

CALL *to* COMPASSION

Reflections on Animal Advocacy
in World Religions

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Introduction

LISA KEMMERER

Ethics are complete, profound and alive only when addressed to all living beings. Only then are we in spiritual connection with the world. Any philosophy not representing this, not based on the indefinite totality of life, is bound to disappear.

—ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Personally, I would not give a fig for any man's religion whose horse, cat, and dog do not feel its benefits. Life in any form is our perpetual responsibility.

—S. PARKES CADMAN

Across time and around the world, religions have provided human beings with a moral framework that outlines human responsibilities for other creatures, and which inevitably underscore the virtue of compassion. Simultaneously, religions have battled human tendencies such as greed, indifference, cruelty, and selfishness.

Religions are too often twisted, or simply sidelined. Although religions tend to teach generosity and nonviolence, people have grabbed and snatched, squabbled and slaughtered. Although religions tend to teach responsibility and simplicity, people have exploited and plundered for profit. Although religions tend to teach social responsibility and compassion, we have shown remarkable selfishness and shameful indifference. Religions generally call people from exploitation and

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greed to compassion and service, teaching us to walk lightly and live gently. Whatever we might *wish* were true, religions teach peace and kindness. Consequently, few are surprised when people of faith speak out against war, build communities in fragmented populations, or protect the defenseless against injustice. Yet comparatively few people in industrialized nations have focused on the needs of nonhumans; few among those of comparative affluence understand the spiritual importance of choosing a vegan diet.

Factory farming causes acute suffering, prolonged misery, and premature death to billions of nonhuman animals every year (see Appendix). Most of us never see the creatures that we eat, their long eyelashes or shiny beaks, marvelous colors or curious eyes. We never know a cow or a turkey as an individual with preferences, anxieties, and curiosities. Most of us only see a specific “edible” body part wrapped in plastic—and we fail to recognize that body part for what it is. Food labels rarely speak the truth. This, your “food,” is part of someone else’s body.

From factory and fur farms to medical laboratories and the pet industry, nonhumans are perceived as objects for our purposes, and mere means to our ends. Technology, mass production, and the sheer number of human beings now crowded onto Earth have exponentially increased the volume and intensity of nonhuman animal exploitation. Yet most of us never see truckloads of cats and dogs euthanized at the local shelter. We don’t see the billions of mice and pigeons who are trapped in tiny laboratory cages, powerlessly awaiting whatever befalls them at the hands of humanity. We don’t see the stale, barred quarters of tigers and chimpanzees imprisoned between circus gigs or TV programs, where they spend their thwarted lives for frivolous human ends. Although most of us never see these animals’ much-diminished lives, we collectively use our dollars to support these forms of exploitation.

In our daily lives, we often act without thinking, behave without conviction, and live without intent. Our spiritual lives too often take

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a backseat to convention, habit, convenience, and the mindless ritual of day-to-day life. But what is the point of religion if spiritual beliefs don't touch and improve human lives? What is the relevance of sacred writings if they fail to mold our interactions with other creatures—the vast *majority* of sentient life on Earth? What is the value of religion if we are no less barbaric for belief?

How do religions guide us in our interactions with nonhumans? What is our responsibility for white turkeys and spotted hogs? Religions offer an impressive array of teachings that encourage compassion and service. Collectively, religions teach adherents not to neglect, abuse, exploit, or slaughter nonhumans, but rather to assist, tend, and respect the myriad other creatures with whom we share so much in common. Why do we so often fail to notice these dominant religious teachings, which encourage us to change our ways? Why are we largely unaware of these powerful texts and teachings?

When called to our attention, these sacred teachings, similar across centuries and continents, are likely to amaze even those who claim no religious beliefs. How much more so will they do for those who claim a particular religious tradition! The religions of the world offer a universal call to compassion, if only we would listen, if only we would make a sincere commitment to adhere to the core teaching of our religion, if only we would allow our religious convictions to change our hearts and guide our actions. In these teachings, were we to pay attention to them, we would find reason to reconsider our responsibility for a stray cat or wounded snake alongside the road, our willingness to invest in drugs tested on mice or dogs, and our choices at the supermarket.

