

# The slaughter you choose not to see

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Acharya Prashant



 The slaughter you choose not to see Photo; File

## Visible ritual slaughter sparks outrage while industrial animal suffering remains systematically ignored every single day

To name a killing is to make it arguable. The moment an act of slaughter is declared, given a date, a theology, a visible place in the calendar, it becomes available to scrutiny, to protest, to the seasonal cycle of debate. The ego is comfortable with this. What it cannot examine, it cannot threaten; and what it has named, it can examine indefinitely, returning each year to the same argument, feeling the motion of moral engagement without disturbing anything it has arranged never to look at.

Every year, as Eid al-Adha approaches, the debate reappears: should the practice be restricted, is public sacrifice acceptable, are there hygiene concerns? The protests and defences line up on cue, and when the festival passes, the argument goes quiet for another twelve months. The animal that was slaughtered is forgotten; the position that was held is remembered.

The Eid sacrifice is, in a crucial sense, honest: it is named, it is visible, and its theology is stated openly as an act of surrender and devotion. One may dispute the logic; one cannot dispute the candour. The animal is not delivered in cellophane with the word “mutton” where the word “goat” should be. The knife is not concealed; the act is acknowledged. ▲



nourishment, of something unambiguously good. And the ego, which has perfected the art of not following threads to their conclusion, does not ask what the glass required.

Here is what it required.

A cow produces milk because she has given birth to a calf. Lactation is not a default biological state; it is a response to maternity. The dairy industry requires the cow to be pregnant repeatedly, because the alternative to pregnancy is no milk, and no milk is commercially unacceptable. When the calf is born, it is separated from the mother, typically within hours to a few days. The mother calls for the calf, the calf calls back, and this continues for days. Anyone who has heard this sound and refused to name it for what it is has performed a significant feat of not-hearing.

But here is the part that most people truly do not know, not because the information is hidden, but because the ego has arranged not to look for it. When the calf born to a dairy cow is male, he cannot produce milk and has no value in the dairy system. He cannot be returned to the herd, because the economics of maintaining a bull are prohibitive at industrial scale. He is therefore killed, typically within days of birth, or raised minimally and slaughtered for flesh within weeks or months. Globally, an estimated 21 million dairy calves are sent to slaughter every year by this mechanism alone. The milk in the glass and the meat on the plate are not separate industries with separate moral ledgers. They are one industry, sharing the same biology, the same cow, the same annual cycle of forced pregnancy and calf removal, and the dairy industry does not merely coexist with the slaughter industry: it continuously supplies it, every time a male calf is born, which is to say every other birth, which is to say always.

The person who says “I am not a meat-eater” while drinking milk is engaged in an arithmetic that does not add up. The separation they believe exists between themselves and slaughter is a product of the packaging, not of the supply chain. There is a body on the floor every time there is milk in the glass, and the two are not morally separable; they are not even economically separable. The dairy industry feeds the meat industry with a regularity and a volume that the language of “food choices” has been carefully engineered to obscure: “Dairy” in place of “repeated forced pregnancy,” “Veal” in place of “the male calf removed from his mother this morning,” “Beef” in place of “the animal the glass of milk required.” The vocabulary does not describe the supply chain; it replaces it.

This is why the annual controversy over visible ritual slaughter is, in a precise sense, a distraction. Not because the question of what occurs in the courtyard is unimportant, but because the outrage it generates among people who fund the same outcome through daily consumption is a form of selective attention the ego has quietly arranged for itself.

More than eighty billion land animals are slaughtered for food every year worldwide. The Eid sacrifice, across all countries where it is observed, accounts for an estimated 50 million animals annually: significant, and less than one-tenth of one percent of the total. The ego cannot feel eighty billion of anything; it can feel one goat dragged across a courtyard, because that is visible and arguable. The eighty billion are invisible, and the invisibility is not an accident of logistics: it is the ego’s preference, industrialised.

Now consider what every religious tradition that speaks of sacrifice actually instructs. The scriptures, when they speak of offering, of qurbani, of bali, are not speaking of the animal’s body but of the self’s attachment. What is to be placed on the altar is not the goat but the clinging, the ego that mistakes its borrowed structures for its fundamental nature, the possessiveness with which the self grips what it calls “mine.” The animal was a symbol, and the symbol required a mind capable of holding two things simultaneously: the outer act and its inner referent. When that double vision is lost, what remains is the literal act and the theological frame, but no longer the intent that made the act mean anything. The ego has found a way to perform surrender without surrendering, offering the goat and continuing unchanged, its identity confirmed rather than disturbed by the performance of devotion.

What the texts actually called for, across traditions, in language that varies but in instruction that does not, was the slaughter of the inner animal: the “I-I” that runs continuously beneath every act of devotion, the self-referential circuit that converts even sacrifice into an occasion for identity maintenance, the clinging that persists through the performance of release. That is what was to be placed on the altar, and no knife reaches it. ▲

close it. Before the knife is drawn, look into the animal's eyes: not glance at them, but look, and stay with what looks back. If you are awake in that moment, what you encounter is not a stranger. The innocence looking back at you is the same innocence that was yours before the scaffolding was installed, before the social conditioning layered itself over whatever you originally were, before the ego borrowed a name, a role, a tradition, and began calling the borrowing its self. The animal has borrowed nothing; it remains the honesty you claim to value. The glass of milk on the breakfast table is waiting for the same question.

The ego is sovereign and cannot be forced to see what it does not wish to see; it has its foreclosure moves: one person's choices make no difference, the problem is structural, nothing will change anyway. Every one of these is the ego protecting its position. The animal's suffering does not appear in any of them, and the suffering has been made invisible by the same mechanism that makes the ego's own operations invisible: the refusal to look.

To look into those eyes honestly is to find that you are looking into a mirror. And having seen yourself in the mirror, to proceed with the knife is something the ego can manage only by looking away, which it will. But the looking away, in that moment, is itself visible if you choose to see it, and the visibility of your own avoidance is something the ego cannot easily unfeel.

What has just been described is not a spiritual experience but a mechanical one. The ego that kills without seeing is the same ego that avoids itself in every other domain, and the avoidance practised at the most intimate and daily point of life, the plate, the glass, the courtyard, the festival meal, is the avoidance that carries forward. Every act of not-seeing at the table is practice for not-seeing everywhere else.

The goat needed the person holding the rope to ask one question before the knife was drawn: is this necessary? Not "is it traditional" or "is it prescribed," because these are the ego's foreclosure moves, designed to prevent the actual question from being reached.

The tradition protects, among other things, this: meat and dairy together occupy eighty-three percent of the world's agricultural land while producing eighteen percent of its calories. Is this necessary, given what you now know, given that alternatives exist, given what you have just seen in those eyes?

If the answer is no, what follows is between you and

Some will read this and change nothing. Others will find that a thread they had not followed before has been followed to its end, and that the following makes certain things harder to do with the same unconsciousness. The hand still reaches, but the reach now carries something it did not carry before, something that, even where it changes nothing, has quietly made the not-seeing slightly less automatic.

That is the only intervention this framework offers: not a verdict, not a programme, just the thread followed to wherever it leads. The knife is visible on Eid; the supply chain is not. Both require the same body on the floor. The question is not which one to argue about but which one you have arranged, very carefully, never to look at.

*Acharya Prashant is a philosopher and author whose work centres on self-inquiry and its application to contemporary life*

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