

Ethical Veganism in RE Supplementary Resource

Unit 1 (ages 5 to 7)

What can we learn from religious stories about how humans should treat other animals?

Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam



'Beautiful Animals'

Georgia, Age 6, West Midlands

NATRE Art in Heaven entry, 2008

Resource 1

Essential Knowledge for Teachers

Judaism and Christianity: Rebecca at the Well

This story is found in Genesis 24. The Book of Genesis is important to Christians and to Jewish people because, as well as the creation narrative and the Fall, it tells the story of Abraham, regarded as the Father of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (the Abrahamic religions), and of his early descendants.

Rebecca becomes Abraham's daughter-in-law when she marries his son, Isaac. She is an important Old Testament protagonist! The story of Rebecca at the well introduces her to readers of the Bible. It is also the first biblical account of two people falling in love, so it is interesting that kindness towards animals features so strongly in the events. The story also introduces Rebecca for the first time – a very important female protagonist of the Old Testament. This first encounter with Rebecca shows her to be compassionate not only to people, but also to animals. Whilst some people stereotype those who care for animals as being sentimental or even weak, as her character develops through the Book of Genesis, it is clear that Rebecca is neither – she is characterised as independent and strong-willed, and even deceives her husband Isaac in order to ensure events go her way.

To really appreciate Rebecca's kindness to animals in this story, it is worth noting that a fully-grown camel can drink over 100 litres of water in just a few minutes. A litre of water weighs almost 1kg. Rebecca made sure that all ten camels had enough water from the well. This would have been exhausting and very time consuming – she must really have cared about those camels!

N.B. Abraham's servant is not named in the Bible itself. The name Eliezer comes from Jewish rabbinical texts.

Christianity: St Philip Neri

Rather than being a story in the sense of an event, this passage gives pupils insight into the ethical concern of an important Catholic saint, St Philip Neri of Rome. There were many Catholic saints who showed concern for animals, often seeing this as an important aspect of their devotion to God.

Islamic Stories: The Prophet and the Ants and the Crying Camel

The two Islamic stories focus on the kindness and compassion shown for animals by the Prophet Muhammad. Not only did he show concern for animals, but he also encouraged others to do the same and admonished people who were cruel or neglectful towards animals – even ants! It is well worth discussing that the Prophet showed comparable advocacy for a large mammal as he did for tiny insects, telling people that even tiny animals are important to Allah.

Remember to explain to, or remind, learners that Allah is the Arabic name for God.

Resource 2

Rebecca at the Well (The Bible's First Love Story)

Christianity and Judaism

Abraham is an important man for many religious people. It is believed that he had a special connection with God. When Abraham was very old, and he thought he and his wife Sarah could not have any more children, they had a son and called him Isaac. This was a sign of God's special love for Abraham and Sarah.

When Isaac grew up, Abraham wanted to help his beloved son to find a wife. They now lived far from Abraham's homeland, and Abraham wanted his son to marry a woman from there. So, as he was too old and frail to make the journey himself, Abraham sent his most trusted servant, Eliezer, to find a wife for Isaac. With ten of Abraham's camels to carry his wares, Eliezer left on his long journey. The mission to find a wife for his master's son had begun.

Eliezer really wanted to find the right wife for Isaac. It was such an important task! He thought very hard about how he could find the right person for Isaac to marry. When Eliezer finally reached Abraham's hometown, he found the well, as it was here that many of the women would come to fetch water for their homes. He and his tired camels sat down wearily. He closed his eyes and said a prayer to God, to help him to make the right choice. Eliezer prayed:

"When I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar so that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too', let her be the one you have chosen for Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

Before Eliezer had finished praying, a beautiful young woman came out to the well, with her jar on her shoulder. She went down to the well, filled up her jar, which was now very heavy with the water, and came up again. Eliezer hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar."

"Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly handed Eliezer the jar to let him a drink.

After she had given Eliezer a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink." She quickly emptied the rest of the water in her jar into a trough for the camels to drink from and ran back to the well to draw more water. Drawing water is very hard work, and camels drink a lot of water, but the woman went back and forth, making sure that all the camels had enough to drink. Eliezer watched her and knew that God had sent this woman to be chosen as Isaac's wife. Her name was Rebecca.