This anthology carries readers from India and China to Malaysia and America, from sacred writings to core religious ideals, from time-honored practices to contemporary animal advocacy. We hope that this anthology will encourage readers to reexamine their religious beliefs and/or those of friends, family, and their local community. Ultimately, we hope that readers will revisit daily habits—most

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importantly, the consumption of products rooted in animal suffering—in the hope that we might move toward a more peaceful, spiritual world.

ESSAYS

Christopher Key Chapple begins our examination of religions and nonhumans by introducing Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions. He focuses on religious symbols, texts, moral teachings, practices, and the stories from the lives of founders and exemplars. He calls attention to yogic poses, which imitate and are named after nonhumans, and which reveal an appreciation for the powers of these nonhuman animals. Chapple also profiles the lives and teachings of Mahavira and the Buddha, the founders of the Jain and Buddhist traditions; he stresses the importance of reincarnation and karma, which maintain an animal-friendly religious philosophy. Finally, Chapple introduces the Hindu Bishnoi, and describes how Bishnoi religious practice led them to protect the natural world—plants and nonhuman animals—even at the cost of their own lives.

Steven J. Rosen examines a particular Hindu branch, the Vaishnava tradition. He explains the Hindu concept of nonviolence, and the Vaishnava version of the Golden Rule (found in most religious traditions): Whatever we do to others will also be done to us. While he notes that a few Hindu sects continue to sacrifice nonhuman animals, he explains the origin of this practice, and notes that the karmic Golden Rule speaks against such ongoing violence—while encouraging veganism. He quotes Bhishma in the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, speaking out against eating flesh. Rosen also explains Hindu reverence for cattle, and reminds readers that nonviolence does not require passivity—nonviolence requires that aggression be used only as a response to violence—to protect self or another who is in need of protection.

The next essay focuses on the International Society for Krishna

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Consciousness (ISKCON), commonly called the Hare Krishnas. Krishna Kripa Das and Peter Alan Medley (Sarvabhauma Das) introduce ISKCON's founder, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977), who carried Krishna consciousness from India to the United States in 1965, bringing Indian vegetarian meals to Americans. Das and Medley note that Prabhupada did not focus on a vegetarian diet first and foremost to reduce suffering, but as a form of devotion to God. Those who love God foster a love for all creatures, which naturally affects diet. The authors explain the importance of the Hare Krishna chant, taught by Prabhupada (now familiar in many countries around the world). Das and Medley note parallels between the *Bhagavad-Gita* (a key portion of the *Mahabharata*) and teachings from other religious traditions, particularly those of Christianity. They also compare ISKCON teachings with voices from the animal liberation movement, demonstrating a shared core.

Charlotte Laws writes of her exploratory adventure into a Jain temple in Southern California. She describes the beauty of the temple, and the comparatively safe and trusting environment that she found within. She explains the rudiments of the Jain religious tradition, including strict ascetic practices, as exemplified by the founder, Mahavira. Laws then focuses on the Jain emphasis on karmic liberation, which requires a life of nonviolence—especially in the kitchen. Laws shares her conversations with Jains during her temple visit, unraveling their understanding of fundamental Jain religious practices, most notably their tendency to purchase and release captive nonhuman animals (especially those destined for slaughter), and their willingness to found and manage sanctuaries, whether for birds, mammals, or insects. In the course of her visit, Laws ponders the strict Jain practice of dietary nonviolence, which excludes not only flesh and eggs but also tubers—yet does not lead Jains to engage in animal advocacy. In her search for understanding, she presents a few brief scenarios to the temple teachers, and then asks not only what they would do, but why.

