

## Religious Practices of the Batubara Community Through Local Wisdom Traditions: Perspectives from Surat Al-Baqarah 165

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### Abstract

*This research aims to produce theoretical ideas about religious practices in local wisdom traditions. The fact that the Batubara Malay community still performs a healing ritual known as Ubat-ubat forms the basis of this research. Besides Islam, elements of Hinduism and Buddhism can also be found in this healing ritual, reflecting a form of religious syncretism. The purpose of this study is to explain why the community continues to practice this ritual from the perspective of Surat Al-Baqarah verse 165. Qualitative methods involving observation and interviews were used to collect data. The results show that the Malay community of Batubara performs the Ubat-ubat ritual to avoid misfortune and express gratitude to the Creator who has provided sustenance to His servants through objects and nature. Whether performed individually or collectively, this ritual reflects the love of Allah, as stated in Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 165, which is the basis for strengthening the devotion of believers. The author hopes that this religious tradition will not become mystical or have a negative impact on the community in the future, both in terms of education, economy, and religion, even though this ceremony is held every year.*

**Keywords:** Religion, Local Wisdom, Tradition, Surat Al-Baqarah Verse 165

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memunculkan ide-ide teoretis tentang praktik keagamaan dalam tradisi kearifan local. Fakta bahwa masyarakat Melayu Batubara tetap melakukan sebuah ritual pengobatan yang dinamai ritual ubat- ubat yang menjadi dasar penelitian ini. Selain agama Islam, Hindu, dan Budha dapat ditemukan dalam ritual- ritual pengobatan, yang merupakan bentuk sinkretisme agama. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menjelaskan mengapa masyarakat masih melakukan ritual ini dalam perspektif surat Al- Baqoroh Ayat 165. Metode kualitatif observasi dan wawancara digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa masyarakat Melayu Batubara melakukan ritual ubat- ubat untuk menghindari bencana dan mengungkapkan rasa terima kasih kepada Khalid yang telah menyediakan makanan bagi hamba-hamba-Nya melalui benda dan alam semesta, baik secara individu maupun kolektif dilakukan menunjukkan Kecintaan Kepada Allah, Surat Al- Baqoroh 165 Sebagai landasan untuk menakan kecintaan orang beriman. Penulis berharap tradisi keagamaan ini tidak menjadi mistis dan tidak berdampak pada masyarakat di kemudian hari baik dari segi pendidikan, ekonomi, maupun agama, meskipun upacara ini dilakukan setiap tahun.



**Keywords:** Keagamaan, Tradisi, Kearifan Lokal, Surah Al-Baqoroh Ayat 165

## Introduction

Religious practices have long been an integral aspect of the Batubara people's way of life. Commonly referred to as rituals, these traditions are deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of the community. Since October 2019, the author has observed this religious activity in Bandar Sono Village, located in Nibung H Angus Sub-district, Batubara Regency, North Sumatra Province. The ritual is performed annually as an expression of gratitude, usually held at the end of the year. More than just a celebration, it is an important spiritual event that brings the community together through shared faith and reflection. Annual preparations are undertaken with a deep sense of devotion, signalling the ritual's central role in the cultural calendar. Its consistent performance over the years reflects the deep-rooted nature of the practice in the daily life and spiritual outlook of the community, underscoring their enduring commitment to preserving religious and cultural identity.

The people of Batubara are renowned for their rich and diverse cultural and religious traditions, which are often passed down through generations and become core elements of their collective identity. Religious practices in the region exhibit a unique blend of Islamic teachings and local customs. This syncretic approach integrates doctrinal elements of religion with local wisdom and cultural practices, resulting in distinct religious expressions within the community (Setiyani, 2021). Rather than generating tension, this fusion of traditions has fostered a sense of unity and mutual understanding among community members. This has allowed individuals to remain rooted in their heritage while articulating their faith in meaningful and contextually appropriate ways. This synergy between cultural traditions and religious practices is a hallmark of religious life in Coal.

