

Animals in Hadith

Empathy, Perspective, and Ecological Consciousness

Hadith reports:

Ya'la ibn Murrah narrated, "One day, as I was sitting with the Prophet ﷺ, a camel rushed toward him and lowered his neck, tears streaming from his eyes. The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Woe to you! Go and find out who owns this camel, for he surely has a grievance.' I found that he belonged to a man from the Ansar. When the Prophet ﷺ asked the man about the camel, he replied, 'By God, I do not know what is wrong with him. We used him for work and to draw water until he became too weak. So, last night we decided to slaughter him and divide up his meat.' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Do not do that. Give him to me or sell him to me.' 'He is yours, O Messenger of God.' The Prophet ﷺ marked the camel with the mark of charity and sent him away."	عَنْ يَعْلَى بْنِ مَرَّةٍ قَالَ وَكُنْتُ مَعَهُ جَالِسًا ذَاتَ يَوْمٍ إِذْ جَاءَ جَمَلٌ يُخَيِّبُ حَتَّى ضَرَبَ بِجِرَانِهِ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ ثُمَّ دَرَفَتْ عَيْنَاهُ فَقَالَ وَيْحَكَ أَنْظُرْ لِمَنْ هَذَا الْجَمَلُ إِنَّ لَهُ أَشَانًا قَالَ فَخَرَجْتُ أَلْتَمِسُ صَاحِبَهُ فَوَجَدْتُهُ لِرَجُلٍ مِنَ الْأَنْصَارِ فَدَعَوْتُهُ إِلَيْهِ فَقَالَ مَا شَأْنُ جَمَلِكَ هَذَا فَقَالَ وَمَا شَأْنُهُ قَالَ لَا أَدْرِي وَاللَّهِ مَا شَأْنُهُ عَمِلْنَا عَلَيْهِ وَنَضَحْنَا عَلَيْهِ حَتَّى عَجَزَ عَنِ السِّقَايَةِ فَأَتَمَرْنَا الْبَارِحَةَ أَنْ نُنَحِرَهُ وَنَقْسِمَ لَحْمَهُ قَالَ فَلَا تَفْعَلْ هَبْهُ لِي أَوْ بَعْثِيهِ فَقَالَ بَلْ هُوَ لَكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ قَالَ فَوَسَّمَهُ بِسِمَةِ الصَّدَقَةِ ثُمَّ بَعَثَ بِهِ. حديث 17822، مسند الإمام أحمد، مسند الشاميين رضي الله عنهم، حديث يعلى بن مرة الثقفي عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم. المكنز، شبكة إحسان
Abu Qatadah ibn Rib'i al-Ansari related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, witnessing a funeral procession, declared: "Some are relieved, and others bring relief." [His companions] asked, "O Messenger of Allah, what does this mean?" He replied, "The believing servant is relieved from the hardships and sufferings of this world to God's mercy; and the wicked servant is one from whom the people, the land, the trees, and the animals are relieved."	عَنْ أَبِي قَتَادَةَ بْنِ رَبِيعٍ الْأَنْصَارِيِّ أَنَّهُ كَانَ يُحَدِّثُ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مَرَّ عَلَيْهِ بِجَنَازَةٍ فَقَالَ مُسْتَرِيحٌ وَمُسْتَرَاخٌ مِنْهُ قَالُوا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ مَا الْمُسْتَرِيحُ وَالْمُسْتَرَاخُ مِنْهُ قَالَ الْعَبْدُ الْمُؤْمِنُ يَسْتَرِيحُ مِنْ نَصَبِ الدُّنْيَا وَأَذَاهَا إِلَى رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ وَالْعَبْدُ الْفَاجِرُ يَسْتَرِيحُ مِنْهُ الْعِبَادُ وَالْبِلَادُ وَالشَّجَرُ وَالْدَّوَابُّ حديث 6591، صحيح البخاري، كتاب الرقاق، باب سكرات الموت. المكنز، شبكة إحسان
Hamza ibn Abi Usayd narrated, "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ went out in the funeral procession of a man from the Ansar to al-	عَنْ حَمْزَةَ بْنِ أَبِي أُسَيْدٍ، قَالَ: خَرَجَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي جَنَازَةِ رَجُلٍ مِنَ الْأَنْصَارِ بِالْبَقِيعِ، فَإِذَا الدُّنْبُ مُفْتَرَشًا ذِرَاعِيهِ عَلَى الطَّرِيقِ فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «هَذَا أَوْيِسٌ يَسْتَقْرِضُ فَأَفْرِضُوا لَهُ»