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Norm Phelps, writing from inside the Buddhist tradition, defines good and evil as joy and suffering; he also notes that joy and suffering are undeniably experienced by every living being. Phelps grounds the Buddhist call to animal liberation in a fundamental, deep equality that stems from our shared existence as living beings, exemplified by the perfect “Buddha Nature” that is inherent in all creatures. He then turns to compassion and empathy, and the first and most important Buddhist precept: Do not kill. He notes that this precept, which protects all sentient creatures, is accepted by Buddhists universally, and requires that we choose a vegan diet. He also explains Buddhist attempts to justify the flesh habit, concluding that the teachings of the Buddha are clear: “Meat eating I have not permitted to anyone, I do not permit [it], I will not permit [it]” (*Lankavatara Sutra* 1999, 219).

Matthew J. Walton focuses on the Buddhist understanding of karma as linked to intention, then applies this understanding to animal liberation. In the process, he explores the basics of Buddhism, including fundamental concepts such as the unavailability of suffering and change, craving as the source of suffering, and the importance of “nondiscriminating compassion for all beings”—compassion that does not allow separation between “self” and “other.” From a Buddhist perspective, Walton notes, we can only liberate ourselves, and liberation is not physical, but spiritual. Nonetheless, he asserts that liberating nonhumans not only sets suffering beings free (physically), but also liberates animal exploiters from the negative karma that is accrued through exploitation and causing harm. Walton concludes that Buddhist animal liberationists would do well to act without malice and anger, and with right intentions—as required by Buddhism. He explains how this change of attitude will, ultimately, lead to more effective animal advocacy.

Louis Komjathy carries readers to China to explore Daoism and diet, examining Daoist teachings and practices both ancient and contemporary. Daoist precepts, like Buddhist precepts, include an injunc-

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tion not to “kill or harm any being.” Yet Komjathy notes that the Chinese diet has rarely been shaped by any concern for nonhumans or the environment, and has instead been determined by such notions as ritual purity, or an interest in attaining immortality. Overall, Chinese who can afford to eat meat do so, and those who cannot, eat as much meat as they are able—which has been precious little until recent times. But a conception of vegetarian Daoist deities eventually emerged, elevating the fleshless diet to one most likely to bring a devotee closer to gods and heavenly realms. Additionally, Buddhism was introduced in the eighth century, and the Chinese people “recognized vegetarianism as a clear requirement” of Buddhist teachings. Buddhist views of compassion and karma influenced Daoism, most notably the School of Complete Perfection, the school in which Komjathy has been ordained as a monk.

Richard Schwartz shifts attention to Abrahamic religions, focusing on Hebrew Bible passages that teach compassion, preservation of health, and the duties of dominion. He notes that human health is harmed when we consume animal products; he also cites Biblical passages that reveal the Hebrew Creator as compassionate toward all beings. Schwartz recalls Isaiah and Psalms, and the Peaceable Kingdom, establishing the Creator’s plan for future peace. He highlights the connection between global warming and animal agriculture, and provides Biblical teachings in support of a vegan diet (though he often uses the more familiar term, “vegetarian”). Schwartz then responds to eighteen common arguments against moving toward a vegan diet, including Biblical passages that offer humans “dominion” and note that we are created “in the image of God,” as well as Jewish feast days, dietary laws, agricultural reform, and a faulty conception of what constitutes a healthy human diet. In a world plagued by factory farming, global warming, world hunger, and oil wars, Schwartz unveils a Jewish imperative that the faithful turn away from animal products.

Judith Barad explores the place of nonhuman animals in the Christian tradition through celebrated Catholics: popes, theologians,

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and saints. She begins with the words of Pope John Paul II, and then explores St. Thomas Aquinas's "proof" that all nonhuman animals have souls. Barad then recalls stories that demonstrate St. Francis of Assisi's compassion for nonhuman animals, especially those under the cruel thumb of humanity, whether turtledoves, rabbits, or lambs. He also extended his caring to humans and wolves, settling a dispute peacefully between these often antagonistic species. Barad explains how Catholic moral exemplars, from Aquinas through St. Francis to contemporary popes, remind Christians that they are to be compassionate, and that they owe these vulnerable creatures of God their kindness, protection, and mercy.

