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Keeping Dogs as Pets in Islām: What Is the Ruling?

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Islām is a complete and comprehensive way of life. Its teachings are not limited to Ṣalāh, fasting and other acts of worship, but provide guidance for every aspect of a Muslim's life. Allāh ﷻ has explained what is beneficial for our Dīn, our worldly lives and our Ākhirah, and He has warned us against matters that may cause spiritual or worldly harm.

There are certain matters which are generally prohibited in Islām but may become permissible in particular circumstances because of a genuine need or recognised benefit. One such matter is the keeping of dogs.

In many societies today, keeping dogs as household pets has become common. Dogs are often treated as members of the family, kept inside the home, allowed onto furniture and beds, and kept primarily for companionship and enjoyment. As a result, Muslims may sometimes be unclear about the Islamic position regarding dogs.

Some may assume that keeping a dog is no different from keeping any other household pet. Others may go to the opposite extreme and believe that Islām teaches Muslims to hate dogs or be cruel towards them. Neither understanding is correct.

The Sharīʿah has given detailed guidance regarding dogs: their physical purity, their saliva, when they may be kept, when keeping them is prohibited, and how they must be treated.

Dogs in the Early Period of Islām

During the early period of Islām, Rasūlullāh ﷺ initially gave an instruction concerning the killing of dogs. Sayyidunā Jābir ibn ʿAbdullāh (RA) narrates:

أَمَرَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ بِقَتْلِ الْكِلَابِ

"Rasūlullāh ﷺ commanded us to kill dogs."

However, this general command did not remain permanently. Sayyidunā Jābir (RA) then states:

ثُمَّ نَهَى النَّبِيُّ ﷺ عَنْ قَتْلِهَا

"Then Rasūlullāh ﷺ prohibited their killing." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1572)

Thus, the initial general command was later withdrawn. The scholars have discussed the wisdom behind the initial instruction and its subsequent abrogation. What is important for us is that Islām does not give people a general licence to kill dogs merely because they are dogs.

This point is particularly important because the Islamic restrictions concerning dog ownership should never be misunderstood as an encouragement towards cruelty, abuse or unnecessary killing. Dogs are among the creatures of Allāh ﷻ and, like other animals, must be treated with justice and compassion.

Is a Dog Najas?

Before discussing whether dogs may be kept as pets, it is important to understand another issue which often causes confusion: the physical purity of dogs.

A common statement is that if a dog touches a person, the person automatically becomes impure. This is not an accurate presentation of the Islamic ruling.

The Fuqahāʾ differed regarding the physical purity of dogs.

The ruling concerning dogs is that some Imāms regard the dog as najas al-ʿayn (intrinsically impure), while other Imāms do not consider the dog itself to be intrinsically impure, although they regard its meat, saliva and leftover water as impure.

Therefore, if there is no external impurity on a dog's body and it comes into contact with a person, that person's body does not become impure merely because of that contact.

As for eating dog meat, all four Imāms are agreed that it is prohibited.

Therefore, the statement, "If a dog touches you, you become impure," is too general. The correct ruling depends upon the type of contact and the Madh-hab being followed.

The Ruling of Dog Saliva

The four Madhāhib differ regarding the legal status of a dog's saliva and the method of purifying a vessel from which a dog has drunk.

According to Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, a dog's saliva is impure. The affected item must therefore be washed. The Ḥanafī position is that washing three times is sufficient, while washing seven times is regarded as recommended rather than obligatory.

According to Imām al-Shāfiʿī, a vessel from which a dog has drunk should be washed seven times. The use of soil as part of the washing is also prescribed in the Shāfiʿī Madh-hab.

According to Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, the vessel should likewise be washed seven times, while another narration from him mentions eight washings. The use of soil is also prescribed in the Ḥanbalī Madh-hab.

