

Tufts

University
Chaplaincy

Religion and the Care, Treatment, and Rights of Animals



Written by Walker A. Bristol, M.Div., Board Certified Chaplain
April 2016
Revised January 2019

Further revised by Dr. Preeta Banerjee, Hindu Chaplain
and the Rev. Daniel Bell, Protestant Chaplain
August 2024

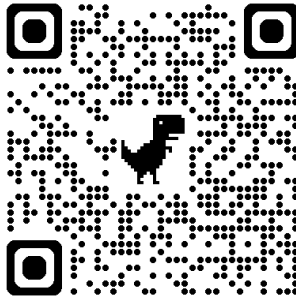
About the Tufts University Chaplaincy

The University Chaplaincy is a dynamic hub supporting religious, spiritual, ethical, and cultural life for all members of the Tufts community. We provide spiritual care, support religious and philosophical communities, educate about spiritual and ethical issues in society and the world, and promote multifaith engagement.

To learn more please visit

<https://chaplaincy.tufts.edu/about/>

To contact our multifaith chaplaincy team, please visit <https://chaplaincy.tufts.edu/contact>, email chaplaincy@tufts.edu, or scan the QR code below to contact a chaplain.



We would be happy to have a conversation and connect you with supportive resources.

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	3
<u>Interfaith Perspectives on End-of-Life Care of Animals and their Clients</u>	4
<u>Supporting Clients of Different Religions and Cultures</u>	6
<u>Buddhism</u>	11
<u>Christianity (Protestant)</u>	12
<u>Christianity (Roman Catholic)</u>	13
<u>Hinduism</u>	14
<u>Humanism (E.g., Atheism, Agnosticism, & Secularism)</u>	15
<u>Islam</u>	16
<u>Judaism (Orthodox)</u>	17
<u>Judaism (Reform)</u>	18
<u>Works Cited and Further Reading</u>	19

Introduction

Religion and the Care, Treatment, and Rights of Animals is a resource designed to support veterinary students and clinicians. It was created and revised by Walker Bristol, a Clinical Chaplain at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, MA. Bristol was the Humanist Chaplain and Assistant Director of the Tufts University Chaplaincy for several years and served as the Chaplaincy's liaison to the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. As the current liaison, I was tasked with further revising this guide, which is now intended to be a "living document" to reflect the ongoing questions, concerns, and insights shared by members of the Cummings School community with the Tufts University Chaplaincy team. Several changes have been made, including a new section called "Interfaith Perspectives on End-of-Life Care of Animals and their Clients." My colleague Dr. Preeta Banerjee, Tufts' Hindu Chaplain, and I wrote this in conjunction with our multi-faith team of chaplain colleagues in response to concerns raised by Cummings students and staff over the past year. As you will see, most of these concerns related to religious and ethical questions about animal euthanasia and the loss of a pet.

This resource also contains Walker Bristol's very informative piece, "Supporting Clients of Different Religions and Cultures," which we commend to you. An increased awareness of others' cultural and religious perspectives in relation to animal care is important for several reasons. It supports our collective work as helping professionals to become more attuned to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is also an important way of ensuring that your clinical work reflects the highest ethical and moral standards. Perhaps most crucially, it is key to becoming a more deeply compassionate medical practitioner and caregiver. From a spiritual standpoint, I would say this is part of what it means to respect the inherent dignity and worth of all living beings.

Please note that this guide is not intended to be a scholarly resource. I encourage you to consult the "Works Cited and Further Reading" section for academic sources you may wish to use for research purposes and your own learning. Also, it is important to note that this guide is not, by any means, fully comprehensive of all religious, philosophical, or ethical perspectives. Each worldview section below reflects the religious and philosophical traditions currently represented by our University Chaplaincy team. However, the perspectives shared in the various quotes are not necessarily endorsed by Tufts University chaplains. They are simply meant to offer a "glimpse" into the teachings of different belief systems you might encounter among clients. Please contact us if you are looking for additional guidance in supporting clients from these or any other spiritual traditions and cultural backgrounds.

Finally, I would be remiss to not acknowledge and thank the following people for their support in updating this resource: Chad Argotsinger, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs; Dr. Preeta Banerjee, Tufts' Hindu Chaplain; John Bourgeois, Library Manager at Cummings' Webster Family Library; Dr. Emily McCobb, Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Clinical Sciences at Cummings; Eric Richman, Clinical Social Worker at Cummings; and the Rev. Elyse Nelson Winger, Tufts' University Chaplain.

May the love and care that have led you into the field of veterinary medicine continue to guide you in your studies and professional calling.

Best wishes,

The Rev. Daniel Bell
Protestant Chaplain
Interfaith Liaison to the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine
Tufts University

August 15, 2024
Medford, Massachusetts

Interfaith Perspectives on End-of-Life Care of Animals and their Clients

*By the Rev. Daniel Bell, Protestant Chaplain,
and Dr. Preeta Banerjee, Hindu Chaplain, Tufts University*

Based on feedback sessions we conducted with veterinary students, staff, and faculty at the Cummings School during the 2023-2024 academic year, we learned that end-of-life care of animals, and support of their human companions (clients) are often top-of-mind. This is especially true of euthanasia, and the related moral distress experienced by clients and clinicians. We have composed the following questions from a clinician's first-person point of view, with bullet-point responses that reflect interfaith perspectives from the Tufts University Chaplaincy team. While far from comprehensive, we hope that this guidance can support you and the vital care you provide to animals and their companions under very challenging circumstances.

How can I support a client in making a decision to euthanize an animal companion, especially if the client has spiritual and/or religious concerns?

