

“And We Ransomed him with a Great Sacrifice”

His Eminence, Prophet Ibrahim (a.s) was already appointed at the post of Messengership. He already donned the mantle of “divine friendship” (Khalil), and seeking the vastness of his skirt the Beneficent Lord had bestowed him with the pearls of merits and virtues. Today again, providence wants to grant him a significant position but to achieve this status he has to pass a strange test. He sees a dream for two consecutive nights that he is slaughtering his one and only son in the path of God. The scene of the third day is described in the following words of the Holy Qur’an:

And when he attained to working with him, he said: O my son! surely I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you; consider then what you see. He said: O my father! Do what you are commanded; if Allah please, you will find me of the patient ones.¹

This conversation clearly shows how steadfast these father and sons were and how particular they were in obeying the command of Allah. The Holy Qur’an is informing us that:

So when they both submitted and he threw him down upon his forehead, and We called out to him saying: O Ibrahim! You have indeed shown the truth of the vision; surely thus do We reward the doers of good:²

Ibrahim (a.s) opened his eyes. My God! What is this? Ismail is standing away from him and smiling; and in his place a ram is lying slaughtered. Ibrahim (a.s) was perplexed. He thought, “If I had seen my son rolling in the dust and blood, and had been patient in obeying the command of Allah, how great my status would have been in the court of Allah. It is a pity that I could not scale those heights. May be this sacrifice is not worthy of acceptance in the courts of the Almighty Lord and that is why it has been neglected.” At that time the Holy Qur’an only tells us that the statement of Almighty Allah supported him:

Most surely this is a manifest trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.³

In many commentaries of Qur’an the “great sacrifice” is said to denote that same ram which was slaughtered in lieu of His Eminence, Ismail (a.s).⁴ In the Shia commentary, *Tafsir Safi* a tradition of *Tafsir Qummi* is also quoted on this topic: When Ibrahim (a.s) decided to slaughter Ismail (a.s), the

Almighty Allah made a beautiful ram its ransom. It used to graze in Paradise since the last forty years prior to this and it was not born of a female; the Almighty had created it with His intention. All the animals that shall be slaughtered in Mina shall all be ransom of Ismail. In this commentary many narrations on this topic are quoted, however the Late Maulana Farman 'Ali (t.s.) has remarked under the translation of this verse that: "Though commentators have construed a fat ram of Paradise by "the great sacrifice" this is absolutely against reason, because even though it be of Paradise and no matter how fattened it may be, in comparison to a prophet it cannot be 'great'. In my view "the great sacrifice" could not be anything other than the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s). That is why the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) used to say: Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn."5

The respected Maulana has differed with the commentators in his writings and with all due respect and reverence I also beg to differ with the Maulana. No proof is required of the fact that the apparent explanation of the Qur'anic verse is different from their hidden interpretation. It is an established fact accepted by all sects of Islam that the Qur'an is revealed with seven letters or seven layers of meanings. Thus it is reported from Jabir Ibn Abdullah Ansari:

I asked the interpretation of some verse from Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s) and he informed me of it. Then I asked him about it again and he gave me a different reply. So I told him: May I be sacrificed on you. Before this day you had given a different reply to this question. He replied: O Jabir! There is an interior of the Qur'an and an interior of the interior. And it has an exterior and an exterior of the exterior. O Jabir! Nothing is beyond the intellects of the people more than the exegesis of Qur'an. Because for most of the verses the beginning portion is about one thing and the last portion is about something else while apparently the statement seems continuous and connected and different meanings are construed from it." Have you noted how clearly the Holy Imam (a.s) has explained that there are multiple meanings of the Qur'an. And if one believes in the apparent meaning it does not mean that one is denying the inner interpretation. And neither does it mean that one who believes in the inner meaning should reject the apparent explanation. That is why Imam 'Ali Reza (a.s) told one of his companions, "Do not become like those who deny the apparent meanings of Qur'an." After this preface, I beg to state that when traditions have explained the "great sacrifice" to also denote the ram that was slaughtered in lieu of Ismail there is no reason that we should deny this apparent explanation only because the esoteric interpretation says that the "great sacrifice" denotes the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s). This denial cannot be justified because on the basis of traditions and principles of faith we are obliged to have faith and believe in both equally. The Maulana himself had acted on the principle a little before the captioned verse. Thus under the explanation of the verse:

...surely I have seen in a dream that...6

He writes its interpretation:

A voice came, 'You passed your test. Right now just offer the sacrifice of this heavenly ram and We have ransomed it with a great sacrifice.' Please note the underlined words on page 718 of the

translation. Though even I agree that of all the arguments that are presented to prove the greatness of this ram not even one is valid and acceptable and none proves the greatness of the ram over Ismail (a.s). For example let us see the following justifications:

1 – Some people say that since the ram was slaughtered, it became great. But I cannot as yet understand how merely being slaughtered endowed it with greatness.

2 – Sometimes it is explained that its greatness is due to the fact that Allah accepted it in lieu of the son of Ibrahim. But this argument clearly shows that its greatness was based on the fact that it became ransom of Ismail. Therefore it could not be superior to Ismail.

3 – It is also stated as a cause that since it was sent by the Almighty God that is why it became great. Now the question is that if you are asked who is greater, a ram sent by God or a Prophet sent by God, whom would you select?

