

# Is Islam against animal rights?

## Introduction

Currently, millions of animals are being slaughtered and sacrificed as part of the Hajj and Eid al-Adha festival. This is an act of worship commanded by Allah and His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). It is a fourteen hundred year old tradition.

The animals that Shariah has stipulated for sacrifice are sheep, cows, goats and camels. At this time of year, there are sometimes suggestions that Muslims are needlessly putting millions of animals to their death. The act of sacrifice is wasteful and outdated, it is said. It is against animal welfare rights and the practice leads to pointless bloodshed.

Let us look at the issue in closer detail. Is Islam for or against animal rights? Is the *udhiyya* (sacrifice) oppressive? Are Muslims wasteful during the Qurbani season? Four points are worthy of close deliberation.

### One

Islam is very specific when it comes to which type of animals must be sacrificed:

Sheep; at least one year old, unless it is fat in which case six months is acceptable

Camels; at least five years old (this can be shared amongst seven people)

Cows; at least two years old (this can be shared amongst seven people)

Goats; at least one year old

All of them must be healthy and free from physical defects.

None of these animals are endangered of extinction, in any part of the world. Millions of cows and sheep have been sacrificed over the years and no one has reported a shortage. In New Zealand, there are about 4.6 million people. There are thirty million sheep in the same country. In 2016, it was reported that there were nearly ten million sheep in Wales alone, in a country where there are only three million people living.

On the other hand, lions are endangered species yet westerners hunt and poach them for fun. In 2015, it was estimated that there are only 30,000 lions living in the wild in Africa. This is compared to 200,000 a century ago. Rich westerners come to East Africa with the sole intention of entertainment via killing endangered species. In July 2015, the American Walter Palmer came to Zimbabwe and killed Cecil the Lion, causing international outrage.

Islam allows hunting. But not for entertainment purposes. Hunters are also reminded that ecological balance must be maintained.

### Two

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was sent as a mercy for all worlds. He taught compassion and decency even towards animals when no one had even heard of human rights, let alone animal rights. He was the pioneer of animal rights centuries before the term was even coined in the west.

\*Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told the story of a man who stopped at a well and also provided water for a thirsty dog nearby. His sins were forgiven as a result (*Human Rights in the light of the Qur'an and Sunnah*, M.I.H Pirzada, Al-Karam Publications, p. 151).

\*Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) reports that whenever they would dismount at a station for a rest, they would remove all baggage and seating from the camel before performing Salah, eating and drinking (Ibid., p. 150).

\*Abdullah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) passed by a group of youth from Quraysh who were shooting arrows at a suspended bird. The youth dispersed as they saw this Companion. Ibn Umar remarked, 'Whoever does this, namely use birds for sport, Allah and His Messenger have cursed them' (Ibid., p. 152).

### **Three**

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was very specific when it came to *how* the slaughter takes place. All rulings are geared towards compassion and decency.

He (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was very insistent that the knife used for sacrifice must be very sharp. The knife should not be sharpened in the front of the animal. The slaughter should not take place in front of other animals. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

'Indeed Allah has prescribed good (*Ihsan*) in all things. So when you kill, kill well. When you sacrifice, sacrifice well. Let each one of you sharpen his blade and let him spare suffering to the animal he slaughters' (*Imam al-Nawawi's Forty Hadith*).

### **Four**

The Prophet instructed Muslims to ensure all parts of the animal are used. Or to word it differently, he ordered us to be sustainable and green. The skin must be used. The bones can be used. The unused meat should be left for other animals to consume. In Muslim countries, the Eid al-Adha season is very important for butchers, farmers, tanners, cloth merchants and many more. They all benefit from the supply chain provided by the sacrifices.

To conclude, an observer must look at the *whole* sacrifice process before declaring it fair or unfair. Anyone who does so will certainly appreciate the green, sustainable and compassionate nature of the practice. Islam is based on decency, love and compassion. This extends to all, including animals.

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