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FROM THE VEDAS

Sacred Cow, Divine Mother

Cow protection: a scriptural edict, a lynch-pin for dharma

The protection of the bovine species is prescribed by Hindu scripture. Orthodox Hindus are adamant that the nurture of cows lies at the core of Hindu dharma, representing symbolically and in real, earthly terms the Hindu reverence for the Divine in all life. Read more about why the cow is sacred in this issue's article on Ten Questions. At a time when the human species is wreaking havoc on nature and the environment, cow protection takes on new meaning as a dramatic headline issue. We present here key scriptural verses from the Rig Veda and the cogent thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi on the subject of goseva, caring for the cow, "the mother of Cosmic Forces."

Rig Veda: She is like the mother of the cosmic Forces, the daughter of the cosmic Matter, the sister of cosmic Energy, the centre of the ambrosia. I address to men of wisdom --kill not her, the sinless inviolate cow.

The divine cow, herself is skilled in eloquence, gives speech to others, who comes surrounded by every kind of utterance, who helps me for my worship of the divine forces, it is only the fool that abandons her.

May cows come and bring us good fortune; let them stay in our cowsheds and be content in our company. May many colored cows bring here prolific milk for offerings to the resplendent Lord at many dawns.

The resplendent Lord bestows affluence on the devotee who offers worship and oblations. He takes not what belongs to the worshiper and gives him more; thereby increasing his wealth more and ever-more, he places the devotee in fortified positions, free from danger.

Let not the cows run away from us, let no thief carry them away; let no hostile weapon fall upon them. May the master of the cattle be long possessed of them, with the milk products of which he makes offerings and with which he serves the godly men.

Let not the cows fall a victim to the arrogant, dustspurning war-horse. Let them not fall into the hands of a butcher or his shop. Let the cattle of the man, the householder, move about freely and graze without fear.

May the cows be our affluence; may the resplendent Lord grant us cattle; may the cows yield food (milk and butter) of the first libation. These cows, O men, are sacred as the Lord resplendent Himself --the Lord whose blessings we crave for, with head and heart.

O cows, you strengthen even the worn-out and fatigued and make the unlovely beautiful to look on. Your lowing is auspicious, and makes my dwelling prosperous. Great is the abundance that is attributed to you in our religious ceremony.

May you, O cows, have many calves grazing upon good pastures and drinking pure water at accessible ponds. May no thief be your master. May no beast of prey assail you and may the dart of vital Lord never fall on you.

O resplendent Lord, a showerer of virility as you are, may we have by your blessings the sturdy bulls for insemination and let us have plenty of nourishment for the cows.

Rig veda viii , 102, 15-16; vi , 28, 1-8 Translation by Swami Satya Prakash sarasvati

and Satyakam Vidyalanka

Mahatma Gandhi: "The central fact of Hinduism is cow protection. Cow protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond this species. The cow means the entire sub-human world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. Why the cow was selected for apotheosis is obvious to me. The cow was in India the best companion. She was the giver of plenty. Not only did she give milk, but she also made agriculture possible

"Cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world. And Hinduism will live so long as there are Hindus to protect the cow. Hindus will be judged not by their tilaks, not by the correct chanting of mantras, not by their pilgrimages, not by their most punctilious observances of caste rules, but their ability to protect the cow.

"I would not kill a human being to protect a cow, as I will not kill a cow to save a human life, be it ever so precious. My religion teaches me that I should by personal conduct instill into the minds of those who might hold different views the conviction that cow-killing is a sin and that, therefore, it ought to be abandoned. My ambition is no less than to see the principle of cow protection established throughout the world. But that requires that I should set my own house thoroughly in order first.

"Cow protection to me is not mere protection of the cow. It means protection of all that lives and is helpless and weak in the world.

"The cow is a poem of pity. One reads pity in the gentle animal. She is the mother to millions of Indian mankind. Protection of the cow means protection of the whole dumb creation of God. The ancient seer, whoever he was, began with the cow. The appeal of the lower order of creation is all the more forcible because it is speechless. The cow is the purest type of sub-human life. She pleads on behalf of the whole of the sub-human species for justice to it at the hands of man, the first among all that lives. She seems to speak to us through her eyes: 'You are not appointed over us to kill us and eat our flesh or otherwise ill-treat us, but to be our friend and guardian.' I worship it and I shall defend its worship against the whole world.

"Mother cow is in many ways better than the mother who gave us birth. Our mother gives us milk for a couple of years and then expects us to serve her when we grow up. Mother cow expects from us nothing but grass and grain. Our mother often falls ill and expects service from us. Mother cow rarely falls ill.

"The reader will observe that behind the foregoing requirements lies one thing, and that is ahimsa (noninjury), otherwise known as universal compassion. If that supreme thing is realized, everything else becomes easy. Where there is ahimsa, there is infinite patience, inner calm, discrimination, self-sacrifice and true knowledge."

Excerpts from The Mind Of Mahatma Gandhi, compiled by R. K. Prabhu & U. R. Rao
<http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgbook/>