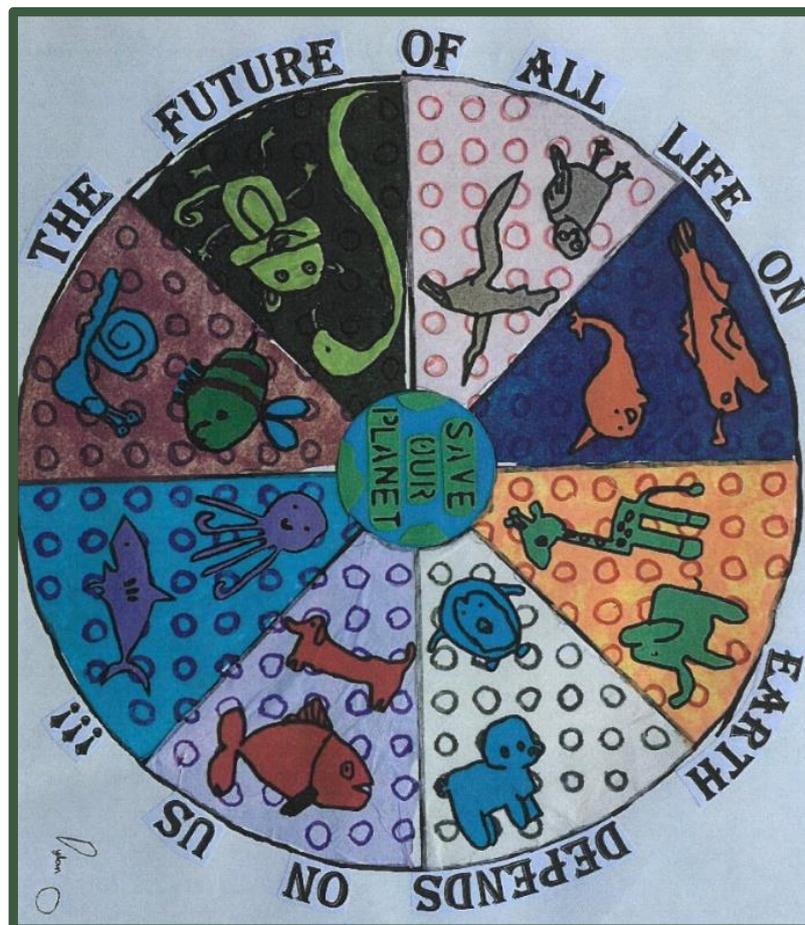


## Ethical Veganism in RE Supplementary Resource

### Unit 2 (ages 7 to 9)

What can we learn from dharmic religions about kindness to animals?



### 'Faith in Art'

Dylan, Age 7

NATRE Art in Heaven, 2020

#### Note for teachers

In dharmic religions there is less of a distinction and separation between the human and animal realm than exists in relation to the Abrahamic faiths. Animals and humans alike are all connected, not only as these religions teach that there is a spark of the divine in all living things, but also because of belief in reincarnation - it is believed that almost all human beings have lived many previous lives in animal form and may do so in the future as well.

## Resource 1: Hinduism and Animals

### 3 reasons why kindness to animals is important to many Hindus

#### 1. Oneness

Hindus believe that everything has the spark of Brahman, who Hindus believe is the Ultimate God. Sometimes Hindus call Brahman 'Ultimate Reality'. This means that everything is united and connected to everything else. There is no separation between humans and other beings. Because animals and other beings differ from us and from each other in so many ways, Hindus believe that we fall into a kind of trap of thinking that we are separate from other animals and from nature. This is a delusion. This Hindu name for this is 'maya'.

At an important meeting of religious leaders, focusing on nature and the environment, this statement was made by representatives of the Hindu religion:

"The human role is not separate from nature. All objects in the universe, beings and non-beings, are pervaded by the same spiritual power."

Hindu Declaration on Nature, Assisi 1986

Animals play an important role when it comes to Hindu gods and goddesses (who are all expressions of Brahman, not really separate gods and goddesses). Many Hindu gods and goddesses have animals as their vehicles, but these are companions – they don't rule over them. And some Hindu gods are even partly animals, like Ganesh who has the head of an elephant or Hanuman, who is part monkey. Not only does this show that animals are important in Hinduism, it also tells us that Hindus believe that animals are in unity with humans, and not separate from us.