4 – The same question is applicable to those who say that it was the ram of Habeel, which was alive in Paradise and it was sent at that time to be the ransom of Ismail.

5 – It is a very significant thing to state that it had grazed in Paradise for years and was fattened a great deal, therefore it was “great.” If the aim of sacrifice is that the flesh and blood is used by God for Himself then indeed the huge ram is “great” in comparison of Ismail (a.s). But is not so, rather:

There does not reach Allah their flesh nor their blood, but to Him is acceptable the guarding (against evil) on your part...7

The Almighty Allah only sees sincerity and piety; thus indeed the sacrifice of the one and only son had much more sincerity and piety than slaughtering a ram. And a son who was born after 90 years of prayers and was the justification of the words: “We give you the good news of a boy...”⁸ and also the bearer of the effulgence of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w). The gist of the matter is that as far as the superiority of Ismail to the ram is concerned I am in perfect agreement with the honorable Maulana. Even though it be a ram of Paradise and however fat it may be, but its superiority to prophets is impossible. Let us however examine this matter from another angle. Is it not possible that in tradition where the ram is said to be “great sacrifice” there is no issue of its comparison with His Eminence, Ismail (a.s)? And this comparison is only the product of our imagination? Is it necessary to construe that it only means “greater than Ismail”? Can it not be construed that it denotes “great in itself” or “greater than other animals”? Would it be against eloquence? The fact is that no trace of comparison with His Eminence, Ismail (a.s) is found in the traditions. Rather they are content to just state the greatness of the ram itself and they inform us that the ram was born without the medium of parents by the command of God and grazed in Paradise for forty years and the Almighty Allah had created it only to save the life of Ismail (a.s). In this regard it possesses a superiority over all animals and that is why it is called “great.” This was the apparent explanation and the inner exegesis indeed says that it refers to the great martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s). Allamah Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali has also confessed this in his translation

and commentary of this verse. I am not quoting his writing for the sake of brevity. In the same way whatever Maulana Farman 'Ali has written about this matter has already been quoted by us above. Even our Zakireen⁹, when they see that the "great sacrifice" refers to the martyrdom of Husayn (a.s) they become needless of more contemplation and instantly translate that: We have made the sacrifice of Husayn as the ransom of Ismail and on the basis of this translation they construct their whole speech (Majlis). They discover such corners of virtues and calamities that even the stoniest heart could not, but be affected by it. Though only this much is correct in this translation that the great sacrifice denotes the sacrifice of Husayn (a.s). The first objection that applies to this translation is that a ransom is always of lesser value and significance than the ransomed object/person. It does not befit the people of reason that they sacrifice a thing of more value to save something of lesser value. And here the sacrifice is said to be ransomed by the "great sacrifice" or in his words Imam Husayn (a.s) is taken as ransom of Ismail, which is not in any way acceptable because the Infallible Imams (a.s) are universally believed to be superior to all prophets except the Last Prophet (s.a.w). Therefore the translation is absolutely wrong. The reply given to this objection is that at that time Ismail (a.s) carried in his loins the seeds of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) and Lady Fatima Zahra (a.s) and also all the Infallible Imams among whom Imam Husayn (a.s) was also included and were Ismail slaughtered at that time, it would have destroyed the seeds of all the Imams. Therefore Imam Husayn (a.s) did not become only the ransom of Ismail (a.s), but he became the ransom of this whole chain of whom he was also a part, and there is nothing wrong according to reason if a part is sacrificed for the whole. The statement of Maulana Farman 'Ali in the margins that: That is why the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) used to remark that 'Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn' also most probably denotes the same thing and he has indicated towards this same reply. These justifications indeed entertain a religious gathering but the actual problem is not solved. Just suppose even if we ignore this question it still remains unsolved that when the aim of the sacrifice was fulfilled and the sincerity and steadfastness of Ibrahim and Ismail (a.s) passed the test and the life of Ismail was also saved, then what was the need of presenting a ransom? Apart from this, we should also note that the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s) was destined much before the incident of Ismail (a.s) and the Almighty Allah had also hinted it on different occasions. Thus His Eminence, Adam (a.s), His Eminence, Nuh (a.s), and His Eminence, Ibrahim (a.s) had already been informed about the event of Karbala' before the occurrence of this incident (of Ismail). Then keeping in mind this point how far is it justified to say that the martyrdom Imam Husayn (a.s) was made the ransom of Ismail's slaughter? Now I do not wish to keep the readers in further suspense. I present the same narration according to which the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s) is said to denote the "great sacrifice." (And indeed it denotes thus!) So that it becomes clear what the intention of the narration is and what the people have construed it to mean.

Fazl narrates that he heard Imam 'Ali Reza (a.s) say: When the Almighty Allah commanded Ibrahim (a.s) to slaughter the ram that was sent in place of his son, Ismail, Ibrahim (a.s) wished he had not been commanded to slaughter the ram and he had been allowed to slaughter Ismail with his own hands so that he had experienced a grief a father feels on slaughtering ones own beloved son and in this way he

would have become eligible for the rewards of such grief stricken people. Thus Allah revealed to him: O Ibrahim! Who is most beloved to you among all the creatures? Ibrahim (a.s) replied, “O my Lord! None among Your creatures is as much beloved to me as Your beloved, Muhammad.” Thus revelation came asking him: Is he more precious to you or your own self? He said that he was more beloved to him than his own self. Then he was asked whether he (Muhammad’s) son was more beloved to him or his own son (Ismail)? Ibrahim (a.s) replied, “His (Muhammad’s) son is more beloved to me. At that time the Almighty Allah informed, “Would you be more aggrieved upon his oppressive slaughter or upon the slaughter of your son by your hands under My orders?” Ibrahim (a.s) said that he would be more aggrieved on the slaughter of the Prophet’s son at the hands of enemies. Then the Almighty Allah informed him that a group would think that they are from the nation of Muhammad and after Muhammad they would unjustly slay his son like a ram is slaughtered. And those people would become eligible for divine wrath due to this act. Hearing this incident, Ibrahim (a.s) became restless and his heart became aggrieved and began to weep.

