



IN THE NAME OF ALLAH THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL

SACRIFICE – HAVE WE DONE OUR FAIR SHARE FOR THE SAKE OF ALLAH?

INTRODUCTION

When the month of Dhulhijjah is approaching, we always remind ourselves of the sacrifice of our prophet Ibrahim (AS) when he was Ordered by Allah to sacrifice his son, Ismail (AS). Then Allah Ordered Ibrahim (AS) to sacrifice an animal as a replacement. (Qur'an surah 37 verses 102 - 111.

We see the sacrifice made by the prophets and various characters in the Qur'an:

1. Prophet Nuh (AS)
2. Prophet Musa (AS)
3. Prophet Isa (AS)
4. Asiyah
5. Maryam
6. The magicians in the time of the pharaoh and Musa (AS)
7. The people of the cave
8. The people of the Trench (Ashabul ukhdood) in surah al Burooj
9. The mother of Musa (AS)

We also read the stories of the sahabah of prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon him), with the likes of Abu Bakr (RA), Bilal (RA), those Muhajireen who did the Hijrah, those Ansar who helped them (may Allah be pleased with all of them), etc.

Other examples

FIRST

And of mankind is he who would sell himself, seeking the Pleasure of Allah. And Allah is full of Kindness to (His) slaves. Qur'an surah 2: 207

Ibn `Abbas, Anas, Sa`id bin Musayyib, Abu `Uthman An-Nahdi, `Ikrimah and several other scholars said that this Ayah was revealed about Suhayb bin Sinan Ar-

Rumi. When Suhayb became a Muslim in Makkah and intended to migrate (to Al-Madinah), the people (Quraysh) prevented him from migrating with his money. They said that if he forfeits his property, he is free to migrate. He abandoned his money and preferred to migrate, and Allah revealed this Ayah about him. `Umar bin Khattab and several other Companions met Suhayb close to the outskirts of Al-Madinah at Al-Harrah (flat lands with black stones). They said to him, "The trade has indeed been successful." He answered them, "You too, may Allah never allow your trade to fail. What is the matter" `Umar told him that Allah has revealed this Ayah (2:207) about him. It was also reported that Allah's Messenger said, "The trade has been successful, O Suhayb!"

SECOND

(Verily, Allah has purchased of the believers their lives and their properties for (the price) that theirs shall be the Paradise. They fight in Allah's cause, so they kill (others) and are killed. It is a promise in truth which is binding on Him in the Tawrah and the Injil and the Qur'an. And who is truer to his covenant than Allah Then rejoice in the bargain which you have concluded. That is the supreme success.) (9:111)

When Hisham bin `Amr penetrated the lines of the enemy, some people criticized him. `Umar bin Al-Khattab and Abu Hurayrah refuted them and recited this Ayah:

THIRD

And those who, before them, had homes (in Al-Madinah) and had adopted the Faith, love those who emigrate to them, and have no jealousy in their breasts for that which they have been given (from the booty of Bani An-Nadir), and give them (emigrants) preference over themselves, even though they were in need of that. And whosoever is saved from his own covetousness, such are they who will be the successful. Qur'an surah 59: 9

Abu Bakr As-Siddiq gave away all his wealth in charity and Allah's Messenger asked him,

« مَا أَبْقَيْتَ لِأَهْلِكَ؟ »

(What did you keep for your family,) and he said, "I kept for them Allah and His Messenger."`

Ikrimah (bin Abi Jahl) and two other wounded fighters were offered water when they were injured during the battle of Al-Yarmuk, and each one of them said that the sip of water should be given to another of the three wounded men. They did so even though they were badly injured and craving water. When the water reached the

third man, he and the other two died and none of them drank any of the water! May Allah be pleased with them and make them pleased with Him.

Al-Bukhari recorded that Abu Hurayrah said, "A man came to the Prophet (Peace and Blessings be upon him) and said, 'O Allah's Messenger! Poverty has stuck me.' The Prophet sent a messenger to his wives (to bring something for that man to eat) but they said that they had nothing. Then Allah's Messenger said,

« أَلَا رَجُلٌ يُضَيِّفُ هَذَا، اللَّيْلَةَ، رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ »

(Who will invite this person or entertain him as a guest tonight; may Allah grant His mercy to him who does so) An Ansari man said, 'I, O Allah's Messenger!' So he took him to his wife and said to her, 'Entertain the guest of Allah's Messenger generously.' She said, 'By Allah! We have nothing except the meal for my children.' He said, 'Let your children sleep if they ask for supper. Then turn off the lamp and we go to bed tonight while hungry.' She did what he asked her to do. In the morning the Ansari went to Allah's Messenger who said,

« لَقَدْ عَجِبَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَوْ ضَحِكَ مِنْ فُلَانٍ وَفُلَانَةَ »

(Allah wondered (favourably) or laughed at the action of so-and-so and his wife.) Then Allah revealed,

﴿ وَيُؤْتِرُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ ﴾

(and they give them preference over themselves even though they were in need of that). " Al-Bukhari recorded this Hadith in another part of his Sahih. Muslim, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i collected this Hadith. In another narration for this Hadith, the Companion's name was mentioned, it was Abu Talhah Al-Ansari, (may Allah be pleased with him).