- Approach the animal with a sense of reverence, recognizing the sacred worth of all living beings in our independent web of life.
- Emphasize the importance of exercising self-compassion as clients face this very difficult decision. (E.g., "You are doing the best you can under the circumstances.")
- Explore what "quality of life" means to clients in relation to caring for the animal, and what a "good death" might look like (e.g., humane, peaceful, smooth, and quick).
- Invite clients to reflect on what they are feeling as they consider options and process information. Gently ask questions like, "What scares you about euthanasia?"
- Share how love takes different forms. (E.g., "What is the most loving and merciful act you can offer your beloved animal at this time?")
- Encourage families to include children in the decision-making process and invite children to be present during the euthanasia.

I am feeling guilt/shame related to euthanizing an animal. What are some spiritual/religious insights that can help me process these difficult emotions?

- Offer the same compassion towards yourself that you provide to your patients and clients. Remember that you are doing the best you can with expertise and courage. No one is perfect and there is no shame in that. Forgive yourself.
- Reflect on what drew you to this profession in the first place. Stay rooted in your calling to this vital work.
- Develop healthy, supportive, and realistic practices of self-care, and commit to them regularly. Check in with yourself and keep track of how you are feeling.
- Reward yourself after a trying situation or week, instead of punishing or criticizing yourself.
- Find and maintain a good support system of colleagues, friends, and family members.
- Consider how you might make meaning out of things that don't always make sense. For example, without minimizing the pain and loss, can you imagine something good emerging out of tragic circumstances?

How can I help a client who is religious/spiritual grieve the loss of an animal companion?

- Validate the client's grief, acknowledging that many in our society unfortunately still trivialize the grieving process for an animal companion. For example, if a client apologizes for crying, you might assure the client that there is no need to apologize or feel embarrassed.
- Acknowledge that the loss is not just about the animal's death itself but the loss of a loving relationship, and the routine and community connected to it.
- Invite clients to share about how their religious tradition and/or spiritual practice can help them make meaning and find strength in the wake of this loss.
- Provide grief support resources, such as pamphlets, websites, local grief circles, pet loss helpline phone numbers, and veterinary chaplain contact information if it is available. For example, visit the resources page on <https://www.lapoflove.com/> and keep a supply of "Pet Loss and Grief" brochures provided by the American Veterinary Medical Association (visit <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/pet-owners/petcare/coping-loss-pet>).

What are some religious/spiritual insights I might offer a client regarding an animal's death, burial, memorialization, and beliefs about the afterlife?

- Invite clients to share a good memory they have of the deceased animal.
- Offer to hold a few moments of silent reflection or prayer, and speak words of gratitude for the life of the deceased animal. For example, "Are there some words of remembrance and gratitude you would like to share about?"
- Regardless of religious/spiritual background, we can all affirm our interconnectedness as living beings on this earth. Affirm the loss in this context.
- Share different options for how the animal's remains can be respectfully buried at home or elsewhere, or cremated. If possible, invite the client to consider options before the death occurs, and encourage families to make these decisions together in line with their beliefs and values. (Also, we want to acknowledge the consumerist element at play in our culture regarding pet cremains. Create a space, if possible, where the client can make decisions that are not completely driven by emotion).
- If it seems appropriate to do so, you can acknowledge the ecological impact of cremation and burial. What are the spiritual values that guide a client in this regard, and what kinds of ecologically-friendly options exist?
- If the clients/families are religious, invite them to share some thoughts on what they believe about the afterlife in relation to their beloved animal companion. People hold a wide range of views on animals in the afterlife. There are no right or wrong answers.

Supporting Clients of Different Religions and Cultures

*By Walker Bristol, MDiv., BCC
Tufts University Chaplaincy Humanist Chaplain (2018-2020)
and Assistant Director (2020-2021)*

Healthcare providers of any kind working in an environment with clients of different religious and cultural backgrounds are faced with a particular challenge: there may never be an easy answer to navigating competing needs and expectations. What research has illustrated, however, is that several strategies of communication can help in clarifying what those expectations might be, establishing trust, and creating space to find where someone's cultural and religious needs and a provider's recommendations can meet.

Religion in America today is hardly understood to be as distinctly categorized as it once was thought to be, though those categories still can prepare us as providers to be welcoming and collaborative with people of different identities. Increasing movement away from traditional religious institutions and between religious communities has upended researcher's expectations for what religious identity might mean today. As you'll see in the later portraits of different religious traditions and their engagement with animal life, religions individually include various perspectives and interpretations of existing religious laws. That said, familiarizing ourselves with some of those common perspectives and some of the roots of religious understanding can create quick avenues for thoughtful communication across lines of difference.

Working in a multireligious capacity, even in urban centers, will rarely mean working with all or most of the religions discussed in this resource—yet, even traditions that are demographically small may be well represented in a particular locale. In practice, many counties in America will have a significant and established presence of only a few different religious communities within the expected service area of a veterinary practice (Portes 2006). However, while demographics suggest that some of those communities will be Christian (Catholic, Mainline Protestant, or Evangelical Protestant), one or more of them may also be a part of another minority religious tradition that may be well represented among your clientele. For instance, by the 2010 Census, while Catholic and Mainline Protestant congregations were the most represented religious communities in Worcester County, home to the Foster Small Animal Hospital, there are four prominent Theravada Buddhist communities registered in the area whose community members greatly outnumber other minority traditions.

This section will explore some of the challenges that emerge in a veterinary healthcare environment with clients of different religious backgrounds and tools that researchers have suggested in navigating them. First, we will discuss how religion tends to inform different dimensions of veterinary medicine, including ethics, relationship building, and grief. Then, we will propose strategies for responding as providers to those different tensions. Finally, we will propose guidance for reading and using the different perspectives included in the following sections of this resource in relation to these strategies of communication and relationship building.

