

Good News

'...And give good news to those who do good (to others)' – Holy Quran 22:37

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Sacrifice - Evoking Humanitarian Awareness!

**(Address on the occasion of *Eid ul Adzha*
Celebrations 2018)**

By Ebrahim Mohamed

**I begin in the name of Allah, the
Beneficent, the Merciful.**

O you who believe, violate not the signs of Allah, nor the Sacred month, nor the offerings nor the victims with garlands, nor those repairing to the Sacred House seeking the grace and pleasure of the Lord. And when you are free of the obligations of the pilgrimage, then hunt. And let not hatred of a people – because they hindered you from the Sacred Mosque - incite

you to transgress. And help one another in righteousness and piety, and help not one another in sin and aggression, and keep your duty to Allah. Surely Allah is Severe in requiting evil. – Holy Quran 5:2

The Holy Quran draws our attention , here, to the sacred devotions of the *Hajj* (**The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca**) and warns against the violations of such devotions; meaning it should not be treated lightly and performed ritualistically. Each act has a deep underlying meaning and contains lessons that are essential for shaping our moral and spiritual goals as individuals and as communities at large. The most important devotions of the pilgrimage take place in the sacred month of *Dhul Hijjah* in the Muslim calendar. The verse highlights the care that should be given by the authorities to the pilgrims and the offerings to ensure that no harm should come to them.

The *Hajj* is a celebration of the absolute unity of Almighty Allah and the unity of humankind. It is a unique assembly of millions of worshippers, freed from worldly frills and the impurities of idol worship, going about their devotions to the Almighty, in peace. In this sense it is a manifestation of one of the greatest 'signs of Almighty Allah' in a world beset with hatred and discord.

Today is known as *yaum al-nahr* which literally means, the day of sacrifice of the animal offerings and its celebration is called *Eid ul Adzha*. *Eid*, as you all know, means a day of ever-recurring joy and *Adzha* carries the same significance of sacrifice. You might well ask what is there to celebrate in sacrificing of animals which some look upon as acts of cruelty despite the fact that animals are slaughtered on a daily basis in abattoirs across the world? Wherein lies the association with joy? To find the answer for this we have to look at the history of sacrifices. If we now look back some 4000 years we will find the human condition with regard to worship and sacrificial offerings prevailing at that time totally different to the condition prevailing today. The 'Deity' then was represented by means of man-made idols whose attributes were cruel and austere and whose anger demanded to be appeased periodically by human sacrifices. It was part of their rituals to sacrifice young boys

and young virgin girls in honour of these gods. These horrific, heinous acts were entrenched in their faith and they saw it as honourable offerings that will earn them paradise and favour with the gods. It is in this kind of environment that the great patriarch, the prophet Abraham grew up in and which he absolutely abhorred and protested against. Through his firm resolve and belief in the One Supreme God, the Lord of the heavens and the earth, he fought against these evil practices until he was finally banished from his homeland in Babylon and settled in Canaan somewhere in the precinct of what is known to us as Israel/Palestine/Jordan today. It is here that a very significant event took place. He saw in a vision that he was sacrificing his eldest son Ishmael. The Holy Quran refers to this incident:

37:102 But when he (Ishmael) became of age to work with him, he said: O my son, I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice thee: so consider what thou seest. He said: O my father, do as thou art commanded; if Allah please, thou wilt find me patient.

37:103 So when they both submitted and he had

thrown him down upon his forehead,
 37:104 And We called out to him saying, O Abraham,
 37:105 Thou hast indeed fulfilled the vision. Thus do We reward the doers of good.
 37:106 Surely this is a manifest trial.

The vision, apparently, was taken literally by Prophet Abraham and Ishmael and whilst they were both ready to carry out the command of Allah, Prophet Abraham was told that he had already fulfilled the vision and what he had seen in the vision was merely a trial or sort of test of faith. He was reminded that he had already fulfilled the sacrifice which he did by offering up his son to help lay the foundation of Islam, the world order of Peace that was being prepared for humankind. The story goes that he was shown a ram which was sacrificed in place of his son. This then put an immediate and emphatic end to the foul practice of ‘human offerings’ and established a permanent awareness of the sanctity of human life. The joy that comes with this victory over the evil forces of idolatry that exercised the worst kind of human cruelties in the name of faith is what we are celebrating today.

The *Hajj* is indeed a great sign of Almighty Allah because it teaches us to live in harmony and at peace with each other regardless of differences in social status, language, colour, and differences of religious and political points of view. The Holy Quran makes it quite clear:

The months of the pilgrimage are well known; so whoever determines to perform pilgrimage, therein there shall be **no immodest speech, nor abusing, nor altercation in the pilgrimage.** And whatever good you do, Allah knows it. And make provision for yourselves, the best provision being to keep one’s duty. And keep your duty to Me, O men of understanding – 2:197

Once again, emphasis is laid on our ‘duty to Allah’ of which the upkeep of basic ethical and moral codes of conduct that underpins a spirit of brotherhood and creates an atmosphere of peace and harmony forms a major part. That such harmony is achieved in a gathering of over two million devoted worshippers from different backgrounds and countries every year with limited policing and security; in stark contrast to the racial and religious hatred and hostilities that plague communities across a large part of the rest

of the world, is indeed a miracle. This is the standing miracle that the Prophet Abraham, his wife, Lady Hagar, his son, the Prophet Ishmael, and his distant descendant, the ‘seal of the prophets’ Muhammad Mustapha (s) gave to the world. Moving together as one, millions of worshippers declare over and over:

Here I am at Thy service O Lord,
here I am.