Here is a picture of Ganesh (sometimes he is known as Ganesha).

Ganesh is a very popular and very well-known Hindu god. He is believed to be the remover of obstacles and full of wisdom. Hindus believe that Ganesh can help bring them wisdom to remove obstacles in their own lives.

Like other gods and goddesses, Ganesh has an animal who is his vehicle (the Hindu word for this is vahara). Ganesh's vehicle is a rat (sometimes he is shown with a mouse). You might think, 'how could such a big figure ride on a tiny rat?' Well, for Hindus this shows that although Ganesh is large and mighty, he does not use his power to crush or rule over those who are not so powerful and mighty. He does not crush the rat, and this symbolises his wisdom and self-control, and teaches Hindus that they too should exercise self-control and that they should always be gentle with others.

Hindus believe that all beings have a soul or spirit, called 'atman'. Often, atman is understood as the true self inside an individual – a spark of the divine in every living thing. The atman is believed to be eternal, which means that it has always existed and will always exist in the future as well.

Most Hindus believe the atman is born or into many different forms of life on earth. This cycle of birth, death and rebirth is called samsara. Hindus believe that, in most cases, anyone born as a human has already lived in many different forms, including in the form of animals. You may have heard this belief referred to as 'reincarnation'.

Hindus believe that birth and rebirth (samsara) is not simply a random process. It operates according to the law of karma. Karma is the cosmic justice system, from which there is no escape. Hindu scriptures tell us about the idea of karma. If people are unkind, their actions will have future consequences. Good karma will lead to a good rebirth and bad karma will result in the next rebirth being not so good. All living beings are involved in this cosmic justice system. Because of this, many Hindus view all life as deserving of respect and kindness. Even a fly that you might squat without thinking about it has an atman, which will have been on earth in many different forms.

### 3. Ahimsa

"Refrain from killing knowingly even the trifling insects like a louse, a bug or a mosquito... Never kill animals... Non-violence is the greatest of all religions"

Swami Sahajanand (Hindu religious teacher)

Ahimsa is the principle of non-harm. In other words, many Hindus will live by the principle of ahimsa by doing their best not to cause harm to other living beings. Ahimsa is not just about not killing or being violent to other beings, it is about not causing emotional harm to others or to ourselves, perhaps by saying nasty things. It is about being actively gentle and kind.

## Cows



Image: Manthaye, Unsplash

The cow is a sacred animal for Hindus, a symbol of life and of the Earth, and thought of by many as a mother, because she gives food and nourishment not only to her own calves, but also to humans, through her milk.

In India, there are many Hindu rituals in praise of cows. These often include bulls (male cows) and calves as well as female cows. In rural parts of India, it is very common for bulls to be used for farm work, like pulling carts, because they are very strong. The Hindu deity, Krishna, was a cow-herder who loved his cows dearly and took great care of them. Some Hindus try to follow his example by caring for cows, as well as respecting other animals.

Even Hindus who are not vegetarian will usually not eat beef (meat from cows) or wear leather (cow skin). In fact, in a recent survey of Hindus in India, nearly three-quarters of the people asked said that they thought you could not be Hindu if you eat beef! This was more people than those who said you could not be Hindu if you never go to temple.<sup>i</sup>

Although many people treat cows with a special level of care in India, sometimes, even in India, some cows are not treated with kindness. There are many Hindu people and organisations involved in Cow Protection movements, speaking up for the kind treatment of cows in India, and across the world.

“Cow protection is one of the most wonderful phenomena in all human evolution, for it takes the human being beyond his species. Man, through the cow, is enjoined to realise his identity with all that lives. Cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Hindus in Britain may revere the cow too. At Bhaktivedanta Manor, in Hertfordshire members of the Krishna Consciousness movement have been running a cow protection scheme for around 30 years. The cows pull traditional ploughs to cultivate the land, and calves are suckled by their own mothers. They are never sold or killed for meat or leather but are treated with love. When they are too old to work or to give milk, they retire and are well cared for. ‘Cow day’ (Gosthastami), a festival in November, is celebrated, and there are vegetarian cooking classes.