At that time the Almighty Allah revealed: O Ibrahim! The grief you would have suffered due to slaughtering Ismail with your own hands, We have ransomed it with this restlessness that you experienced due to Husayn and his slaying and I have bestowed you with the highest position of the grief stricken people; and that is the aim of the divine saying:

And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice. 10

You must have noted what the tradition says. Read the narration and think upon its explanation. Does it say that Allah made the sacrifice of Husayn (a.s) as ransom of the slaughter of Ismail? After writing this tradition, Allamah Majlisi has also explained it and first of all he has mentioned the objection of the lesser value of the ransom and the greatness of Imam Husayn (a.s). Then he has stated the same point, which we have stated in our forgone discussion. However after that he says: It is not stated in this tradition that the Almighty Allah made Husayn the ransom of Ismail, therefore there is no scope of objection about ransom. Rather it says that the Almighty Allah ransomed the grief of Ibrahim (a.s) he would have experienced by slaughtering Ismail by his restlessness and weeping upon Husayn (a.s). Then he says: Obviously on the basis of this tradition the “ransom” here does not denote ransom in the real sense. It only denotes giving something in exchange because His Eminence, Ibrahim (a.s) was regretting that he had missed the reward of grieving for his son. Therefore the Almighty gave him in its place a thing that was more rewarding and superior, that is the grief on the sufferings of Imam Husayn (a.s).

The gist of the matter is that the martyrdom of Husayn (a.s) was a pre–destined event. It did not occur to save Ismail from slaughter. Therefore the objection is not applicable that the ransom must be of lesser value than the ransomed thing.

Towards the end I would also like to point out that if the ‘b’ in ‘bi zibhin azeem’ is taken to be article of causation it would denote ransom in the true sense. However, under such circumstances would it become the cause of the ransom and not ransom itself. That is, it would mean that due to the “great

sacrifice” We have given the ransom of Ismail and saved him because if Ismail had been slaughtered, Imam Husayn (a.s) would not have come into existence. Therefore to save him, Ismail was saved through the ram. Allamah Majlisi has also suggested this interpretation in *Biharul Anwar*. The aim of the Allamah is that if the ransom is taken in its actual connotation, we would have to consider ‘bi’ as the ‘bi’ of causation. And if it is not considered causative we would have to accept that the pronoun of ‘ha’ contains a metaphor and also the ransom would have to be considered synonymous to “replacement.” Hopefully the inner interpretation of this verse has become clear for the readers.

Now it remains to be seen why the Almighty Allah has honored the martyrdom as a “great sacrifice.” By comparing it to other events from the aspect of the loftiness of the aim, the importance of the events, the comprehensiveness of the consequence and its effectiveness it could be shown that a sacrifice greater than this had neither been offered before nor is there any possibility that it shall be done even in the future. But since all such discussion here would prolong the article so much that no space would remain for other articles in al-Jawwad Journal, I refrain from the same. However, it need not be mentioned that this is just a preface to a deeper understanding of Karbala’ Tragedy.

The Great Sacrifice

There are so many misunderstandings among the Muslims regarding the verse: “And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice,” that no other verse of Qur’an is equal in this aspect. I had written an article in al-Jawwad Muharram Special Issue on the topic of this same verse. In that treatise I had explained and investigated all the aspects of the verse in the light of traditions and narrations and explained how the status and position of Imam Husayn (a.s) is so high and lofty that he could not be considered as a ransom of Prophet Ismail (a.s). According to the view of Allamah Majlisi (vide *Biharul Anwar*) Imam Husayn (a.s), the Chief of the Martyrs is the cause of the ransom itself. In his view the actual connotations of the verse is that: Due to the great sacrifice We saved Ismail by ransoming him. That is, because the Chief of the Martyrs was supposed to appear in the progeny of Ismail (a.s) and if he had been slaughtered, this effulgence would not have come into existence, the Almighty God saved Ismail (a.s) and in his lieu the ram was slaughtered. Hence the question arises that many innocent lives were taken and blood spilled after Prophet Ismail (a.s). Many Prophets of Bani Israel were killed at the hands of the oppressors and the verse of Qur’an proves it:

...and killed the prophets unjustly... 11

Then what is the reason that only Imam Husayn (a.s) should be taken as the evidence of this verse? However by studying carefully the words of the verse it becomes clear that here it does not merely denote the killing of an innocent soul in the path of Allah. Rather it denotes that special condition of killing that is referred to as “the Great Sacrifice.” It is obvious that no proof could be given about those honorable prophets that they were “slaughtered.” Only Prophet Yahya (a.s) is able to fill the criterion and his similarity to Imam Husayn (a.s) extends to the fact that his severed head was also placed in a

tray and presented to a king. However first of all his circumstances can hardly be compared to the incidents of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s), so how could it be greater than the sacrifice of Imam Husayn (a.s)? Secondly the interpretation of Allamah Majlisi shows that the great sacrifice was to occur in the progeny of Ismail (a.s) and it is not connected to anyone from Bani Israel. Otherwise for its protection there was no need to save the life of Ismail (a.s). Therefore, Prophet Yahya (a.s) can never be the evidence of this verse. Let us now see which murder in the progeny of Ismail (a.s) is such that it could be called as “the great sacrifice” and its greatness should also be absolutely proved.