RELIGION, CULTURE, AND ETHICS

In the Western study of religion, researchers typically describe the relationship between religion and ethics as informing how a community thinks about agency and existence. In some traditions, usually Abrahamic traditions like Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, agency is expected to be understood as referring to the individual person or animal, distinguishing them from other individuals. While this varies for some movements within these traditions, this understanding in relation to other cultural factors informs ethical positions and practices for members of those faiths. In other traditions, the understanding of agency might be more fluid—for instance, the understanding of brahman in Hinduism, a singular reality that underlies all life.

Researchers in comparative religion and philosophy have given some clarity to this relationship. Susan Setta and Sam Shemie, in writing about religious traditions formulating ethical decisions in healthcare, wrote:

Patterns emerge in the comparative study of religious perspectives on death. Western traditions show their rootedness in Judaism in their understanding of the human individual as a finite, singular creation. Although the many branches of Western religions do not agree on precisely how to determine death, they are all able to locate a moment of death in the body. In Eastern traditions personhood is not defined in physical terms. Moreover, the influence of indigenous systems on the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism is significant. From prescribing the location of death, to resisting medical intervention and definitions of death, Hinduism and Buddhism in their many forms, echo these indigenous traditions (Setta 2015).

They go on to explain that, according to their study, Hinduism and Buddhism traditionally believe that the dying process begins with the ending of heart and brain function, rather than ending. In human medicine, this can present practical challenges regarding touching or moving the human body after being declared dead by the medical team. In this way, many standards in Western healthcare operate according to expectations held by Western traditions about the nature of personhood and the event of death.

However, the relationship between a person's religious beliefs and ethical principles is always informed by more than just their tradition. People in different geographic contexts, particularly if they have exposure to religious diversity, may live out their tradition's values differently than expected. For instance, Muslims in countries with different cultural norms profess different perspectives on the traditional pillar of the Islamic faith of salat, or praying five times a day. Whereas most Muslims in Muslim-majority countries like Afghanistan and Indonesia report praying five times a day, most Muslims in pluralistic countries like the United States report praying once a day—either by necessity given limited spaces in which to pray or by a different understanding of that pillar of faith.

For this reason, a religion's prescribed ethics, even as described by other members of the tradition, give only a part of the picture of that person's ethical system. Understanding how many people in a tradition approach certain questions of ethics can help a provider know what to account for in developing a medical practice—for instance in the Muslim case, having available space for prayer in or near the practice building. However, having sustained and trusting relationships and clear avenues of communication are important in clarifying exactly what a particular client's philosophy and needs might be in relation to a patient's care.

RELIGION, CULTURE, AND RELATIONSHIPS

As intertwined phenomena, religion and culture together inform someone's manner of relating to other people as well as their manner of communicating their needs and desires. A common system of encoding and decoding messages—both verbal and non-verbal—is generally what binds people of shared cultural and religious heritage. In healthcare, being conscious of differences between your own culture of communication and that of your client or patient is a necessary part of aiding them in decision making and supporting them through a crisis.

All interactions in healthcare are intercultural, not only because people even in the same geographic locations can come from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, but because the culture of veterinary medicine is unique in itself. Healthcare carries its own terminology, assumptions, and norms that are different even between different practices and fields within a subculture. Recognizing the importance of cultural sensitivity and awareness is the first step in building cultural competence, although much like with ethics, by nature a

provider can never fully step into a culture that isn't their own. Miscommunication, the result of a rift between different cultures, can cause dissatisfaction and stress for both providers and clients (Ulrey 2001).

Both in learning about a new culture and in finding ways of articulating your own that are accessible, notice regular moments of confusion or difficulty understanding. Finding ways to transmit information and to build relationships that cross over intercultural and interreligious barriers requires noticing the pressure points when details tend to get lost or conflict usually arises. In this way, experience working in a particular cultural or multicultural environment naturally helps a thoughtful clinician to grow in their understanding and to connect more readily with new clients of a different cultural or religious experience.

Although not yet studied in veterinary medicine, partnerships between community health centers in human medicine and local religious communities have been found to allow for a more well-rounded support and care and new avenues to conflict resolution (Gee 2005). While sometimes programmatic, these partnerships may even just involve clinicians contacting leaders in a religious community to discuss what particular needs they have. As those relationships deepen, community members come to be able to trust a veterinary practice will be attentive to their needs beyond even their own personal experience.

Community partnerships also allow for avenues into public health interventions that can indirectly benefit a veterinary practice. This might involve visits by clinicians to community sites where they have animal companions for screenings, preventative recommendations, and other modes of risk reduction that might escalate into problems more difficult to treat once brought to the clinic (Levin 2016). For instance, Christian communities may have Blessing of the Pets ceremonies where many community members will bring their companion animals to receive blessings by the minister. Whereas churches with relationships to medical clinics often pair congregational events with screening or preventative treatment for common diseases, events attracting companion animals might be able to do the same with a developed partnership between a veterinary practice and a faith center.

With respect to individual cross-cultural and interreligious relationships, Marjorie Kagawa-Singer and Leslie Blackhall suggest:

When the physician and patient are from different cultural backgrounds, the physician needs to ask questions that respectfully acknowledge these differences and build the trust necessary for the patient to confide in him or her. Physicians can use knowledge about particular cultural beliefs, values, and practices to respectfully recognize a person's identity and to assess the degree to which an individual patient or family might adhere to their cultural background. One way to begin this dialogue is by evaluating patients' and families' attitudes, beliefs, context, decision making, and environment (ABCDE)...The purpose of this mnemonic is to help avoid the dual pitfalls of cultural stereotyping or ignoring the potential influence of culture. In this way, the risk of miscommunication may be reduced.