## Vegetarianism and veganism



Image: Jo Sonn, Unsplash

Meat cannot be obtained without harming living creatures... Injury to living beings harms the possibility of heavenly bliss... Shun the use of meat.”

The Vedas: Manu Samhita (Hindu holy book)

“How can he practice true compassion Who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh?”

Thiruvalluvar (Hindu poet and philosopher)

For lots of Hindus, the logical conclusion of these beliefs is to avoid eating meat because it is not possible to eat meat without killing an animal, which makes ahimsa impossible. People who don't eat meat are known as vegetarians. For most Hindu vegetarians this means not eating eggs as well as not eating meat. Dairy products like milk, yoghurt or cheese can be eaten on a Hindu vegetarian diet.

Dairy products usually come from cows (but sometimes also from sheep, goats, donkeys or other mammals). It is important for many Hindu vegetarians that the animal who produces the milk is well cared for and not treated cruelly. To have milk, a female mammal must have had a baby. Usually, dairy cows are separated from their calves (baby cows) for the farmer to get enough milk for humans. Some Hindus think that this causes harm and so they might only get their dairy products from special 'ahimsa herds' where calves are allowed to stay with their mothers and none of the cows or calves are killed to make meat. There is an ahimsa herd in Leicestershire, England, and you can visit its website here: <https://www.ahimsamilk.org/> . Other Hindus might choose not to have any dairy products at all. People who do not eat or use anything that comes from an animal are called vegans. Some Hindus decide to be vegan as they believe that this is the best way to practise ahimsa. It is their way of doing their best to avoid, as much as they can, doing any harm to others.

## The Story of King Yudhisthira and the dog

***This is a story from the Mahabharata, an ancient Indian epic which is very important to Hindus (an epic is a very long story, usually split up into lots of smaller stories). This story takes place right at the end of all the stories. Before we begin, it is important to know that, at the time it was written in India, dogs were considered to be one of the dirtiest and most lowly of animals.***

The Great King, Yudhisthira, his four brothers and his wife set out across a dangerous and craggy mountain range, to try to reach heaven. Only the most special and exceptional beings could ever go to heaven directly while their body was still alive, rather than having to die first and this is what they were hoping to do.

As the six people climbed across the steep and slippery peaks, one by one, each one of them, except, Yudhisthira fell to their death. All who fell had faults which stopped them entering heaven alive. One was too greedy, another too proud of his intelligence, another was too vain, another was not kind enough, one was too boastful of strength. The only person left alive was Yudhisthira, along with the small stray dog who had become his loyal companion. Alone, except for the dog, and full of sadness, Yudhisthira was greeted by Indra, King of Heaven.

Indra looked upon Yudhisthira and offered him a place in Heaven. This had been just what Yudhisthira had wanted, but now, everything had changed. Yudhisthira did not want to go to Heaven to be all alone, without his brothers or his wife. When he told Indra this, Indra assured him that, although his fellow humans had had their faults, and were not perfect enough to enter Heaven still alive, their souls had already gone to Heaven, where they would all be re-united.

Indra commanded Yudhisthira to leave the dog and take his place in Heaven. Much to Indra's surprise, Yudhisthira refused to leave the stray behind. Indra could not believe what he was hearing.

"What good is that dog? Look at it! It is old and thin and has no value" he exclaimed, with a mocking tone.

"I will not go without him." cried Yudhisthira.

"This dog has been my loyal companion. He sought my help and has loved me unconditionally ever since. The pleasures of heaven will mean nothing to me in comparison to the grief he will feel on losing me. I will never turn my back on those who need me."

Indra had never heard anything like this and thought that it was utter madness. "It is just not possible for this feeble old dog to enter Heaven. Heaven is no place for it!" he scolded.

Yudhisthira replied, "The dog has done nothing to deserve to be abandoned. And he has none of the faults of my brothers and wife. If this dog does not deserve to go to Heaven, then neither do I!"

