

PERFORMING A SACRIFICE ON BEHALF OF OTHERS

INTRODUCTION

Muslims are required to perform the sacrifice of an animal on the occasion of Eid al-Adḥā (10th-12th Dhu 'l-Hijjah), with the intention of worship. This is called *al-uḍḥiyya* in Islam. The purpose of this worship is to remind ourselves of our forefather our master Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. Symbolically, this act also serves to highlight the importance of sacrifice as a concept in Islam.

The Companions once asked the Prophet ﷺ, ‘Oh Messenger of Allah, what are these sacrifices?’ He replied, “It is the *Sunnah* of your father Ibrāhīm.” They asked, “What benefit does it serve?” The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘For each hair is a unit of reward ... for every hair of wool is a unit of reward [also].’¹

CAN WE PERFORM A SACRIFICE ON BEHALF OF OTHERS?

The sacrifice that we perform on the occasion of Eid al-Adḥā is *wājib* (“necessary”) upon every adult Muslim who is not travelling and is able to afford it.

As a merciful and selfless gesture, Muslims are allowed to make a sacrifice on behalf of others too. For example, many Muslims perform an additional sacrifice in the name of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. What is the proof for this?

- Our master Ḥanash رضي الله عنه reported that he observed our master ‘Alī رضي الله عنه sacrifice two rams. When he asked him why? ‘Alī replied, “Verily the Prophet ﷺ left instructions to me to sacrifice on his behalf, so I am sacrificing on his behalf (إن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أو صاني أن أضحي عنه فأنا أضحي عنه).”²

1 *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (3127), narrated by Zayd b. Arqam.

2 *Sunan Abū Dāwūd, Kitāb al-ḍahāya, Bāb al-aḍḥiyya an al-mayyit* (2790).

- As a matter of fact, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself performed a sacrifice on our behalf. Abū Ṭalhā ؓ reports that the Prophet ﷺ sacrificed one ram and whilst sacrificing the other he said, “This is on behalf of every member of my ummah who believed/s in me and testified/s [to my prophethood].”

IS THIS ACT SHIRK?

Salafi/Wahhabi Muslims deem such an act to be shirk (“polytheism”) (may Allah protect us from such!). Though it is clearly proven as an act of Sunnah they argue this is what the pagan Arabs used to do. They would sacrifice animals and then proclaim ‘...this is in the name of Lāt, this is in the name of ‘Uzzā.’

They argue that we are doing no different by taking the name of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Sacrifices should only be done purely for the sake of Allah.

Moreover they add that Allah d has deemed this act harām (“totally forbidden”) in the Qur’an. There are four places in the Qur’an where Allah d says, ‘...something which has been slaughtered as a sacrifice for other than Allah (وما اهل به لغير الله)’ is forbidden to consume. They argue we are doing exactly the same as the pagan Arabs.

It is a travesty to think that our acts are similar to that of the pagan Arabs.

IN REPLY

1. They believed that the idols were worthy of worship, we do not believe the same about Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. We worship Allah Most High alone.
2. We are still sacrificing for the sake of Allah Most High. All we are doing is asking Allah to dedicate the reward of the sacrifice to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. **This is not shirk.** This is Sunnah.
3. The verse means those who take the name of their idols [and not Allah Most High] when they are slaughtering the animal. The pagan Arabs would take the names of their idols as they placed the knife on the neck of the animal. Muslims only take the name of Allah when they are slaughtering

the animal. They are required to recite *باسم الله اكبر* and nothing else. Abū Bakr Jaṣṣāṣ al-Rāzī offers the explanation thus:

ولا خلاف بين المسلمين ان المراد به الذبيحة اذا اهل بها لغير الله عند الذبح

‘There is no dispute amongst the Muslims that the verse refers to when someone else’s name is taken other than Allah at the time of the sacrifice.’³

When the Arabs would sacrifice the animal, they did so with the intention of worshipping the idols whose name they would take. They did not have the intention of *īthāl al-thawāb* (conveying reward to the deceased) for anyone or anything. Muslims, on the other hand, sacrifice for the sake of Allah Most High and dedicate the reward to others, just like the Prophet ﷺ did with us.

4. Sa‘d ibn Mu‘ādh رضي الله عنه upon the instruction and consent of the Prophet ﷺ, dedicated a well in the name of her mother, Umm Sa‘d. If the Salafi interpretation is to be believed, the water [for drinking and ablution] would be haram. Of course, it is not.⁴

In short, there are no parallels between what the pagan Arabs used to do, and what the Sunnah of our master Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is in this matter. Performing a sacrifice for the sake of Allah Most High and then dedicating the reward to one of His creations is an act of devotion, worship and compassion.

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3 Karam Shāh al-Azharī, *Ḍiyā’ al-qur’ān* (1:16).

4 *Ḍiyā’ al-qur’ān* (2:612).