

Giving in the Way of Allah (Infaq) is a Defining Characteristic of Muslims

H A R U N Y A H Y A

There is a most important truth revealed in the verse **“You will not attain true goodness until you give of what you love,”** (Surah Al ‘Imran, 92) One of the most basic qualities that leads people to “goodness” in the true sense is “altruism.” The word itself means the willing and immediate renunciation of things a person possesses, loves and values. It means being prepared when necessary to undergo all kinds of difficulty and trouble for the values one believes in or those whom one loves, and to do all in one’s power on their behalf with enthusiasm, determination and will. It means being able to renounce one’s own interests when faced with a choice between them and the values one upholds and the people one loves and to make all kinds of material and other sacrifices for their sake.

However, human passions have been created with a predisposition towards poor moral values such as selfishness and egotism. Unless properly trained, these selfish emotions come to completely dominate a person’s moral framework. Such a person thinks mainly of himself rather than of anyone else. He always wants the best, the most attractive, the most perfect of everything for himself. Yet he also expects everyone else to demonstrate understanding and self-sacrifice. Whenever he encounters any difficulty he expects those around him to undergo risks and inconvenience for him, and to support him even to the extent of foregoing their own interests. He desires to protect his own wishes and interests and to ensure his own ease and comfort. In an adverse situation a person may be able to renounce many things he values – in the name of protecting his or her interests and preventing any harm from coming to him. Allah has revealed this excessive selfishness in the human spirit in the Qur’an:

Truly man was created headstrong – desperate when bad things happen, begrudging when good things come. (Surat al-Ma’arij, 19-21)

It is possible to free one’s spirit from this weakness by understanding faith and living by the moral values of the Qur’an. Someone who understands the truths revealed in the Qur’an and the moral conception commanded by Allah will achieve a state of morality capable of exhibiting altruism at any moment of his life. That is because in the verse **“It is the people who are safe-guarded from the avarice of their own selves who are successful”** (Surat at-Taghabun, 64), Allah has revealed that it is safeguarding their desires from this vice that will lead people to salvation in this world and the next.

Allah has created the human conscience in order for people to protect their passions from evil and to attain the kind of moral values beloved of Him. The voice of that conscience shows people the way to avoid all forms of wickedness and to attain what is good. The deep love and powerful fear of Allah in the heart of a true believer prevents him from being vanquished by the wickedness of his desires. Knowing that the true purpose behind his existence in the life of this world is to attain Allah’s approval, such a person seeks to spend every moment of his life behaving in such a way that will be pleasing to Allah. He knows that the life of this world is but short, and that a person must strive for the eternal life of the Hereafter. He never forgets that all the interests he obtains here are transitory, after which he will have to render account to Allah. He knows that those who seek to ensure their own desires and interests in the life of this world, instead of seeking Allah’s approval, mercy and Paradise, may be rewarded with eternal suffering in the Hereafter. On the other hand, Allah will recompense altruistic moral values with goodness and beauty in this world and by eternal, incomparable blessings in the next. In the Qur’an, Allah imparts these glad tidings to people who behave morally,

Those who do good will have the best and more! Neither dust nor debasement will darken their faces. They are the Companions of the Garden, remaining in it timelessly, for ever. (Surah Yunus, 26)

So Allah gave them the reward of the world and the best reward of the Hereafter. Allah loves good-doers. (Surah Al ‘Imran, 148)

... If anyone desires the reward of the world, We will give him some of it. If anyone desires the reward of the Hereafter, We will give him some of it. We will recompense the thankful. (Surah Al ‘Imran, 145)

When one thinks of self-sacrifice, however, what comes to mind should not be solely giving away part of one’s material possessions, that part which represents more than one actually needs for oneself. Self-sacrifice is a way of life that stems from strength of faith and dominates a believer’s entire life. This spirit of altruism needs to be

present within a sensitivity of conscience to everything going on around a person. Altruism means a person seeking to feel himself responsible on every matter, from social problems to the oppressed, persecuted, starving and needy people all over the world, and striving to find a solution to them. It is the employment of one's reason and conscience at the highest possible level, without ever saying, "There are plenty of people with the means and resources to resolve all these issues, so let them do it." It means those with a "vestige of good," as revealed in the verse: **"Would that there had been more people with a vestige of good among the generations of those who came before you, who forbade corruption in the Earth, other than the few among them whom We saved. Those who did wrong gladly pursued the life of luxury that they were given and were evildoers"** (Surah Hud, 116), Muslims who believe, who listen to the voice of their consciences and fear Allah, acting in the knowledge of their responsibilities.

When we look at the events experienced by Muslims throughout the course of history we see that they have always been able to overcome troubles and difficulties in this way. Beginning with the Prophet Muhammad (saas), made a role model for all humanity by Allah, and his companions, Muslims have always lived this moral framework in the best manner possible and have been a means whereby, with their superior solidarity and instances of self-sacrifice, Islam and the moral values of the Qur'an have spread all over the world. The superior moral values and generosity of the Prophet (saas) are revealed thus in the hadiths:

** The Prophet (saas) was the most generous of people in auspicious deeds. The Prophet (saas) was more generous even than the wind blowing from the direction of good.*

** He never said "I do not possess such" when asked for something and never begrudged anything asked of him.*

** Abu Zerr told me the following: "Son of my brother! I went to the Prophet's (saas) side. Taking my hand, he said, 'Abu Zerr! Even if I had as much gold and silver as Mount Uhud I would wish to spend it in the way of Allah, leaving not a farthing behind'."*

The Prophet (saas), the finest role model for Muslims with his superior moral values, encouraged the faithful to be generous in these words during a sermon:

** In one of his sermons, after giving thanks to Allah he [The Prophet Muhammad (saas)] said: "O People! Know that Allah has chosen Islam for you as your religion. Adorn your Islam with generosity and pleasing moral values. I wish you to know that generosity is a heavenly tree, with its roots in Paradise and its branches in this world. Those of you who have generosity will adhere to one of those branches, and that branch will carry him to Paradise. As for parsimoniousness, that is a tree with its roots in Hell and its branches in this world. Whoever clings to one of those branches by being parsimonious, it will carry him to Hell." Later the Prophet (saas) again said, "Be generous in the way of Allah."*

The companions of the Prophet (saas) who were ready to unquestioningly give up their goods and lives in order to gain the approval of Allah exhibited great examples of self-sacrifice throughout their lives. Since they possessed a sure and certain belief in Allah and the Hereafter they never regarded giving in the way of Allah (infaq) as representing any kind of loss; on the contrary, they saw it as an important opportunity to gain the love of and closeness to Allah. As revealed by Allah in the verse: **"And how is it with you that you do not give in the way of Allah, when the inheritance of the heavens and the Earth belongs to Allah? Those of you who gave and fought before the Victory are not the same as those who gave and fought afterwards. They are higher in rank. But to each of them Allah has promised the Best. Allah is aware of what you do."** (Surat al-Hadid, 10), those who sacrificed their property in times of difficulty acted in the knowledge of the value of that action in the sight of Allah.

Therefore, all Muslims must take these superior moral values of our Prophet (saas) and his companions as role models for themselves, and must compete with one another to help those in need. It must never be forgotten that self-sacrifice performed with true sincerity is most valued in the sight of our Lord and a marvellous opportunity for Muslims who seek to attain the infinite blessings of Paradise.

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