Much like other approaches to conflict resolution in veterinarian-client relations, clarity in communications and finding the most accessible ways to explain concepts is both important and an ongoing process. In interreligious communication, a clinician may need more information than usual to be able to find the best way to explain a medical idea. The ABCDE evaluation mentioned here helps clarify a particular person's identity and needs, and place them in relationship with their cultural and religious identities and with the medical needs of a patient. You can learn more about this method by reading the work of Koenig and Gates-Williams (Koenig 1995).

RELIGION, CULTURE, AND GRIEF

Religion and culture are intertwined with how grief is processed, both outwardly and inwardly. As discussed earlier, philosophical beliefs about the nature of life and death greatly influence the meaning of the dying process. Religions encapsulate the practices that facilitate the safe passage of a soul from this plane to another—or, for those traditions without a belief in the afterlife, affirm and cherish the memory of someone lost in the world of the living. Culture similarly creates, or limits, the space in which a person is allowed or encouraged to grieve, and offers tools for undergoing the grief journey.

Some research has suggested that, in America, facets of religion—feelings of interconnectedness and space to express that feeling, community, social rituals that legitimize grief—help people process grief more efficiently and with fewer negative consequences like depression or increased anxiety (Alvarado 1995). This does not necessarily mean people who have a religious belief in an afterlife fear death less than atheists or agnostics, but it implies that religious Americans have access to social resources for support that non-religious Americans may not necessarily have as readily. This is also true in terms of meaning making—an important part of finalizing the grief process. Religious communities and practices incorporate a system by which people might understand the purpose of a loss or come to understand it as a part of life, whereas secular systems might require more work or investment on the part of the grieving person (McIntosh 1993).

In grieving the loss of a pet or animal companion, this all appears to still be true, though especially in terms of validating that such a loss can be as real and important as the loss of a person. Researchers, however, still only know so much about the specifics of what that decision making and grieving process looks like. Anna Chur-Hansen writes,

Although Williams and Mills (2000) have suggested that religious factors may be important in people's responses to the death of their companion animals, the effects of religious belief have not been investigated empirically. There is also the potential for the religious beliefs of clients to be of significance to practising veterinarians. For example, a client's religion may influence decisions about euthanasia, or how the client conceptualizes and deals with grief. The extent to which people apply a religious framework for understanding human death to companion animal death is unknown. Understanding this aspect of grief in bereaved pet owners may assist vets in providing a sensitive service to their clients. It may also provide owners with formats for rituals that assist them in coming to terms with the loss of their pet. It may influence how they choose to dispose of the body of their animal, which again may be of relevance to veterinarians when offering disposal options (Chur-Hansen 2010).

After euthanasia, many practices offer memorial options such as paw presses or cremated ashes (sometimes contracted out to other agencies which handle disposal). Part of the challenge in developing systems that might work for veterinary practices at large to better accompany clients to the process of a dying animal companion is the diversity of religious and cultural experiences across a pluralistic country like America. For this reason, it becomes all the more important to develop an understanding of and build relationships in the particular environment in which a practice is situated, attuned to its specific demographic makeup. This can inform what, for example, disposal and ritual options might be most common and welcomed by clientele.

Although ethical conflicts seem daunting by nature and, as discussed earlier, by the deep roots of different perspectives, compromise between clients and providers is almost always possible. In human medicine, clinical ethicists begin the process of resolving conflict by gathering as much information as possible while also simplifying the particular issue at hand into as clear and nonspecific terms as can be (such as, patient autonomy or maintaining confidentiality). Reframing the conflict both for the provider and for a client can help in the process of exploring alternatives and making sure all sides of the conflict are heard clearly. For some ethical issues, once framed in general terms, providers can look into

existing literature or contact the AVMA to understand how other practices have approached issues. Some circumstances—such as those that would present a major public health crisis—present barriers to compromise that may be insurmountable. Otherwise, communication and clarification are reliable measures for confronting problems of ethics that hadn't been previously anticipated (Kahn 2016).

Establishing standards for your veterinary practice can help depersonalize conflicts of ethics and an accessible culture of care for clients (Jevring-Back 2007). For instance, a hospital in a community with a significant number of Buddhist clients may frequently be expected to leave deceased remains untouched for several hours after a euthanasia. Creating policy changes around this need creates a more welcoming environment for such clients—both by ensuring a euthanasia room can be left occupied for an extended period of time without clinical use and by working collaboratively with local community members to determine how long it might be appropriate to leave a body undisturbed. Although religious conflicts may be unfamiliar or seem to be held more deeply than philosophical commitments, the nature of healthcare in a pluralistic society demands seeking collaborative solutions by both clients and providers, and demands a give-and-take on all sides. Building an awareness of the cultural and religious needs of clients in a particular community allows a clinician to not only develop practices that fit those particular needs but also to quickly develop relationships of trust.

Clients' grief responses are reliably unpredictable. Many things inform how a person grieves the loss of an animal in their life, including psychological, social, spiritual, and cultural factors. Accompaniment and clear communication through the entire dying process is important no matter the client's cultural location or religious system, though. Given this, Chur-Hansen suggests:

The provision of clear information by the veterinarian and, possible, time to make a decision [regarding euthanasia] is greatly appreciated by pet owners. In addition, when a pet is to be euthanized, it may be helpful for veterinarians to inform clients ahead of time that it is not uncommon to experience considerable distress after the euthanasia of a pet. Veterinarians are also in a position to offer some more positive alternatives to clients' feelings of guilt and their dwelling on the unpleasant aspects of their pet's death. Reassuring a client that they have acted responsibly as an owner, and drawing their attention back to happier memories of their pet, can be genuinely helpful in their grief (Chur-Hansen 2010).

As discussed earlier, even general knowledge of what a client's particular needs might be as they relate to culture and religion can help a provider facilitate a healthy grieving process. Additionally, asking open-ended questions about what a client believes about life after death and encouraging them to have those conversations with faith and ethical leaders in their lives can sustain a meaningful client-provider relationship and encourage a healthy grief process.