In the progeny of Ismail (a.s) quite later on, we notice the incident of Abdullah Ibn Abdul Muttalib, who was going to be slaughtered in the way of Allah and Abdul Muttalib was fully prepared to slaughter him in order to fulfill his vow. However his mother and other people of Mecca objected to it and restrained him from such a course of action and thus the question of a ransom arose. The drawing of lots started with ten camels and always the name of Abdullah was drawn. Until the lots were cast for 100 camels and Abdullah and then it was drawn for the 100 camels and in this way Abdullah was saved from being slaughtered at that time, just as Prophet Ismail (a.s) had escaped the slaughter. Due to this event the Islamic religious law has stipulated 100 camels as the penalty of willful murder.

In any case, Prophet Ismail and after him Abdullah, both were fully prepared to be slaughtered but Providence saved them for divine wisdom. That is why the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) used to say: I am the son of two slaughtered ones (sacrifices). After this event if any incident in the progeny could be termed as “the great sacrifice” and which is in its fullest sense, is that of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s). This divine wisdom is worth contemplation that even though Imam Husayn (a.s) had suffered so many physical and emotional wounds that were alone sufficient to cause death, the connection between him and life was not severed until the prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. So much so, that the accursed Shimr committed the heinous act that caused furor in the earth and the heavens. And the trustworthy Jibraeel announced from the skies: Know that! Husayn has been slaughtered in Karbala’!

In any case, in this essay, I would like to briefly describe the events of Ismail (a.s) and Imam Husayn (a.s) and draw a comparison between them to point out why the Almighty Allah has honored the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s) by the lofty title of “the great sacrifice.” And also whether the events of the martyrdom and the circumstances of the slaughter of Imam Husayn (a.s) are really worthy of this title or not. Although I know that if any scholar takes up the task of writing on this topic, even after writing reams and reams he would confess that he has not been able to do justice to the subject matter.

And inspite of this I have dared to write about it. I think that so what if my writing could not show the “great sacrifice” in the true light. At least it would be a proof of my daring of unbounded love. Anyway, I would restrict this essay only to those topics that are common, if only in name, to Prophet Ismail and Imam Husayn (a.s). It is obvious that as much the causes of peace of the heart and leisure keep on decreasing and as much they increase spiritual pain and physical discomfort as much the greatness of the slaughtered one shall go on increasing. Slaughter is itself the greatest pain and in addition to it the

presence of other pains enhances its greatness. Let us now, in the light of this view, cast a brief glance on both the events from their beginning to the end.

(1) Cause of the slaughter

Prophet Ismail (a.s) was being slaughtered by the command of Allah and he was even aware of it. His words as recorded in Qur'an: "...do what you are commanded..."¹² prove my assertion that he himself had also given the permission. Therefore his killing was not based on injustice and neither could he be called an oppressed one. On the other hand the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s) was such a great cruelty whose equal could not be found since the inception of the created world until Qiyamat. His Eminence, Ibrahim (a.s) was going to slaughter Ismail (a.s) for the pleasure of God and the words: "Thus do We reward the doers of good."¹³ have given him the certificate of acceptance also. On the other hand the killers of Husayn (a.s) were cutting off his parched throat to gain the proximity of Yazid. They did not care that through this deed they would become eligible for a painful chastisement. They slaughtered Husayn (a.s) and earned the displeasure of Allah, they slit the heart of the Prophet and injured the feelings of Lady Fatima (s.a.). They made a crack in the foundation of Islam. They blemished the face of humanity. They shattered the screens of civility and ethics and insulted humanity. They proved true by spilling innocent blood, the fear of the angels when they had said:

What! Wilt Thou place in it such as shall make mischief in it and shed blood...¹⁴

(2) The Slaughtered One

The one who was slaughtering Ismail (a.s) was his own respected father whose love and affection for his son could be gauged even if we ignore his perfect humanity, prophethood and friendship of God, just by the fact that Ismail (a.s) was fruit of his prayers of 99 years. Until that time Ismail (a.s) was his only child and all his future hopes were connected to him alone. He was supposed to be his support in his old age. He was the light of his eyes. He was the strength of his heart and the achievement of his life. In such circumstances, how gentle he would have been in using the knife could be understood by any sensible person. On the other hand, the killers of Imam Husayn (a.s) were such that instead of mercy and gentleness their hearts were filled with cruelty and mercilessness. Instead of any love and regard in their eyes they were having utter shamelessness and their tongues, instead of softness and kindness had hardness and sharpness. They were deadly enemies and were utterly shameless. They were enemies of ethics. In their view the meaning of humanity was only limited to the glitter of gold and silver. And this glitter had perplexed their eyes so much that they did not flinch in making a six-month infant a target for arrows. How can any mercy and caution be expected from such people? The events testify that they did not rest content only to slaughter Husayn (a.s). They put into practice all the atrocities that a human mind can imagine. Apparently from this aspect also the greatness of the sacrifice of Husayn increases.

