



## One Health: Connecting Humans, Animals and the Environment

### Video Transcript

#### The influence of culture and religion

[Jakob Zinsstag]: Cows. They evoke one of the fundamental cultural achievements of human beings, the domestication of wild animals.

At one point in time, humans began to influence the care and reproduction of certain animal species. They started using them for hunting and as livestock. This left an imprint not only in human development but also in human cultures. Culture and religion shape the norms and values that govern our relationship to animals. In this sense, the human-animal relationship is quite similar to the relationship we have to other human beings. Thus, how we relate to animals is as manifold as our cultures and religions. There are at least three basic concepts. Some animals are regarded as intimate companions with a high emotional value. Others are considered as prey, their meat having a financial value.

There are those animals that prey upon humans. They are certainly one of the reasons for deep-seated fears against wildlife, and these fears explain partially that predators have either been extinct by humans in large parts of the world or are threatened by extinction. Nevertheless, humans are close relatives of animals and we should exercise our stewardship towards them. This idea is expressed in many myths and beliefs of ancient times, some of them still valued today. Ancient Egyptians saw humans and animals as one flock of God. Today's Fulani in West Africa have creation myths that express a similar view. Biblical texts report that humans and terrestrial animals were created on the same day. Jewish Shabbat regulations imply the resting of livestock. In this sense, there are traces of a strong co-creational attitude in the Judeo-Christian Bible. In the Quran, animals are considered close to humans, a closeness that we observe as this woman milks her livestock in Chad or seeing this woman milk a horse in Kyrgyzstan.

Our present world is shaped by several tendencies. On the one hand, globalised livestock production maximises profits with little regard for humane standards towards animals. This coincides with millions of small-holder farmers intensifying moderately their livestock production in order to leave the poverty trap, for example, here at this small-scale dairy farm in Kenya. On the other hand, there is the tendency of forming increasingly close relationships with companion animals. These are humanised and sometimes considered as family members. In all this, it is important to keep in mind that animals are not commodities. They have certain rights. This is reflected by a growing literature on the moral status of animals and animal welfare.

So let us summarise the sometimes contradictory forces and concepts that shape our relationship to animals. They include the aspirations of a globalised economy, the drive towards social development, and the commitment to animal welfare. Culture, religion, and economic considerations equally influence the human-animal relationship. Those forces also influence how human and animal health might cooperate as One Health. If we work in different cultures and want to achieve One Health outcomes, we absolutely need to adopt the view that there are many legitimate perspectives. We need to accept that practices should be adapted to local contexts. As a first step, we need to clarify our own perspective in order to adopt a self-reflexive attitude. We need to ask: What is my personal, cultural, and religious background that shapes my animal-human relationship? Thus we may learn how our own attitude towards animals influences the value we give animal life, economically or emotionally. So what are your attitudes towards animals? How do they influence your values towards them?