As Yudhisthira said these words, the dog transformed into the god Dharma, who had been Yudhisthira's father, too. Dharma, for Hindus, means duty or righteousness. The dog was the god Dharma, sent to test his son, and both went to Heaven that day.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

What sort of person do you think Yudhisthira was? Why would you describe him in this way?

Why do you think the god Dharma wanted to test Yudhisthira? How does Yudhisthira pass the test?

From this story, what do you think Hindus believe about how people should treat animals?

Do you think this story tells us anything about how Hindus believe we should treat other people?

Why did Indra think it was OK to abandon the dog?

Why did Yudhisthira refuse to abandon the dog?

What do you think about these two points of view?

What do we mean by 'loyal'? Do you think animals can be loyal?

**Going even deeper – wider issues for discussion**

What can we learn from this story about Hindu beliefs about heaven and the gods?

What does this story tell us about dharma (the idea) and Dharma (the god)?

Why do you think loyalty and devotion are important to Hindus? To whom should Hindus be loyal?

## Resource 2: What does Buddhism say about kindness to animals?

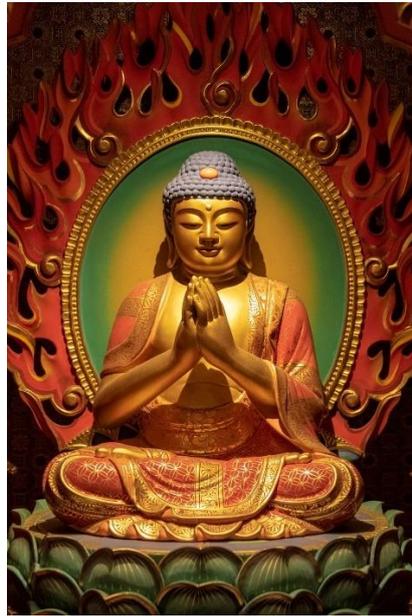


Image: Nick Fewings, *Unsplash*

Buddhists follow the teachings and example of the Buddha, Gautama Siddhartha. He was born over 2500 years ago in Nepal.

### Precepts

The Buddha taught that there are five precepts to help people to live a good life. A precept is not quite a rule or commandment, but more of a goal to live up to – an ideal to strive towards and master in a person's everyday life.

When it comes to thinking about how humans should act towards animals, there are two precepts that are very important:

- **Do not kill living beings/do no harm to living beings**

This is really important as some ways in which humans use animals involve killing them – for instance for meat, leather, silk or fur. Sometimes humans also use animals in ways that do harm to them. An example might be keeping a pet in a very small cage or pen. Ahimsa is the name given to the idea that people should avoid doing harm. (If you have studied Hinduism, you will see that ahimsa is important for many Hindus, too).

- **Do not take anything that is not freely given a**

This is important as humans sometimes use animals in ways that take from them without giving them a choice. An example might be making animals perform in circuses. This takes away their freedom not only because they may be kept in pens or cages, but also it takes away their freedom to just simply behave in the way they would if they were free. Another example could be taking milk from cows. The milk is really intended for her calf to drink, but farmers almost always take away the calf so that the cow can be milked. Her milk will be sold for humans to drink or to be made into butter, cream or cheese.

## Metta

Metta means loving kindness or good will to others. Buddhists believe that it is important to develop and keep practising loving kindness to other people and towards animals. The Metta Sutta is a much-loved teaching from the Buddha and, in it, it says:

As a mother would risk her life  
to protect her child, her only child,  
even so should one cultivate a limitless heart  
with regard to all beings.

(Karaniya Metta Sutta)

## People and Animals are not Separate

All beings fear danger,  
life is dear to all.  
When a person considers this,  
He does not kill or cause to kill

(Dhammapada, 129)

Buddhists believe that all living creatures are closely connected. People may be reborn as animals and vice versa in the cycle of reincarnation. From its very beginnings over 2500 years ago, Buddhist thought recognised that animals were like people in many ways. For instance, it was known that animals seek pleasure and comfort, they can suffer pain and distress, so they try to avoid pain or danger. Buddhism has also always recognised that animals have family ties, and they form communities and friendships, just like we do.