Andrew Fitz-Gibbon investigates animal advocacy through the lens of Christian mysticism. He notes that the ascetic, world-denying tendencies of mystics would seem to work against any animal liberation teachings among mystics, but he notes that this is not the case. He discusses the central role of unity (or Oneness), and explains the difference between pantheism and panentheism. In the absence of dualism—with all contained in One—Fitz-Gibbon notes that mystics can harbor no human/nonhuman distinction. He then explores the lives of Christian mystics who have lived close to other creatures, providing them with protective care. Fitz-Gibbon reminds readers that hagiographies recalling the lives of saints were written long before there was any need for animal liberation, and that these mystics therefore can't speak directly to a contemporary movement, but that Christian mystics provide an example of "a way of life deeply sympathetic to animal advocacy."

Through Society of Friends insights and spiritual visions, Gracia Fay Bouwman Ellwood explores the central importance of the Inner Light, which is present in all human beings, and is also shared by the divine. Ellwood explains how love is connected with this Light, and with God. She quotes mystics and poets to unveil the Hidden Paradise that is "present throughout our world, despite pervasive alienation, violence, and pain"—despite the "ocean of darkness" in which we

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live. In the tradition of “prophetic challenge,” Ellwood explains how Friends created boycotts and petitions, and worked with the Underground Railroad to further the cause of abolition. Through Society of Friends’ spiritual understandings and practices, Ellwood outlines a precedent for animal liberation.

“Scapegoating” is when a dominant group blames a subordinate group (or vulnerable individual) for personal or community misfortunes, or natural disasters. Stephan R. Kaufman explores two authors, René Girard and Ernest Becker, to examine scapegoating as a social phenomenon, as central to the Christian tradition, and as informative for animal advocacy. Girard observed that humans mimic one another, while Becker noted that social conditioning teaches us what is “good.” Putting these two ideas together, Kaufman argues that humans who share a sense of what is good are likely to experience shortages, leading to conflict. When conflict escalates, social cohesion is threatened. At such times, humans frequently band together against a scapegoat, whether human or nonhuman. Kaufman calls attention to the conflict that developed around Hebrew sacrificial tradition, as demonstrated by the prophets. He also comments that the New Testament presents Jesus as an innocent scapegoat, crucified by the Romans in the hope of preventing a Passover rebellion. Jesus-as-scapegoat reveals “the lies that underlie scapegoating” in a religious tradition that teaches “that God sides with those who are weak and vulnerable.”

The next chapter (Lisa Kemmerer) carries us into the world of Islam, exploring sayings from the life of the Prophet, and core teachings from the Qur’an, such as the importance of love and compassion, the human obligation to tend what Allah has created, and the imperative for *zakat* (sharing, almsgiving). Muslims are to be compassionate and to share with those in need, no matter who “those” might be. This chapter also explores Islamic laws, revealing what is likely Islam’s strongest and most unique contribution to animal liberation. Islamic law forbids cruelty to nonhuman animals, especially for frivolous or unnecessary ends, thereby protecting the myriad crea-

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tures from the fur industry, the entertainment industry, and almost all exploitation for science. For most of us, eating animal products is also unnecessary, and Islamic laws therefore extend to protect factory farmed animals as well, requiring that Muslims avoid the consumption of factory farmed products, whether flesh, nursing milk, or reproductive eggs, when they are able to make other choices.

Academics and activists alike view Al-Hafiz Basheer Ahmad Masri (1914–1992) as a pioneer in the field of animal welfare/rights and Islam. Masri's grandson, Nadeem Haque, leads readers through Masri's life—from a noteworthy youth in India, to a tumultuous political life in Africa, to the animal welfare movement of the mid (to late) twentieth century in England. Masri, who became an important religious leader and lecturer, strengthened Christian understandings of the Islamic world, and Muslim understandings of Islamic obligations in the area of animal welfare/rights. He worked with the World Society for the Protection of Animals and Compassion in World Farming (CIWF), and was commissioned to publish papers and books on the subject of Islam and animal welfare/rights, culminating in his most definitive work, *Animals in Islam*.

