



Château d'Omonville
27110 Le Tremblay
FRANCE

ORDRE DE LA ROSE-CROIX
MOUVEMENT PHILOSOPHIQUE, INITIATIQUE
ET TRADITIONNEL MONDIAL

Tél. : 33 (0) 2.32.35.41.28
Fax : 33 (0) 2.32.35.66.03
Internet : www.rose-croix.org
Courriel : amorc@rose-croix.org

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*“The greatness of a nation can be judged
by the way its animals are treated.”*

Gandhi (1869-1948)

OPEN LETTER TO THE ANIMALS

By Serge Toussaint, Grand Master of the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis

An open letter to the animals? When they are unable to read! What an absurd idea, in theory. But who knows? Perhaps, beyond our words, they are able to understand what we are thinking and saying about them. And if you accept that Man himself is an animal – admittedly an extraordinary one – then this letter is addressed both to you and to the animals, through you. I therefore invite you to give it a careful read with an open mind, and to derive food for thought from it...

Because they feel superior to all other creatures, human beings have a tendency to think that the Earth belongs to them, and that they can use Nature however they wish, without being accountable to the so-called ‘inferior’ realms. They are forgetting that the first hominids appeared around ten million years ago, whereas animals have been living on our planet for hundreds of millions of years: therefore the animals were our planet’s first inhabitants, and it is the animals, along with the vegetable realm, that have had an input into making it an environment favorable to human life. This means that the animals have, as it were, prepared the way for our arrival, and that we are indebted to them for our living here.

Before continuing, I think it would be useful to briefly remind ourselves of the major stages in the evolution of life on Earth. According to scientists, life appeared in the seas and oceans approximately 4 billion years ago, in the form of single-celled organisms. Life then gradually developed and gave rise to increasingly sophisticated creatures: amphibians, reptiles (including the much-talked-about dinosaurs), birds, mammals, then the first hominids, from Ramapithecus around 10 million years ago through to Homo sapiens (the species to which we belong) around 300,000 years ago, by way of Cro-Magnon man, Neanderthal man, and so on. Humanity is therefore the result of a very long evolutionary process that owes a great deal to the animals, not to say to the animal nature, in the noblest sense of that term. This explains why the human being, in its embryonic and then fetal development, replicates the major stages that life has followed as it has evolved.

Ever since Humanity appeared on our planet, it has been dependent on the animals inhabiting it: firstly for food and clothing and then, having domesticated some of them, for moving around, carrying loads, working the earth, etc. Without them, human beings would have been unable to either survive, or to improve their living conditions in the way that they

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have been doing throughout history. But instead of appreciating them and respecting them, humans have come to consider animals as things placed at their disposal by Nature, or even by God Himself. It should be noted that this attitude was not confined to the most uncultivated or uneducated: in all ages, philosophers and thinkers tended to do the same, showing the degree to which this ‘inferiorization’ of animals was embedded in people’s minds.

Besides the fact that animals contribute either directly or indirectly to our food, many inventions beneficial to Humanity have been inspired by them: boats, submarines, planes, helicopters, parachutes, radar, sonar, weaving, and so on and so forth. Very often, in fact, it is by observing and imitating the know-how of animals that we have ended up moving around in the air, on the water, and beneath the oceans, and have created machines, devices and tools that have enabled Humanity to make progress in the field of technology. Seen in this light, the animals are our masters, and we have a lot more to learn from them.

Of course, and most fortunately indeed, there have always been people of all races, nationalities, and social classes who have respected and loved animals, whether wild or domesticated. In all eras, there have been those who have dedicated themselves to their protection and care, and to promoting a better understanding of them. Let us not forget that there exists a Universal Declaration of Animal Rights, formalized in 1978 by UNESCO, and that numerous associations have been created over the past few decades for the purpose of working for the protection of animals; obviously, we should give our support to these. The Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, for its part, published a Rosicrucian Declaration of Human Duties in 2005, in which it says: “It is each individual’s duty to respect animals and to truly see them as beings that are not only alive; they are also conscious and feeling.”

As you know, animals have endured and are still enduring mankind’s stupidity, ignorance, and cruelty. From the pain inflicted on them as part of magico-religious practices based on superstition, to the suffering they are subjected to in the name of an outmoded concept of what is science, not to mention those that are slaughtered for their meat or to produce luxurious personal adornments from their skins, millions of animals are dying every day, in the most barbaric conditions. And whilst I recognize there may be a case for mankind getting involved in controlling the animal realm to avoid the proliferation of certain species, I do not understand how people can go hunting for fun, to the extent that birds are bred for ‘release’ into the wild the day before a shoot. What can we say, either, about fox-hunting or stag-hunting?

