

The Eid of Sacrifice

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On the occasion of Hajj and Eid, the best theme to reflect on is "Sacrifice". All Hajj and Eid rituals are about sacrifice. From the financial and mental preparation to the journey to Makkah to the different steps guided by the dos and do nots one may understand or not. It's all about giving and letting go of money, time, comfort and pride. Likewise, Eid-ul-Adha is the festival where we offer a sacrificial animal to Allah to commemorate the great courage and sacrifice of our father Ibrahim (Peace be upon him). It is also about learning how to give away the most precious things we think or assume we own. We read in the Qur'an: **"Then, when (the son) reached (the age of) (serious) work with him, he said: "O my son! I see in vision that I offer you in sacrifice: now see what is your view!" (The son) said: "O my father! Do as you are commanded: you will find me, if Allah so wills, one practicing Patience and Constancy!" So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice), We called out to him, "O Abraham! "You have already fulfilled the vision!" thus indeed do We reward those who do right. For this was obviously a trial. And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice" (37:107)**

The questions, which may come to mind in this context are: Did Allah really want Ibrahim (P.b.u.h.) to kill Isma'il (P.b.u.h.)? And would any father accept this trial let alone pass it? The answer for both is certainly not! Allah Almighty tested Ibrahim (P) to see how committed he was to His cause. Any person would argue: Well! Didn't Allah test him when he was thrown in a ditch with burning fire when he was still in Mesopotamia! The answer is: the two trials are different because the first one led to a salvation for Ibrahim (P) and rescue from the plan of Nemrud the tyrant king and in the second trial it was a divine order to do something that any father would refuse to do. This last trial was certainly the toughest. Yes! It was tougher than to be thrown in the fire for the following reasons:

1- In this trial, Ibrahim (P) was ordered to kill his only son at that time after he awaited for an offspring for a very long time. When Isma'il was born Ibrahim was in his mid eighties. Then when the son was 14 Allah wanted him as an offering for sacrifice. Why would he have to kill a son that he waited for his advent after decades of prayers and supplications?

2- When Ibrahim was thrown in fire he was a young independent man who did not have anybody depending on him. It's true no one could ever go through this test like he did, but thinking for others; his family and followers is not easier; sometimes parents would sacrifice their lives to save their children. Therefore, the option of dying instead of his son for sacrifice was not there. The most amazing thing is that the killer had to be the father himself. From another angle, this act could not be seen as an injustice or oppression of a tyrant such as Nemrud, but it was an order from Allah who does not allow oppression and injustice.

3- With patience and perseverance, some people can endure some physical pain and suffer

some material losses which could lead even to death, but to make others – especially one's child- suffer and feel pain and death is far more painful. In this case, the father is ordered to slaughter his son without showing the reason for that.

Allah calls this trial a great one when He says, **“For this was obviously a great trial?”** We can keep reasoning and elucidating, but we will probably never reach a comprehensive conclusion. However, the most important thing we should keep in mind is that Allah knows better than us even if we sometimes think that a certain action is not clear to us and why we perform it. We should accept and submit to Allah as Ibrahim (P) did. As a matter of fact, one of the meanings of Islam is acceptance.

The religion of Islam is indeed about sacrifice in order to attain the pleasure of Allah, piety, and righteousness. Muslims won't succeed in their lives until they learn again how to sacrifice the endeared things to their hearts such as time and money among themselves beginning with their families, relatives, and neighbours and every person who needs help or cause which requires support. In fact, the principal secret behind the success of the first Muslim generations was indeed their sacrifice for the religion of Islam and their critical understanding that unless one gives away one cannot receive. This was the result of a deep appreciation of Islam and its essence. Allah (swt) says, **“By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you give (freely) of that which you love; and whatever you give, of a truth Allah knows it well.”** (3:92)

And He also says, **“It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity, to fulfil the contracts which you have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing.** (2:177)

Therefore, if we want Islam to flourish again in our hearts, families, communities, centers and society the we simply need to sacrifice more and more of our time, wealth, experience, and skills. The companions of the Prophet (S) always saw themselves as if they were neglecters of their duties and many of them did not content with what many people today would consider as a good practice of Islam.

On another note, offering a sacrifice on the day of Eid is not something optional, but it is rather an obligatory act for those who can afford to do it. Many people think that it's okay not to offer a sacrifice to Allah on the tenth of Dhil-Hijjah and be content with only the Eid prayer. I say to all my dear Muslim brothers and sisters: Eid -ul-Adha is not just about eating lamb meat and distributing it to the poor people, but it is more about the ritual of the sacrifice and the offering of the animal to Allah (swt). Unfortunately, many young generations have not experienced the spirit of Eid-ul-Adha as we used to do when we were children and as it's still

engraved in our minds. We have always called this Eid of Sacrifice the “Big Eid” because Eid-ul-Fitr comes after Ramadan, which is a great month where everybody fasts, and this Eid has been always a Eid where we enjoyed the actual sacrifice and the family ambiance where everyone helps to clean, cook, share and distribute the meat. I hope this Eid will mean something for the younger generations to come in the next ten or twenty years from now insha Allah.