“Indigenous Peoples: Kinship and Killing” (Lisa Kemmerer) retells a variety of lively indigenous myths explaining how nonhumans and humans morph from one species to another, engage in competitions that outline their fates, and maintain a delicate balance of power. This vision of an extended community—of kin across species—leads indigenous peoples to view nonhuman animals as they view human animals, with respect and responsibility. Indigenous peoples tend to recognize that they are dependent for survival on the larger world, and that amiable relations with nature and nonhuman animals are therefore beneficial. It is therefore not surprising that many indigenous myths—indeed, myths from every religious tradition—hearken back to a peaceable community, a time when all beings lived without bloodshed, and explain how this universal harmony was destroyed. Indigenous traditions (like all religions) teach that peaceful relations

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are preferable, so what does this mean for hunting traditions at a time when many natives are able to make different dietary choices?

Linda G. Fisher is Ojibway and Cherokee. She describes childhood experiences with fish and snakes, commenting: “I do not understand cruelty and indifference, whether directed toward people or other creatures.” Consequently, she cannot understand contemporary Native American ceremonial costumes made of leather and feathers, the ongoing glorification of “traditional” fishing and hunting, or other practices that demonstrate a lack of empathy or respect for nonhumans and “Mother Earth.” She reflects on oppression—against her people and against nature—and fears that all Americans (natives and immigrants alike) now share the same path, a path of exploitation and destruction. Fisher, an artist and animal activist, is a vegan; her mother is vegetarian. Fisher is also fully Indian. She attends powwows and wears beaded jewelry passed down from distant ancestors. She even keeps a picture of Chief Seattle in her art studio, lest she forget his words: “We are all one breath.”

Dianne Sylvan describes Wicca as “a religion of Earth and stars, wind and rain, of ivy growing in spirals and people dancing in spirals,” a religion that allows for both the feminine and the masculine, a religion that has emerged to satisfy the needs of those who no longer feel comfortable with the religion of their childhood. Sylvan comments on contemporary tendencies—alienation from nature, exploitation of nonhuman animals, male domination, materialism, and the unending quest for profits—all inimical to Wicca. There are no established Wiccan laws, Sylvan notes, only general understandings and tendencies. She provides a few Wiccan basics: freedom for all, individuality, and “not to harm.” She notes that the Wiccan vision is holistic, leading many practitioners to activism. For Sylvan, “not to harm” is central to her ongoing animal advocacy. Where strands of belief and practice are interwoven, where change “is the only eternal truth,” Sylvan’s vision highlights the power of the individual and supports grassroots activism.

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The final chapter, written by Fireweed, reveals a Wiccan path rejecting contemporary dualisms and forms of hierarchical dominance, whether patriarchy, animal exploitation, or environmental degradation. Fireweed makes clear that she can only speak as one practitioner among many, but notes a few common links between Wiccan spiritual visions and practice and the feminist, anarchist, environmental, and social justice movements. She expresses frustration with Wiccans who fail to include nonhuman animals in their circle of compassion, who prefer to ritualize or otherwise justify and rationalize killing sentient beings for food. For example, some Wiccans and ecofeminists reference an assumed “natural” food-chain hierarchy even though they strongly reject all other hierarchies as unnatural and harmful. Some Wiccans feel—against medical evidence—that animal products are necessary to human health, or that a prayer or a moment of thanks neutralizes an exploitative diet of flesh, eggs, and dairy products. Fireweed, in contrast, notes that there are many feminists, ecofeminists, and Wiccans who rightly include other creatures in their “earth-honoring spiritual practice based on immanence, interconnectedness, and harm reduction.” Fireweed reminds readers that “healing from the wounds of patriarchy requires radical shifts in perspective,” and that these shifts have the power to free wounded individuals—including nonhuman individuals—from the constraints of limited vision.

Note: Many terms stemming from religious traditions around the world have a variety of English spellings due to the complications inherent in transliteration—moving words from a particular language to another written language, where it is sometimes impossible to match sounds or their ascribed notations in a particular alphabet. While some of these diverse spellings have been unified across essays, others have been left to the particular expressions preferred by authors behind the individual essays that comprise this anthology.