The NC State University College of Veterinary Medicine commissioned a study on beliefs about an afterlife from a diverse selection of clients across the United States. They found that a majority of those who believed in a human afterlife also believed in an afterlife for companion animals (roughly 73%). In general, Christian respondents (both Catholic and Protestant) were more diverse than average in their beliefs about animal life after death, with only about 60% affirming they believe pets go to heaven. By comparison, Buddhist and Mormon respondents were more likely than average to believe in an animal afterlife, with 77% and 81% respectively (Royal 2016).

This data itself doesn't necessarily better prepare us to engage with a particular client, but it indicates how important individual conversations and community partnerships are, even in helping clients deal with grief after medical decision-making is over. Building understandings of what clientele in a particular community setting tend to believe about an animal afterlife or animal souls may inform support group practices, memorial services, and even blessings or other religious services to have available for end-of-life cases.

Buddhism

“We string a bead on our rosary of life when we adopt a companion animal from a shelter instead of buying from a breeder or pet store. We string a bead on our rosary of life when we spay or neuter our companion animals to ensure that no additional dogs or cats come into the world while millions are being killed every year because there are no homes for them.”

- Norm Phelps, *The Great Compassion: Buddhism and Animal Rights*

“When one kills with a true bodhichitta intention, with a heart filled with Dharma wisdom and compassion, the act actually becomes one in which it is ‘beneficial to kill.’ ‘This pure motivation behind the altruistic decision to end another sentient being’s suffering – putting them out of their misery by ending their present life while knowing absolutely that one could at that very moment be creating the karmic causes for one to be born in the hell realm – makes such a killing beneficial.’ Rinpoche went on to explain that the vow of non-killing refers to abstaining from killing that is associated with and backed by ignorance and negative attachment. It is that kind of killing that creates negative karma. Only killing with a motivation that is ‘totally pure’ becomes a virtue. Of course, one in such a position must do everything within their capacity to prevent such a compromising decision, to ascertain that there is no alternative treatment or other method at all possible – and even then, the decision is not an easy one.”

- Leah Richards, “Euthanasia with a Good Heart,” *Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition*

“The Buddha was very clear in His teachings against any form of cruelty to any living being. One day the Buddha saw a man preparing to make an animal sacrifice. On being asked why he was going to kill innocent animals, the man replied that it was because it would please the gods. The Buddha then offered Himself as the sacrifice, saying that if the life of an animal would please the gods then the life of a human being, more valuable, would please the gods even more. Man’s cruelty towards animals is another expression of his uncontrolled greed. Today we destroy animals and deprive them of their natural rights so that we can expand our environments for our convenience. But we are already beginning to pay the price for this selfish and cruel act. Our environment is threatened and if we do not take stern measures for the survival of other creatures, our own existence on this earth may not be guaranteed. It is true that the existence of certain creatures is a threat to human existence. But we never consider that humans are the greatest threat to every living being on this earth and in the air whereas the existence of other creatures is a threat only to certain living beings.”

- The Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera, “The Buddhist Attitude to Animal Life”

“The traditional understanding of the First Precept, Do not kill, is not restricted to its literal meaning. Peter Harvey, a Buddhist scholar and ethicist at the University of Sunderland in the UK, points out that, “Each precept has a positive counterpart.” An American Buddhist scholar at the University of Virginia, and former translator for His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Robert Thurman, tell us that “Not merely not killing, but preserving lives is the first of Buddhism’s commandments.” This precept has always been understood by all denominations of Buddhism to apply to all sentient beings. Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen teacher who is, along with the Dalai Lama, one of the two Buddhist teachers best-known and most-revered in the West, tells us that, “In every country in the world, killing human beings is condemned. The Buddhist precept of non-killing extends even further, to include all living beings.” And Nhat Hanh goes on to say, “I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world . . .”

- Dharma Voices for Animals, “Buddhist Teachings on Animals”

Christianity (Protestant)

"Animals share some of the privileges of God's people, and so the Sabbath rest applies equally to them: "Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest" (Exod 23:12 ; cf. Lev 25:7 ; Deut 5:14). Further, an ox treading the corn was not to be muzzled (Deut 25:4 ; quoted in 1 Col 9:9 ; and 1 Tim 5:18, ; where it is applied to people) and a fallen ox was to be helped to its feet (Deut 22:4 ; cf. Lev 22:27-28: ; Deuteronomy 22:6-7 Deuteronomy 22:10). Jesus also pointed to the humanitarian treatment of animals on the Sabbath (Matt 12:11-12 ; Luke 13:15 ; 14:5) and argued from this that he should free people from illness on the Sabbath. This sense of responsibility for the welfare of animals is summed up in Proverbs 12:10: "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal." Thus, animals are owed some of the basic obligations we extend to fellow human beings."

- Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*

"I believe that humans are made in the image of God and given a special responsibility for stewardship of the whole of creation. Human arrogance, among other sins, leads us to justify the horrific abuse of God's creation for our own selfish means. I believe that through grace, created beings have the opportunity to be reconciled with one another, with creation, and with God. Grace is a gift from God, not earned or deserved."

- Sarah Withrow King, *Animals Are Not Ours: An Evangelical Animal Theology*

"We United Methodists do not teach that animals have souls and therefore need redemption and forgiveness or heaven in the same way that humans do. However...we support regulations that protect and conserve the life and health of animals, including those ensuring the humane treatment of pets, domesticated animals, animals used in research, wildlife, and the painless slaughtering of meat animals, fish, and fowl."

- United Methodist Church, "What We Believe"

"The doctrine of creation demonstrates that God's covenantal relationship with and continuing providential care of animals, exercised through human dominion, should be understood as benevolent stewardship rather than as autocratic despotism...even if animals are excluded from heavenly paradise, however it is understood, this simply puts a greater burden on us to ensure their benevolent treatment in this life. The most important argument Christian theology supports, though, is that the purpose of animals is much more than simply their instrumental value to humans."