(3) Tools of Slaughter

Religious law commands that before slaughter the instrument should be sharpened adequately so that the slaughtered one has to undergo minimum pain. Apart from this, His Eminence, Ibrahim (a.s) was an affectionate father as mentioned above therefore it goes without saying that he must have sharpened the knife as much as possible. However in Karbala', where other rules of human behavior were ignored, the sword used to sever his holy head was so blunt that according to famous traditional reports, it took twelve slashes before it could complete its job. In addition to this, another aspect of the greatness of Husayn (a.s) is that even if Ismail (a.s) had been slaughtered, only a single stroke would have been used for it and his body would have received only a single wound. However, for the killing of Husayn (a.s), which attack was such that it had not been used hundreds of times? Swords, daggers, arrows, spears, maces, stones, burning pieces of wood, ridicules. In other words, every instrument that had been invented to injure the body and soul until that time, all were employed for Imam Husayn (a.s). Such was the propensity of the injuries inflicted upon the purified body of the Holy Imam that according to famous traditions only the front portion of his body had 1951 wounds.

(4) Method of Slaughter

Regarding Ismail (a.s) the Holy Qur'an says:

...he threw him down upon his forehead... 15

It means that Ibrahim (a.s) made Ismail (a.s) lie down sideways so that his cheek touched the earth in the same way as a ram is laid for slaughter. This is done in such a way so that there is ease in cutting the neck and it is least painful way of severing the head. Mulla Mohsin Faiz has explained it in the above way. On the other hand the manner in which Imam Husayn (a.s) was beheaded was such that no tongue has the strength to speak about it and no pen could summon the courage to describe it. It is sufficient to say that Imam Husayn (a.s) is given the special title of: 'One slaughtered at the nape.' and how painfully the head is severed from the body by this method cannot be imagined by anyone.

(5) Condition of welcoming death

Ismail (a.s) accepted the command of slaughter, which even though it would have granted a lofty position to him and his respected father, he still considered it a calamity and trouble; that is why he said:

...if Allah please, you will find me of the patient ones. 16

Saying so he announced his patience, which is restricted to troublesome circumstances. On the other hand, Imam Husayn (a.s) and his companions considered their killing and slaughter, which was neither under the command of Allah nor due to some retaliation or penalty, as solely for the pleasure of God and on the basis of the steadfastness of their truth a mercy, as the following tradition indicates:

“The condition of Husayn (a.s) and some of his special companions was such that as calamities continued to befall them, their countenances shone more and more and their limbs and organs expressed absolute peace and comfort and the soul continued to proceed on the stages of peace.¹⁷ This is regarding some special companions, if the general condition of all the companions and relatives is to be seen one could read the following words of another traditional report, which describes the conversation on the eve of Ashura day:

The Holy Imam said, “All of you shall be killed tomorrow and none shall be spared.” All said, “Thanks be to Allah, that He bestowed us the honor to be slain with you.”

On the basis of such steadfastness and daring in being killed we are compelled to say that the incident of Husayn (a.s) is not only great but it is the “greatest” such that the history of the world has failed to provide us with its equal.

(6) Condition of the slaughtered one

It is the command of the religious law that before the slaughter the beast of slaughter must be fed and watered adequately. Apart from this Ibrahim (a.s) himself wanted to provide every sort of comfort as much as was in his power, for the last time for his son. That is why at the time of leaving the house he had him fed to satiation. He asked Her Eminence, Hajrah to give him a bath and dress him in nice clothes and to comb his hair and apply kohl to his eyes. In other words before the supposed slaughtered, Ismail (a.s) got the opportunity to become content by way of personal appearance and comfort. However, what a pity! The slaughtered one of Nainawa (Husayn), his children, relatives, companions, ladies and guests; leave alone comfort and satiation, they were even deprived of the basic necessities of life, like water. In what a nice way the Kufans hosted their guests? Not even a drop of water was allowed for three days and the sound of “Thirst, thirst” used to emanate from the tents.

An Urdu poet has described this in the following lines:

The king had commanded that people may drink the water

As also the horses, riders and camels.

Do not prevent them even if the infidels drink it.

But do not allow any water to the beloved of Fatima.

Although the Almighty Lord has given the river (of Paradise) in the dower of the mother of this same thirsty one.

There Her Eminence, Hajrah had combed the hair and here the hair that Sayyida had arranged at some time were now filled with desert sand. There special clothes were used to dress Ismail (a.s) and here at the time of departure, Imam Husayn (a.s) requested his sister to get the old tattered dress so that it may

remain safe from the hands of the plunderers after his martyrdom.