The magico-religious practices that I just referred to particularly concern those rituals during which animals have their throats slit and their blood drained out, for the purposes of taking away or setting a curse, removing or admitting an evil spirit, enlisting the help of evil forces or warding them off, and so on. Animals are also sacrificed in order to obtain the favor of God Himself. However, whatever conception one may have of God, it ought to be clear to any believer that no sacrifice of this type can please Him, and that He disapproves of any suffering inflicted unnecessarily on animals.

Does this mean that certain suffering endured by animals is necessary? No, it does not. Let us rather say that there are reasons to justify the killing of some, but not of others. At the risk of surprising you, I am not shocked by the fact that we sacrifice some animals in order to feed ourselves, because I think that this can be responding to a need, and is part of the natural order of things. In the wild, there are many animals that kill other ones in order to feed themselves. This may be something we deplore, but it is the case. It is even necessary, in order to avoid the

proliferation of certain species whose survival would otherwise be threatened through lack of food or habitat. The act of preying on other animals therefore forms part of the laws that enable Nature to regulate and renew itself. We can, therefore, understand Man himself killing animals for food.

Unfortunately, as you know, animals killed for food are too often slaughtered in a cruel manner, so that they do suffer ‘unnecessarily’. It should be both a moral duty and a legal requirement to slaughter them in such a way that they do not become stressed, and feel the least possible pain, or even none at all. Moreover, all animals concerned should most certainly be reared “as close as possible to Nature” and, when the time arrives, transported under the best possible conditions. You will undoubtedly agree that if this were the case in all countries in the world, it would be a great step forward in terms of respect for animal life. In the same vein, how can we fail to be shocked when we learn that some 25% of animals slaughtered end up not being eaten, but in the incinerator?

Earlier on, I also mentioned the suffering imposed on animals “in the name of an outmoded concept of what is science”. This clearly concerns what is referred to as “animal experimentation”, or “vivisection”, not to mention “cosmetic testing”. Such practices are both barbaric and unnecessary: unnecessary, because the way in which the animal that is being tormented reacts is, in the vast majority of cases, not transposable to humans; barbaric, because the experiments being carried out cause it extreme stress and pain, of which we should be utterly ashamed. But here too, we have to be realistic: it is sometimes necessary to carry out certain operations on animals before performing them on humans. This should be only on an exceptional basis, and then it is vital to ensure that they suffer as little as possible, as is meant to be the case when a person is operated on in a hospital or clinic.

What can we say, either, about the animals that are killed or mutilated throughout the world, because their meat, horns, bone, bile, fins, tails or other parts of their body are supposed to increase intelligence, physical strength or lifespan, cure cancer or AIDS, be aphrodisiac, and other aberrations? How pathetic and sad it is, to see that millions - or even billions - of people still believe in such superstitions, and therefore participate in the capture and massacring of animal species that are often rare and at risk. Unfortunately it will take a long time to get them to understand that these beliefs have absolutely no foundation, and that their ‘traditional’ character is a deception. On the same lines, what on earth is there to appreciate about bullfighting, cock-fighting, and other barbaric ‘traditions’?

The question of whether Rosicrucians are vegetarian is one that I am often asked, particularly at Conventions. The answer is that some are, and others are not. In this area, as in all areas concerning their private lives, AMORC leaves its members entirely free to choose for themselves. Some eat meat, and others do not. I would add that being vegetarian is not a requirement for being on a spiritual quest, and is not an indicator of spiritual evolution. This is why the Master Jesus, among others, said that “It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth” (by means of the words that they speak). Most of the vegetarians that I know are vegetarian either because it is better for their health, or because they are taking a stand against the maltreatment of animals, which we can only respect and agree with. Without actually arguing in favor of vegetarianism, my view is that, if only for environmental reasons, it would be very much in Humanity’s interest to reduce its consumption of meat.

Following these general considerations, I would like to address a more mystical aspect of the ‘animal condition’. Contrary to what is thought by most people, including those who respect and love them, animals do not constitute a realm fundamentally different from the human realm. From a Rosicrucian point of view, animals – just like human beings - are vehicles of the Universal Soul and its major attribute; that is, they are vehicles of the Universal Consciousness, as it is expressing itself on Earth through all living creatures. That is why, in various forms and to differing degrees, they have sense faculties and are intelligent. We only need to look at the way they protect themselves from predators, find their food, chase their prey, build their nests, put together their lairs, raise their young, and so on. Such things are often attributed to their instinct. But what we call “instinct” is in fact nothing but the expression of the Universal Consciousness through the animals.