Just like the sacrificial animals, humbled by the chanting of the praises of the Almighty, surrender peacefully to a higher force, i.e. man, so does the pilgrims surrender to the calling of their Creator Who has their lives in His Hands.

We should remember that whilst not all of us are able to be present in Mecca, we are all on a pilgrimage right here. The human heart is our *ka’bah* which needs to be purified of all idols that weaken our faith in the Almighty. These idols come in the form of our egos, our prejudices; our hatred; our greed; our superstitions, our suspicions, our lusts - everything low and sordid that harden our hearts and in the end tear societies apart.

The question that now remains is; what happens once the pilgrimage is over? Will it be back to the usual prejudices; the bigotry; the discriminations - the type of behaviour that we are warned violates the signs of Allah manifested during the *Hajj*?

The verse quoted at the beginning tells us what is expected of us once the pilgrimage is over:

‘And when you are free from the obligations of the pilgrimage, then hunt.’

This means all the restrictions that were imposed during the *Hajj* are now lifted but then it mentions certain strict conditions that shall remain in place forever and these are:

And let not hatred of a people — because they hindered you from the Sacred Mosque — incite you to transgress. And help one another in righteousness and piety, and help not one another in sin and aggression, and keep your duty to Allah. Surely Allah is Severe in requiting (evil). -5:2

These are the take-away lessons we should all seriously reflect upon and remember for as long as we live; and teach to our offspring; to our friends; to our communities; to whomsoever we come in contact with. This verse is as relevant today as it was in the early days of Islam. It appropriately lays down a universal code of conduct which the modern world, beset by strife and division, is sorely in need of and that is:

- Not to allow yourselves to be overtaken by ‘hatred’. Even if you

were treated unjustly in the past, do not respond with acts of injustice.

In fact the recurring message of The Holy Quran is ‘the doing of good to others.’ But ‘doing good’ in terms of Quranic teachings is not confined to a mere show of respect for justice (*‘adl*). Nay, Islam takes the acts of benevolence a step further by calling on Muslims to also show deep concern for the well-being of others. This is called *ihsan* in the Holy Quran. But there is even a higher level of benevolence than *ihsan*, which demands the ultimate sacrifice. It is referred to in the Quranic axiom *wa itaa ithil qurba*¹ which means to go the extra mile by treating others as if you would your own kith and kin. This is the level of absolute selfless benevolence we are expected to extend to the less fortunate. Indeed a tall order but it is with this kind of spirit that we are now told to:

- Help one another in righteousness and piety and not in sin and aggression.

What greater guidance is there that can be offered to an errant society plagued by violence than that contained in these words of wisdom, which comes directly from our Creator? With this mindset how can we not have deep empathy and compassion for suffering humanity wherever they might find themselves? It is thus with indescribable pain that we witness the

suffering in Yemen just around the corner of the holy precincts of Mecca; and, of course, elsewhere in the world. During these holy days we pray for a world where this level of goodness, righteousness and piety with firm opposition to sin and aggression is predominant. The *Hajj* proves to us that such a state of heightened humanity, of deep empathy and readiness to serve selflessly to bring about social harmony and peace in the world, is possible when humanity, like the sacrificial animal, completely surrenders to the commandments and will of the Almighty.

Another great lesson we learn from the *Hajj* is to avoid extremities whether temporal or religious. The Holy Quran draws our attention to this important lesson as follows:

And when you have performed your devotions, praise Allah as you praised your fathers, rather a heartier praising But there are some who say, Our Lord, give us good in this world. And for such there is no portion in the Hereafter – 2:200

And there are some among them who say: Our Lord, grant us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and save us from the chastisement of the Fire. – 2:201

¹ Holy Quran 16:90

It was the respected Muslim Saint, Rumi, who put this concept into perspective very well when he said: 'Anything which is more than our necessity is poison. It may be power, wealth, hunger, ego, greed, laziness, love, ambition, hate or anything.'²

It is this imbalance of the demanding 'physical' over the 'spiritual' that highlights the modern evils of politicising and commercialising the Faith thus reducing it to a state of hollow ceremonialism on the one hand and religious fanaticism and extremism on the other. Fuelled by greed, this imbalance breeds intolerance and aggression. In the end it leads to conflict and violence of which the senseless killings of Muslims by Muslims, in particular, stand out.

Muslims who have been blessed with these noble teachings of the Holy Quran and the universal message of peace should know that life is not just about this world. The Holy Quran and the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of God be upon him) warns us repeatedly that there is indeed a day of accountability awaiting us; a day when we will have to answer for our deeds and bear the consequences of our actions in this life.

It is thus of vital importance that we continue to put into practice the noble

lessons of *Hajj*. The world needs it more so today than ever. So we call on everyone to help us to spread this wonderful message of peace by disseminating the Holy Quran which contains these noble teachings far and wide. This was the appeal made by the Holy Prophet (pbuh) on *Arafat* in his farewell sermon.

Invest in your spiritual banks by donating to this worthy cause. If we do this sincerely, in all humility and concern for humanity, we hope and pray that the Almighty reward us with His forgiveness, Mercy, and Protection, *Insha'Allah* (If it pleases Allah).



We strongly condemn all acts of aggression and terror including all violations of basic human rights specifically those carried out in the name of Religion or State!

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² MM Noorul Hasan Lucknowi – *Rumi's Answers – A Must Read*