Baqi' Cemetery. Suddenly, there was a wolf lying on the road with his forelegs stretched out. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "This is Uways seeking an allotted share, so allot something for him." They said, "We agree with your opinion, O Messenger of Allah." He said, "From every grazing flock, one sheep each year." They said, "That is a lot." So, the Prophet ﷺ motioned to the wolf to snatch from them, and the wolf went away.	، قَالُوا: نَرَى رَأْيَكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، قَالَ: «مِنْ كُلِّ سَائِمَةٍ شَاةٌ فِي كُلِّ عَامٍ»، قَالُوا: كَثِيرٌ. قَالَ: «فَأَشَارَ إِلَى الذَّنْبِ أَنْ خَالِسَهُمْ، فَأَنْطَلَقَ الذَّنْبُ دلائل النبوة ومعرفة أحوال صاحب الشريعة، «بَابُ مَا جَاءَ فِي مَجِيءِ الذَّنْبِ مَجْلِسَ النَّبِيِّ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَطْلُبُ شَيْئًا»، جزء 6، صفحة 39
Abdullah ibn Mas'ud narrated, "While we were with the Prophet ﷺ in a cave at Mina, Surat al-Mursalat was revealed to him. He was reciting it and I was receiving it directly from his mouth when a snake suddenly sprang toward us. 'Kill her!' the Prophet ﷺ said, so we rushed toward her, but she escaped. The Prophet ﷺ said: 'She was spared your harm just as you were spared hers.'"	عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ بَيْنَمَا نَحْنُ مَعَ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي غَارٍ بِمِنَى إِذْ نَزَلَ عَلَيْهِ وَالْمُرْسَلَاتِ وَإِنَّهُ لَيَنْتُلُوهَا وَإِنِّي لَأَتْلُقَاهَا مِنْ فِيهِ وَإِنْ فَاهُ لَرَطْبٌ بِهَا إِذْ وَثَبَتْ عَلَيْنَا حَيَّةٌ فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَقْتُلُوهَا فَابْتَدَرْنَاهَا فَذَهَبَتْ فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَقِيَتْ شَرَّكُمْ كَمَا وَقِيْتُمْ شَرَّهَا حديث 1861، صحيح البخاري، كتاب جزاء الصيد، باب ما يقتل المحرم من الدواب.

05-16 Lecture: Dr. Tlili on Animals in Hadith and Islamic Ethics

Date Time: 2026-05-16 17:58:04

Location: OASIS gathering, Gainesville, FL (exact venue not specified in attachments)

Instructor: Dr. Tlili

Summary

The gathering opened with gratitude for living in Gainesville, a university town with access to scholars and intellectual resources, and with the stated intention of helping the local Muslim community engage more deeply with scholarship at the University of Florida. Dr. Tlili was introduced as a UF scholar specializing in animals and ecology in the Islamic tradition, with a PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of Pennsylvania and approximately seventeen years on the UF faculty. The handout for the session provided the Arabic and English texts of the key hadith reports discussed in the lecture, including the camel, funeral procession, wolf, and snake narrations.

