

## ***Merhaba, Kedi!***

### **Religious Values Behind Turkish Hospitality to Cats**

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Walking the byways of the city of Istanbul, Turkey, you will find lots of furry friends who are both friendly and look very well cared for. They have clean and thick fur, fat bodies, and some even look relaxed and act as they please, sleeping in houses of worship, standing on top of bookstore windows, going in and out of hotel restaurants, one even having his own 'throne' in several public places. They seem to really enjoy their life as cats, and the Turkish people take care of them with affection. These are not street cats; they are more like shared pet cats that have their own life choices. In short, you could say that Türkiye is a country that really respects cats!

Based on my observations, everyone in Turkey (not only in Istanbul), seems to be deeply immersed in their role as 'parents' for these street cats. Never once did I see anyone shooing away or yelling at the cats to leave. The human and cat worlds actually live peacefully side by side, and not just because the Turkish people like cats; there is a religious component to this relationship.

*"Cats are the companions of the Prophet Muhammad,"* said Serdar Yorusun, our tour guide in Turkey. Lots of scripture in the Koran mentions the good relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and this feline friend. As one well-known story goes, Rasulullah SAW was willing to cut his robe when he was about to get up to pray, because he did not want to disturb the cat that was sleeping on his robe. There is even a story about the Prophet Muhammad who gave in and allowed his cat Muezza to drink water from the cup for ablution until the cat finished drinking and then Muhammad cleaned himself. Following in the footsteps of the prophet, the people of Turkey who are predominantly Moslem really view cats as sacred and ritually clean animals, just as the Prophet Muhammad saw these animals.

*“Cats are animals whose bodies, sweat, food scraps, and saliva are pure. Its saliva even has cleansing properties. His life is cleaner than humans.”* (Hadith Narrated by Malik)

Even the prohibition on treating cats badly is inscribed in the holy Koran. In the Hadith of the History of Bukhari, it is explained that it is unlawful to kill a cat by making it thirsty. Therefore, as a Muslim it is recommended to give a cat water and improve its life, and by doing so that person will receive a reward. To sum up, religious values strongly guide not only the daily lives of religious communities in Turkey, but also the treatment of cats.