## What does all this mean for how Buddhists live their lives?

It's complicated! Buddhists follow the teachings and example of the life lived by the Buddha. The Buddha lived a very long time ago and his teachings are recorded in lots of different texts. Some types of Buddhists place more emphasis on certain types of texts that record the Buddha's teaching than on others. Some of these texts seem to set down some quite strict rules about not eating or using animals for clothing, whilst others do not seem so strict. Many of the Buddha's teachings strongly encourage kindness to animals and urge Buddhists to see the similarities and connections between humans and other animals.

## So, do you have to be vegetarian or vegan to be a Buddhist?

Not all Buddhists are vegetarian or vegan. It seems that the Buddha himself was not vegetarian, as he died of food poisoning from eating tainted pork. However, many Buddhists do choose to be vegetarian or vegan though, as they believe that the 2 precepts, we looked at earlier here can only be fulfilled by not harming animals for food, clothing and so on. Also, if humans take things from animals to use for themselves, like wool, milk, or even an animal's freedom to roam and act as they naturally would do, we cannot be sure that these things are freely given, and often we know they would not be.

Some communities of Buddhist monks or nuns are vegetarian or vegan. Monks and nuns are men and women who choose to live away from their families in monasteries, dedicating their whole lives to the practice of Buddhism. The rules that Buddhist monks or nuns must follow are stricter and more detailed than those for Buddhists who are not monks or nuns. Traditionally, monks and nuns rely on the charity of the wider

community, who are called 'lay people' for their food. Some monasteries may allow the monks or nuns to accept meat as long as the animal has not been killed especially for them. Some say this is to make it easier for the lay people to give freely to the monks and nuns.

## 5 Buddhist Teachings on Animals

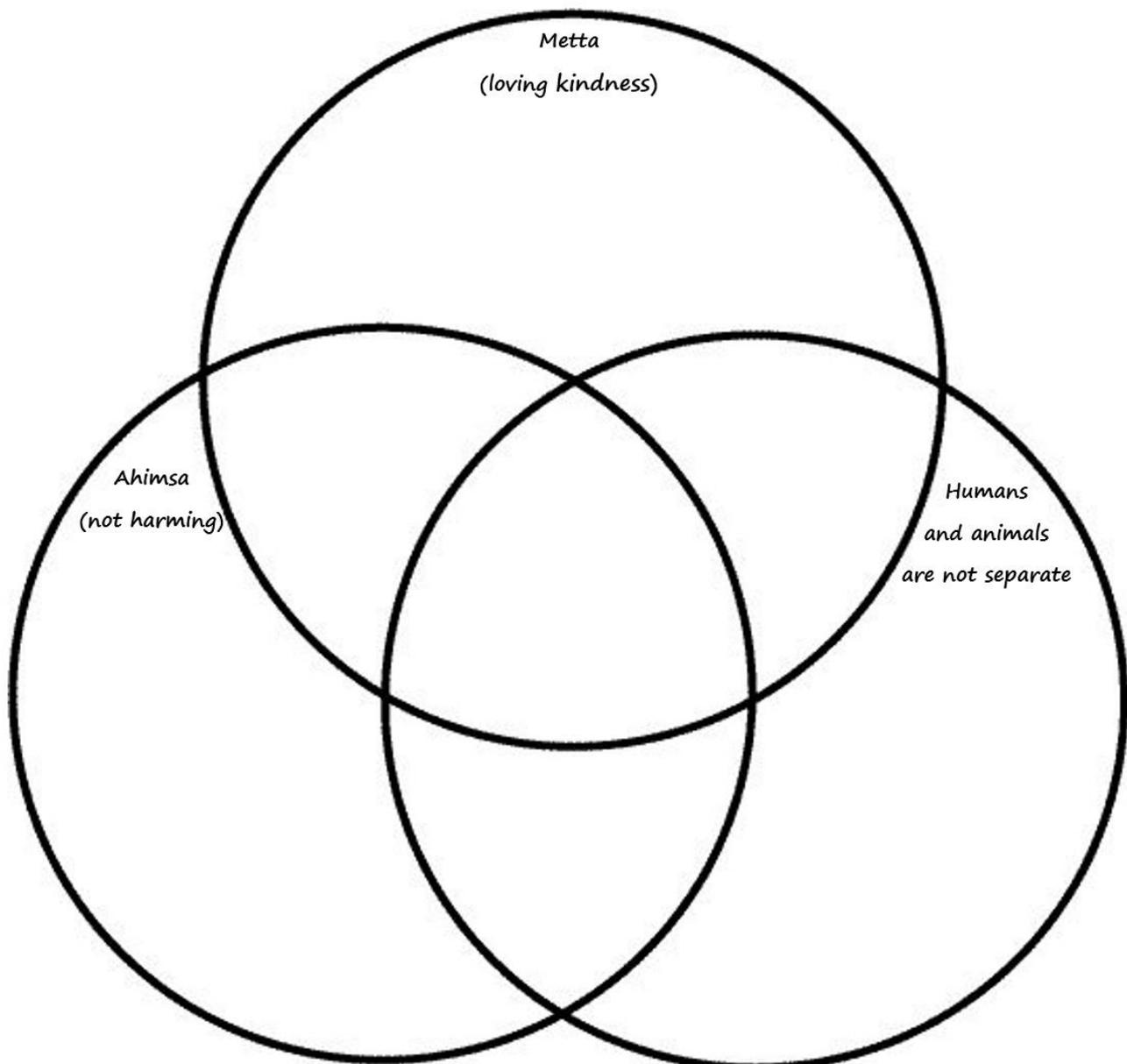
Working in groups, take a look at these Buddhist teachings about animals. Ask your teacher for help with words or parts of the quotes that you find tricky to understand.

