

# Re-evaluating Uḍḥiyyah: A Reflection on Tradition, Perception, and Contemporary Criticisms

## Introduction

In recent times, the significance and relevance of Uḍḥiyyah (animal sacrifice), a deep-seated tradition in Islam, is being questioned by some in the Muslim community. These voices are calling for a reimagining of this ritual in more symbolic or non-animal-based terms. This paper aims to reiterate the firm roots of Uḍḥiyyah in Islamic theology and tradition, address the counterarguments raised by these voices, and emphasize the importance of maintaining the integrity of our faith practices.

## A Tradition Embedded in the Qur'ān and Sunnah

Firstly, it's well-established that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his Companions performed Uḍḥiyyah. While we understand that this doesn't inherently make it obligatory, it's crucial to acknowledge that the Qur'anic verse (22:34) explicitly refers to the rite of sacrifice, highlighting its importance within the divine provision, "and We have appointed for every nation a rite (of sacrifice) that they may mention the name of Allah ﷻ over the beast of cattle that He has given them for food".<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, it's vital to underline that the Prophet ﷺ sacrificed a hundred camels during his final Hajj, underscoring the value and significance he attributed to this practice. He (Jabir) said, "The total number of those sacrificial animals brought by 'Ali from the Yemen and of those brought by the Prophet ﷺ was one hundred." (Saḥīḥ Muslim Book 15, Hadith 159).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنْسَكًا لِيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ مَا رَزَقَهُمْ مِنْ بَهِيمَةِ الْأَنْعَامِ فَإِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَلَهُ أَسْلِمُوا وَبَشِّرِ الْمُخْبِتِينَ  
<sup>2</sup> قَالَ فَكَانَ جَمَاعَةُ الْهُدَى الَّذِي قَدِمَ بِهِ عَلَيَّ مِنَ الْيَمَنِ وَالَّذِي أَتَىٰ بِهِ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مِائَةً

## The Islamic paradigm and the liberal paradigm

The Islamic paradigm and the liberal paradigm often diverge, presenting distinct outlooks. As adherents to Islam, we must appreciate that being Muslim encompasses more than simple self-identification. It involves acknowledging an All-Knowing, All-Powerful, and Compassionate Creator, Allah ﷻ, who has conceived and maintains the universe. Muslims recognize that they will be held morally accountable for their actions in the life to come, guided by the teachings given to Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ in the Qur'ān and Prophetic Sunnah.

### Objective Morality in the Context of Islam

According to the Islamic perspective, we uphold an objective morality sourced from our comprehension of Allah ﷻ's decrees. Islam adopts a theocentric worldview, situating Allah ﷻ as the ultimate moral authority. The purpose of our existence is to worship and obey Allah ﷻ to the utmost of our capabilities. We steadfastly hold that only Allah ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ are the exclusive lawmakers of what is ethically correct and incorrect, allowed and forbidden. Allah ﷻ proclaims in the Qur'an, "It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their affair. And whoever disobeys Allah ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ has indeed strayed into a plain error." (33:36)<sup>3</sup>

As for the new-found concept of "green Qurbani", while we respect and acknowledge the need for sustainable practices, the ritual of Qurbani is a significant part of our faith. It has been prescribed by Allah ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ, and as Muslims, we are duty-bound to follow this guidance.

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<sup>3</sup> وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مِؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَىٰ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُّبِينًا

## Addressing Material Differences and The Status of Humans

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, along with his Companions, lived during a period vastly different from our own, with respect to material conditions, social structures, and technological capabilities. Yet, their guidance and the principles they espoused continue to hold relevance in the contemporary world. These principles, rooted in the teachings of the Qur'ān, fundamentally assert the unique status of humans in Allah's creation.

