

PHILOSOPHY OF THE HAJ SACRIFICE

(Extracted and translated from Tawzihul Manasik-e-Kamil-e-haj)

Every Haj pilgrim is required to sacrifice sheep in the course of his haj pilgrimage. It is one of those essential rituals to be performed on the day of Idd-el-Adha - the 10th of the month of Zul-Haj at Mina near Mecca. It is in commemoration of the great sacrifice of his son Ismail offered by Prophet Ebrahim in obedience of the command from Allah.

Perhaps over a million of animals are slaughtered every year on that occasion. But this tradition makes many wonder at the underlying philosophy. Is this mass slaughter of animals not a wastage of valuable meat, is the question being asked.

Let us first ponder over the divine injunctions for this essential ritual and big sacrifice. The holy Quran clearly stipulates in verse 33 of Surah Hajj:

"And to every nation he appointed acts of devotion that they may mention the name of Allah on what he has given them of the cattle quadrupeds (as their sustenance); So your God is One God, therefore to Him should you submit, and give good news to the humble."

And in the same Sura the verse 32 mentions the place of sacrifice:

"You have advantages in them till a fixed time, then their place of sacrifice is the Ancient House (refers to Mecca)".

Both these verses imply that for every nation a sacrifice had been fixed and the place of sacrifice for the Muslims is near Mecca (i.e. the sacrificial ground at Mina).

Thus the sacrifice is a clear command of Allah as stipulated in the holy Quran and it behoves every Muslim to accept it by strict obedience of divine command without any reservation.

Nevertheless it should be appreciated that this sacrifice at Mina of an animal is a grace from the All-Merciful Allah. If at the time when Hazrat Ibrahim a.s. was ready to sacrifice his young beautiful son Ismail in compliance with Allah's command, a sheep had not been sent down from heaven to be slaughtered in place of his son, the tradition of the slaughter of one's dear son would have remained for all the times to come. It would have remained incumbent upon every Haj pilgrim to sacrifice his son which

would have posed many problems. How many would have the strong faith and conviction to emulate the spirit of sacrifice in full submission to the will of Allah as displayed by Hazrat Ibrahim and Ismail?

This shedding of blood of the sacrifice once a year in a prescribed way on a specified place and date by millions of Muslims in reverence of God's signs could act as a great impact on the enemies of Islam even if all the meat were not consumable.

It shows the world that the Muslims can unitedly come forward on one platform to give sacrifice in upholding the principles and tenets of their holy faith.

It is not unusual for pilgrims to observe at the sacrificial place of Mina that quite a large number of poor pilgrims from Africa and other parts of the world wait on to collect the meat of the sheep sacrificed for their consumption or preservation for later use. Thus this sacrifice helps the poor to obtain nutritious food from the meat.

Not only inside Arabia but also from other neighbouring countries of Africa, Syria, Jordan and Yemen, thousands of shepherds are able to dispose off their sheep they have been rearing in the course of previous year thus enabling economic upliftment and cash earning of a large section of the lower class people. Does it not contribute towards the circulation of wealth from the high to the lower income groups ?

It could also be noticed that the Bedouin Arabs from the places around Mecca collect the sacrificed meat, separate it from bones and after cutting into small pieces, they place them on strings and thence dry the meat by hanging on high mountains in cooler areas. The preserved meat is then consumed gradually or resold on the market thus providing income to the poor.

Even then if due to excessively large number of pilgrims making the sacrifice, if all the meat is not consumable, there is no reason why a project of preserving it in cold storage cannot be considered. Perhaps canning of the surplus meat could also benefit other underdeveloped and poor countries.

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Thus let it be clearly understood that the Haj sacrifice is for obedience to the command of Allah and in reverence to those signs which lead toward Allah.