Rebecca agreed to return with Eliezer and marry Isaac. Eliezer's test worked! When Rebecca and Isaac met, they instantly fall in love.

Eliezer's test was all about finding a woman to be Isaac's wife who was not only kind to humans, but to animals as well. This is the first story in the Bible about two people falling in love. It also teaches that our kindness should not just be for other people, but for animals as well.

Resource 3

St Philip Neri

Christianity

Some Christians believe that there are just a few people who are especially close to God and who live especially good lives. They are known as saints. Christians may see saints as really great examples of how to live their own lives.

There are many saints who, as well as trying very hard to be kind and loving to people, also took great care to be very kind to animals as well. St Philip Neri was one of these people.

St Philip Neri is a famous saint admired by many Christians. He was known for being jolly and full of laughter, as well as for welcoming people on their religious travels to the holy city of Rome. But, as well as this, he cared very deeply for animals.

St Philip Neri did not eat meat – he was a vegetarian! Although there are lots of people who are vegetarian nowadays, here in Britain, it was very unusual to be a vegetarian 500 years ago in Italy, where St Philip Neri lived. There were a few people who were vegetarian because they wanted to give something up that most people enjoyed, to show their love for God. St Philip Neri was vegetarian not only for this reason, but because of his love for animals as well. Once, as he was passing by a butcher's shop he said, 'If everyone was like me, they wouldn't kill animals!'

He really wanted to see animals being happy and free. He did not like to see birds in cages and set them free when he could. However, once free the birds chose to stay with the saint. On another occasion he was given some live partridges to make a meal from, but instead he set them free. He would not even swat a fly, and always made sure they were let out of the window. Where most people would kill mice that were captured, St Philip Neri would take them to be released in safe places.

Resource 4

The Story of the Prophet and the Ants

Islamic story

After a long day of hard work, collecting leaves and building their nest, the ants began to head home. The sun was going down, but strangely it felt hotter and hotter as the ants got nearer to their nest and the light seemed to be getting brighter, too. Then, the ants who were marching ahead of the others saw what was going on. There was a fire!

Just as they realised what was happening, the ants heard a loud but gentle voice coming from above. It was the Prophet Muhammad, who had set up camp nearby with his companions, as he travelled.

“Look at what you’ve done!” he said to the people gathered around the fire.

“You’ve built your fire too close to the ants’ nest. Those poor little creatures will get burnt!”

As soon as he said this, one of the people took a huge jug of water and poured it on the fire, putting it out. All of the ants breathed a big sigh of relief. They could now go home safely.

As the ants continued to march home, they heard the Prophet say, “No matter how small or large the animals are, they are all important to Allah.”

That night, the ants slept soundly, safe in the knowledge that the Prophet Muhammad was looking out for them.

The Story of the Crying Camel

Islamic story

The desert is a hard road. It had been a long journey, and everyone was tired, including Ahmed. The last few miles, everyone was looking ahead to the oasis and at last they arrived. Arriving after so many days’ travel, the Madinah oasis was such a relief. People threw off their dusty garments, took showers, had drinks and at last found some time to relax. Gradually, people began to rest. Ahmed, who had travelled with his camel, found a cool place among the flower beds and took some fruit juice. He knew he really should look after his camel, take the heavy load off her back first, but he was so very tired. Ahmed sat down and relaxed.

The Prophet Muhammad had to pass that way during the afternoon, and as he came near, he heard a dreadful whining sound, someone was very sad. He hurried to see what was so distressed. It was a camel, tied to a tree, loaded with huge sacks. The poor creature was filthy, sweaty, hungry and thirsty. The Prophet looked swiftly around, but there was no one looking after the animal. The Prophet brought water to the camel, untied her, and removed the sacks, and made the poor animal more comfortable.

Then he headed into the oasis, breaking the tranquil atmosphere: “Whose camel is left outside tied up?” he asked. The sharpness of his voice was unusual, and the resting travellers jumped up. Ahmed felt suddenly worried. He stepped forward to admit the camel belonged to him. “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?” the Prophet asked. “Allah trusted you to look after this camel, but you sit resting while Allah’s creature suffers!” Ahmed promised that he would always look after his camel properly from now on.