Among the Malay community in Batubara, this form of ritual known as "Ritual Ubat-ubat" has been performed for centuries. It is considered an embodiment of local wisdom and serves as a communal event involving participants of all ages, including adults, teenagers and children. The ritual is usually led by a traditional authority or respected ritual leader, which underlines its sacred nature. Beyond its religious dimension, the ritual also serves as a social event that strengthens intergenerational bonds. Its continued practice highlights its role in preserving collective memory and fostering social cohesion. As such, it functions both as a religious expression and as a cultural tradition. Its wide appeal across generations ensures its vitality and relevance in contemporary society.

The main purpose of this ritual is to cultivate a deep transcendental connection with God. This is achieved through a series of symbolic actions and spiritual expressions, which are usually organised into groups based on the level of sacredness or commitment of the participants (Mulyadi, 2018). Each group may perform rituals with different intentions, shaped by individual or communal aspirations. The symbolic dimension of ritual imbues the ritual with multiple layers of meaning, elevating it beyond mere performance. The ritual allows participants to internalise spiritual values and reaffirm their faith in a structured and meaningful way. In addition, it also provides a space for communal reflection and spiritual renewal. For many participants, the ritual serves as a moment of purification and reorientation towards divine principles. As such, the ritual fulfils both personal and collective spiritual functions.



Beyond their spiritual significance, these rituals play an important role in preserving local history and cultural identity. These rituals serve as a medium through which individuals and groups construct, transmit, and sustain collective narratives and memories (Pratama et. all., 2023). Through active participation, community members reaffirm their ties to ancestral traditions and shared cultural values. As such, these rituals serve as living archives of cultural knowledge and historical continuity. It also serves as a form of symbolic resistance to the erosion of cultural heritage amidst the pressures of modernisation. As such, it empowers communities to remain grounded in their cultural roots while navigating the complexities of contemporary life. It reinforces a collective sense of cultural belonging and pride. The continued practice of the ritual is therefore a testament to the community's resilience and enduring commitment to cultural preservation.

These rituals are deeply embedded in the daily lives of Batubara people, shaping social norms, communal values and individual behaviours. It is widely recognised that individuals who participate in these rituals throughout their lives from birth to death tend to develop deep emotional and spiritual attachments to the traditions. This strong connection significantly influences their worldview, life choices, and sense of purpose. Therefore, the study of these traditional rituals is crucial to understanding how abstract concepts such as identity and existence are grounded in the lived cultural experiences of the people (Said & Saidy, 2024). These rituals offer valuable insights into how communities navigate life's transitions and uncertainties through culturally embedded practices. These rituals serve as a reflective mirror of the inner life and aspirations of the collective, which helps maintain a cohesive and meaningful social order.

This healing ritual is also a manifestation of the Batubara community's efforts to uphold harmony between humans and nature, a value system that they want to pass on to future generations. As a long-standing cultural tradition, this ritual is a form of local wisdom in Indonesia that is rich in values that promote social solidarity and shared prosperity (Hariandi et. all., 2025). The ritual reflects an integrated worldview where spiritual beliefs and environmental elements are seen as interconnected. It further strengthens the collective identity of the community and provides a sense of historical and cultural continuity. As a religious and cultural expression, the ritual symbolises resilience in the face of external change. Through this practice, Batubara communities articulate their values and worldview by harmonising the spiritual and natural worlds. Its continued relevance underscores the fundamental role of this ritual in the moral and cultural framework of the community.

The Ubat-ubat ritual has attracted the attention of researchers because of its uniqueness, especially in the context of local wisdom traditions that are rarely found in other religious practices. Performed in a Muslim cemetery under the remains of ancient sono tombs believed to be several centuries old and recently destroyed by natural burning, the ritual site itself has deep spiritual significance. This sacred location adds a profound symbolic dimension to the ritual. Local belief holds that participation in the Ubat-ubat Ritual can bring healing from illness and improved livelihoods. This belief, passed down through generations, is still strongly held by many in the community. Despite limited empirical evidence to support this claim, the participants' unwavering belief in the efficacy of this ritual maintains its relevance

and popularity. Hence, this ritual serves not only as a form of spiritual expression, but also as a source of perceived physical and metaphysical healing and well-being.