Imam Ahmad recorded that Anas said, "The Muhajirin said, 'O Allah's Messenger! We have never met people like those whom we emigrated to; comforting us in times of scarcity and giving us with a good heart in times of abundance. They have sufficed for us and shared their wealth with us so much so, that we feared that they might earn the whole reward instead of us.' He said,

(No they won't, as long you thanked them for what they did and invoked Allah for them.)" I have not seen this version in the other books. Al-Bukhari recorded that Yahya bin Sa'id heard Anas bin Malik, when he went with him to Al-Walid, saying, "The Prophet called Ansar to divide Al-Bahrayn among them. The Ansar said, 'Not until you give a similar portion to our emigrant brothers.' He said,

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REWARDS FROM ALLAH

Surah 61:

"O You who believe! Shall I guide you to a commerce that will save you from a painful torment.

That you believe in Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad Peace and Blessings be upon him), and that you strive hard and fight in the Cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives, that will be better for you, if you but know!

(If you do so) He will forgive you your sins, and admit you into Gardens under which rivers flow, and pleasant dwelling in Gardens of 'Adn - Eternity ['Adn (Edn) Paradise], that is indeed the great success.

And also (He will give you) another (blessing) which you love, help from Allah (against your enemies) and a near victory. And give glad tidings (O Muhammad Peace and Blessings be upon him) to the believers."

WHAT IS SACRIFICE?

"Say (O Muhammad): "Verily, my *Salat* (prayer), my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allah, the Lord of the '*Alamin* (mankind, jinns and all that exists). He has no partner. And of this I have been commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims." Al An'am 6: 162-163

Let us now look at what sacrifice means. What should we sacrifice? What sacrifices are more difficult to make? What sacrifices deserve to be called great?

The Two Types

Sacrifice, as we have seen, simply means to give up things which we love and hold dear, which in our eyes have some value for us. We may possess them now or hope

and aspire to have them in future. The things may be tangible and concrete or intangible and abstract. Important among concrete things are time, money, worldly possessions, physical abilities, life. Important abstract things may include our ties of love and affection, especially familial, likes and dislikes, preferences and prejudices, views and opinions, desires and aspirations, pleasures and comforts, status and roles, or merely our ego.

Let me state here three basic principles which, in my view, are important to understand if we want to have a full understanding of sacrifice.

Firstly, giving up something deserves to be called a sacrifice only when we love and value it. Hence, it is difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between the concrete and the abstract. In the final analysis, every sacrifice is a sacrifice of our love or value. When we give away money, or life, or a familial tie for the sake of Allah, what we really give up, and that makes it a sacrifice, is our love for money, life or a relative, not the object itself.

Secondly, it is more difficult and more necessary to sacrifice abstract things rather than the concrete.

Thirdly, we can give up something we love and to which we attach value only for something we love more and to which we attach greater value.

Tangible Sacrifices

We need not dwell here for long upon the sacrifices of concrete things. We know, we realize and we recognize very well the need and importance of such sacrifices, even if we are at times unable or, quite often find it hard, to make them. But, once we dedicate ourselves to a cause, each one of them may be required to be given at its own time and place. Hence, we should pause to note certain of their more important characteristics.

Time

Time is our most precious commodity. Nothing we covet and desire in life can be obtained except by spending time, and spending it properly, in its pursuit. We maybe spending our time to seek pleasure, to earn money and worldly possessions, to work, to enjoy, or we may simply idle it away - doing nothing.

Time is the first thing that Allah demands of us. It takes time to fight in the way of Allah. It takes time to pray. It takes time to do Da'wah. It takes time to read the Qur'an. It takes time to visit the sick. Every moment should be spent in seeking His pleasure, in fulfilling our commitment to Him. But, if you reflect more deeply, you will realise that what you are really required to sacrifice is not your time. It is the things in whose pursuit your time is being spent, things which may be contradictory to your goals in life, meaningless, unimportant or less important compared to Allah's

cause. Therefore to give your time for Islam, before anything else, you must be ready to sacrifice many other things which claim your time.

How can you bring yourself to sacrifice these things and devote your time to Allah?

Remember that time is one thing you cannot hold on to even for a moment. It must continuously slip away from you, in whatever way you choose to spend it. Its value to you is simply what you gain from it. Time will melt away, what you earn will stay.

Remain ever-conscious that every moment in time, depending on how you choose to spend it, will turn into either eternal bliss or an endless misery. Remembering this will strengthen you most in sacrificing your time. The moments you cannot hold on to today will return to you tomorrow, never to go away. Why should you not sacrifice earning something which you will only find turning into a never-ending misery and remorse?

So, while time passes by, reckon deeply: what are you gaining - something transient or something abiding? Will it be a remorse or a joy? What preference has Islam in your time? What proportion of it is devoted to Allah? "Let every person look to what he has forwarded for the morrow" (al-Hashr 59:18).

Sacrificing time for the sake of Allah is the essence of Islam: whenever summoned, you must respond. Hence you should continuously train yourself to give up everything by giving your time to the cause of Allah. Five times a day this quality is ingrained in your character. On Fridays, you have been instructed thus to respond: "O Believers! When the call to Prayer is sounded on the day of Congregation, hasten to God's remembrance and leave all worldly commerce. This is for your own good, if you but knew it" (al-Jumu'ah 62:9).

Worldly Possessions and Money

Most of your time is spent in the pursuit of money or worldly possessions obtained through money. Their desire and love is ingrained in our nature. "Alluring unto man is the love of worldly desires - women and children and heaped up treasures of gold and silver, and horses of high mark, and cattle, and lands" (al-Imran 3:14).

