

THE WAY OF YOUR FATHER, IBRAHIM

By Muhammad Shafi

Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim
Al-hamdu lillahi wa salamun 'ala rasulillah

Udhiyyah, or the sacrificing of animals in the days of 'Eid al-Adha, is about a lot more than just eating more meat. When the Sahabah (r.a) asked about what it means, the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) replied; *"It is the way of your father, Ibrahim."*

The way of our father, Ibrahim.

Ibrahim (a.s), the father of the monotheistic traditions, their prophets and people, was faced with unimaginable challenges in his unflinching submission before Allah alone, and in every instance came through triumphant. Before the whole world and the whole of humanity, his life shines as an incredible example of unwavering devotion to Tawhid, the epitome of which is commemorated by the Udhiyyah.

We all know the story, how, after spending almost a century childless and then finally being granted a son, the overjoyed father is commanded to take the newborn and his young mother out to the wilderness of the desolate valley of Makkah... how, after having got there, he is abruptly ordered to turn around without another word and return alone... how, once out of sight, he raises up his hands with a heavy heart and flowing tears before his Maker and entrusts to Him his young and utterly defenceless family... how years were to pass before he is permitted to return to Makkah to visit but not to dismount from his camel... he sees his young one now walking and thrilled at the arrival of his father, and the mother of his child washes his feet before seeing him off with a brave face and resolve as firm as his own... then how, after years again, he is now permitted to return and this time to stay for some time with the child and his mother, making up for lost time as a father and a husband, every day a source of increased delight with the unravelling of the father/son relationship... how it is then when all fatherly feelings of love are at a passionate peak, having been rekindled after years of separation, his commitment to Allah is put to the ultimate test: he is commanded through a vision to put the child to the knife... how father and son brace themselves to submit completely before the Divine Will, demonstrating once and for all that devotion to the Allah overrides the love of all else... and how finally, when the child has been blindfolded and laid out at the alter and the father has sharpened his knife and is about to sacrifice the dearest of all worldly possessions ever entrusted to him, the grace of the Overwhelmingly Merciful intercedes, a ram replaces the resolute son on the alter, and it is triumphantly declared, "O Ibrahim, you have truly fulfilled the vision! Thus do we reward those who do good!"

This is the way of our father Ibrahim that Believers the world over enact in the days of 'Eid al-Adha. It is a symbol of the solid determination with which we are supposed, if we do truly believe, to surrender our all before the Will of the Cherisher of the Heavens and Earth, the One whom we serve and adore. The spirit of what the Udhiyyah represents does not simply begin at the butcher's and end with biryani, it is a statement from those in a state of submission – Muslims – of how complete and true that submission is.

And just as submission is the only state that finds the pleasure of the Maker – **"The only way of life (acceptable) before Allah is Submission (al-Islam)"** (3:19) – the expression of submission is the most beloved of expressions, too. *"No person performs an act more dear to Allah on the Day of Sacrifice ('Eid al-Adha) than the flowing of blood (of the sacrificial animal),"* said the Messenger (s.a.w), *"and truly the animal will come forth on Judgement Day with its horns and hair and hooves intact (to be weighed in the scales of good deeds). And truly the blood takes its place with Allah before it lands on the earth, so perform (the sacrifice) with an open and happy heart."* (at-Tirmidhi)

And precisely because this act brings about so much pleasure from Allah, the four days of 'Eid al-Adha are days of celebrating and rejoicing – and the meat of the slaughtered animals is Allah's hospitality towards those that demonstrate the spirit of selfless surrender through the Udhiyyah. The Prophet of Allah (s.a.w) is reported to have said; *"I had previously forbidden you from (storing) the meat of the sacrificed animals beyond three days, but now eat yourselves, feed others and store what you wish."* (Muslim & at-Tirmidhi)

The general practice of our community here of arranging for the Udhiyyah to be carried out 'back home' does not, in the light of the above, fulfil this aspect of the sacrifice. If the feast of sacrificed animals is hospitality extended from Allah to us, what ungracious guests are we to pass the plate on to others! The Prophet Ayyub (a.s) was once bathing when all of a sudden, golden locusts began to shower down on him. Immediately, he began to gather them all up in his garment. Allah addressed him saying; *"O Ayyub, had I not enriched from the need of what you see?"* *"Yes, indeed, by Your Honour! But I am never above being in need of your Grace,"* replied the true servant of Allah, Ayyub (a.s).

Sure, it's tempting to place orders for Udhiyyah in countries where you can get away with it for a tenner or less – solely out of our thoughts for the poor and needy, of course – but by not having at least one Udhiyyah performed here we don't only deprive ourselves and our families of the Grace of the most Gracious, we completely lose sight of the whole point of 'Eid al-Adha – the Festival of the Sacrifice. We don't even remember what it is we're rejoicing – not that that stops us rejoicing regardless, though, thanks to not having our eyes anywhere near the ball, our 'rejoicing' often

finds its way into hired limos and from there to untold crazy places with behaviour reflecting anything but submission. It has to be worrying that more rebellion is displayed to Allah on the day of celebrating the most breathtaking example of obedience than on any other. If *"...good deeds are loved by Allah in these ten days (of Dhul-Hijjah) like no other"* (al-Bukhari), how abhorrently offensive must blatant disregard for His Commandments be in them? Both of the 'Eids are powerful symbols of powerful truths – Allah's mercy and the total submission of true faith, and Allah does not take kindly to His symbols being shown disrespect to. ***"And whoso reverences the Symbols of Allah, that surely is from the piety of the hearts."*** (22:32)

A final note on the Udhiyyah: Jabir (r.a) relates that he saw the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) make a sacrifice of two rams saying; *"O Allah, (these were) from you and (and are now an offering back) to you, from Muhammad and his Ummah"* (Ahmad, Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah & ad-Darimi). Abu Dawud & at-Tirmidhi relate 'Ali (r.a) would make two sacrifices saying; *"My beloved asked me to make one for him."* Enough said?