

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

ARE DOGS REALLY IMPURE? A HUNTING DOG'S CATCH

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Muslims widely assert that dogs are impure to touch and are prohibited in Islam from being kept inside a home.

There is no prohibition of any sort with respect to a dog in the entire Quran.

These beliefs are solely supported by [Islamic secondary sources](#). **All animals** as part of God's beautiful creation belong to Him and will return to Him after their death.

006.038

"There is not an animal in the earth, nor a bird that flies with its wings, but (are) communities like you. Nothing have we neglected from the Book, and they (all) shall be gathered to their Lord"

Many Muslims are aware of the Quranic narrative of the cave sleepers of Chapter 18 (Surah Kahf) who had with them a dog that also slept with them for hundreds of years (God alone knowing exactly how long 18:26). Not only did God keep the sleepers safe, He also kept the dog safe allowing it to stretch its paws over that prolonged period (18:18). These sleepers were **righteous folk** and were truly guided aright (18:13).

There is no sense of any sort of prohibition against dogs in this narrative of the Quran.

This is also not the only mention of a dog in the Quran. Apart from the parable encountered in verse 7:176, the scripture also informs the reader that a hunting **dog's** catch is **lawful (Arabic: uhilla) to consume as food**. No doubt, dogs would have been trained to hunt and catch their prey with their mouths. This poses considerable difficulty with the Muslim assertion that dogs are impure to the touch, yet the food they catch remains lawful for consumption.

A typical popular translation notes the narrative captured as follows which tacitly addresses the Muslim dilemma:

005:004

"They ask you what is lawful to them (as food). Say: lawful (Arabic: **uhilla**) to you are (all) things good and pure: and what you have **taught your trained hunting animals (to catch)** (Arabic: **Mukalibeen**) in the manner directed to you by God: eat what they catch for you, but pronounce the name of God over it: and fear God; for God is swift in taking account"

Popular translations such as the one above make use of the terms '**hunting animals; beasts, birds of prey, hunting creatures, falcons, predatory animals**' as a translation of the Arabic term '**Mukalibeen**'.

Arabic speakers will no doubt be familiar with the term '**kalb**' in general Arabic parlance which refers to a **dog**. This is no different from how the classical Arabs also understood the term.

WHAT DOES THE QURANIC ARABIC ACTUALLY SAY IN 5:4?

وَمَا عَلَّمْتُمْ مِنَ الْجَوَارِحِ مُكَلِّبِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ نَهْنٍ مِمَّا عَلَّمْتُمْ

Mukalibeen

Illustration - Joseph Islam

The term **MUKALIB** derived from the root word (K-L-B) literally translates as **ONE WHO TRAINS DOGS TO HUNT**

مُكَلِّبٌ A dog trained and accustomed to hunt.
(L.) See the verb. = A captive, or prisoner,
(S,) having the feet shackled, or bound; (S, K;)
i.q. مُكَبَّلٌ, from which it is formed by trans-
position, (S,) accord. to some. (TA.)

مُكَلِّبٌ One who trains dogs to hunt; (S, K;)
as also كَلَّابٌ: and sometimes signifying one
who trains the فَيْد, and birds of prey, to take
game: see **Kur v. 6: one who possesses dogs**
trained to hunt, and hunts with them; (L;)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

The above is its proper rendering. A lot of commentators do try to broaden the **Kalb (dog)** in this context to include other animals of prey such as falcon birds etc. However, this is debated, as the **proper** significance of this term refers to **dogs alone**.

كَلْبٌ a word of well-known signification, [The dog:] (Ş:) or any rounding animal of prey: (L, K, &c. :) but whether birds [of prey] are comprised in this term is a point that requires consideration: (Esh-Shiháb El-Khafájee:) and especially applied to the barking animal [or dog]: (K:) or rather, this is its proper signification; and it admits no other: (MF:)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

WAS THE DOG INSIDE THE CAVE OR OUTSIDE THE CAVE?

As Islamic ideology in the main asserts that as dogs are impure and should not to be kept within the confines of the home where angels do enter nor do they bless the home, much is then made of the Arabic term '**wasid**' as encountered by the Quran.

018:018 (part)

"...while their dog stretched his two forelegs on the threshold (Arabic: wasid)..."

Many Muslims assert relying on a theological understanding of the impurity of a dog, that this term is a reference to an entrance **outside the cave**.

Quite apart from a dog lying outside the cave for possibly hundreds of years openly exposed to the elements and with the risk of being detected while the sleepers were hiding safely inside the cave; it appears that there is little support for such a restricted interpretation from the Quran or classical lexicon authorities.

The Quran makes use of the verbal form 'awsada' of the root 'W-S-D' in two other verses of the Quran to signify a vault or covering over something.

090.020

"Over them will be Fire vaulted over them / closed in on them (Arabic: mu'sadatun)"

104.008

"Indeed, it shall be made into a vault over them / closed in on them (Arabic: mu'sadatun)"

The popular understanding of the term 'wasid' is simply a 'threshold'. However, there is nothing in the term to indicate that this is a restricted reference to a location outside an entrance. In fact, notable classical lexicons even allow for the understanding that in the context of the surah kahf, 'wasid' was a reference to a **cavern** or a location **inside the cave or indeed, an enclosure**.