Local traditional leaders place significant cultural and spiritual importance on this ritual, which is held annually at the end of the year. Events typically include prayers at ancestral graves, offerings of offerings and white cloth, and communal activities that continue late into the night. These ritual components are believed to invite blessings and provide spiritual protection for the participants and the wider community. Even those who are not actively involved in the ritual are often drawn to observe it, realising its significance as a meaningful expression of local heritage. The atmosphere developed during the ceremony fosters communal solidarity and spiritual reflection. Its ceremonial aspect serves to connect the participants with their ancestors and God. As such, the ritual serves as a social and spiritual anchor for the Batubara people, strengthening community ties and reaffirming their cultural heritage.

However, from the perspective of Islamic teachings, the Qur'an, which is considered the primary source of divine law and guidance, emphasises the centrality of monotheism (tawhid). Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 165, underscores the importance of exclusive devotion to Allah and warns against excessive love or attachment to entities other than Him. This verse highlights the spiritual risks of engaging in practices that may lead to shirk, or associating partners with Allah, which is seen as a fundamental deviation from Islamic monotheism. In this regard, religious rituals should be critically evaluated to ensure their alignment with the fundamental principles of Islam. The Qur'anic message thus serves as a theological framework for discerning the validity and acceptability of ritual practices.

Previous research during 2020-2025 has highlighted the integration of Islamic teachings with local traditions, highlighting both harmony and tension in Indonesia's diverse society. Harahap et al. conducted qualitative case studies in Aceh, North Sumatra, and Yogyakarta, showing how local customs such as "Di'iet," "Kerah," and "Tepa Selira" have been revitalised to promote community harmony under the banner of religious moderation; they argue that local wisdom can actively support the development of moderate Islamic values in multicultural societies (Harahap et al., 2024). Muliadi et al. explore the Makulliwa Lopi ritual among coastal communities in Polewali Mandar, documenting the syncretic process by which fishermen adapt customary practices into Islamic norms, and conclude that this leads to increased social cohesion and moderate religiosity. (Muliadi et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Hamid, Ritonga and Nst examined the local wisdom of Dalihan Na Tolu among the people of South Tapanuli in East Nusa Tenggara, highlighting how ancestral traditions became a pillar of interfaith tolerance and moderate religious attitudes. (Keban et al., 2024).

While these studies underline the potential of local wisdom to strengthen moderate Islam, this study is different and supports the originality of your current research in several ways. Firstly, unlike Harahap et al.'s broader, multi-regional approach, this research provides an in-depth ethnographic focus on the Batubara Malay community, specifically the *Ubat-ubat Ritual* in Bandar Sono Village. Second, your research uniquely integrates a strong theological critique grounded in tawhid, specifically analysing practices through the lens of Surat Al-Baqarah 165-a level of doctrinal engagement absent from the referenced works. Third, the Batubara ritual's emphasis on healing and environmental symbolism, performed in a sacred



cemetery under a centuries-old *sono* tree, offers a different lens: the interweaving of spiritual healing, ecological awareness, and ancestor veneration, which is not addressed in other studies. Finally, by investigating how these rituals navigate potential *polytheism* while affirming communal identity, your work critically examines the tension between cultural preservation and religious orthodoxy, positioning it as a timely contribution to the ongoing discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia's pluralistic landscape.

The author expresses concern about the potential theological implications of rituals that could inadvertently deviate from the core principles of *tawhid*. This concern raises a crucial question: to what extent can Batubara communities uphold their adherence to Islamic orthodoxy while respecting longstanding traditional wisdom? This tension is an important area for scholarly inquiry and ongoing inter-community dialogue. Reflection on such matters invites Muslim communities to engage in critical appraisal of local rituals to determine whether they conform to Islamic principles or pose a risk of doctrinal deviation. This assessment should be informed by the Qur'anic framework, particularly the guidance provided in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 165. Understanding the boundary between culturally rooted expressions and potential religious offences is crucial to maintaining the integrity of the Islamic faith. The key challenge, therefore, is to harmonise the preservation of cultural heritage with an unwavering commitment to religious orthodoxy, without compromising the core values of the faith.