(7) Circumstances surrounding the slaughter

Prophet Ismail (a.s) went for the slaughter in an absolutely peaceful mood. He was not suffering from the shock of separation of the helpers and relatives. He was not aggrieved that he had been unable to bury the last remains of his companions. He was not dreading whether after he was dead he would be buried or not. He was not surrounded by enemies from all sides from whom there could be any chance of disrespect after getting killed. He had no apprehension as to how the ladies of his family would be dealt with. He was yet a child. He neither had family nor children, neither siblings nor any companions and friends. He was absolutely alien to those relationships. He was at peace that he had come from home with his father and only his mother remained at home; regarding whom he was certain that his father was present to comfort her. He also was sure that his dead body would be buried with all respect and honor. But did Imam (a.s) also have this assurance? Did his preceding circumstances make him also so assured and content? Was he also calm regarding the events that were to follow his martyrdom? Before his eyes lay his relatives and helpers, his beloved ones, his supports and his assistance and he had laid them down in a tent to sleep forever. Now, who knew what would happen to those corpses? Who knew he would be buried? The knowledge of the unseen (Ilme Ghaib) which is supposed to be a meritorious qualification of Imamate, let me say without any intention of causing disrespect that in those circumstances it was the cause of great torture. He must be seeing that after him the tents shall be put to fire. Coverings would be snatched away from the heads of Zainab and Umme Kulthum. A thorny collar shall be put around the neck of his ailing son. This leader of the world would be given the post of a camel driver. Twelve necks shall be tied up in a single rope. The ladies of his house shall be taken around from town to town with heads uncovered on camels without saddles. In the bazaars of Kufa and Syria they would be exhibited in public. They shall be presented in a gathering where wine was drunk. They shall be kept in prisons. If they wept they shall be punished with canes. If they tried to remove thorns they shall be pricked with spear points. They shall be made targets of ridicule. They shall be scolded and spoken to in acerbic words. And in addition to all this there are many other calamities that just their imagination is sufficient to make any sensible person shiver. However, Husayn (a.s), in spite of knowing all this, neither he feared death nor he hesitated to move towards it. There is no doubt that in such circumstances it was only Husayn (a.s) who could have welcomed death with a smiling countenance. Actually there is no similarity at all between the circumstances of Ismail (a.s) and Imam Husayn (a.s) that a comparison could be drawn between them.

(8) Consequences of the Slaughter

After these prefaces and events, if we contemplate upon this matter that from the aspects of consequences, which of the two events was having more importance, we would realize that even if the incomplete slaughter of Ismail (a.s) had reached completion it would not have served any other purpose except increasing the personal honor and status of Ibrahim and Ismail (a.s). And in the court of the

Almighty their honor would have scaled heights beyond imagination. That is the scope of the effect of its benefits would have remained limited only to two persons. On the other hand, the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s) was having a great and magnificent effect. There is no doubt that due to this martyrdom, the status of Imam Husayn (a.s) also increased but it is only one aspect. If you consider the second aspect, the beneficial effects of this sacrifice were for all humanity and the whole world has gained from its consequences. This sacrifice was like the harkening to the plaintive call of Islam in distress. The barge of Islam was about to sink in dry land. Husayn (a.s) conveyed it to safety with the gush of his blood. The tree of humanity had begun to dry up with the heat of satanic handiworks. Husayn (a.s) watered it with his own blood and the blood of his companions so that it may not wither away. He watered it so well that there is no possibility of its extinction until the Day of Judgment. The benefits gained from the sacrifice of Husayn (a.s) are not restricted to Husayn and his companions. Rather they have encompassed all humanity.

Apart from this, the benefit derived from the slaughter of Ismail (a.s) was achieved merely through the readiness for slaughter. Both father and son, agreed respectively, to slaughter and be slaughtered. All the preparations were made and it was certain that they would practically do it the way it was supposed to be done. All this became very much clear even before the actual action. That is why, the Almighty Allah abrogated the slaughter after their intention became obvious, saying:

You have indeed shown the truth of the vision... 18

He declared that He had achieved what He intended. Now if the slaughter were really to be taken to completion, it would be a useless act. It means that looking closely, no benefit was related to the slaughter in a way that it could only be achieved by its completion. In other words you can say that the slaughter itself was of no use. Whatever benefit was desired it was only related to the willingness of slaughter. On the other hand, the benefits of the great sacrifice of Karbala' could not have been obtained without the completion of this sacrifice. Benefits and consequences of the sacrifice of Imam Husayn (a.s) that are mentioned above, all of them depended on the sacrifice of Husayn (a.s). In any case if the worth of a thing is estimated through its consequences and effects, if the actual status of deeds and actions depends on their results we would have to agree that ignoring other previous effects if you only consider the end results you have to say that the sacrifice of Imam Husayn (a.s) was indeed the reality and truth. It is not even remotely connected to exaggeration and poetry. Indeed this event is deserving from all angles that it should be given the certificate of perfection and along with the "great morals" of the paternal grandfather (the Prophet) the "great sacrifice" of the grandson (Husayn) should be recorded in Qur'an until the Day of Judgment because:

...Surely thus do We reward the doers of good. 19

Communal Sacrifice

Prior to Prophet Ibrahim (a.s) there was no concept of determination to bear difficulties with cooperation, to say farewell to comfort and luxury in a communal manner for the sake of religious propagation and to sacrifice ones honor; there was no such thing in the world of religion. An impartial glance at the history of religions shows that the sacrifice of Ismail was the first incident when the family members of a Prophet helped him shoulder to shoulder to fulfill his aims according to his directions. Only three famous prophets had passed before this: (1) Prophet Adam (2) Prophet Idris and (3) Prophet Nuh (a.s). Apart from this we find the name of Prophet Lut (a.s) among the contemporaries.

