

LIFE THROUGH THE EYES OF A DONKEY

My owner, Yusuf, calls me Lightning because of the thin black streak running across my back. Where I come from, most of us donkeys have this mark, but it doesn't mean that we're all the same inside. All of us have our own personality although sometimes it's difficult for people to see as we don't tend to show much of how we feel. But not showing how you feel is not the same as not having any feeling, wouldn't you agree? When Yusuf gets upset in class, for example, sometimes he doesn't really want his friends to know, so he just keeps quiet and tries to smile his troubles away.

It's the same with us donkeys. We don't always show it when something hurts our body, but we do feel the pain. In fact, we feel a whole lot of different things, just like many other living creatures. Personally, I love the feel of dust on my back when I roll on the ground; I love the feel of cool water in my mouth when I'm too hot. I love munching on fruit or vegetables when I get lucky enough to be given some. And I really love the warm feeling I get inside when Yusuf speaks to me kindly and strokes me. I know he cares for me and looks after me, and this makes my daily work easier.

But I don't just feel good things. Wouldn't it be great if we only felt good things? I feel the weight of the cart, pulling my shoulders with every step. I feel nails digging into my feet when they get stuck in my hooves. I feel pain in my stomach when I have too many parasites.

Sometimes I feel worried when something doesn't look quite right on the street. It could be a hole in the ground, a puddle reflecting light into my eyes, or a big vehicle I never came across before. When I get worried, I sometimes stop on the spot. A lot of owners don't realise that some of the things we come across as we walk can unsettle us, and they lose patience with us.

Thankfully, Yusuf isn't like that. When I get worried, he reassures me and gently pulls my lead while offering me something nice to eat. Yusuf has never led me into danger before, so I trust him, and I usually get over what troubles me quickly. The reason I'm so happy with Yusuf and work hard for him is that he knows about the five animal needs that ensure my welfare.

My first welfare need is about having enough food and water throughout the day, especially when I work hard. As I said before, I might not look like I am thirsty or hungry, but Yusuf still offers me water and food throughout the day and also at night. Food gives me energy and keeps me healthy so that I can continue to work as hard as Yusuf needs me to.

My second welfare need is about having a safe and comfortable place to stay at night. Lots of bad things can happen to me at night, if I am left to roam freely. I can get attacked by wild animals, knocked over by a car or even stolen. That's why I like resting in a shelter with some of my friends, where I feel safe from harm and protected from the rain. During the day, when Yusuf doesn't need me, he leaves me in the shade, also near my friends. He makes sure he never ties me up in the sun and never ties my legs together with wire. In fact, he doesn't use wire anywhere on my body. It digs into my skin and causes wounds which are really painful and can get infected.

My third welfare need is about getting the treatment I need when I'm not well. If Yusuf wants me to work hard for as long as possible, he needs to make sure that my body is in good condition, inside and out. He does so by giving me some medicine to get rid of the parasites that live in my tummy, several times a year. He also inspects my body every week to see if anything is wrong or needs attention. I completely depend on Yusuf to realise for himself when I'm in pain and to do something about it. Knowing I am looked after and cared for is so reassuring.

My fourth welfare need is about avoiding stress, fear or distress. These things don't necessarily show on my body, but they make me feel horrible inside, just like Yusuf feels when he's unhappy, scared or badly treated. What happens to living beings' minds and hearts is as important as what happens to their bodies. Living every day in fear of being hit, working too long without a break, or carrying loads that are too heavy would make anyone suffer. It makes us donkeys suffer.

My fifth and last welfare need is about being able to express my normal behaviour. Yusuf's usual behaviour as a young boy is to play with his friends, spend time with his family, be out and about, and be left alone when he wants to be. Donkeys' usual behaviour also consists in spending time with friends and family. We don't like being alone much. It's not the way we donkeys are supposed to live. We're supposed to spend time with the donkeys we get on best with when we're resting. If we're always left alone, we become sad and we lose the spark that makes living beings happy to be alive.

Yusuf knows all of this; that's why he's the best caregiver and owner. He and I make a great pair and I hope I continue to work for him and with him for as long as possible.

