

# IS THE SACRIFICE CRUEL TO ANIMALS?

Currently, millions of animals are being sacrificed as part of the Hajj and *Eid al-Adha* religious festival. This is an act of worship commanded by Allah and His Messenger ﷺ.

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 The act of sacrifice is wasteful and outdated, it is said.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 waste.

**Question** Is Islam for or against animal rights? Is the *udhiyya* (sacrifice) oppressive? Are Muslims wasteful during the *qurbānī* season?

Here are a few points are worthy of close deliberation:

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

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

**Camel** at least five years old (this can be shared amongst seven people)

**Cow** at least two years old (this can be shared amongst seven people)

**Goat** at least one years old

- All of them must be healthy and free from physical defects.
- None of these animals are in danger 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 4.8 million people. There are thirty million sheep in the same country. In 2019, it was

reported that there were approximately ten million sheep in Wales alone, in a country where there are only about 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.
2. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ 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:
- The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ told the story of an immodest woman who was forgiven simply because she passed by a dog panting near a well. Seeing how thirsty the dog was, she took off her shoe, tied it to her scarf and drew up some water. Her sins were forgiven as a result of this act.<sup>1</sup>
  - Anas ibn Malik reports that whenever they would dismount at a station for a rest, they would remove all baggage and seating from the camel before performing *ṣalāh*, eating and drinking.<sup>2</sup>
  - ‘Abd-Allāh ibn ‘Umar 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.’<sup>3</sup>
3. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was very specific when it came to how the slaughter takes place. All rulings are geared towards compassion and

1 *Sunan Ibn Maja*, cited in Muhammad: Mercy and peace personified, by Mawlana Mohammed Shakir Noorie, Maktab-e-Taibah, Mumbai, India, 2017.

2 *Human Rights in the light of the Qur’an and Sunnah*, M.I.H Pirzada, Al-Karam Publications, p. 150.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

decency. He ﷺ was very insistent that the knife used for sacrifice must be very sharp. The knife should not be sharpened in front of the animal. The slaughter should not take place in front of other animals. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, 'Indeed Allah has prescribed good (*ihsān*) in all things. So when you kill, kill well. Where you sacrifice, sacrifice well. Let each one of you sharpen his blade and let him spare suffering to the animal he slaughters.'<sup>4</sup>

4. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ 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-Aḏḥā season is very important for butchers, farmers, tanners, cloth merchants and many more. They all benefit from the supply chain provided by the sacrifices.

All this was clearly laid down fourteen centuries ago. The first law in the UK aimed at any compassion towards animals was introduced in 1822.

## **CONCLUSION**

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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