In her lecture, titled "Animals in Hadith: Empathy, Perspective, and Ecological Consciousness," Dr. Tlili argued that the hadith tradition expands the believer's moral imagination by inviting Muslims to see the world from the standpoint of animals and other parts of creation. Animals are presented not merely as objects of human ethical concern, products, property, or tools, but as subjects with inner lives, vulnerabilities, forms of communication, agency, and moral claims upon human conscience. The lecture framed animals as fellow believers, participants in Islam's sacred history, and members of a wider created order whose flourishing and suffering have ethical and spiritual significance.

A central theme was perspective-taking. Dr. Tlili connected human empathy to the "animal gaze," arguing that trying to imagine animal experience helps humans recognize life's interconnectedness and rethink moral responsibility. The film *Cow* was used as an example of an attempt to view the world through farm animals' lives without a narrator mediating the experience. This led into hadith examples: the camel who sought refuge with the Prophet ﷺ after years of labor and the threat of slaughter; the funeral hadith in which the death of a wicked person brings relief not only to people but also to the land, trees, and animals; the wolf who negotiated for a share of livestock and whose perspective the Prophet ﷺ relayed; and the snake who escaped harm, prompting the Prophet ﷺ to note that she had been spared the companions' harm just as they had been spared hers.

The lecture then developed an ecological ethic rooted in *ḥurma* (sanctity). Dr. Tlili explained that creation, including animals, plants, water, streets, soil, mountains, and even seemingly inanimate entities, has a God-given right to mindful treatment and should not be abused physically or verbally. The Qur'anic image of the servants of the Merciful who "walk gently on

earth" was presented as a model for humility, restraint, and reverence toward creation. Human moral failure was described as disruptive not only to society but also to the delicate web of life, while true piety involves being a source of relief to creation as a whole.

The Q&A extended these principles into practical ethics. Dr. Tlili argued that eating animals is permitted but should be understood as a divine favor, not an unrestricted right. Mentioning God's name and facing the qibla in slaughter should remind humans of the animal's dignity and the responsibility to minimize suffering. She strongly criticized industrialized food systems, including some products labeled halal, when animals are transported, confined, handled, or slaughtered in ways that violate Islamic ethical principles. She emphasized that Muslims should strive for better options without claiming absolute purity, may reduce or give up meat when ethical meat is unavailable, and should not declare meat itself haram when God has permitted it.

The discussion also addressed pet keeping, especially dogs. Dr. Tlili reframed the common question about dogs in the home by focusing on the ethics of commodifying animals for human pleasure. She argued that modern pet economies, especially puppy mills and breeding markets, have caused tremendous suffering for dogs. She contrasted this with historical Muslim societies where dogs were often cared for in public spaces, served useful community functions, and occupied an "in-between" space near human settlements rather than being either exterminated or commodified as indoor luxury pets. Working dogs were acknowledged as permitted in Islamic law, while community models, such as well-cared-for street dogs, were presented as more ethical than treating dogs as consumer products.

The lecture concluded that the hadith tradition offers a morally decentered vision of creation. Humans may benefit from animals, but that benefit must be limited by compassion, restraint, necessity, and accountability before God. Wild animals should largely be left alone through non-interference, habitat protection, and avoidance of pollution. Domestic and farm animals, because they depend on humans, must be given food, space, natural conditions, medical care, and lives aligned with their own needs rather than human convenience. The overall message is that ecological mindfulness is not peripheral to Islam; it is part of Muslim moral character and spiritual responsibility.

Knowledge Points

1. Community Engagement and Speaker Introduction

- **Purpose of the Gathering:** The host framed the lecture as part of an effort to connect Gainesville's Muslim community with the scholarly resources available through the University of Florida.
- **Academic Context:** Gainesville was described as a university town blessed with people devoted to learning, teaching, and intellectual work.

- **Guest Speaker:** Dr. Tlili was introduced as a scholar of animals and ecology in the Islamic tradition, with a PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of Pennsylvania and seventeen years on the UF faculty.
- **Lecture Materials:** Attendees received a handout containing the hadith reports used in the lecture. Copies of the speaker's first book, *Animals in the Quran*, were also made available, and a forthcoming book was mentioned.