- Donna Yarri, *The Ethics of Animal Experimentation*

Christianity (Roman Catholic)

“God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image.¹⁹⁸ Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives.”

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Pt. 3, Sec. 2, Ch.2, Article 7: “The Seventh Commandment.”

“Since animals are not made in the image and likeness of God and do not have immortal souls, it is acceptable to euthanize an animal humanely. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* doesn’t without prescription say directly that pets will or will not go to heaven but it does give some guidance. All living things have a soul (it’s what makes a body alive) and when it does, the soul is separated from the body. In man, the soul is immortal so it keeps on living but the soul of an animal, or plant even, is not immortal and simply ceases to exist once the body perishes.”

- “Euthanizing and Eternal Life of Pets,” St. Michael Society

“We preach that all of human life is sacred, from womb to tomb. Not everyone agrees with that sentence. But I further believe that, since all life comes from God, all of life is sacred. We see each other as individuals because that’s how our limited senses perceive each other. But God sees us all as one. Over the years, the death of an animal was final. There was no belief of an animal’s continued existence. That’s why the pain of the loss of an animal friend was so profound. This was it. There is no future chance of seeing the animal again. However, looking at it today through eyes of love, I believe we will see our pets in eternity. After all, how can we be perfectly happy when an important part of our happiness is missing? Life doesn’t die. Love wouldn’t allow it! Our mind may not be our friend, but God is!”

- Fr. Joseph Breighner, “The loss of a pet and the power of love,” *The Catholic Review*, Archdiocese of Baltimore

Hinduism

“Deer, camel, donkey, monkey, rats, creeping animals, birds and flies - one should consider them like one’s own children, and not differentiate between one’s children and these creatures.”

- *Bhagavata Purana 7.14.9.*

“Reach out to friends, family, colleagues and veterinary professionals to talk about your loss. Conducting rituals may help you accept the situation openly. Lay your pet to rest in your backyard, carve a tombstone and write a eulogy, you can also choose to rest him in a pet cemetery or conduct a memorial service for your pet. If there are children in your family, explain it to them patiently and encourage them to participate in the farewell ceremony. They can sketch a picture of your pet, write a letter, plant a tree at the burial site or throw in the pet’s favourite toy while laying him to rest...Our relationship with our pets is of unconditional love and acceptance.”

- Nivedita Kumar, “Coping with the death of a pet,” *The Hindu*

“...yoga traditions, in their acknowledgement of consciousness as foundational to existence as a whole, provide processes and methods for elevating individual human consciousness in ways that have direct bearing on collective animal and human well being... hence, their protection by human beings is understood as integral to both the cultivation of *sattvika* (illuminated) consciousness in human society and the expansion of what may be called the “circle of protection” that is the basis of human civilization.”

- Kenneth Valpey, “Animating Samadhi - Rethinking Animal-Human Relationships through Yoga,”

-
Patanjali, the author of the Yoga Sutras, presents 5 specific ethical precepts called *Yamas* in the second chapter of his book. *Yamas* give us basic guidelines for living a life of personal fulfillment that will also benefit society. One of these *yamas* is *Ahimsa* or non-violence, i.e. not causing harm to others as well as ourselves. He then makes clear the consequence of not following these teachings: It is simply that we will continue to suffer. The question then is how do we cause the least harm in a situation considering all the stakeholders involved?

- Dr. Preeta Banerjee, Tufts University Hindu Chaplain

“In the presence of one who is firmly established in nonviolence, hostility recedes” (*ahimsā-pratiṣṭhāyām tat-sannidhau vaira-tyāgaḥ*).

- Sutra 2.35, Yoga Sutras by Patanjali

Humanism (E.g., Atheism, Agnosticism, & Secularism)

“Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing. We accept our life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be. We welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be known.”

- “The Humanist Manifesto III,” *The American Humanist Association*

“To start, we know that animals suffer. If we don’t think souls are necessary to explain consciousness, then we can’t treat all animals like Descartes did—as unfeeling meat-machines that only seem as if they experience. Instead, we know that at some point in the branching tree that connected our simplest ancestors to our most recent primate ones, consciousness developed. We can dispute where that line is, but it’s hard to peg that line lower than the animals we farm and eat.”

- Vlad Chituc, “Why Atheists Should Be Vegans,” *Nonprophet Status*

“That’s the key: needless suffering...even today populations living in certain climates, such as the Inuit in the arctic, simply can’t survive without hunting and fishing. (Moreover, ethical animal experimentation is a current necessity of our modern survival and thriving, and psychologists tell us that certain house pets are good for our emotional well-being.)”

- Fred Edwords, “An Omnivorous Animal Agenda,” *Humanist Network News*

“So insofar as their rights are derived from their value, they may have many rights (or at least the most important ones). Humanists can argue that cows have the right to graze (rather than be fed a chemical diet) because it’s in our best interests to eat such cows (and not the ones pumped full of steroids and what have you). And I can argue that because my happiness depends on chessie’s happiness, she has a right to be happy (and therefore will get a new stuffed toy for her birthday). In fact, the more we understand that we live in a complex web of life, that we depend on the ecosystem’s stability for our survival, the more favourably we’ll consider the other lifeforms in that ecosystem. So humanists may argue that plankton have rights too.”