According to Imām Mālik ibn Anas, the leftover water from which a dog has drunk is regarded as pure. Nevertheless, he also accepted the Prophetic instruction that the vessel should be washed seven times. The Mālikī scholars therefore differed in explaining the reason for this washing, since they did not regard the dog's saliva itself as impure.

Is it permissible for a Muslim to Keep a Dog Simply as a Household Pet?

The teachings of Rasūlullāh ﷺ clearly discourage and prohibit keeping dogs without a recognised Sharʿī need. Rasūlullāh ﷺ said:

لَا تَدْخُلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ بَيْتًا فِيهِ صُورَةٌ وَلَا كَلْبٌ

"The angels do not enter a house in which there is a picture or a dog." (Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 3322)

The scholars explain that the angels referred to here are the angels of mercy.

This is a serious warning for a believer. A Muslim should consider whether keeping an animal merely for enjoyment or companionship is worth depriving the home of the presence of the angels of mercy.

There is an even stronger warning concerning unnecessary dog ownership. Sayyidunā ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar (RA) narrates that Rasūlullāh ﷺ said:

مَنِ اقْتَنَى كَلْبًا لَيْسَ بِكَلْبِ مَاشِيَةٍ أَوْ ضَارِيَةٍ، نَقَصَ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ مِنْ عَمَلِهِ قِيرَاطَانِ

"Whoever keeps a dog that is neither for guarding livestock nor a trained hunting dog, two qīrāṭs will be deducted from his deeds every day." (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 5480)

Some authentic narrations mention the deduction of one qīrāṭ, while others mention two. The scholars have offered various explanations for the difference between these narrations.

The essential message, however, is unmistakable: keeping a dog without a recognised need causes a serious and continuing loss of reward.

Therefore, keeping a dog simply because one finds it cute, enjoys its companionship, wishes to follow a popular trend, or wants it merely as a household pet is not permitted according to the recognised teachings of the Fuqahāʾ.

What If the Dog Is Kept Outside the House?

A common misconception is that keeping a dog as a pet is permissible as long as it is kept outside the house, such as in a backyard or kennel. This is incorrect. The prohibition relates to keeping a dog without a recognised Sharʿī need, not merely to keeping it inside the home. Although the Ḥadīth concerning the angels refers to a dog being inside the house, the warning regarding the deduction of reward applies generally to keeping a dog without a permitted purpose. Therefore, keeping a dog outside merely as a pet does not make it permissible.

What Do the Four Madhāhib Say About Keeping Dogs as Pets?

The four recognised Madhāhib all restrict the keeping of dogs without legitimate need, although their terminology differs.

Ḥanafī Madh-hab

It is mentioned in Fatāwā Shāmī:

لَا يَنْبَغِي اتِّخَاذُ كَلْبٍ إِلَّا لِخَوْفِ لِصٍّ أَوْ غَيْرِهِ فَلَا بَأْسَ بِهِ وَمِثْلُهُ سَائِرُ السِّبَاعِ عَيْنِيٌّ وَجَازَ اقْتِنَاؤُهُ لِصَيْدٍ وَحِرَاسَةِ مَاشِيَةٍ وَزَرْعٍ إِجْمَاعًا

"It is not appropriate to keep a dog except when there is fear of a thief or some similar danger, in which case there is no harm in doing so. The same applies to other predatory animals. It is also permissible, by consensus, to keep a dog for hunting, guarding livestock, and protecting crops."

Thus, according to the Ḥanafī Fuqahāʾ, keeping a dog merely for pleasure or companionship is regarded as makrūh taḥrīman (prohibitively disliked and sinful to do without a valid reason).

