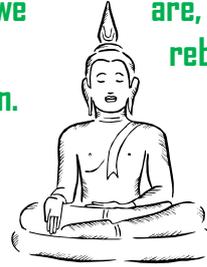




## Animals in Buddhism

Buddhism is a very animal-friendly religion. It asks all Buddhists to be kind to animals. Animals have always been thought of in the Buddhist religion as 'feeling beings'. They might not be as clever as we are, but they can still feel hurt and suffering. Any human can be reborn as an animal, and an animal can be reborn as a human.



### **Buddhists:**

Look up any of the words printed in blue.

- Try to do no harm to animals.
- Show love and kindness to everyone, and also animals.
- Try to avoid working in a trade that is connected with the killing of animals.
- Avoid cruelty to animals. Otherwise you will pay for your cruel acts in a future life. A soul can be reborn in a human body or as an animal. *(The doctrine of Karma says that being reborn as an animal is to punish us for our misdeeds in this life.)*
- Treat humans and animals with equal respect.
- It is wrong to kill, frighten or harm animals, as all beings are afraid of hurt, injury and death.

### Dhammapada 129

*All living things fear being beaten with clubs.*

*All living things fear death.*

*We must put ourselves in the place of the other.*

*Let no one kill or cause another to kill.*

This care for animals begins way back in Buddhist history. The very first Buddhist king of India was **Asoka**. He wrote that he was very worried about the number of animals that had been killed for meals and other uses, such as leather. He felt that he should put an end to the killing.

*(You must remember that humans are adapted by nature to eat meat as well as vegetables. If you're not sure, look at your **teeth**. Incisors for nipping and biting. Canines for tearing meat. Premolars (carnassials) for slicing meat, and molars at the back for grinding.)*

He also thought that animals were just as important as humans when he set up studies to find medicinal plants. He also planted trees and stopped the people burning forests to protect the animals that lived in them. **Can you think of anything we do that might be similar?**



Some, but *not all* Buddhists are vegetarians, and the Buddha himself did not make a rule on eating meat.

Buddhists think that non-human life is just as divine as human life. Animals are seen to be an evolving kingdom of living creatures which, in time, would get to perfect enlightenment.

Buddhists were the very first people to build special hospitals to treat injured and sick animals. (I guess we would call them vets' surgeries.) They were set up to ease the pain and suffering of any animal.

Today, if you visit a Buddhist country, many animals can be seen living around Buddhist temples. The priests welcome them and enjoy living with these little wild creatures.

Can you think of anything we might do that would be like this?



Please remember to feed the birds during the winter, when times are hard for them. Research the right food to give them and how to do it.

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/youth/>



In Japan, there lies a beautiful park, called the Deer Park of Nara. Centuries ago, it was set up as a wildlife sanctuary so that the people could have the chance to meet nature at close quarters. The deer will happily walk amongst the people without fear. The people see them as gentle and graceful and the ideal messengers of the sacredness of life. Where could you go around County Durham to walk in a nature reserve? <http://www.durhamwt.co.uk/>

Near to the deer park a pond. Japanese visitors can buy small pond creatures to release into the wild in ceremony called 'Hojo- Small children and old people come up to the pond and gently release

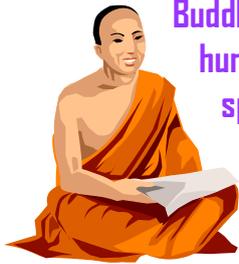


Marston Lake at Low Barns Nature Reserve

the minibeasts into the pond. It is seen as an act of apology for any damage they have done to the environment in the past. The people have given the gift of freedom to the animals.

In Japan, it is seen as very important that children should grow up with animals. They say it teaches them that protecting animals is the same as protecting the innocent. Wouldn't it be lovely if all children around the world were happy to protect the wildlife around them, keeping them free and happy? Those children would never grow up to be cruel to animals, and they'd be much more caring and kind with everyone.

(Look up St. Francis of Assisi.)



Buddhists believe that animals should not be experimented on, hunted, bred or killed to make fur coats or tortured for sport or for any other reason.



Experimenting on animals:

Buddhists will tell you that experimenting on animals is wrong if the animal is harmed in any way. However, they do realise that animal experiments can have a big effect on human, (and animal), health.

Some Buddhists will say:

- The experimenter must remember that they might get bad karma from experimenting on animals.
- Experiments must only be for a good purpose. (Not just for perfumes and make-up.)
- Experiment on animals only when there is no other way to do it.
- Design your experiment to do the least amount of harm possible.
- Don't kill the animal if it's possible.
- Treat the animal kindly.

### Animals in the Jatakas

The Jataka stories are Buddhist folktales which often have animal characters. The Buddha can often appear as an animal too. (The Bodhisattva) Sometimes the stories are about the problems between humans and animals. (The animals are often kind and generous, while the humans are not!) You can find some of these stories at:

<http://www.jatakkatha.com/index.htm>

[http://www.holybooks.org/budhism/jataka\\_tales/jt00.html](http://www.holybooks.org/budhism/jataka_tales/jt00.html)

<http://www.holybooks.org/budhism/jatak/index.htm>