Allah ﷻ, as stated in the Qur'ān, created all that exists in the heavens and the earth for the benefit of humans. This is elucidated in Surah Luqmān, where it is said: "Have you not seen that Allah has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth and amply bestowed upon you His favors, [both] apparent and unapparent? But of the people is he who disputes about Allah without knowledge or guidance or an enlightening book [from Him]." (Qur'an 31:20).<sup>4</sup>

This verse presents a clear understanding of the purpose of creation and the hierarchical positioning of humans within it. The bounties of Allah ﷻ are at humanity's disposal, a testament to our distinctive role and responsibility. However, it is essential to remember that while everything is created for human benefit, it is not for human exploitation. Islam teaches us to maintain a balance, to be just stewards of the Earth, and to show mercy and kindness to all creatures.

The recent advocacy for a "Plant-Based Eid" reflects an emerging view that places humans and animals on the same level. This notion is ostensibly rooted in the pursuit of compassion and environmental sustainability. However, it raises a significant theological question about the position of humans in relation to the rest of creation. In the Islamic framework, while animals are to be treated with kindness, respect, and care, they are not considered equals to humans.

The Qur'ān and Hadiths reiterate the special status of humans, who are endowed with intellect and moral responsibility, attributes that set them apart from animals. This

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<sup>4</sup> أَلَمْ تَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَأَسْبَغَ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَهُ ظُهْرًا وَبَاطِنًا وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُّنِيرٍ

distinction does not diminish the value of animals or justify their mistreatment. Rather, it underscores the unique accountability of humans as custodians of the Earth.

Therefore, equating humans and animals as equivalent undermines the Islamic perspective, which emphasizes the balance between utilizing the bounties bestowed by Allah ﷻ for human benefit, and the obligation to care for, respect, and uphold the rights of all of Allah's ﷻ creations. The Prophet ﷺ himself was known for his compassion towards animals, setting an example of kindness and respect, but he also recognized and upheld the unique role and responsibilities of humans within the created order.

### Concerning the Obligatory Nature of Uḍḥiyyah

While some Companions like Abu Bakr, Umar, and Abu Mas'ūd al-Anṣārī did not consider Uḍḥiyyah to be obligatory, they did not renounce it or advocate against it. Their actions were to prevent Uḍḥiyyah from being seen as a compulsory act, not to undermine its significance or validity. Even the narrations (athār) of Ibn Abbās and Bilal emphasize charity through meat, not plant-based alternatives, thereby upholding the importance of Uḍḥiyyah.

There are clear and distinct views within the classical schools of Islamic law (fiqh) regarding the duty of Uḍḥiyyah. On the one hand, we have the position held by the majority of scholars, who view Uḍḥiyyah as a Sunnah, a commendable act but not obligatory. This is based on narrations from prominent figures in Islamic history like Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Bilāl and Abu Mas'ūd al-Badri (may Allah ﷻ be pleased with them) This is also the view of eminent scholars such as Suwayd ibn Ghafalah, Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab, 'Alqamah, al-Aswad, 'Ata, Shafi'i, Ishāq, Abu Thawr, and Ibn al-Mundhir.

## Their Proofs

Ḥudhayfah ibn Usayd al-Ghifārī, is reported to have said: "I witnessed Abu Bakr and Umar, neither of them was sacrificing animals. In their talks, they disliked being imitated." Shafi'i said: "This means that they feared that those who saw them might think it is obligatory."<sup>5</sup>

Al-Bayhaqi intentionally added the statement of Shafi'i so to drive home the objective of transmitting the above tradition- that Uḍḥiyyah is not an obligatory act rather it is Sunnah Mu'akaddah.

Ibn Ḥazm transmits the same with a different chain in the chapter of "Uḍḥiyyah is a Good Sunnah", proving that it is Sunnah Mu'akaddah. It has been narrated to us from the path of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mahdi that Ḥudhayfah ibn Usayd al-Ghifārī, who said: "I have seen Abū Bakr and 'Umar and they did not sacrifice out of dislike to be followed."<sup>6</sup>

Al-Bayhaqi outlines exactly what is meant by Sunnah Mu'akaddah when he placed the following traditions under the chapter heading "Chapter: Sacrifice is a Sunnah that we like to adhere to and dislike to abandon."