This love and desire of worldly things, let us remember, is neither condemnable nor even bad or evil. The world is not inherently evil; such is not the teaching of the Qur'an. Money and wealth are not despised; it is called the khayr (good). And quite logically. For the path to Allah, and to the other-worldly blessings, passes through this-world. If we abandon this-world, we have nothing left by which to gain those priceless treasures. Hence, indeed, it is the only source and basis of gaining Allah's pleasure and the other-world.

What makes this-world evil is when we forget that all this has been placed at our disposal for the duration of this-world only, as a means to real and eternal goals,

which are better than anything whatever and everything this-world may have to offer. When means become ends, they bring misery by diverting us away from what is of real value to us. The above quoted Qur'anic verse, therefore, continues:

All this may be enjoyed in the life of this world; but God - with Him is the best of all goals. Say: Shall I tell you of something better than that? For the God-conscious there are, with their Lord, gardens through which running waters flow, therein to dwell forever, and spouses pure, and God's good pleasure . . . (al-Imran 3:14-15)

Worldly possessions are not easy things to give away in the way of Allah; so many falter and fail when confronted with real choices. What will help you to offer these difficult sacrifices is to constantly remember certain things.

Firstly, nothing belongs to you; everything belongs to Allah. When you sacrifice something in the way of Allah, you are only returning it to the rightful Owner. "To God belongs everything in the heavens and the earth."

Secondly, whatever great value you may attach to worldly possessions, these will become naught with your last breath.

All that is with you comes to an end; but what is with God is everlasting (al-Nahl 16:96)

And tell them the parable of the life of this world: it is like water which We send down from the skies, and the plants of the earth absorb it; but [in time] they turn into straw which the winds scatter; and God is Omnipotent over everything. [Remember] wealth and children are the adornment of this world's life . . (al-Kahf 18:45-6)

Thirdly, only by giving it away for Allah can you receive it back, increased manifold.

Lend unto God a goodly loan. Whatever good you shall forward on your own behalf, you shall find it with God, as better and richer in reward (al-Muzzammil 73:20)

The parable of those who spend their possessions in the way of God is that of a grain out of which grow seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains . . . (al-Baqarah 2:261)

Think for a while: What worth can your claims of commitment to Islam have if you spend more money on meaningless pleasures, like smoking and eating, than on your cause? Of what value is your faith in the promises of Allah, when the slightest hope of profit in this world makes you invest all your savings in a business transaction, but the promise of at least seven hundred-fold return, never to be taken away, cannot force your purse-strings open? You may measure what place Islam occupies in your life by looking at what proportion of your wealth you spend in the way of Allah.

Sacrificing wealth has never been easy. But ours is an age when a better standard of living, enjoyment and pleasure, consumerism and material gains have become the only objects of life. Hence you should watch carefully lest you fail in this respect.

Life

A time may come when you will be required to sacrifice your life for the sake of Allah. To so lay down your life is the highest act of doing shahadah; you then deserve to be called shahid. Life is your most precious possession. To sacrifice it means you have to sacrifice everything which life gives or makes possible, all concrete and abstract things that have been mentioned earlier.

You can indeed become eager to die in the way of Allah as soon as you realize that your life does not belong to you but to Him, and you must render to Him what is His due. You should also remember that death you can never escape or avoid, that it will always come at the appointed hour and place, in the appointed manner (al-Imran 3:185, 144-5, 154-6 ; al-Nisaa 4:78). You should also know that those who die in the way of Allah attain a life, for themselves and their community and their mission, which transcends their death: "And say not of those slain in God's way, "They are dead"; Nay, they are alive but you perceive it not."(al-Baqarah 2:154)

Let there be no love of this world, let there be no fear death.

Only then can you attain the strength necessary to sacrifice your life. Only by being ready to die can you overwhelm hostile forces. Only then the door of success shall open. By dying you attain life, both for yourself and for the community. Unless you are prepared to die you forfeit the right to live especially as a community.

Not that everyone of us will be called upon to give away his life. But the yearning to do so must burn in every heart. "One who does not fight or even thinks of fighting in the way of Allah will die the death of a hypocrite", said the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him (Muslim). He also said: "By Him in whose hands is my life, I love that I die in the way of Allah and made alive, that I die again and again given life, I again die and once again given life, only to die again in the way of Allah." (Bukhari, Muslim)

Intangible Sacrifices

Time, money, life and other similar things are no doubt hard to sacrifice. But they have some aspects by virtue of being concrete and tangible, which ease the hardship in giving them up. You can objectify what you are required to sacrifice. You also have the satisfaction of seeing with your eyes what you have given away. Moreover, such sacrifices, when of some great magnitude, are usually called forth in moments of crises. A moment of crisis has its own logic and urgency, which inspires and compels one to bring out his best. At such a moment, you are conscious of the situation, you realize the urgency of need, you are emotively over-whelmed. Also

such sacrifices are primarily of a personal nature, offered by personal choice, which does not usually involve a complex network of inter-personal relations.

It is the sacrifice of things which are intangible and abstract in their nature which is not only more difficult to make, more important for the individual and the collectivism, more necessary for success in a struggle, but also more likely to be overlooked or ignored. More often than not they are not even considered to be worth making a sacrifice of. Abstract things may be ignored as objects of sacrifice because they are rooted in heart and mind, they are not objectifiable, sacrificing them is not a visible act. They are to be sacrificed unobserved and unnoticed, in everyday life, and not in the heat of the moment.