- Peg Tittle, “A Humanist View of Animal Rights,” *Humanist Association of Canada*

Islam

“Abu Hayyan [al-Andalusi] seems to accept that all animals, human or nonhuman, will enter either heaven or hell, and possibly continue to live on there forever. Al-Razi relates that in the opinion of the Mu'tazilis, after compensating nonhuman animals for their suffering in this life, it is possible that God will allow some of them to reside in heaven (R31:26). Al-Tha'labi cites an opinion according to which the dog of the Dwellers of the Cave (18/al-Kahf: 22) and 'Uzayr's ass (2/al-Baqara: 259) will dwell in heaven. Sheep, as indicated in the tradition attributed to the Abu Hurayra, are also said to be among the animals of heaven.”

- Sarra Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an*

“Muslims do recognize animal rights, and animal rights means that we should not abuse them, torture them, and when we have to use them for meat, we should slaughter them with a sharp knife, mentioning the name of Allah (SWT)...So, Muslims are not vegetarianists. However, if someone prefers to eat vegetables, then they are allowed to do so. Allah has given us permission to eat meat of slaughtered animals, but He has not made it obligatory upon us.”

- Muzammil Siddiqi, “Fatwas on Vegetarianism”

“Most Muslim scholars agree that the saliva of a dog is ritually impure, and that contact with a dog's saliva requires one to wash seven times...It is to be noted, however, that one of the major Islamic schools of thought (Maliki) indicates that its not a matter of ritual cleanliness, but simply a common-sense method way to prevent the spread of disease. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Angels do not enter a house wherein there is a dog or an animate picture." (Reported by Bukhari) Many Muslims base the prohibition against keeping a dog in one's home, except for the case of working or service dogs, on these traditions.”

- Huda, “Dogs in Islam”

“Cutting [an] ear or tail of a dog or castrating it is not permitted without any necessity since this act is a kind of changing Allah's Creation which is forbidden in Sharia...Imams Tabari and Syoothi have reported in their Tafseer from many righteous ancestors that the prohibition of changing Creation of Allah in [The Holy Quran 4:118-119] means castrating them. However, some Muslim scholars permitted such an act if there is any benefit for doing so such as to diminish their sexual desire to protect them from fighting to control females.”

- “Veterinary treatment of dogs,” *Islamweb Fatwas*

Judaism (Orthodox)

“It is a violation of Jewish law to neuter a pet. The Torah prohibits castrating males of any species (Lev. 22:24). Although this law does not apply to neutering female pets, neutering of females is prohibited by general laws against tza'ar ba'alei chayim (causing suffering to animals). Please note that, while the law prohibits you from neutering your pet, it does not prohibit you from owning a pet that is already neutered. If you want a neutered pet, I strongly encourage you to adopt from one of the many reputable shelters, such as Spay and Save (where I adopted a cat), Kitty Cottage (where I adopted two others) or the Delaware Humane Association.”

- Tracey R. Rich, “Treatment of Animals,” *Judaism 101*

“The suffering of animals in the service of human needs may not be discounted as morally inconsequential. Surely this higher sensitivity should be applied to areas of questionable human necessity...The Talmud states that the Jewish people are praiseworthy for their desire to serve God beyond the letter of the law. This expression of religious devotion has been applied to many ritual precepts; should we not apply it with equal diligence to precepts that affect other living creatures? Moreover, this directly benefits God's works and improves the world. By engaging in acts of compassion, we become worthy of receiving the blessing of our sages: that God will show mercy to those who are merciful.”

- Rabbi David Sears, “Compassion for All Creatures,” *Canfei Nesharim*

“An animal's natural desire to take care of its young is at its greatest in the few days immediately following birth. We must be sensitive to its feelings, and we must leave the calf, lamb or kid with its parent at this time (Leviticus 22:27)...The commentaries explain that the Torah is instructing us [in Exodus 23:12] to allow our animals to rest and appreciate Shabbos—which does not mean incarcerating them in a pen, but rather allowing them to wander and graze freely.”

- Rabbi Natan Slifkin, *Man and Beast: Our Relationships with Animals in Jewish Law and Thought*

“A person's attachment to a pet, as you mention in your question, a ‘beloved dog,’ can be great and very important. When my daughter and son were young, their pet hamster “Shlumiel” died. Naturally, they were ‘broken hearted’ and we buried the deceased pet. The children wrote notes to the pet that we included as we shoveled in the earth. They were also encouraged to ‘say a few words’ of their love of their hamster. In no way did I feel that this encroached on sacred Jewish tradition, nor did I feel that they had lost sight of the enormous deference accorded human life (and death) as distinct from the loss of animal life. While in the process of driving to the Jewish cemetery one day, I noted a pet cemetery where pets were buried in very elaborate funeral ceremonies. I can understand the depth of emotion of losing the ‘family pet,’ however, at the same time there may be a blurring of the place in Judaism of humanity. Everything must be done to preserve our love of human life and not equate human-kind with animal-kind. To do so, may have the undesirable result of losing our Jewish perspective on all life.”

- Rabbi Sanford Shudnow, “Is it wrong to light a yahrzeit or want a memorial service for a beloved dog?” *Jewish Values Online*

Judaism (Reform)

“Another significant debate exists regarding the inclusion of sterilization within the Noahide laws (*Sanhedrin* 56b). While some scholars believe that gentiles are also included in this proscription, many decisors assert that non-Jews have the prerogative to perform these procedures (*Aruch Hashulhan* 5:26)... Nonetheless, it remains prohibited for Jewish urologists or veterinarians to perform nontherapeutic sterilization for non-Jews. Moreover, as with other prohibitions, a Jew may not ask a non-Jew to sterilize for himself (*amira le'akum*), even in a subtle or indirect manner (EH 5:14), although using non-Jewish doctors may be preferable in certain cases of legally mandated procedures.”

- Jerusalem Post, “Ask the Rabbi: Neutering animals.”

