

# Dogs In Islam

In Malaysia there is now a Muslim-only furor over a photograph of a Muslim (hijabbed) girl holding a puppy. The usual calls for her punishment, and so on. Why? Because dogs are haram in Islam, objects of hysteria and hate, except in limited circumstances when they may be used as guard dogs. It's as with sports – participation in most sports is haram, save for those that can be connected to preparing oneself for battle, or Jihad. Thus wrestling and archery are okay, but tennis, swimming, and basketball are not.

A full discussion of dogs in Islam can be found [here](#).

Now you may be prompted to ask: why is there this hatred for dogs? It comes not from the Qur'an, but from the Hadith, also called the Traditions, that is the written stories about what Muhammad said and what he did, of which there were many tens of thousands, but they were collected, and winnowed according to degrees of assigned authenticity, by scholars of the Hadith, or *muhaddithin*. That "authenticity" depends on study of the chain of transmission – the isnad-chain – by which a story, or hadith, can be traced back, as close as possible, to the time of Muhammad himself. Thus if F was told a particular hadith by E who in turn heard it from D who heard it from C who heard it from B who heard it from A, and A lived at the time of Muhammad, that is adduced as evidence for assigning the highest degree of authenticity. Some Hadith possess such an isnad-chain, but many do not. Some may have a missing link in the isnad-chain, or cannot be traced back to the time of Muhammad. Non-Muslims may dismiss all this as nonsensical, because so many of the Hadith are surely just the natural accretions of time, made up by imaginative believers who were indulging themselves. Muslims, not inclined to give an inch on the matter, refuse even to contemplate the notion of subjecting early Islam to historical study and critical analysis, as Christianity and Judaism have been.

The biography of Muhammad, or Sira, and the Hadith constitute the Sunnah, which is the name given to the guiding light, for Muslims in every place, and for all time, of the behavior, and the principles underlying the behavior, of Muhammad and his earliest followers. Non-Muslims often fail to grasp the importance of the Sunnah; they think that it's all the Qur'an. That is useful to apologists for Islam who sometimes say that the authority for some particularly disturbing behavior or attitudes of Muslims "is not in the Qur'an" because it is not, it is in the Hadith, or the Sira. For example, the murders of those who were thought to have mocked Muhammad, such as the poetess Asma bint Marwan, Abu Afak, and others are to be found not in the Qur'an but in the Hadith, or in some cases in the Sira. Some scholars of Islam consider the Sunnah to be even more important than the Qur'an as a guide to Muslim behavior and Muslim attitudes.

Now why should there be these Muslim strictures on dogs?

I offered a possible answer to this question [here](#). In that article, I made two errors. The first was that in the particular Hadith quoted, it is not Muhammad who said he would refuse to enter a house in which there were dogs but rather the angel Gabriel, who then told Muhammad. And the word "statues" – which I found in a manual of Islamic rules that I can no longer locate – may not be right, and the word "pictures" more accurate. My main point – that the linking of the depiction of the human form (whether "statues" or in "pictures") as objects of possible veneration (statues and pictures in Christian homes at the time would have been of religious figure) and dogs, can be explained as based on the desire to help Muslims clearly distinguish themselves, by shunning observances both of Christians (representations, in two or three dimensions, of Jesus, Mary, assorted saints) and of Zoroastrians (deep respect for dogs), from the Kuffar.

I've been waiting to see if any scholars of Islam think my conjecture – having to do with the desire of early Muslims to

hold themselves apart from, and superior to, both Christians (those who had “pictures” or “statues” in their houses) and Zoroastrians (those who had a particular affection and respect for dogs, as that expert on Zoroastrianism, the late Mary Boyce, noted when she lived among the few remaining Zoroastrians in Iran in the pre-Khomeini period of its existence) – might be right.