Living together and undertaking struggle in the cause of Allah requires such sacrifices. They are of such a nature that hardly ever will you feel that you are required to make them that such objects are worth making a sacrifice. But without such sacrifices, no strong, cohesive collective life can come into being and no struggle can be made with some hope of success. For example, take your likes and dislikes. They cannot be weighed like money, but you have to sacrifice your likes and dislikes that you hold for persons, for objects, for opinions. Such intangible things in fact may require a greater spirit of sacrifice. In the cause of Allah one has to give up not only his life and money and time and resources, but also his inner likes and dislikes, his love and hatred. The Prophet said: "One who loves for the sake of Allah alone and makes enmity for the sake of Allah alone. . . he perfects his Iman" (Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi).

When we refer to the Sahabah we usually say: Allah was well-pleased with them, they were well-pleased with Him (radiyallahu anhum wa radu anhu). Why? It means that they had submerged their entire personality in the Will of Allah, to the extent that they liked what Allah liked and they disliked what Allah disliked. They gave away not only their lives and their properties for the sake of Allah, but their whole personality.

This is one important type of sacrifice that we usually neglect and without which it is extremely difficult to form that united and bonded collectivism which alone can further the cause of Allah. Let us have a closer look at some of them. They include, as said earlier, things like love and hate relationships, likes and dislikes, preferences and prejudices, desires and motives, pleasures and comforts, hopes and expectations, habits and customs, values and attitudes, status and roles, or merely the ego.

Familial Love

Familial love is the strongest and the most predominant relationship that we have in this world. From childhood till death, love for parents and children, for husbands and wives, for brothers and sisters, even for other relations, remains at the centre of our lives, it dominates all our concerns. We usually live and work and acquire worldly possessions for the sake of love and responsibility to them.

It is quite normal for us to consider its claim upon our heart and mind, upon our attention and loyalty, upon our time and wealth as prior to every other claim. The familial bonds of affection bind us to themselves as no other bonds do. So often we hear someone saying 'my family has the first claim upon me' or someone taking pride in being 'totally devoted and loyal to his or her family'.

And for good reason. Family is the oldest and most important human institution. It is the bedrock of all civilization and culture that man has built up. Without such deep and pervasive love and such overriding loyalty it would never succeed in fulfilling the role of transmitting civilizational values, norms and mores, or making them secure and stable. Without family man, as man, will perish.

Why then, should you be required to sacrifice familial love in the way of Allah? For obvious reasons.

Firstly, you cannot bring your own self wholly under Allah unless His claim upon your life, love and loyalty becomes the most urgent and important. Hence familial love must be subordinated to God. Otherwise it is likely to force or tempt a believer to behave in a manner contrary to the demands of God.

Secondly, family is always the strongest bastion wherein lie entrenched the established values, beliefs, customs and way of life. Becoming Muslim means you begin to change yourselves and your society. You begin to challenge and overthrow the established way of life. That the first resistance to change and rebellion against the ways of forefathers should be offered within the precincts of family love is quite natural.

Thirdly, you commit yourselves to undertake Jihad with all that you possess. Its claim upon everything you have must override every other claim, including the claim of family love. Nothing should deflect you from the path of Jihad. Family love, even if it is not an impediment, you may have to sacrifice in many ways in order to fulfil your duty.

The Qur'an therefore tells us:

And know that your wealth and your children are but a trial, and that with God is a tremendous reward (al-Anfal 8:28).

And confronts us with a profound, fundamental question: Whom do you love more? Allah or . . . ?

Say: If your fathers and your sons and your brothers and your spouses and your clan and your possessions that you have acquired and the commerce that you fear may slacken, and the dwellings you love - if these are dearer to you than God and His Messenger and to struggle in His way, then wait till God brings (the fulfilment of) His Command; God guides not the rebellious people (al-Tawbah 9:24).

The sacrifice of familial love may take various shapes depending on how it stands in the way of obeying Allah and striving to seek His pleasure. In the first instance, familial love demands obedience to parents, to elders, to the ways of forefathers or customs and society. Such obedience, if contrary to the demands of obedience to Allah, you must give up. You must abide by your reason, your conscience, your faith, the guidance you have received from God.

And when it is said to them, 'Follow what God has sent down', they say 'No, but we will follow only that which we found our forefathers doing.' Why, even if their forefathers did not use their reason and if they were not guided? (al-Baqarah 2:170).

We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents, yet (even so) should they endeavour with you to make you associate with that whereof you have no knowledge, then do not obey them . . . (al-Ankabut 29:8).

Further, those whom you love may simply refuse to believe in what you believe. Or, they may embark upon open hostility to Allah and His cause. Such hostile relatives may strive to suppress the voice of truth, mock and ridicule you, persecute you, drive you away from your homes, eliminate you.

You should sacrifice all feelings and ties of love with such inimical and hostile family members. Love for Allah and love for His enemies cannot go together. Only by offering the maximum sacrifice of totally renouncing love for them can you have faith engraved on your heart, be counted among the 'Party of God' (Hizb-Allah), receive the rewards of Paradise and His good pleasure.

You shall not find any people who [truly] believe in God and the Last Day and who [at the same time] are loving anyone who opposes God and His Messenger - even though they were their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their clan. Those - He has engraved faith upon their hearts, and He has strengthened them with inspiration from Himself; and He shall admit them into gardens through which running waters flow, therein to dwell forever. God is well pleased with them; and they are well-pleased with Him. They are God's party . . . (al-Mujadalah 58:22).

Like Ibrahim, that paragon of sacrifice in the way of Allah: First, he had to repudiate his father and even forgo his desire to seek Allah's forgiveness for him. Later, he had to demonstrate his willingness to sacrifice his son.