وَصِيدٌ *A court, or an open or a wide space in front of a house or dwelling, or extending from its sides* : (Ṣ, M, A, L, Mṣb, K̄:) as also أُصَيْدٌ ; q. v. : (L:) pl. وَصْدٌ and وَصَائِدٌ. (TA.) — *A threshold* (Mṣb, K̄) *of a door or entrance.* (Mṣb.) — *A door, or entrance.* (A.) See وَصَادٌ. — It has the first of these meanings in the K̄ur: xviii. 17; (A, L, TA;) or the second: (TA:) or the third: (A, TA:) or it there means The cavern of the Aṣḥāb el-Kahf. (K̄*, TA.) — Also, وَصِيدٌ, (K̄,) or وَصِيدَةٌ, (Ṣ, A, L,)

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [3]

Mūsadtun مَوْصِدَةٌ (pct-pic. sing. f. IV.): Closed over (a fire the heat of which is not allowed to escape and no one can get out of it) (90:20; 104:8). *Wasīd* وَصِيدٌ (n.): Threshold of a door; Entrance, Courtyard; Store; Enclosure (18:18). (L; T; R; LL)

Source: 'Abdul Mannan 'Omar Dictionary of The Holy Qur'an [4]

DOG RELATED NARRATIVES IN HADITH - QUESTIONABLE PROVENANCE

The Ahadith corpus provides narratives on this issue which are often found to be in theological tension with one another.

In one particular report, one notes the Prophet asserting that angels do not enter a house which has either a dog or a picture within it. [5] Another finds the Prophet ordering that dogs should be killed. [6] In another, one finds the loss of a reward for one's good deed each day if a dog is kept in the home (barring exceptions). [7]

In contrast, a prostitute is found forgiven by God for providing water to a thirsty dog about to die by removing her shoe and tying it with her head-cover to draw water out of a well. [8] In yet another, one notes that dogs used to urinate and pass through mosques at the time of the Prophet and water was never sprinkled over the dog's urine. [9]

While discussing fabrications of traditions in connection with the Prophet, a 19th century scholar notes:

“The possibilities which Muslims admit themselves in this field are evident from a tradition in which the authorities seem to give away the **secret quite unconsciously**; 'The Prophet,' it says in a tradition in al-Bukhari, (Note 5) gave the order to kill all dogs except hunting and sheep dogs.' Umar's son was told that Abu Hurairah also hands down the words: '**but with the exception of farm dogs as well**'.

Umar's son says to this: 'Abu Hurairah **owns cornfields**,' i.e. he has a vested interest in handing down the order with the addition that farm dogs should be spared as well. This remark of Ibn Umar is characteristic of the **doubt** about the good faith of the transmitters that existed **even in the earliest** period of the formation of tradition. (Note 6) [10]

FINAL THOUGHTS

Islamic ideology in the main asserts that dogs remain impure and should not to be touched or kept within the confines of the home. In some narratives from [Islamic Secondary sources](#), there is even suggestion that the Prophet ordered the killing of dogs.

The Quran makes no such statement and given some of the narratives in the Quran where a dog is encountered, the popular belief of Muslims seems to be severely challenged, if not outright negated.

The Quran clearly informs its readers that the righteous men of the cave (In Surah Kahf 18) possessed a dog who slept with them in the cave.

Some legitimate questions arise:

- Would the angels not have entered the cave where the dog lay?
- Why did God protect the dog allowing him to stretch his paws (18:18)?
- Why was a statement not made in these verses with regards the claimed impurity of the dog or in fact, **at any place in the Quran?**
- Why does the Quran in verse 5:4 **clearly** inform its readers that the food hunted by dogs is **lawful (Arabic: Halaal) for consumption** if it is (as claimed by many Muslims) unlawful to touch such a creature?
- Why do translations attempt to hide the true meaning of the word 'mukalibeen' from verse 5:4 and translate it to other than its proper meaning or significance? or is this a clear example of theological interference with the Quranic text and deliberate obfuscation?

Please also note that the Quranic text does not inform the reader that the dog was a guard dog other than where he lay. Furthermore, it is clear from the verse that the righteous cave sleepers were not out hunting, but rather they were fleeing. This quells the oft encountered assertion in Muslim thought that it was a hunting dog.

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 7, Page 2627

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] Ibid., Page 2625

[3] Ibid., Volume 8, Page 2945

[4] OMAR, A M, Dictionary of the Holy Quran, Arabic Words - English Meanings, Noor Foundation - International Inc, First Edition May 24, 2003, Reprint used February 26 2010, Page 610

The highlight marked in red on the lexicon excerpt is my own insertion. It has no bearing on the original text other than it emphasises relevance to the topic at hand. It is merely an illustration and has solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[5] SAHIH BUKHARI, Volume 4, Book 54, Number 539, University of Southern California Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement [online], Translation available at <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/054-sbt.php> [Accessed 23rd January 2012]

[6] SAHIH BUKHARI, Volume 4, Book 54, Number 540, University of Southern California Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement [online], Translation available at <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/054-sbt.php> [Accessed 23rd January 2012]

[7] SAHIH BUKHARI, Volume 4, Book 54, Number 541, University of Southern California Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement [online], Translation available at <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/054-sbt.php> [Accessed 23rd January 2012]

[8] SAHIH BUKHARI, Volume 4, Book 54, Number 538, University of Southern California Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement [online], Translation available at <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/054-sbt.php> [Accessed 23rd January 2012]

[9] SAHIH BUKHARI, Volume 1, Book 4, Number 174, University of Southern California Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement [online], Translation available at <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/004-sbt.php> [Accessed 23rd January 2012]

[10] GOLDZIHHER. I, (Muhammedanische Studien) Muslim Studies Volume II Edited by S.M.Stern: Translated by C. R. Barber and S.M.Stern (George Allen & Unwin Ltd) Page 56 - Cited as quotation 2: Yahya b.Mu'in in Tab.Huff., VI, no 41. Cited Notes: (5) Sayd, no.6 cf Harth no.: al-Tirmidhi, I p281,17, (6) This passage must be considered in relation to evidence which makes it CLEAR that in earlier times, Abu Hurairah was NOT considered an authority.

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