### Research Methods

This research was conducted in Bandar Sono Village, Batubara Regency, North Sumatra Province, where this religious ritual takes place at the end of the year. Community members participating in this event are expected to bring food with them, as the activity lasts for an entire day. The event is held in front of an ancient *sono* tree located in a public cemetery, which serves as an important spiritual site for the ritual. The gathering creates a communal atmosphere that emphasises spiritual reflection and cultural continuity. The location, combined with the timing and collective participation, increases the sacredness of the event. For many participants, the event is more than a tradition, but also a spiritual obligation and a symbol of identity. It reflects their enduring connection to the beliefs and practices of their ancestors.

The data collection techniques used in this study involved a literature review and interviews with local traditional and religious leaders. The journals selected for this research were published between 2019 and 2024 and accessed through Google Scholar. Each journal deemed relevant to the research theme was read thoroughly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic. These sources provided scholarly perspectives that enriched the analyses of the ritual practices. Interviewees included religious leaders, traditional leaders, and ritual participants within the community (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021). Their insights are crucial in contextualising the meaning and significance of rituals within local cultural and religious frameworks. The combination of literature and first-hand narratives provides a balanced and in-depth exploration of the phenomenon.

The author uses *imaginative ethnographic* methodology, as introduced by Paul Willis. This method allows the researcher to actively participate in, observe, and describe the

medicinal practices of the Malay community in Batubara Regency (Darmalaksana, 2020). Through this approach, the author can immerse herself in the lived experiences of the community while interpreting their symbolic and cultural expressions. This approach provides a flexible and reflective lens to explore how meaning is constructed in ritual practices. Rather than being a passive observer, the researcher engages with the participants, capturing not only the observable actions but also the emotions, beliefs, and social interactions embedded in the ritual. This ethnographic engagement offers a nuanced understanding of the cultural logic behind the ritual. Ultimately, this methodology enriches this research with a depth and authenticity that is difficult to achieve through conventional methods alone.

## Results and Discussion

There are two main perspectives on the relationship between religion and culture. The first views culture as an intrinsic component of religion, while the second views religion as part of culture. In many societies, religion is often deeply integrated into everyday cultural practices (Mulyadi, 2018). This dynamic relationship illustrates how spiritual beliefs are embedded in local traditions and customs. In Batubara, the annual *Ubat-ubat* healing ritual is an example of this integration, serving as a religious ceremony rooted in cultural practices. At the centre of this ritual is prayer, which is a core element of religious observance.

Experts have identified four important components commonly found in religious rituals (Karim et. all. 2021; Rochanah, 2019):

1. Shrine ceremonies are usually held at ancestral graves or locations of spiritual significance.
2. Sacred time rituals are aligned with spiritually meaningful dates or annual cycles.
3. Ritual objects and implements include flowers, food offerings, and traditional symbolic objects.
4. The appointed ritual leader is usually a community elder, religious authority, or respected customary figure.

This study reveals that the religious practices of the people of Batubara are heavily influenced by local wisdom and traditions passed down through generations. Although the majority of Batubara residents identify as Muslim, many rituals blend Islamic teachings with indigenous customs, resulting in a form of religious syncretism that reflects both cultural heritage and devotion to Islam. (Aksa & Nurhayati, 2020; Husna & Maola, 2023). Rather than considering these rituals to be in conflict with Islamic beliefs, community members often interpret them as complementary. This suggests a culturally adaptive approach in which spiritual needs are harmonised with local expressions. Religion in Batubara is therefore not just a belief system, but a living tradition shaped by historical and cultural contexts.