And Ibrahim's prayer that his father be forgiven was but due to a promise he had made to him, but when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of God, he disavowed him; Ibrahim was most tender-hearted, most clement (al-Tawbah 9:114).

Or, like Nuh: His heart cried out for his son who was drowned in front of his eyes: "O my Lord, my son was of my family, and Your promise is surely true?" But, once told that 'he was not of your family, it was a deed not righteous', he willingly agreed not even to make a plea in this regard (Hud 11:45-6).

Or, like Lot: He forsook his wife because her sympathies lay with the people who refused to heed his call to surrender to Allah alone.

Or, like the Companions of the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him: Fathers were arrayed against sons, and sons against fathers, even on battlegrounds, but flinch they did not.

Those who simply refuse to believe but are not actively hostile require a different sort of sacrifice. You should give up your friendship with them, but treat them with kindness and justice. Snapping all ties of love is an ultimate act, but the plunge has to be taken once only. Continually to live with relatives who disagree with you or dislike your ways and make no secret of it - may be more difficult, even greater sacrifice. For while your activities and beliefs may be disparaged, hurting you deeply, you are still to treat them with compassion.

Obeys them not [your parents who strive to make you indulge in shirk]; but keep them company in this world with kindness (Luqman 31:15).

Not always will your family members be opposed or indifferent to your life-mission; they may be sympathetic. Even so demands made by their love may be in conflict with or different from the demands placed upon you by Allah. In situations like this, do not remain unmindful of the fact that love for even those who are good Muslims may some times tempt you away from the path of your love for Allah Hence the need for sacrifice may still be there.

Often you will be under subtle pressures of various sorts. Resisting them will require continuing sacrifices in many ways. Choices, in all cases, may not be that simple and obvious. Sometimes their dislike and disapproval will be made plain to you, explicitly or implicitly; you will have to disregard them. Sometimes pleas and demands will be made in the name of love, rights, or authority, all finding sanction in Islam; you will have to resist them in a proper manner. Wives and children will ask to be loved and cared for; you will have to strike a balance.

You will, then, have to subdue to your commitment to Allah your desire to please them, not to hurt them, not to disappoint them, not to fail their expectations. Or, you will have to forgo their support and approval, your need for warmth and affection. You will have to make complex choices as to the points beyond which your obligation to serve, to discharge your duties, to obey, will have to be abandoned, if they become an impediment in your way to Allah.

Friendships

Friendships constitute another major area of inter-personal relations of love and affection. Friendships are formed round common temperaments, interests, pursuits and goals. As Muslims you have only one goal and one pursuit: 'one who surrenders his whole being to God'. Hence many friendships you will have to sacrifice. Equally significantly, many enmities and dislikes you will have to put an end to. Conversely,

you will have to make new friendships: someone you may have always disliked may find a place in your heart and become dear to you.

Whether they be familial relations or friendships, social relations serve a vital need. They provide you the necessary strength and reinforcement by their approval and support. You will have to sacrifice such vital social support as relations are disrupted, approval is withdrawn if not replaced by positive disapproval, long-standing friendships are broken. Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, the respected leader and the Trustworthy, immediately became the 'mad-man', the 'fanatic', the 'enemy of people'.

Like friendship, your likes and dislikes, like your relations, dominate every part of your life. They extend to views and opinions, taste and temperament, feelings and emotions, attitudes and behaviours. Each in its own way needs to be sacrificed at times.

Views and Opinions

Your own views and opinions are always very dear to you. Your feelings of attachment to your views only grow stronger once you have become committed to a purpose in life, to a world-view. Then you develop a strong sense of right and wrong, truth and falsehood. More importantly, you often think that there can be only one way to look at things: either right or wrong, with your own view always being right. However, your own views - on a particular matter, strategy, way of doing things - may not find acceptance by others. You may then be required to forgo them, withdraw them, or even act against them. Unless you view something as a clear matter of violating Allah's injunction, you must sacrifice your views. This may be more important for strengthening collective life than the sacrifice of wealth.

Feelings and Emotions

Your feelings and emotions are equally dear to you. At times you must give up doing things you find you are not doing for the sake of Allah alone, even if you like them and find them attractive and useful; at other times, you must involve yourself in things you do not like doing, which are against your temperament, only because they please Allah.

At times you should suppress your urge to speak, and fall silent, even if that urge is compulsive; at times you may have to overcome your desire to remain silent, and speak up. You may feel anger rising up in you, an urge to revenge, to speak evil - yet you must hold your tongue.

At times you may prefer solitude and quiet, yet you may have to plunge into intense social activities and contacts; at others, you may very much want to mix socially, but you may have to withdraw into solitude.

You may aspire to be 'something' or 'somebody'; those aspirations may have to be totally abandoned. Your ambitions, your plans, may need to be scrapped.

Taste and Temperament

Even in very mundane affairs you will be required to sacrifice your taste and temperament. You will have to live, eat, sleep and dress in ways which may not be to your liking, to your taste or in harmony with your life-style and preferences. You must accept them, and accept them without grumbling, willingly, without hurting others, causing inconvenience or disruption.

Ego

And, finally, your ego, your self-esteem, your image of your own self, your love of this image. Sometimes hidden, sometimes open, it lies at the root of so many evils. To annihilate 'self' may be a desirable station on a mystic's path, but on the path of the prophets of God, the only thing required is to surrender your ego to the will of God. Our self-esteem becomes so important to us that it breeds obstinacy, stubbornness, obduracy, contempt of others. To sacrifice it becomes one of the most difficult acts in life, but it has to be done.

