

April 26, 1974

Dr. Robert Richter  
145 West 86th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10024

Dear Bob:

The weight of halakhic opinion is that the principle of *lo t'vakeh*, which prohibits causing unnecessary pain to non-human life, refers only to pain during life-time, and not to death itself. Painless death may, under ordinary circumstances, be proscribed on the grounds of *ona'ah*, i.e., vandalism or wanton destruction, rather than pain.

These circumstances are not present, however, in the situation you described to me, namely, an old dog which is sick to the point of debilitation.

I have found no reference in the literature to the analogue, in animal life, of "mercy killing." However, as I explained above, as long as the killing of the animal is not an act of wanton destruction, and is painless, there is no prohibition in doing away with it. (For your information, the major source dealing with this issue, is Rabbi Ezekiel Landau of Prague, in his *Orinot*.) → ק"ו ק"ו ק"ו ק"ו

Hence, you may have a veterinarian cause painless death to the animal.

Finally,-- my congratulations on having the good sense and intuition to pose a *shiur* on an issue so many other never assume comes in the purview of Halakhah.

Cordially,

RABBI NORMAN LAMM

NL:cw