These rituals are usually performed as an expression of gratitude to Allah SWT and as a request for protection and prosperity. It functions simultaneously as a cultural celebration and a religious obligation, strengthening communal bonds and individual piety. Symbolic offerings and communal prayers reinforce the spiritual atmosphere of these rituals. Through participation, individuals reaffirm shared values and religious commitments, underscoring the multifaceted significance of the ritual.



The *Ubat-ubat* ritual, held annually by the Malay community of Batubara, has been preserved from generation to generation with unwavering devotion. The ceremony is usually held in a cemetery or public space to ensure wide participation. Notably, the ritual welcomes people from outside Bandar Sono Village, including from Asahan Regency, Tanjung Balai City and Medan, reflecting its regional importance and inclusive nature. Intergenerational transmission strengthens the legitimacy of the culture and ensures its survival amidst modernisation. The annual gathering serves as a moment of spiritual reflection, reaffirming community values and encouraging sustainability.

The ritual is usually performed in the morning, around 7am, at the village cemetery. Community members gather at predetermined meeting points or directly at the cemetery, where they are received by residents from nearby hamlets in Nibung Hangus Sub-district. These collective gatherings highlight the hospitality, solidarity and communal ethos of the ritual. Participants often bring offerings and food, demonstrating their respect and anticipation. The event serves as a cultural celebration and spiritual pilgrimage, characterised by solemnity and a deep sense of shared purpose.

Viewed as a moral and spiritual obligation, these healing rituals have been institutionalised as annual acts of gratitude. These rituals allow communities to express their gratitude for divine blessings, especially in areas such as health and agricultural success. The ceremony brings individuals together in shared spiritual aspirations and collective memory, symbolising devotion and interdependence. The ceremony also honours the ancestors who initiated the tradition, strengthening cultural continuity and local identity.

In particular, the ritual also serves to give thanks for bountiful agricultural produce and ask for protection against pests and crop failure. This highlights the agrarian roots of the ritual and its relevance to rural livelihoods. The practice exemplifies a form of *spiritual ecology* where humans, nature and the divine are interconnected. The ritual emphasises the belief that sustenance and well-being are granted through divine intervention. It combines religious devotion with practical concerns, strengthening survival and social cohesion.

In traditional societies, the term "ritual" is often associated with mystical offerings and supernatural beliefs. For many indigenous peoples, rituals are a means of expressing gratitude to God and asking for protection. These ceremonies may include sacred objects or locations such as ancient trees, caves, or symbolic statues believed to have spiritual powers. The sacred is thus conceptualised as something that includes both divine and natural elements, a worldview that reflects religious syncretism. Historically, rituals served to connect humans with forces beyond their control, a belief system that persisted until the rise of formal religions such as Islam.

Prior to the arrival of Islam, the people of Batubara adhered to animism and dynamism. Located along the Strait of Malacca, Batubara's coastal geography made it receptive to outside influences while maintaining traditional healing practices as a way to avoid misfortune. These rituals reflect a longstanding relationship with nature and the supernatural world. They are not limited to physical healing, but also aim to maintain spiritual balance and mutual safety. The prayers offered in these rituals are considered prayers of protection for the entire village, reinforcing shared cultural beliefs and values. The *Ubat-ubat* ritual functions as both a religious and agrarian ceremony, seeking divine blessings for health, protection and

agricultural success. It combines religious devotion with local ecological concerns, demonstrating the interconnectedness of faith, nature and survival. Community participation in this annual event underscores its importance in maintaining social resilience and cultural identity.

The ceremony begins with an opening speech by the traditional leader, expressing appreciation for the collective financial, physical and spiritual contributions that ensure the success of the ritual. This is followed by a collective prayer led by a religious leader, which reinforces spiritual unity. Afterwards, the participants share a meal together, symbolising gratitude and togetherness. This inclusivity not only applies to the village itself, but also allows participation from neighbouring areas. The openness of this ritual underlines its wider cultural and spiritual significance.

Traditional leaders in Batubara play an important role as mediators of culture and religion. They provide guidance that harmonises Islamic teachings with local values such as social harmony and ecological balance (Husna & Maola, 2023). Through their leadership, the convergence between Islamic spirituality and local wisdom is maintained and made relevant to contemporary life. Their efforts ensure that cultural transmission occurs in a way that remains consistent with Islamic ethical standards.