Continual Sacrifices

Some great sacrifices are such as are made once in life, like that of life. Some are very minor but must be made continuously. Their continuing nature makes them important because of many intangible aspects. Firstly, they require you to be ever-alert and watchful lest opportunities come and find you napping, indifferent, unmindful or unable to recognize them. Secondly, they require a steady and constant will, which requires a greater effort to maintain it. Thirdly, they are too small to qualify as acts of heroism. But they are no less effective for character-building, social organization and success. Even a drop of water falling steadily and persistently may make a hole in a rock. Fourthly, they are not called forth in moments of crisis; rather they must be made in the ordinary run of daily living. Despite being minor in nature, this makes them harder to offer. For faced with a great challenge, under an acute crisis, looking forward to an immense reward, it is always easier to summon all your inner resources, to summon the greatest will, to offer the best. Such is human nature.

In a way we are required to make small, very small, sacrifices every moment in life. For at every step and every moment we are faced with a choice - however small - to go one way or to go the other way. Every choice made to please Allah means taking a decision to sacrifice something. Even, as you choose to offer Fajr (morning) Prayer, you sacrifice your sleep and the warmth of your bed.

Driving on a road where there are high hills, deep ravines, steep slopes, sharp bends and twists, you are more likely to be cautious, to drive safely, to negotiate your way through all the difficulties. But on a road which is even and uneventful, with no

bends and twists to negotiate, no obstacles to surmount, no slopes to climb up and down, you are more likely to become carefree and unmindful. Thus you are likely to involve yourself in an accident, or miss your opportunities, or lose your way, or be unheedful of what is required of you.

There are sacrifices to be made in regular day to day living - in home, in work place, in market, in social contact, in organizational work, even in privacy - which are likely to be missed. They are more difficult to make simply because they are not even recognized as suitable stuff for sacrifice.

Without Prospects of Success

Sacrifices made when prospects of worldly success are not in sight have an extra dimension to them. When your efforts seem likely to bear fruit, it is much easier to give time, money and life, to withdraw your opinion, to work with persons whom you dislike, much easier to adopt courses you personally disapprove of. But when such prospects are bleak or non-existent, all these acts become extremely difficult. In moments of despondency, with no victory in sight, or with defeat looming large - one is more likely to cling to his time and money, to insist on his opinion and view, to make an issue of his dislike of certain persons and actions. Yet the reward for sacrifice made in such moments is much greater.

Not equal is he among you who spent, and who fought, before the victory; those are higher in rank than those who spent and fought afterwards (al-Hadid 57:10).

Islam: A Path of Struggle

First let us briefly look at an important question. Why must Islam be so emphatically linked with the idea of struggle? What has the one to do with the other? Cannot a person become a good Muslim without involving himself in a struggle that necessarily requires sacrifices? The answer is: **No**. And for very obvious reasons.

Islam is not merely the confession of a faith which is made once in a lifetime. The faith is of cosmic dimensions. It requires a radical reorientation of entire life and the world. The confession is not merely verbal; it is an act of witnessing which must transform life into a living and continuing testimony of faith. You enter Islam by saying shahadah (bearing witness). But you can live in Islam only by constantly doing shahadah (al-Baqarah 2:143, al-hajj 22:28). Doing shahadah will bring you in ceaseless confrontation with false gods inside you, and with those outside you. It will also require a ceaseless striving to reshape self and society so as to attest to your witnessing.

The bedouins say: "We believe." Say: "You believe not but you only say, 'We have surrendered (in Islam),' for Faith has not yet entered your hearts. But if you obey Allah and His Messenger (SAW), He will not decrease anything in reward for your deeds. Verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Only those are the believers who have believed in Allah and

His Messenger, and afterward doubt not but strive with their wealth and their lives for the Cause of Allah. Those! They are the truthful. (Qur'an surah al Hujuraat 49: 14-15)

YOU NEED TO STRIVE!

Being Muslim thus requires becoming Muslim. Becoming Muslim, after the seed of Iman has been sown in the heart, is a two-fold process: to summon one's own self and to summon mankind, to live under the sovereignty of One God alone. Both are inextricably linked together, both are to be taken up simultaneously.

Summoning mankind is not a passive call. It is an active, dynamic process, a movement. It must wage Jihad with all available resources so that all false claimants to absolute rule are dethroned, oppression and corruption are over powered, and justice is established among mankind. That is why the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, in the very early days of Makkan life, declared:

There were such people before you that a man would be seized and a pit would be dug for him in which he would be thrown, then a saw would be brought and placed over his head and he would be cut into two, and his flesh would be combed away from his bones by iron combs - still nothing would turn him away from his religion. By God, he will complete this mission until a rider will travel from San'a to Hadramawt and will have no fear but of God, and no worry but about a wolf that might harm his cattle (Bukhari).