2. Main Thesis: Hadith Expands Moral Imagination

- **Animal Perspective-Taking:** The hadith tradition invites believers to imagine the world from the standpoint of animals and other creatures.
- **Animals as Subjects:** Animals are not treated merely as resources or objects of human use; they have experiences, desires, vulnerabilities, subjectivities, and agency.
- **Animals in Sacred History:** The lecture emphasized that animals play important roles in Islam's sacred history, from small creatures to large ones.
- **Fellow Creatures and Believers:** Animals were described as fellow creatures, and in the Q&A Dr. Tlili stressed that an animal's life counts before God and that animals participate in submission to God.
- **Goal of Perspective-Taking:** By considering animal standpoints, believers cultivate empathy, humility, ecological mindfulness, and a broader moral imagination that embraces all creation.

3. Moral Significance of Perspective-Taking and the Animal Gaze

- **Human Analogy:** Just as healthy human relationships require recognizing another person's perspective, ethical relations with animals require attentiveness to how human actions affect them.
- **The Animal Gaze:** Viewing the world from an animal's standpoint deepens awareness of interconnectedness and challenges humans to reconsider social norms and ethical responsibilities.
- **Animals Are Not Products:** Dr. Tlili emphasized that animals are individuals with their own subjectivities, not merely products, tools, or commodities.
- **Film Example - Cow:** The film *Cow* was discussed as an example of an attempt to observe dairy cows' lives with minimal human narration, allowing viewers to ask what a cow experiences and how human consumption participates in animal suffering.
- **Limits of Human Knowledge:** The lecture acknowledged that animal interiority may remain partly inaccessible, but the effort to attend to it is morally transformative.

4. Core Hadith Case Studies from the Handout

- **The Complaining Camel:** A camel came to the Prophet ﷺ with tears in his eyes after years of labor and after his owners decided to slaughter him because he had become too weak. The Prophet ﷺ intervened and saved the camel's life. This hadith shows that animals are not tools to be discarded when no longer useful; they possess feelings, fears, expectations of recognition, and a claim to care.

- **The Funeral Procession (Janazah):** When a funeral passed, the Prophet ﷺ explained that the believer is relieved from worldly suffering, while the death of a wicked person brings relief to people, the land, the trees, and animals. This hadith links human moral character to the well-being of the entire ecological order.
- **The Wolf / Uways:** A wolf sought an allotted share from grazing flocks. The Prophet ﷺ relayed the wolf's request and, when the companions rejected the proposed arrangement, signaled to the wolf to take what he needed. The report recognizes predators' right to exist and seek sustenance and portrays the Prophet ﷺ as an advocate and translator for nonhuman interests.
- **The Snake in the Cave at Mina:** When a snake sprang toward the companions and escaped after they rushed to kill her, the Prophet ﷺ said that she had been spared their harm just as they had been spared hers. This hadith recognizes mutual vulnerability and teaches that self-protection does not justify harming animals beyond necessity.
- **Hadith Sources Noted in the Handout:** The handout identified the camel report from *Musnad Ahmad*; the funeral report from *Sahih al-Bukhari*; the wolf report from *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa wa-Ma'rifat Ahwal Sahib al-Shari'a*; and the snake report from *Sahih al-Bukhari*.

5. The Delicate Web of Life and *ḥurma* (Sanctity)

- **Creation Has Well-Being:** The lecture stressed that animals, trees, land, water, soil, and other parts of creation can experience harm or relief in ways that matter morally.
- **Human Morality Affects Creation:** Ethical and spiritual failure disrupts not only human society but the broader harmony of the natural world.
- **Ḥurma Defined:** *Ḥurma* means that each creature or element of creation has a God-given sanctity and right to mindful treatment.
- **No Physical or Verbal Abuse:** Dr. Tiili explained that creation should not be abused physically or verbally, extending moral concern beyond animals alone.
- **Walking Gently on Earth:** The Qur'anic description of the servants of the Merciful who walk gently on earth was presented as a model for ecological humility and restraint.
- **Ethic of Reverence:** *Ḥurma* creates an ethic of compassion, accountability, and reverence for the created order.