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<sup>5</sup> أَخْبَرَنَا أَبُو الْحُسَيْنِ بْنُ بِشْرَانَ، أَنَا أَبُو الْحَسَنِ الْمِصْرِيُّ، نَا ابْنَ أَبِي مَرْيَمَ، نَا الْفَرِيَابِيَّ، ثَنَا سُفْيَانُ، أَبِيهِ، عَنْ مُطَرِّفٍ، وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ، عَنِ الشَّعْبِيِّ، عَنْ أَبِي سَرِيحَةَ بَعْغِي حَدِيثَهُ بِنَ أُسَيْدِ الْغِفَارِيِّ، قَالَ: "أَدْرَكْتُ أَبَا بَكْرٍ، أَوْ رَأَيْتُ أَبَا بَكْرٍ وَعُمَرَ لَا يُضَحِّيَانِ. فِي بَعْضِ حَدِيثِهِمْ: كَرَاهِيَةٌ أَنْ يُقْتَدَى بِهِمَا " قَالَ الشَّافِعِيُّ: يَعْني فَيُطْنُ مَنْ رَأَاهُمَا أَنَّهَا وَاجِبَةٌ

<sup>6</sup> وَرَوَيْنَا مِنْ طَرِيقِ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ مَهْدِيٍّ عَنِ سُفْيَانَ الثَّوْرِيِّ عَنِ مُطَرِّفِ بْنِ طَرِيفٍ عَنِ الشَّعْبِيِّ عَنِ أَبِي سَرِيحَةَ حَدِيثَهُ بِنَ أُسَيْدِ الْغِفَارِيِّ قَالَ: لَقَدْ رَأَيْتُ أَبَا بَكْرٍ، وَعُمَرَ وَمَا يُضَحِّيَانِ كَرَاهِيَةٌ أَنْ يُقْتَدَى بِهِمَا.

Other proofs that are used by proponets of this position are as follows:

It is related from Ikrimah, the freed slave of Ibn Abbās, from Ibn Abbās may Allah ﷺ be pleased with them, who used to give his slave two dirhams when Eid al-Aḍḥa came and say: "Buy meat with these and tell people that Ibn Abbās has offered a sacrifice."<sup>7</sup>

Mas'ūd Al-Anṣārī, may Allah ﷺ be pleased with him, is reported to have said: "I tend to abandon the sacrifice, although I can afford it; for fear that my neighbors might think it is obligatory on me."<sup>8</sup>

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr comments in al-Istidhkār and says, "Abū Mas'ūd al-Anṣārī said, "I refrain from the Eid sacrifice while I am able to afford it, fearing that my neighbors might think it is obligatory for me." Abū Umar said, "The Prophet ﷺ of Allah ﷺ performed sacrifice all his life, and it was not reported that he abandoned the Eid sacrifice. It was highly recommended; therefore, it is not suitable for a wealthy believer to abandon it. And the taḥfīq is with Allah ﷺ."<sup>9</sup>