There was no question of sacrifice before Prophet Adam (a.s). Although he had to try his best to impart training for his children. But in this aspect also he was all alone. His children also did not cooperate with him to the extent that could be expected in that simple age. The blatant murder committed by Qabeel is a clear proof of the absence of such cooperation. Lady Hawwa (Eve) also is not recorded to have presented any extraordinary efforts or sacrifice worthy of mention. At least we have no sources for such information.

Prophet Idris was also alone in the Herculean task of religious propagation. No clear or unclear proof can be presented of the cooperation of his family members.

Now the age of Prophet Nuh (a.s) arrived. He was faced with the task of reforming a community that was absolutely wayward. He expended all his powers for a period of 950 years to correct his nation and in lieu of the labors of inviting towards good he was given all sorts of calamities. Even stones were showered on him. He was targeted with malicious taunts and ridicules. However, all these things were aimed at Prophet Nuh (a.s) alone. His family members were absolutely unrelated with all this. Leave alone the mention of his “unrighteous son” who no more remained from his family. I am talking about his believer sons, Saam, Haam and Yafith. The list of their virtues is only limited to the fact that they had only brought faith. They were also similar to those eighty sincere people who had brought faith. It cannot however be said that the sons of Nuh (a.s) cooperated in his work and shared his difficulties. He had a wife who spied for the infidels and was a confidant of the enemies. The Holy Qur’an says:

Allah sets forth an example to those who disbelieve the wife of Nuh and the wife of Lut: they were both under two of Our righteous servants, but they acted treacherously towards them so they availed them naught against Allah, and it was said: Enter both the fire with those who enter.²⁰

This verse also provides the judgment about the family of Prophet Lut (a.s). He had no male issue, so no help could be expected from this quarter and the Holy Qur’an has already told us about the condition of his spouse. In other words, he was also alone in the field of religious propagation. That is why he had uttered in a sad tone:

Ah! That I had power to suppress you, rather I shall have recourse to a strong support.²¹

Keeping these circumstances in mind, we can add to the merits and superiorities to Prophet Ibrahim (a.s), the fact that he was the first Prophet who received total cooperation to fulfill a divine mission. The first display of this was at the time of the sacrifice of Ismail. The Almighty Allah says:

And when he attained to working with him, he said: O my son! Surely I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you; consider then what you see.²²

By saying, “consider then what you see” and by finding out the opinion of Ismail (a.s), Prophet Ibrahim (a.s) made his achievement a joint achievement of himself and his son. Otherwise it would have remained an achievement of only Prophet Ibrahim (a.s) and Prophet Ismail (a.s) would not have got any credit for it.

In the present form just as this incident shows the high divine recognition of Prophet Ibrahim (a.s) in the same way it is a mirror of the self-discipline, high character, patience and forbearance of Ismail (a.s).

Anyway, this event was the foundation stone of cooperation and help of family members of a prophetic household with the prophets in the path of God, which was placed at the hands of Ismail (a.s). Those who succeeded him after this, continued to build upon this.

The helpers of Prophet Musa (a.s) from his relatives did not remain confined to the four walls of his house. The whole tribe of Bani Israel assembled under his leadership. Historical events and Qur’anic statements prove this fact.

No progress worth the mention took place in this regard during the period of Prophet Isa (a.s) because he was sent only as a Prophet for Bani Israel. His job, according to the New Testament was only that he brings back to the flock “the lost sheep of Bani Israel.” That is why his helpers and companions remained limited to the Bani Israel. During the holy period of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) the building of cooperation and partnership arose one more level, and not only do we find the family members of the Prophet among helpers in religion and only his tribes people but many people of other tribes are also seen. Except for Banu Umayyah, Bani Teem and Bani Adi there was hardly any tribe whose representatives did not cooperate and help in spreading the Islamic faith and strengthening it with their lives and property even though they may have been less in number.

However the aim of this writing is not to prove that every person who sat in the company of the Prophet was a helper. Indeed it would have been an occasion of great pride for me if the incidents had given me the chance to do so. I would have boasted to all the religions of the world that my Prophet was such that those who benefited from his company, those who obtained light from the effulgence of his guidance and those who saw the miracle of his leadership were such people that each was the devotee of truth, an ardent follower of Divine Recognition and one who considered every material thing inferior in the path of Allah and one who was ready to sacrifice his life and property over the command of God. But if I claim thus, my conscience would falsify me and there would be no solution for me except to bow down my head in shame.

Indeed, as far as the Prophet had raised the edifice of sacrifices, after that the only destination remained was that all the supporters that were there and all the friends he was having, all of them should be having the same opinion and same caliber. But for this purpose another half a century was required after the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) and there was need for the plains of Karbala’.

At last that day also arrived when the actual and perfect meaning of “Communal Sacrifice” was going to be presented to the world with all its fine points. Husayn (a.s) came to the plains of Karbala’ and along with him brought the aged, the young, the middle aged, children, women, men his relatives and strangers, Arabs and non-Arabs. He brought with him people of all ages and gender. Fathers, sons, uncles, nephews, maternal uncles, brothers, sisters, husband-wife, people of the family, tribesmen, co-religionists. In other words, people of every relationship were represented in Karbala’. All came carrying the same feelings in the heart. All came carrying the same longing for sacrifice. The companions of Husayn (a.s) had attached their hearts to the heart of Husayn (a.s) with some unknown magnetism, and that is why every heartbeat of Husayn (a.s) was creating turmoil in their hearts. They had made their vision the mirror of the vision of Husayn. That is why the center of their view was the point of view of Husayn (a.s). They had given the rein of their thoughts in the hands of Husayn (a.s), and they used to think only that which was according to the wish of Husayn (a.s). They had entrusted their actions and character under the actions and character of Husayn (a.s) and they did only what Husayn (a.s) did.