Shāfiʿī Madh-hab

Imām al-Nawawī (RA) writes:

فَمَذْهَبُنَا أَنَّهُ يَحْرُمُ اقْتِنَاءُ الْكَلْبِ بِغَيْرِ حَاجَةٍ وَيَجُوزُ اقْتِنَاؤُهُ لِلصَّيْدِ وَلِلزَّرْعِ وَلِلْمَاشِيَةِ

"Our Madh-hab is that keeping a dog without need is prohibited, while keeping one for hunting, crops or livestock is permissible." (Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

Mālikī Madh-hab

The Mālikī Fuqahāʾ likewise discouraged keeping dogs where there is no recognised benefit or genuine need.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (RA) explains that unnecessary ownership may result in frightening people and preventing the angels of mercy from entering the place in which the dog is kept. (al-Tamhīd)

Ḥanbalī Madh-hab

Ibn Qudāmah (RA) states:

وَلَا يَجُوزُ اقْتِنَاءُ الْكَلْبِ إِلَّا كَلْبَ الصَّيْدِ أَوْ كَلْبَ مَاشِيَةٍ أَوْ حَرْثٍ

"It is not permissible to keep a dog except a hunting dog, a dog for livestock or a dog for crops." (al-Mughnī)

The basic principle across the four Madhāhib is therefore clear: keeping dogs merely as recreational household pets is not permitted.

When Is It Permissible to Keep a Dog?

Although the Sharīʿah permits keeping dogs in certain circumstances, Muslims should not take these exceptions lightly or use them as an excuse to keep dogs merely as pets. The general discouragement of keeping dogs remains, and permission is granted for legitimate needs and purposes, as explained below.

The Qurʾān and Sunnah themselves recognise circumstances in which dogs may be kept because of genuine need or benefit. Allāh ﷻ says:

وَمَا عَلَّمْتُم مِّنَ الْجَوَارِحِ مُكَلِّبِينَ تُعَلِّمُونَهُنَّ مِمَّا عَلَّمَكُمُ اللَّهُ

"And those hunting animals which you have trained, teaching them from what Allāh ﷻ has taught you" (Sūrah al-Māʾidah, 5:4)

This verse clearly establishes the permissibility of using trained hunting animals, including dogs.

Among the recognised reasons for which dogs may be kept are:

1. Hunting

A trained hunting dog may be kept and used according to the conditions established by the Qurʾān and Sunnah.

2. Protecting Livestock

Dogs may be kept to guard sheep, cattle and other animals against predators, theft or other dangers.

3. Protecting Crops and Farms

Another narration states:

مَنْ أَمْسَكَ كَلْبًا فَإِنَّهُ يَنْقُصُ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ مِنْ عَمَلِهِ قِيرَاطٌ إِلَّا كَلْبَ حَرْثٍ أَوْ مَاشِيَةٍ

"Whoever keeps a dog will have one qīrāṭ deducted from his deeds every day, except a dog for crops or livestock." (Saḥīḥ Muslim, 1575c)

Therefore, dogs may be kept to protect agricultural land, farms and orchards.

4. Security and Protection

The Fuqahāʾ have also permitted dogs for guarding homes, property and people where a genuine need exists.

The juristic principle behind this is that the Sharīʿah itself permitted dogs for protection in certain circumstances, and other comparable genuine security needs may therefore also fall under this allowance. (al-Fiqh al-Muyassar, 7/31)

5. Other Genuine Needs

In contemporary circumstances, scholars have also discussed guide dogs for the visually impaired, police dogs, detection dogs, rescue dogs and other similar cases.

Where there is a genuine and recognised need, these cases are not treated in the same manner as keeping a dog simply as a pet.

The important distinction is therefore between need and desire. A dog kept for a legitimate purpose is fundamentally different from a dog kept merely for companionship, amusement or fashion.

In today's world, modern security measures such as cameras, alarms and mobile phones can often provide adequate protection without the need for a guard dog. However, where a genuine need exists, such as protecting livestock on a farm or acreage, keeping a dog remains permissible. In such cases, the dog should be kept outside, properly cared for and not treated as a household pet. Where the need can reasonably be fulfilled without keeping a dog, refraining from doing so is the more cautious and preferable approach.