Women also play an important role in the preparation and execution of rituals. Two days before the event, women engage in collective shopping and food preparation activities, which reinforce solidarity and shared responsibility. Those who are unable to collaborate in groups are encouraged to prepare food at home. This gender inclusion reflects the communal and integrative nature of traditional Batubara practices, where spiritual and logistical contributions are shared based on social roles.

The use of symbolic media in the *tolak bala* ritual is an integral part of the performance and its perceived efficacy (Pratama et. all., 2023). These objects are rich in philosophical meaning and cultural significance (Rochanah, 2019). They translate abstract beliefs into tangible forms that resonate with participants. The main ritual media include:

1. Agarwood is believed to attract good spirits.
2. Yellow Pulut is served as a symbolic food for the spirits.
3. An animal offering involving parts of a buffalo, cow or goat, symbolising wholeness and sacrifice.
4. Tepung Tawar is a traditional charm that uses natural ingredients (setawe, sedinging, adai uso) and symbolic liquids such as cucumber water and lime water to ward off evil (Maulidin & Nawawi, 2024).

From an Islamic theological perspective, *Surah Al-Baqarah* verse 165 asserts that only Allah is worthy of love and worship. Excessive attachment to something other than Allah can lead to *shirk* (associating partners with Allah) (Hariandi et. all., 2025). This verse serves as a guiding principle for Batubara communities in ensuring that their rituals do not compromise the integrity of *tawhid* (the oneness of God). Although many traditional practices are retained, the community is increasingly conscious of aligning them with Islamic principles.

This awareness prompts critical reflection on ritual intentions and theological boundaries. Despite engaging in culturally rich ceremonies, Batubara Muslims go to great lengths to clarify that their prayers and offerings are directed solely to Allah. Religious





leaders often liaise with traditional authorities to ensure the practices' conformity with Islamic doctrine. (Said & Saidy, 2024). Thus, the community maintains a selective approach: preserving those customs that are compatible with Islam while modifying or discarding those that are not.

#### A. An Analytical Exploration of Surat Al-Baqarah 2:165 and its Relevance to Local Rituals in Batubara

Surat Al-Baqarah verse 165

*Meaning: "And there are those who take other (worshippers) besides Allah as a counterpart to Allah: They love them as they love Allah. But those who believe are overflowing with love for Allah. If the wrongdoers could see, they would see that to Allah belongs all dominion, and Allah is very severe in His punishment." (Qur'an 2:165, translation by Yusuf Ali)*

This verse plays an important role in Islamic theology by emphasising monotheism (tawhid) and warning against shirk, the act of associating partners with Allah. It emphasises that true love, devotion and worship must be directed solely to Allah, and that misplacing such devotion, even in forms that do not outwardly look like idolatry, can lead to spiritual deviation.

#### B. Theological Dimension The centrality of Tawhid

From a theological point of view, this verse asserts that emotional and spiritual attachments should be exclusive to Allah. The Arabic term *yuhibbūnahum ka-hubbillāh* ("they love them as they love Allah") implies that even emotional loyalty if directed towards entities other than Allah in a way that competes with devotion to Allah can be a form of hidden shirk (*syirik khafī*). In the context of the *Ubat-ubat* ritual in Batubara, this raises important theological questions:

1. Are symbolic elements (such as offerings, sacred trees, or spiritual mediums) honoured in a way that suggests divine intervention?
2. Do participants see these objects as intermediaries or as symbols through which their prayers are directed only to God?

If the latter, then the practice may be within the bounds of permissible cultural expression that does not contradict the essence of tawhid. If the former is true, however, then the practice risks crossing over into religious syncretism that violates Qur'anic tawhid.