“We should also note that the castration of animals was prohibited and this has always been considered as a form of maiming, which was forbidden (*Shelat Yaabetz* 1.11). We may summarize this by relating that our tradition demands kind treatment of animals... Human life must be saved if it is at all possible... When dealing with experimental animals we should be quite certain that they are not subjected to pain or used for frivolous reasons as for example cosmetic experimentation.”

- Central Conference of American Rabbis, “New American Reform Response: Jewish Involvement in Genetic Engineering.”

“...[T]he care of animals was always an important part of our tradition. We would, therefore, say that the heirs [of a man who left behind a cat when he died] are duty bound to either care for this animal which was important to their father or to find an appropriate home for it. They may certainly not put it to sleep or abandon it.”

- Central Conference of American Rabbis, “New American Reform Response: Responsibility Toward Pets.”

“The death of a beloved pet is a traumatic experience and it is important to find an appropriate and meaningful way to mark the loss. Our tradition does not offer an ancient ritual for this because it is only in contemporary times that humans have formed the type of close emotional attachment to our pets that we find natural. Although it is entirely appropriate and I would suggest important to create a ritual for the loss of a pet, it is not appropriate to incorporate our traditional mourning/memorial liturgy (i.e. *Eil male rachamim* and *Kaddish*) for this purpose. Although we love and adore our pets and they are significant members of our families, they are not human. It is important that we remain cognizant of the boundaries that do exist as a part of the natural world--raising up and honoring our creature companions without debasing the responsibilities, benefits and privileges that come with being human.”

- Rabbi Janet Offel, “When A Beloved Pet Dies,” Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health at Hebrew Union College

Works Cited and Further Reading

- Alvarado, Katherine A., Donald I. Templer, Charles Bresler, and Shan Thomas-Dobson. "The relationship of religious variables to death depression and death anxiety." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 51, no. 2 (1995): 202-204.
- Caruana SJ, L. (2020). Different religions, different animal ethics? *Animal Frontiers*, 10 (1), 8–14. <https://doi.org/10.1093/af/vfz047>
- Chur-Hansen, Anna. "Grief and bereavement issues and the loss of a companion animal: People living with a companion animal, owners of livestock, and animal support workers." *Clinical Psychologist* 14, no. 1 (2010): 14-21.
- D'Silva, Joyce. *Animal Welfare in World Religion : Teaching and Practice*. Routledge, 2023.
- Does it matter how we treat animals?* (n.d.). BBC Bitesize. Retrieved December 5, 2023, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zkdk382/articles/zns2kmn>
- Garcia, A., & McGlone, J. J. (2022). Animal Welfare and the Acknowledgment of Cultural Differences. *Animals*, 12(4). Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12040474>
- Gee, Leslie, Douglas R. Smucker, Marshall H. Chin, and Farr A. Curlin. "Partnering together? Relationships between faith-based community health centers and neighborhood congregations." *Southern Medical Journal* 98, no. 12 (2005): 1245-1251.
- Jevring-Bäck, Caroline, and Erik Bäck. *Managing a veterinary practice*. Elsevier Health Sciences, 2007.
- Kagawa-Singer, Marjorie, and Leslie J. Blackhall. "Negotiating cross-cultural issues at the end of life: you got to go where he lives." *Jama* 286, no. 23 (2001): 2993-3001.
- Kahn, Peter A. "Bioethics, religion, and public policy: Intersections, interactions, and solutions." *Journal of religion and health* 55, no. 5 (2016): 1546-1560.
- Kemmerer, Lisa. *Animals and World Religions*. Oxford University Press. 2012. Giles Legood. *Veterinary Ethics*. Continuum. 2000.
- Koenig, Barbara A., and Jan Gates-Williams. "Understanding cultural difference in caring for dying patients." *Western Journal of Medicine* 163, no. 3 (1995): 244.
- Linzey, Andrew, and Clair Linzey, editors. *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Animal Ethics*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019.
- McIntosh, Daniel N., Roxane Cohen Silver, and Camille B. Wortman. "Religion's role in adjustment to a negative life event: coping with the loss of a child." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 65, no. 4 (1993): 812-821.
- Portes, Alejandro, and Rubén G. Rumbaut. *Immigrant America: a portrait*. Univ of California Press, 2006.
- Rahman, S. A. (2017). Religion and Animal Welfare—An Islamic Perspective. *Animals : An Open Access Journal from MDPI*, 7(2), 11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani7020011>
- "Religion and Animals Project." Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics. <http://www.oxfordanimaethics.com/what-we-do/religion-and-animals-project/>
- "Rivers of Faith." The Pluralism Project at Harvard University. <http://pluralism.org/religions/>

- Royal, Kenneth D., April A. Kedrowicz, and Amy M. Snyder. "Do all dogs go to heaven? Investigating the association between demographic characteristics and beliefs about animal afterlife." *Anthrozoös* 29, no. 3 (2016): 409-420.
- Setta, Susan M., and Sam D. Shemie. "An explanation and analysis of how world religions formulate their ethical decisions on withdrawing treatment and determining death." *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine* 10, no. 1 (2015): 6.
- Szűcs E, Geers R, Jezierski T, Sossidou EN, Broom DM. "Animal welfare in different human cultures, traditions and religious faiths." *Asian-Australas J Anim Sci.* 2012 Nov; 25 (11):1499-506.
- Jerrold Tannenbaum. *Veterinary Ethics: Animal Welfare, Client Relations, Competition, and Collegiality*. Mosby. 1995.
- Ulrey, Kelsy Lin, and Patricia Amason. "Intercultural communication between patients and health care providers: An exploration of intercultural communication effectiveness, cultural sensitivity, stress, and anxiety." *Journal of Health Communication* 13, no. 4 (2001): 449-463.
- Williams, Sandy, and Jennifer Mills. "Understanding and responding to grief in companion animal practice." *Australian Veterinary Practitioner* 30, no. 2 (2000): 55-62.