Where does each teaching fit in the Venn diagram?

Which one does your group agree with or like the most?

Are there any that you don't agree with?

Are there any that people in your groups had very different opinions about?



<p>I have loving-kindness for footless creatures; for those with two feet I have loving-kindness. I have loving-kindness for those with four feet; for those with many feet I have loving-kindness. May all beings, all living beings, all creatures, every one, meet with good fortune; may nothing bad come to anyone.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Snakes, Anguttara Nikaya 4:67)</p>	<p>Let him not destroy, or cause to be destroyed, any life at all, or approve of the acts of those who do so. Let him refrain even from hurting any creature, both those that are strong and those that tremble in the world.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Dhammika Sutta, Sutta Nipata II:14(19))</p>
<p>Whether they be creatures of the land or air, whoever harms here any living being, who has no compassion for all that live, let such a one be known as depraved.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Sutta Nipata)</p>	<p>All beings fear danger, life is dear to all. When a person considers this, He does not kill or cause to kill.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Dhammapada, 129)</p>
<p>As a mother would risk her life to protect her child, her only child, even so should one cultivate a limitless heart with regard to all beings.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Karaniya Metta Sutta)</p>	<p>Whenever there is the evolution of living beings, let people cherish the thought of kinship with them, and thinking that all beings are [to be loved as if they were] an only child, let them refrain from eating meat.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Lankavatara Sutra)</p>

## Resource 3: Sikhism and Animals

### Why is kindness to animals important to many Sikhs?

Sikhs believe in one God, called Waheguru, who is the creator of everything. They also believe in the oneness of all of God's creation. This means that they do not see animals as separate or divided from human beings. Sikhs believe in samsara, which means that when a living being dies, its soul is reborn in another form. You may hear this belief being referred to as 'reincarnation'. According to this belief, human beings have almost always taken the form of other animals in lives they have lived already, and they may live in animal form in the future, too. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, reminds Sikhs that even people with wealth and power who do not follow God, are not even equal to a humble ant, who never forgets its purpose or goal. There are lots of Sikh stories that show animals helping and inspiring people, as well as stories urging people to be kind to animals, too.

Sikhs must take care of everything that God has created. All these beliefs encourage Sikhs to avoid cruelty to other people and to animals, and to act with care and kindness. Sewa (sometimes written as seva), which means selflessly serving others is an important part of being Sikh. Many Sikhs see sewa as a duty not just towards other people but to animals, and often towards the whole environment as well. Some Sikh stories tell of animals fulfilling the duty of sewa, reminding us of the oneness of humans and animals; all being valuable parts of God's creation.