6. The Wolf, Predators, and Coexistence

- **Predators Are Not Villains:** Wolves and other predators were described not as malicious enemies but as beings seeking survival.
- **Negotiation and Agency:** The wolf report grants predators a kind of agency by presenting them as capable of proposing coexistence and negotiating an ethical arrangement.
- **Prophetic Mediation:** The Prophet ﷺ served as a bridge between humans and predators, validating the wolf's perspective and weighing human and nonhuman interests.

- **Challenge to Fear-Based Narratives:** Dr. Tlili noted that negative cultural portrayals of wolves, especially in Western stories, have had real consequences, including severe harm to wolf populations.
- **Historical Muslim Impact:** Later biographical sources recorded the "Delegate of the Predators" alongside human delegations, showing that animal interests were treated as meaningful and legitimate within the wider Muslim imagination.

7. The Snake and Ethical Limits on Harm

- **Mutual Threat:** The snake had the capacity to harm the companions, but the companions also posed a threat to the snake.
- **Vulnerability Matters:** Because the snake was being chased and had escaped, the Prophet's wording placed her safety first in many versions of the narration.
- **No Species-Based Devaluation:** Even a feared species was not treated as having lesser intrinsic worth.
- **Self-Protection Only:** Humans may protect themselves from real danger, but the clash of interests between humans and animals does not grant permission to harm beyond what self-preservation requires.
- **Fairness Across Species:** The hadith teaches fairness and care even when the animal involved is frightening or potentially dangerous.

8. Contemporary Environmental Relevance

- **Not a Peripheral Concern:** Ecological mindfulness was presented as central to Muslim moral character, not a secondary or optional concern.
- **Environmental Harm as Spiritual Failure:** Deforestation, animal cruelty, reckless exploitation of natural resources, pollution, and habitat destruction are not merely technical or material problems; they carry ethical and spiritual accountability.
- **The Righteous Believer:** A righteous person should not be someone from whom creation needs relief; rather, their presence should minimize burden and harm to people, land, trees, animals, and the wider created order.
- **Environmental Justice:** The hadith tradition offers a framework that integrates spiritual devotion with environmental justice and responsibility.

9. Q&A: Food, Halal, and Industrial Animal Production

- **Eating Animals Is Permitted but Not Absolute:** The Qur'an and hadith permit eating animals, but this is a divine favor, not an unrestricted right.
- **Ritual as Reminder:** Facing the qibla and mentioning God's name at slaughter should remind humans that the animal's life has value before God.
- **Minimizing Suffering:** Islamic teaching requires avoiding unnecessary pain, including not killing one animal in front of another, not sharpening the knife in front of the animal, and not dragging or pulling the animal violently.

- **Questioning Modern Halal Labels:** Dr. Tilili criticized industrialized slaughter systems, including machine slaughter with religious wording attached, when they fail to reflect the ethical substance of Islamic teachings.
- **Hajj Sacrifice Concern:** She specifically raised concerns about animals sacrificed around Hajj, including overseas transport and suffering before slaughter.
- **Not Absolute Purity, but Striving:** She acknowledged that perfect ethical purity may be impossible, especially for families and people with health or financial constraints, but Muslims should keep searching for better options.
- **Reducing or Avoiding Meat:** Giving up or reducing meat is permissible when ethical animal products are unavailable, but Muslims should not declare meat itself haram when God has permitted it.
- **Alternative Protein Sources:** Where available, supplements and non-meat protein sources can reduce dependence on unethical animal products.