Breeding and Selling Dogs

The same principle applies to breeding dogs. Breeding dogs for a genuine lawful purpose, such as guarding, hunting or other recognised needs, is different from breeding them merely to supply the pet market. A Muslim should therefore not breed dogs simply as a business for sale as household pets.

Islām Does Not Teach Cruelty Towards Dogs

The prohibition of keeping dogs merely as pets does not mean that Muslims should dislike, mistreat or harm dogs.

On the contrary, some of the most powerful Aḥādīth concerning mercy towards animals relate specifically to dogs.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ described a man who saw a dog panting from extreme thirst and eating moist earth. The man descended into a well, filled his shoe with water and gave the dog a drink. Allāh ﷻ appreciated his act and forgave him. The Ṣaḥābah (RA) asked: “Are we rewarded for kindness towards animals?” Rasūlullāh ﷺ replied:

فِي كُلِّ كَبِدٍ رَطْبَةٍ أَجْرٌ

“There is reward in every living creature.” (Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 2363)

This Ḥadīth beautifully demonstrates the balance of Islām.

A Muslim may not keep a dog merely as a household pet, but that same Muslim may earn immense reward by feeding a hungry dog, giving water to a thirsty dog, rescuing an injured animal or protecting it from abuse.

Indeed, obedience to the Sharīʿah should make a believer more merciful, not less.

What If Someone Already Owns a Dog?

If a Muslim already owns a dog simply as a pet, he or she should first learn the Islamic ruling and then correct the situation in a responsible and compassionate manner. The animal should never simply be abandoned, neglected or harmed.

If there is no genuine need to keep the dog, an appropriate new home may be found where the animal will be cared for properly.

Where a genuine Sharʿī need exists, the dog should, where reasonably possible, be kept outside the main living areas and properly cared for. Merely keeping a dog outside, however, does not itself make keeping it permissible.

At the same time, the owner remains responsible for providing food, water, shelter and humane treatment.

The relevant rulings of ṭahārah and najāsah should also be observed according to the Madh-hab followed.

Conclusion: A Balanced Islamic Approach

The Islamic ruling concerning dogs is based neither upon hatred nor cultural prejudice. It is based upon the guidance of Allāh ﷻ and His beloved Messenger Muḥammad ﷺ.

The Sharīʿah discourages keeping dogs as pets. Keeping a dog is only permitted for legitimate needs and purposes recognised by the Sharīʿah, as discussed in this article. These exceptions should not be used as an excuse for keeping dogs merely as household pets. If one is unsure whether their circumstances justify keeping a dog, one should consult a reliable Islamic scholar for guidance.

At the same time, keeping dogs merely as household companions is contrary to the guidance of Rasūlullāh ﷺ. A believer should take seriously both the warning regarding the angels of mercy and the daily reduction of reward mentioned in the authentic Aḥādīth.

For a Muslim, the question should not simply be:

"Everyone else keeps dogs as pets, so why can I not have one?"

Rather, the believer asks:

"What does Allāh ﷻ want from me, and what will bring greater blessing into my home and my life?"

Our homes should be places where Allāh ﷻ is remembered, the Qurʾān is recited, Ṣalāh is established and the angels of mercy are welcomed.

A Muslim willingly gives up something that he or she may personally desire when the guidance of Rasūlullāh ﷺ teaches that leaving it is better for one's Dīn.

At the same time, the believer remains merciful towards every creation of Allāh ﷻ.

The same Islām which prohibits keeping dogs merely for amusement teaches that giving water to a thirsty dog can become a means of forgiveness from Allāh ﷻ.

This is the beautiful balance of Islām: obedience without cruelty, cleanliness without hatred, and mercy while remaining within the limits established by Allāh ﷻ.

May Allāh ﷻ grant us the correct understanding of His Dīn, enable us to follow the Sunnah of Rasūlullāh ﷺ with wisdom and balance, and bless us with the quality of mercy towards all of His creation. Āmīn.

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