Suwayd bin Ghafalah said, "I heard Bilāl saying, 'I do not care if I were to sacrifice a rooster, and I would rather donate its price to an orphan or a poor person than to slaughter it as a sacrifice.'. Al- Thawrī said, "I do not know if this was Suwayd's own opinion or something that Bilāl had said."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> فَذَكَرَ مَعْنَى مَا أُخْبِرْنَا أَبُو صَالِحِ بْنِ أَبِي طَاهِرِ الْعَنْبَرِيِّ، أَنبَأَ جَدِّي، يَحْيَى بْنُ مَنْصُورٍ، ثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَمْرٍو، أُخْبِرْنَا الْقَعْنَبِيُّ، ثَنَا سَلْمَةُ بْنُ بُحْتٍ، عَنْ عِكْرَمَةَ مَوْلَى ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا كَانَ إِذَا حَضَرَ الْأَضْحَى أُعْطِيَ مَوْلَى لَهُ دِرْهَمَيْنِ فَقَالَ: اشْتَرِ بِهِمَا لَحْمًا وَأَخْبِرِ النَّاسَ أَنَّهُ أَضْحَى ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ  
<sup>8</sup> أُخْبِرْنَا أَبُو الْحُسَيْنِ بْنُ بَشْرَانَ، أَنبَأَ أَبُو الْحَسَنِ عَلِيُّ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ الْمِصْرِيُّ، ثَنَا ابْنُ أَبِي مَرْيَمَ، ثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يُونُسَ الْفَرِيَابِيُّ، ثَنَا سُفْيَانُ، عَنْ الْأَعْمَشِ، عَنْ أَبِي وَإِلٍ، عَنْ أَبِي مَسْعُودِ الْأَنْصَارِيِّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: إِنِّي لَأَدْعُ الْأَضْحَى وَإِنِّي لَمُوسِرٌ؛ مَخَافَةَ أَنْ يَرَى جِيرَانِي أَنَّهُ حَنَمٌ عَلَيَّ  
<sup>9</sup> وَقَالَ أَبُو مَسْعُودِ الْأَنْصَارِيِّ إِنِّي لَأَدْعُ الْأَضْحَى وَأَنَا مُوسِرٌ مَخَافَةَ أَنْ يَرَى جِيرَانِي أَنَّهَا حَنَمٌ عَلَيَّ. قَالَ أَبُو عَمَرَ ضَحَى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ طُولَ عُمْرِهِ وَلَمْ يَأْتِ عَنْهُ أَنَّهُ تَرَكَ الْأَضْحَى وَنَدَبَ إِلَيْهَا فَلَا يَنْبَغِي لِمُؤْمِنٍ مُوسِرٍ تَرْكُهَا وَبِاللَّهِ التَّوْفِيقُ  
<sup>10</sup> عَنْ الثَّوْرِيِّ، عَنْ عِمْرَانَ بْنِ مُسْلِمٍ، عَنْ سُؤَيْدِ بْنِ عَقَلَةَ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ بِلَالَ يَقُولُ: «مَا أَبَالِي لَوْ ضَحَيْتُ بِدَيْكٍ، وَلَآنَ أَتَصَدَّقُ بِثَمَنِهَا عَلَى يَتِيمٍ أَوْ مُعْتَبَرٍ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِنْ أَنْ أَضْحِيَ بِهَا» قَالَ: فَلَا أَدْرِي أَسُؤِيدٌ قَالَهُ مِنْ قِبَلِ نَفْسِهِ أَوْ هُوَ مِنْ قَوْلِ بِلَالٍ

Hudhayfah ibn Usayd, said, "I saw Abu Bakr and Umar, and they did not perform sacrifice." Ikrimah said, "Ibn Abbās sent me with two dirhams to buy meat for him and he said, 'Whoever you meet, say his is Ibn Abbās's sacrifice.' Ibn 'Abd al-Barr comments on these traditions and says: "This is like Bilāl's action, as it was reported that he sacrificed a rooster. It is known that Ibn Abbās's intention by his saying was that the sacrifice is not obligatory, and that the meat he bought with two dirhams was sufficient for the Eid sacrifice. He was practically showing that sacrifice is not obligatory. This is also the meaning of the report from Bilāl if it is authentic. And the tawfiq is with Allah ﷻ."11

On the other hand, scholars like Rabi'ah, Mālik, al-Thawrī, al-Awzā'i, al-Layth, and Abū Hanīfah, and according to one report from A'mad as well as the view favored by Ibn Taymiyyah, is that Uḍḥiyyahh is obligatory for one who can afford it. This understanding is based on various ahādith, including the one narrated by Abū Hurayrah, where the Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever can afford it but does not offer a sacrifice, let him not come near our prayer-place."

In conclusion, while there are scholars who argue for Uḍḥiyyahh being obligatory and others who maintain that it is Sunnah, it's critical to understand that these are the two primary perspectives within the Islamic scholarly tradition regarding Uḍḥiyyahh, based on comprehensive study of textual evidence. These scholars have devoted their lives to understanding and interpreting the religion in its totality and context, and their differing views reflect the depth and richness of Islamic jurisprudence.