10. Q&A: Dogs, Pet Keeping, and Commodification

- **Pet Keeping Reframed:** Rather than giving a narrow legal answer about dogs in the home, Dr. Tilili focused on the ethical problem of keeping animals primarily for human pleasure.
- **Dogs and Suffering:** She argued that modern dog pet-keeping has harmed dogs through breeding markets, puppy mills, commodification, and the killing of surplus dogs.
- **Historical Muslim Care for Dogs:** Historical Muslim societies were described as caring for street dogs, feeding and protecting them, and allowing them to serve community functions such as cleaning organic waste and guarding neighborhoods.
- **The In-Between Space:** Dogs traditionally lived near humans, often around the entrances and streets, without necessarily being brought indoors as luxury pets.
- **Working Dogs:** Islamic scholarship permits working dogs, such as guard dogs and hunting dogs.
- **Community Dog Model:** Dr. Tilili pointed to places like Turkey as an example of dogs living freely in public spaces while being fed and cared for by communities.
- **Cats Compared to Dogs:** Cats were described as less problematic as pets because they are generally more independent.

11. Q&A: Farming and Animal Care

- **Give Animals the Life They Would Prefer:** The guiding principle is to consider what life the animal would want, not what humans want to impose.
- **Avoid Cages and Confinement:** Farm animals should not be confined in ways that deny their natural movement, social needs, and preferences.
- **Natural Diet and Space:** Cows, goats, sheep, and similar animals should have space to graze and should be fed in ways that align with their natural needs, rather than purely for industrial convenience.
- **Care for Dependents:** Domestic animals depend on humans and should be treated almost like members of the household: fed, treated when sick, given space, and protected from unnecessary pain.

- **Respect Actual Needs, Not Human Luxury:** Spending lavishly on an animal is not the same as giving the animal what it needs, such as companionship with other animals, room to run, and suitable living conditions.

12. General Human Responsibility Toward Animals

- **Wild Animals:** The primary responsibility is non-interference: do not destroy habitats, pollute their environments, push them out of their spaces, or make their lives harder.
- **Domestic Animals:** Humans have direct responsibility because these animals depend on human care.
- **Working and Riding Animals:** Animals may be used for riding, transport, milk, and food, but unnecessary pain is prohibited. Do not overload animals, do not load them long before travel begins, and do not sit on a mounted animal merely to have a conversation.
- **Milking Animals:** Islamic legal discussions include detailed rules meant to minimize pain, such as clipping nails before milking cows or sheep.
- **Killing Only for Food:** Dr. Tlili emphasized a Shafi'i legal example: if a sheep swallows a valuable diamond, one may not kill the sheep primarily to recover the diamond, even if one intends afterward to eat the meat. The animal's life is more sacred than property.
- **Minimum Pain at Slaughter:** When animals are killed for food, they must be killed with the proper intention and in a way that minimizes pain and preserves dignity.

Questions

- **How do the lecture's concepts apply to food sources and industrialized animal production?**
Dr. Tlili answered that animal products are permissible, but the permission comes with responsibility. Slaughter rituals should protect animal dignity and remind humans that animal life matters before God. Industrial systems often fail this standard even when products are labeled halal.
- **What can Muslims personally do if halal labeling is not enough?**
She advised striving rather than seeking impossible purity: research meat sources, look for better options, reduce dependence on animal products when needed, and recognize that giving up meat can be permissible when ethical meat is unavailable.
- **What is the role of dogs in the family, home, and prayer context?**
Instead of focusing only on legal technicalities, Dr. Tlili emphasized the ethical problems of pet keeping and dog commodification. She contrasted modern pet markets with historical Muslim care for community dogs and acknowledged the permissibility of working dogs.
- **If someone wants to start a farm, how should animals be kept?**
The answer was to give animals the kind of life they would prefer: space, social

interaction, natural food, grazing, medical care, and freedom from cages or unnecessary confinement.

- **Do responsibilities differ between types of animals, such as wild animals, farm animals, fish, and animals requiring ritual slaughter?**

Dr. Tiili distinguished between wild animals, toward whom humans mainly have a negative responsibility of non-interference, and domestic animals, toward whom humans have direct obligations because they depend on human care. Killing animals is restricted to food and must be done with dignity and minimal pain.