#### C. Hermeneutical Insights of Love, Devotion, and Worship

This verse highlights the nuanced difference between worldly love and spiritual devotion. It warns against elevating anything to a status where it becomes the object of supreme love and reverence. Scholars such as Ibn Kathir, Al-Qurtubi, and Sayyid Qutb interpret this verse as a warning against internalised idolatry, where love or dependence on creatures or objects can rival one's devotion to Allah. In traditional societies like Batubara, where sacred symbols and ritual media (e.g., *agarwood*, *fresh flour*, animal sacrifices) are central to community practices, this verse serves as a hermeneutical tool. It allows scholars and community leaders to distinguish between cultural symbolism and religious

substitution. The critical criterion is *niyyah* (intention): Are these practices performed with the intention of pleasing Allah, or do they reflect reliance on intermediaries?

#### D. Sociocultural Implications of Ritual Practices and Syncretism

Batubara society exemplifies a syncretic religious identity, shaped by centuries of interaction between animist traditions and Islamic orthodoxy. *Ubat-ubat* rituals reflect cultural memory, agrarian gratitude and communal cohesion. However, its elements such as sacred trees, ancestor offerings, and spirit summoning ingredients have similarities with pre-Islamic animist beliefs. In this regard, *Surat Al-Baqarah 2:165* serves as a critical lens to evaluate:

1. How rituals evolved under the influence of Islam;
2. How Islamic values are localised without losing theological clarity;
3. How to balance respect for cultural heritage with commitment to Islamic monotheism.

A critical analysis shows that the intentional framework of the ritual plays a decisive role. If the *Ubat-ubat* ceremony is seen as a symbolic expression of gratitude to Allah and not as an invocation of spirits or natural forces, then it may be theologically valid. However, ambiguity in belief and practice opens the door to the *syubhat* (doubtful things) that Islamic scholars warn against.

#### E. Practical Applications and Religious Reform

Surah Al-Baqarah 2:165 not only warns but also guides people towards greater religious clarity. For a society like Batubara, this involves:

1. Educate participants on the meaning and limitations of ritual symbols;
2. Encourage spiritual sincerity (*ikhlas*) and right belief;
3. Facilitate dialogue between religious scholars and cultural custodians to ensure practices are in line with Islamic principles.

In many Muslim societies undergoing similar cultural-religious transformations, this approach has led to a reinterpretation of traditional rituals, preserving their communal function while refining their theological content. Surah Al-Baqarah verse 165 provides a profound theological and ethical framework for evaluating religious practices, especially in syncretic contexts such as Batubara. The verse underscores that while cultural expressions of faith are valuable, they should not obscure the central tenet of Islam, which is tawhid. The verse calls for intentionality, theological awareness, and spiritual discipline. Thus, the people of Batubara, while honouring their ancestral traditions, must continually assess their practices in light of Qur'anic injunctions to ensure that their love, devotion and worship remain directed only to Allah.

### Conclusion

A technique or method to make a tradition sacred is called ritual. Since rituals are religion in action, myths, and social customs and religions are created and maintained through rituals. In a broader sense, the term "ritual" refers to a set of activities that include movements, chants, prayers, readings, and the use of tools. These activities may be performed individually or collectively and may be led by a traditional leader or figure in the ritual. Rituals are performed to establish a transcendental connection with something considered divine. Usually, rituals are performed with various symbolic methods and are categorised into



groups according to how sacred or serious they are to certain people. The author delves deeper into the traditions of the Batubara Malay community. From an Islamic point of view, some traditions are not in accordance with Islamic teachings and can damage one's faith. The same goes for the healing traditions involved in these processes. Some practices go against Islamic beliefs and can make people who believe in mystical powers think that these rituals can remove bad luck.

The religious practices of the Batubara community show the synergy between Islamic teachings and local wisdom. Surat Al-Baqarah, verse 165, provides a framework of understanding that can help the community to maintain their monotheism while still appreciating and preserving the culture and traditions that have become part of their identity. Their local wisdom is still seen as a means to enrich worship, with full awareness that everything must be offered only to Allah, in accordance with the message in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 165. This research opens up space for further studies on the dynamic relationship between religion and culture, and how communities can maintain a balance between the two without sacrificing one of them.

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