O You who believe! Shall I guide you to a commerce that will save you from a painful torment. That you believe in Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad [SAW]), and that you strive hard and fight in the Cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives, that will be better for you, if you but know! (If you do so) He will forgive you your sins, and admit you into Gardens under which rivers flow, and pleasant dwelling in Gardens of 'Adn - Eternity ['Adn (Edn) Paradise], that is indeed the great success. And also (He will give you) another (blessing) which you love, help from Allah (against your enemies) and a near victory. And give glad tidings (O Muhammad [SAW]) to the believers. (Surah as Saff 61: 10-13)

The path of Islam cannot therefore be anything other than the path of struggle, and therefore sacrifice. Is not Islam, one might say, a gift of God? It surely is. Without His help and His enabling hand we can take no steps on the straight path (al-Sirat al-Mustaqim), the path of Islam. Yet only through our sincere intention and devoted striving can we deserve to receive this most precious gift, to retain it, to grow in it, to derive full benefit from it. The gift, no doubt, is given in His infinite mercy and kindness, but it is not unconditional. If given whether desired or not and earned or not, it would have become cheap, valueless. That is why the Qur'an says that Allah "guides unto Himself him who turns unto Him" (al-Shura 42:13). Turning towards God requires both will and effort; it also entails turning away from all false gods besides God. It is a total change of direction, inner and outer. Progress, then, depends on striving: "Those who strive hard in Our way - surely We shall guide them onto Our paths" (al-Ankabut 29:68).

Rasul Allah (sal Allahu alaihi wasallam) said: "When Allah created Paradise, He said to Jibreel: 'Go and look at it.' Jibreel went and looked at it, then came and said: 'O my Lord! By Thy might, no one who hears of it will fail to enter it.'

Allah then surrounded it with disagreeable things, and said: 'Go and look at it, Jibreel.' He went and looked at it, then came and said: 'O my Lord! By Thy might, I am afraid that no one will enter it.'

When Allah created Hell, He said: 'Go and look at it, Jibreel.' Jibreel went and looked at it, then came and said: 'O my Lord! By Thy might, no one who hears of it will enter it.'

Allah then surrounded it with desirable things and said: 'Go and look at it, Jibreel.' Jibreel went, looked at it, then came and said: 'O my Lord! By Thy might and power, I am afraid that no one will remain who does not enter it.' [Abu Daud]

Struggle: The Indispensable Key

Such is the law of God (Sunnat Allah), not only for Islam, but for all the priceless gifts our lives have been blessed with. Look at some of them: the eyes we see with, the ears we hear with, the hands and the feet we work with, the air we breathe and the water we drink, without which life cannot even exist. We have not made them, nor could we, even if we wanted. We get them without asking, we have no inherent claims upon them nor any inalienable right to possess them. They are all gifts of God's grace. Yet to retain them and to derive full benefit from them we must put in our best efforts.

Not much comes to us in life without endeavour or struggle. We gain only what we earn by our strivings: "We have created man into (a life of) trial and pain" (al-Balad 90:4). "And that nought shall be accounted unto man but what he has striven for" (al-Najm 53:39). The soil is there, the water is there, the seed is there; but the soil will not turn seeds into crops unless we dig it, plough it, sow the seeds, water the plants, protect them and harvest the crop. Without sweat and toil, the gifts of God that abound all around us will not yield their full treasures to us. Indeed the richer the treasures desired, the greater the efforts required.

Islam and Sacrifice

Islam is not just one gift among many; it is the choicest gift of God (al-Maidah 5:3). Out of all the countless bounties and the blessings that Allah has given us to enable us to live our lives in this world, the greatest and the most important is that He has guided us to the true meaning and purpose in our lives. That purpose and that meaning is to live for Him, to strive to seek His Pleasure, and even to die in His way. Instead of living like animals - being born, eating and drinking, procreating and dying we live a meaningful existence. Life is thus lifted up from being a transient, fleeting moment in history, terminable at death, to an eternal event. Our existence is

no more directed to merely coveting and acquiring the blessings and bounties that abound in this-world. Instead the way is open to turn this-world's possessions into everlasting benefits to be reaped in that-world, sometimes by taking and enjoying them, gratefully, sometimes by giving them up.

If ordinary things in this world cannot be obtained without effort, obtaining meaning and purpose in life, which is Islam, must surely require utmost endeavour. The nature and magnitude of struggle, and of sacrifice, must be commensurate with the nature and value of the goal we want to reach.

And what purpose in life could be more valuable, more compelling, more important, more urgent, than that of bringing the whole man - his inner personality, his environment, his society, the entire world - to the path of Allah. Without struggling hard, merely by wishing, desiring, professing, making claims and statements, how can we ever hope to reach the destination that we have set for ourselves? If one's daily bread cannot be earned without effort, will Allah give His greatest blessing - success in this life and success in the life to come - unless we prove that we deserve to receive it? Unless we demonstrate that our profession of faith is rooted in our hearts, that we are truthful in our claims of loyalty, that we are prepared to offer sacrifices required of us.

Says the Qur'an:

Do you think you should enter Paradise unless God establishes who among you have struggled hard and who are patient? (Al-Imran 3:142)

Do you think you should enter Paradise while there has not yet come upon you the like of those who passed away before you? Misery and hardship befell them (Al-Baqarah 2: 214)

Do the men think that on their [mere] saying 'We believe', they will be left to themselves, and will not be put to the test? We certainly put to the test those that were before them (Al-Ankabut 29:2-3)

Of course, this does not mean that our efforts and sacrifices can in any way match the gifts Allah gives to us; yet it is through our own labour that we get food from the earth; yet it is so priceless that the hard work put in by a farmer cannot be considered equivalent to the immense benefit that we derive. Similarly, whatever we are required to sacrifice in our struggle in the way of Allah is not measurable against the benefits that we shall personally derive, that the Muslim Ummah will collectively gain, that mankind as a whole will reap. Nevertheless we must prove, within our human limitations, that we are prepared not only to profess our faith in our cause, but also prepared to struggle and sacrifice what we really love for that which we declare to be dearest to us. That is why, in the Qur'an, Iman is almost invariably bracketed with righteous deeds (al-'amal al-salih) and with Hijrah and Jihad. Indeed only those believers are declared to be truthful in their claims to faith

who are certain and unwavering, who struggle in Allah's way with their lives and possessions (al-Hujurat 49:15).

Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your kindred, the wealth that you have gained, the commerce in which you fear a decline, and the dwellings in which you delight ... are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger, and striving hard and fighting in His Cause, then wait until Allah brings about His Decision (torment). And Allah guides not the people who are Al-Fasiqun (the rebellious, disobedient to Allah). 9: 24

Struggle, as we briefly mentioned before, is undertaken at two levels. At the personal level, Iman requires that one bring his self under Allah and obey Him; that one must therefore love Allah more than everything else: "The (true) believers love God more than all else" (al-Baqarah 2:165). Put differently, Iman requires that nothing is too worthy, nothing is too valuable to sacrifice in order to earn Allah's pleasure.

But it is at the collective level that struggle, and hence sacrifices, are required in order to summon the entire world to live under One God. Most often the Qur'an denotes the struggle in this sense as Jihad. Iman demands dethroning all false gods, standing up to all forces of evil, oppression and corruption. Jihad is required to subdue all forces in rebellion against God. It therefore requires sacrifices of a vastly different order and nature than those required to subdue one's Nafs (self).

Your wealth and your children are only a trial, whereas Allah! With Him is a great reward (Paradise). So keep your duty to Allah and fear Him as much as you can; listen and obey; and spend in charity, that is better for yourselves. And whosoever is saved from his own covetousness, then they are the successful ones. (At Taghabun) 64: 15-15

Sacrifice and Inner Resources

Sacrifices contribute to the success of our struggle in two ways. Firstly, they strengthen our inner spiritual and moral resources and develop qualities of character which are essential to our struggle at every level. Secondly, they develop and reinforce cohesion and discipline within a collectivism, giving it the strength and resources to conduct Jihad at the wider social level.

Every act of sacrifice nourishes and increases your Iman; for it transforms a verbal confession and a mental conviction into a living reality. It confirms, and thus increases, your love for Allah; for at every step you give up something for the sake of this love (al-Imran 3:172-3). It reinforces your loyalty and fidelity to Allah; for all other loyalties become secondary as they are sacrificed for the sake of this loyalty. In short, sacrifices bring you nearer to Allah. The process is mutually interactive: the stronger the faith, the greater the will and capacity to sacrifice; the greater the sacrifices, the more internalized and deeper the faith.

Sacrifices are essential for the development of all moral qualities, but especially for the development of patience, endurance, perseverance, fortitude, resolve and determination. These can be summed up in just one word: Sabr. Every sacrifice reinforces the quality of sabr, making it grow in quality and strength. Sabr, in turn, sustains and increases the capacity to sacrifice. Again, the process is dialectic. All promises of help from Allah, all assurances of success in this-world and rewards in the Hereafter, have been made conditional upon the attainment of Iman and Sabr (al-Imran 3:139,125 ; al-Anfal 8:46 ; al-A'raf 7:137 ; al-Zumar 39:10).

Sacrifice and Collective Discipline

Sabr is a very comprehensive virtue. One of its many aspects is discipline. Discipline is closely related to sacrifice; they are in fact interdependent. In its comprehensive sense inclusive of self-discipline, spiritual and moral discipline, organisational and social discipline - it cannot be attained unless you are prepared to sacrifice things you love. Nor can you continuously offer sacrifice of things to which you assign some value without developing a discipline within you, an inner discipline. Though disciplined, collective life, too, plays no less important a role in reinforcing the spirit of sacrifice. And sacrifice is equally essential for generating and sustaining such disciplined collective life. Let us briefly see why.

It is obvious that while walking on your personal way to God, you will need to attain to greater and greater heights of sacrifice and self-discipline to succeed in seeking His pleasure. But once you decide to come together with others to struggle together to bring the world under the lordship of its Creator, you stand in greater need of making sacrifices. Without them, neither your organized collective struggle can take a durable shape and achieve necessary strength, nor can you aspire to be successful in your mission. "God loves those who, fighting in His way, join ranks as if they are a wall of molten lead", says the Qur'an (al-Saff 61:4). What a beautiful and meaningful parable. Strong and solid, fused and welded, impregnable and without cracks and fissures, that is how members of a Muslim community, joined, welded together, strive in the way of Allah.

Now, how is a wall built? It is built of many single building blocks, each with its own individuality. How do the blocks 'join ranks' to turn into a solid, strong and impregnable wall? One block goes over another, one sits by the side of another, and so the wall goes up as you start cementing them, gaining in strength and height at each step. The blocks may look so similar, as do human beings, yet each has an inner individuality of its own. No block is required to sacrifice this individuality. Indeed the richness and strength is gained by virtue of so many individualities coming together.

But as you build the wall, if each block is adamant to go its own way, if it is not prepared to carry the load which will come upon it from the top or give support to the blocks below it, if a block which is going into a corner is not prepared to be chiselled so that it can fit in its place, a strong wall will never be built. Many bricks will have to go into the foundations below the ground, never to be noticed by

anyone after the building is finished. Yet they will be bearing the whole load, and without their sacrifice the building will not rise even above the ground. Many blocks will have to be broken, so that they can fit into a uniform wall.

Without some sacrifices on the part of each block a solid wall will never come to exist.