Therefore, any suggestion or assertion that Uḍḥiyyahh could be plant-based is without any basis in classical Islamic jurisprudence. The discourse around Uḍḥiyyahh has never included plant-based sacrifices, and such a notion goes beyond the understood parameters of the scholarly discourse. It introduces a completely new dimension that is not supported by the Qur'ān, ḥadith, or the established scholarly consensus.

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11 ومعلوم أن بن عباس إنما قصد بقوله أن الضحية ليست بواجبة وأن اللحم الذي ابتاعه بدرهمين أغناه عن الأضحية إغلاماً منه بأن الضحية غير واجبة ولا لازمة وكذلك معنى الخبر عن بلال لو صح وبالله التوفيق

It's essential that we respect the profound wisdom, knowledge, and intellectual rigor that underpins Islamic jurisprudence. While there is room for debate and differing opinions within this system, it is crucial that these debates adhere to the methodologies and principles established by the scholars, grounded in the Qur'ān and Sunnah. As such, the concept of a plant based Uḍḥiyahh, which lacks any textual basis or scholarly endorsement, falls outside the scope of accepted Islamic discourse.

## Refuting the Call for a Plant-Based Eid

The call for a "Plant-Based Eid" deviates from the authentic tradition, dismisses the Prophet's teachings, and challenges the sanctity of the ritual. Moreover, this shift disrupts the balanced dietary practices promoted by Islam, which includes the consumption of both plant and animal products. Islam encourages healthy eating, comprising grains, vegetables, non-vegan products like honey, milk, and meat. Thus, attempts to endorse a vegan Eid are inherently disruptive to these principles.

## Eating Meat: A Natural Divine Provision

Allah ﷻ has permitted the consumption of certain meats, which includes the ritual sacrifice on Eid. There is no moral objection to it when slaughtered or hunted following Islamic methods. While the current state of industrial farming raises ethical concerns, they don't undermine the legitimacy of consuming meat but call for reforms in farming practices.



## The Blessings of Grazing Livestock and Their Benefits in the Qur'ān

In the Qur'ān (16:5) Allah reminds man of His blessing. He states, "And the grazing livestock He has created for you; in them is warmth and [numerous] benefits, and from them you eat." This verse emphasizes the blessings and benefits bestowed upon humans through the creation of domestic animals, such as camels, cows, and goats.<sup>12</sup>

In the context of the early Arab society, which relied heavily on domestic animals for their economic livelihood, the Qur'ān highlights the significance of these animals. The verse mentions two specific benefits derived from them. Firstly, the wool from these animals provides warmth, enabling humans to make clothing that keeps them warm during winters. Secondly, humans can consume their meat and obtain other dairy products like milk, butter, and yogurt.

Furthermore, the verse alludes to the countless other benefits tied to the various parts of these animals, including their meat, skin, bone, and hair. It implies that throughout history and until the Last Day, humans will continue to discover and innovate ways to utilize and process these animal resources for food, clothing, medicine, and other domestic purposes.

The Qur'ān also acknowledges the aesthetic aspect of domestic animals. When these animals return home from grazing in the evening or are sent out to graze in the mornings, they serve as silent symbols of the strength and pride of their owners. Additionally, some animals, such as camels and oxen, are harnessed for transportation purposes, enabling humans to reach distant places and carry heavy loads.

It's important to note that while the Qur'ān highlights the benefits of grazing livestock, it also recognizes certain restrictions and prohibitions. For example, some animals are prohibited for consumption due to what is this? Nevertheless, the overall message is to appreciate the blessings and diverse benefits provided by these animals, which have been created for the well-being and sustenance of human beings.

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<sup>12</sup> وَالْأَنْعَامَ خَلَقَهَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا دِفْءٌ وَمَنْفَعٌ وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ

## Conclusion

As Muslims, we should strive to uphold the traditions and practices of our faith, rather than reshape them to align with modern ideologies. We all have a responsibility to ensure the ethical treatment of animals and to promote sustainable practices, but we should be cautious about discarding religious traditions based on personal preferences or external ideologies. The practice of Uḍḥiyah is not merely a symbolic ritual; it's a deeply ingrained part of our faith and identity that we should strive to uphold.