Ibrahim had given the opportunity to think and contemplate. Husayn (a.s) had also presented the details of the consequences of the confrontation to his companions. However, the responses were different. Saying: “You will find me of the patient ones,” Ismail (a.s) gave opportunity for the possibility that he considered the sacrifice a calamity for himself. But if you read the responses of the companions of Husayn (a.s) you will realize that they considered this sacrifice a welcome bounty. They were eager to die in the path of God. They had an ardent desire to have themselves beheaded for truth.

Imam Husayn (a.s) had reached a stage during his journey when slumber overtook him. When he awoke, he was uttering the words: Indeed we are for Allah and indeed we shall return to Him. His Eminence, ‘Ali Akbar asked the reason for reciting the Qur’anic verse. He replied, “I have heard a caller say: You are hastening forward and your death is hastening to take you towards Paradise.” His Eminence, ‘Ali Akbar asked, “O father! Are we not on truth?” The Imam replied, “Yes, son, by Allah, we are on the truth.” Now ‘Ali Akbar replied with such a great certainty and poise that his reply is sufficient to inculcate valor even in the dead hearts. He said, “Dear father, then we are not in the least worried of dying for the truth.”

On the eve of Ashura, Imam Husayn (a.s) released all his companions from his oath of allegiance and Zuhair Qayn, His Eminence, Abbas, Muslim bin Ausaja and many other companions and relatives representing all those present over there expressed the firmness of their intention to help and support the Imam (a.s). They emphatically declared this in forceful words. Imam Husayn (a.s) had told them, “All of you are going to be killed and none shall survive.” They replied happily, “Praise be to Allah, Who

bestowed us the honor to be martyred with you.” Such an example has no equal in history of death. Anyway, this was a reply of the elders and grown-ups. Now I would like to mention about that lad who was more or less the same age of Ismail (a.s). That is, His Eminence, Qasim, who was hardly thirteen at that time. When on the eve of Ashura, Imam Husayn (a.s) prophesied the martyrdom of each person individually and but intentionally omitted the name of His Eminence, Qasim, he became restless and disconcerted and asked the Imam about it. Instead of replying Imam (a.s) asked him, “How do you regard death?” Now compare the response of this lad to that of Ismail (a.s). He replied immediately, “Dear uncle, (I regard death) sweeter than honey.” Only those who have taste could gauge the sweetness of the reply of this young boy. We would have to agree that just as the sacrifice of Karbala’ had a wide scope of communal participation, in the same way the level of enthusiasm of the participants was so high that its equal is not found anywhere and it is beyond imagination.

In any case, Imam Husayn (a.s) and his companions came with zeal and a united enthusiasm to the plains of Karbala’ to present their sacrifices. All of them showed such unity and similarity in words and deeds that Imam Husayn (a.s) had to confess this fact. Please recall that famous statement of the Holy Imam on the Ashura eve. “Indeed, I do not know whose companions were more loyal and better than mine. Or whose Ahl al-Bayt were more righteous and kind. So, may Allah give you a good recompense.”

Does this statement not announce that of all the buildings of sacrifice that had been constructed so far, this one was the loftiest of them? And events show that it was the last stage. The preface of sacrifice that Ismail (a.s) had written on the plains of Mina by his submission and will, it was concluded on the deserts of Karbala’ by Imam Husayn (a.s) and his companions with their own blood. This was the brilliant and effective end of that which had started with Ismail (a.s) and it was absolutely astonishing and magnificent. The whole world feels those facts and is compelled to confess its greatness. The world famous Persian and Urdu poet of the Indian Peninsula, Allamah Iqbal Lahori says regarding the ardent love for Almighty, which brought about this communal sacrifice in the following words:

“The end of it was Husayn

While its beginning was Ismail.”

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1. Surah Saffat 37:102
 2. Surah Saffat 37:103–105
 3. Surah Saffat 37:106–107
 4. Tafsir Kabir, Vol. 7, Pg. 160, Malimut Tanzil, Pg. 759, Durre Manthur, Vol. 5, Pg. 284
 5. Pg. 719, Urdu Translation of Holy Qur’an by Late Maulana Farman ‘Ali
 6. Surah Saffat 37:102
 7. Surah Hajj 22:37
 8. Surah Hijr 15:53
 9. Plural of Zakir, Speakers about the virtues of Ahle Bayt (a.s.) and their afflictions, especially the Tragedy of Karbala’

10. Surah Saffat 37:107
11. Surah Baqarah 2:61
12. Surah Saffat 37:102
13. Surah Saffat 37:110
14. Surah Baqarah 2:30
15. Surah Saffat 37:103
16. Surah Saffat 37:102
17. Maniul Akhbar, quoted in Biharul Anwar
18. Surah Saffat 37:105
19. Surah Saffat 37:105
20. Surah Tahrim 66:10
21. Surah Hud 11:80
22. Surah Saffat 37:102

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