### How do these beliefs affect how Sikhs live?

There are no Sikh rules that tell Sikhs exactly what to do or not to do when it comes to animals. For instance, while many Sikhs choose to be vegetarian (and some may be vegan, too) there is no rule in Sikhism which says they must be. If we look at the lives of some of the ten gurus, at least two of them were keen hunters (Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh). The 7<sup>th</sup> guru, Guru Har Rai, had a special love of nature and animals. He went hunting, not to kill animals but to capture them and keep them as part of his Sikh community. Sometimes they were sick or injured animals who he captured so that they could be cared for. Throughout the Guru Granth Sahib (the writings which Sikhs regard as their living Guru) there is much to encourage kindness and compassion to animals. There are also stories and sayings of the ten human Gurus that speak of the importance of treating animals with kindness, care and respect. After all, Sikhs believe they too are part of God's creation and they too have the spark of Waheguru, which is present in all living things.

## Sikh Stories that encourage Kindness to Animals

### Guru Nanak and the Snake

*This story is an example of an animal who is aware of God and who performs the duty of sewa.*

When Guru Nanak was a teenager, one of his jobs was to look after his family's cows. He loved to do this. It meant that he could be out in nature, thinking about God's wonderful creation, and it pleased him greatly to care for the animals.

One very hot day, as Nanak was watching the cows graze and thinking deeply about God and the wonders of nature, he fell asleep under a tree. As Nanak slept, he dreamt, instead of just thinking, about the wonders of God's creation. And as he snoozed away, the sun moved. He was no longer protected by the shade of the tree and was in danger of getting a nasty sunburn.

Silently slithering along, came a great big poisonous snake – a cobra – with a huge hood at its neck. The cobra spied Nanak and could tell that, even in his dreams, he was with God. Noticing that the boy would soon burn or be woken by the heat of the sun from his sleep, the cobra spread its hood over Nanak, like a parasol shading him from the hot rays.

While the cobra was hovering over Nanak, Rai Bular, the head of the village came by on his horse. Not understanding that the cobra was trying to help and serve Nanak because of his devotion to God, Rai Bular, galloped over to Nanak. He was going to rescue Nanak from the dangerous snake. So afraid was he that the snake would bite Nanak, he was ready to kill it, if he had to.

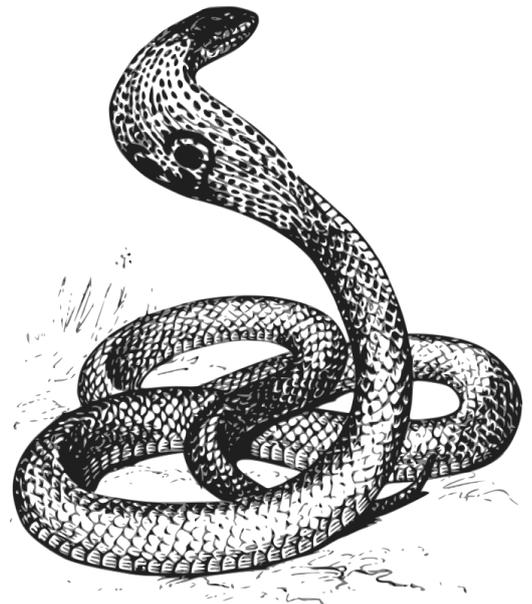


Image: 1001freedownloads.com

As Rai Bular got closer though, he noticed that the snake was not frightened by his noisy and powerful galloping horse. In fact, it seemed to be thinking deeply too, as it sheltered Nanak from the blistering rays of the sun. Perhaps, like Nanak, the snake was thinking about God and the wonders of nature. When he got near to Nanak, Rai Bular realised what was happening: the snake was serving and protecting this special and holy boy.

Rai Bular suddenly remembered that Nanak was always with God and that God is in everything – all the animals, all the fishes, all the insects – in every living thing, even poisonous snakes! Rai Bular never ever forgot this peaceful scene. He was inspired by it for the rest of his days and loved and served Nanak all through his life.

