposes) and uses them for riding, transportation and cultivation of land and also keeps them as a source of beauty, decoration and wealth for himself.

Thus, the Holy Qur'an places the animal world side by side with the human world, so as to live with this creature as part of his environment, but he is responsible for its protection and care. This is why Islam prohibits aggression and wickedness toward animals needlessly, except at the time of need. This is because the right and superiority given to man over animals is so that he should use them with kindness and leniency.

Hence, the Islamic laws warn against harming and hurting animals or their environment, such as destroying their grazing land or killing them; with the exception of those that are harmful to man, where, when necessary, killing them will serve as a saving of one's health and self, for instance, snakes, scorpions, etc.

It is narrated that the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) warns against the killing of bees and the eating of wild donkeys. It was said that the prohibition of eating wild donkeys was to prevent their extinction. In another tradition, it prohibits catching birds from their nests at night or taking them before they are fully grown and have not learnt to fly.

This is because the Islamic principles respect the law of environmental balance between man and animals, thus, the animals have the right to depend on and protect themselves from any intruder by running or flying away, but in the above-mentioned condition they cannot depend on themselves as expected.

Consequently, the law which we have mentioned earlier, i.e., the law of "La Dharara Wa La Dhirara" has an overwhelming effect in the field of protecting and preserving the animal environment. Like the prohibition of hunting birds, animals and fishes in their reproductive season, or the prohibition of throwing poisonous substances into the rivers so as to kill aquatic animals, or the prohibition of destroying trees and crops, as well as the prohibition of causing or spreading corruption in the earth.

From this Qur'anic description, we can detect Islamic views and opinions towards animals and our responsibility toward this universe and how we should live with it. We have already seen this Prophetic Tradition which states, "No Muslim will grow a plant or sow a crop, that birds, animals, or man eat from

it, unless he has a reward (Sadaqah) for it.”

So, this means that man is rewarded for whatever good deed he performs, like protecting another man, or any other animal. This shows the Islamic concern and encouragement toward protection and preservation of animals, in that the animals, also, have their own rights and wealth, as these verses clearly state,

كُلُوا وَارْعَوْا أَنْعَامَكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي النُّهَىٰ

“Eat (for yourselves) and pasture your cattle: Verily, in this are signs for men endued with understanding.” (20:54)

وَفَاكِهَةً وَأَبًّا مِّنَّا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ

“And fruits and fodder, for use and convenience for you and your cattle.” (80:31–32)

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا وَيَعْلَمُ مُسْتَقَرَّهَا وَمُسْتَوْدَعَهَا ۗ كُلٌّ فِي كِتَابٍ مُّبِينٍ

“There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance depends on Allah.” (11:6)

Thus, in the Islamic point of view (Shari‘ah) of protecting animals and feeding them, it is a charity (Sadaqah) and killing animals cruelly and hurting them is a prohibited action (which has its own severe punishment).

On the other hand, the Islamic laws have prohibited the mutilation of animal’s bodies and changing their shape, like cutting off their ears, castrating them, etc., whether done by hand or by the use of modern equipment and instruments. Allah has cursed the devil who deceives man, prompting him to carry out this aggressive act, and Almighty Allah, while narrating Satan’s wiles against man, says,

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمْتِنِهِمْ لَا مَأْنِيَهُمْ لِأَمْرِنَهُمْ فَلْيُبَيِّتْكُنَّ أَذَانَ الْأَنْعَامِ وَلَا مَأْنِيَهُمْ فَلْيَغْيِرَنَّ خَلْقَ اللَّهِ ۗ وَمَنْ يَتَّخِذِ الشَّيْطَانَ وَلِيًّا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ خَسِرَ خُسْرَانًا مُّبِينًا

“I will order them to slit the ears of cattle, and to deface the (fair) nature created by Allah. Whoever, forsaking Allah, takes Satan for a friend, hath surely suffered a loss that is manifest.” (4: 119)

Indeed, through these texts, laws and concepts, we are able to understand the Islamic principles which call for the protection of animals and their environment.

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