As for the most evolved animals, there is no doubt in my mind that they have a soul that has reached the stage of acquiring its own identity over a period of time. This applies to those that live in direct contact with humans, such as cats, dogs, horses, donkeys and other domesticated animals, and also to monkeys, elephants, whales, dolphins and other wild animals. They are all conscious not only of their environment, but also of themselves. Consciousness of self is not, therefore, the sole prerogative of human beings, even if it is unquestionable that in humans it is particularly developed. This means that animals are capable not only of reasoning, analyzing, imagining, extrapolating, and more (this being probably the case for the most evolved animals), but that they are also - and perhaps most importantly – capable of reflecting on themselves and their condition.

If you are one of those people who has a dog, cat, or other ‘pet’ animal, then I am sure that you will have become convinced that they possess consciousness of self, and that all they are lacking is speech, as we commonly say. Better yet, you will have noticed that they have a ‘sixth sense’ that enables them to sense atmospheres and the mental states of those they live with. When I was a child, we had a dog whom I loved, who clearly loved me too. Whenever I became unhappy or sad, he came to me and looked me in the eyes, as if to comfort me. I have no doubt whatsoever that this was a spiritual communion, an exchange between souls.

In common with consciousness of self, love is in no way the sole prerogative of human beings. Apart from the personal example I have just mentioned, we have all heard or read genuine accounts proving this: dogs that have let themselves die on the graves of their masters, cats that have travelled thousands of miles or kilometers to get back to their adopted family, horses that have taken their injured rider back to the place they set out from, and so on. But it would be wrong to think this only applies to domesticated animals. Wolves have brought up children (this is not a myth), gorillas have become friendly with humans (among them Diane Fossey), dolphins have saved sailors, etc. Animals are most certainly able to love and to have empathy and even, I am convinced, to show compassion.

We sometimes hear talk about the cruelty of certain animals, especially those that live in the wild. This is nonsensical, because no animal - predators included - attacks another with the deliberate intention of making it suffer: it attacks for food, to protect itself or defend its territory, or some other reason connected with its survival or that of its offspring. Likewise, when a shark, crocodile, bear, snake, or other animal seriously injures a human or even kills them, it is out of predatory or defensive instinct: they may be showing that they are dangerous, but not that they are cruel. Only humans, in fact, are capable of showing cruelty to animals and to their fellow creatures. This is due to the fact that humans have free will and are able to use it in a negative fashion, to the point of committing acts that are unworthy of their status.

Like most Rosicrucians, I think that there is reincarnation. In other words, I think that each human being has a soul that reincarnates at regular intervals until it has attained the state of wisdom, the ultimate goal of its spiritual evolution. However, metempsychosis - which is the belief that a human being may come back in the body of an animal in order to atone for its errors - seems totally unfounded to me, if only because it is opposed to the law that we find on Earth and throughout the Universe, the law of Evolution. On the other hand, I think that an animal that is sufficiently evolved may, at some point, cross over into the human stage and experience its first life in that realm, and then reincarnate there. If you accept this principle, then it could be that the dog or cat that is so familiar to you is in the process of becoming human...

Whether we are aware of it or not, all living things are interdependent, not only biologically, but also karmically. This means that, in accordance with this spiritual law of karma - also known as the "law of reaction" or the "law of compensation" - Humanity's well-being is influenced by, among other things, the way in which it treats animals. Pythagoras had fully understood this, because he said: "For as long as men continue to destroy the living things of the lower realms without pity, they will know neither health nor peace. For as long as they kill animals, they will kill one another. The one who sows murder and suffering cannot reap joy and love".

In connection with these observations, I am convinced that the more human beings respect and love animals, the more they will respect and love one another, for they will be opening up to what mystics in general and Rosicrucians in particular call "Universal Love". In parallel with this, medicine and surgery will make such progress that, by pooling what is best and most humanistic about them, they will together be able to cure most of the illnesses that can affect Humanity. Indeed I think that - in accordance with the law of karma, this time in its positive aspect - the physical suffering of human beings will lessen in line with their applying themselves to not making animals suffer.

To close this letter, I invite you to imagine that the animals are able to reply to it with an "Open Letter to Humans". What, in your view, would they say to us? How would they assess our behavior towards them? What would they ask us? What hopes would they have, both for themselves and for us? In pondering these questions, bear in mind that it is possible we shall have to make recompense to them in the beyond, particularly to those who, like us, have an individual soul and are taking part in the evolution of the Universal Consciousness, as it is expressing itself on Earth.

In the bonds of the love that the animals expect from us, I send you my warmest wishes.

Serge Toussaint
Grand Master of the Rosicrucian Order