## Bhai Kirtia and the Bear

***This story reminds Sikhs that animals and humans are one, and people may take the form of other animals in lives they have lived or may live in the future.***

Once there was a big open-air meeting, so lots of people were out and about in the streets. Among them was the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh. There was a performer attracting crowds with his large bear. The performer wrestled with the bear and made him perform lots of tricks by poking and prodding him with a stick.

Bhai Kirtia, a Sikh and follower of Guru Gobind Singh was enjoying the performance tremendously, laughing out loud and clutching his sides when the bear was made to do tricks. As the show was coming to an end, Guru Gobind Singh asked Bhai Kirtia if he recognised the bear. A little shocked, but still smiling, Bhai Kirtia replied “Guru Ji, this is a bear that I have never seen before.” The Guru looked Bhai Kirtia in the eye and smiled gently. “That is your father!” he exclaimed.

Bhai Kirtia was shocked and felt very upset. His father had died a few years ago. Why would the Guru taunt him like this? He told the Guru that his father had been faithful to God, had served others and always said his prayers. But as Bhai Kirtia looked at the bear more intently, he realised that what the Guru said *was* true. Knowing that he had not lived nearly as faithfully and in service of others as his father, he asked the guru, “if this fate awaited my father, then what awaits someone like me?” Bhai Kirtia was no longer laughing and was now seeing the performance through the eyes of the unfortunate tormented bear.

Guru Gobind Singh agreed that Bhai Kirtia’s father was mostly a very good man, but one day he had refused a poor man a share of the sweet dough, called karah prashad, that is given out after worship. The poor man was starving and had begged for it, and upon being refused, he begged again. Instead of giving this poor man a small share of the karah prashad, Bhai Kirtia’s father had scolded him and shouted, “Why do you behave like a bear?”

The hungry man was hurt and humiliated. He was so desperate to eat that he picked up a piece of the karah prashad which had fallen onto the dirty floor. He held it up, gave praise and thanks to God, and ate it, before scurrying away.

It was only a few days after this had happened, Guru Gobind Singh told Bhai Kirtia, that his father had died. “Your father was born again as the unfortunate bear we see before us today, on account of his unkindness to the poor man, asking for karah prashad.”

A tear rolled down Bhai Kirtia’s face, but the Guru continued: “However, it was his dedication to God and sewa that allowed him to meet with you again here today.”

On hearing the Guru’s words, people took pity on Bhai Kirtia. They begged Guru Gobind Singh to please find a way to redeem Bhai Kirtia’s father. The Guru bought the bear from the performer. Now, the bear who was actually Bhai Kirtia’s father could live a happy life, no longer having to be taunted to perform, and re-united with his son. The Guru prepared karah prashad, making sure that the bear had his share as well as everyone else. Shortly after eating the karah prashad, the bear fell asleep for the very last time. His soul was freed from the cycle of rebirth and became one with God. This is called ‘moksha’ and it is the ultimate goal for which every Sikh person strives.

## Bhai Kirtia and the Bear

Draw a picture to illustrate each of these scenes

<p>1. Bhai Kirtia is enjoying watching a dancing bear performing. The bear's owner is prodding him and tormenting him to make him do tricks.</p>	<p>2. Guru Gobind Singh tells Bhai Kirtia that the bear is actually Bhai's father, reincarnated. Bhai Kirtia can no longer enjoy the performance because he is now thinking of how the poor bear must be feeling.</p>
<p>3. Bhai is told that his father was reincarnated to this life because, although he refused to give blessed food (karah prashad) to a poor man, who he shouted at and asked "why do you behave like a bear?"</p>	<p>4. The Guru takes pity on Bhai and reunites him with his father, now in the form of the bear by buying the bear from the performer.</p>
<p>5. The Guru shares karah prashad with everyone, including the bear. The bear falls asleep and dies. He is freed from the cycle of rebirth. He becomes one with God. This is called 'moksha'.</p>	<p><b>I think that this story teaches</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/06/29/religion-in-india-tolerance-and-segregation/>