Al-Islam.org
Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project
Published on *Al-Islam.org* (https://www.al-islam.org)



# The Sacrifice of Ismail

Your dear son, the fruit of your life, your joy, your reason for being, the meaning of your existence, your son, no, your Ismail – Knock him down as a lamb and offer him as a sacrifice! Hold his limbs under your feet so he cannot escape. Hold his head by grabbing his hair in your hands, cut his carotid, but hold him under your feet until you feel he cannot move anymore. Then – stand up and leave him alone! Oh "obedient" one and "Servant" of God! This is what God wants from you. This is the "call of your faith" "the spirit of your message". This is your responsibility – Oh "responsible man"! Oh "father of Ismail"!

Ibrahim had two alternatives – either to follow the cry of his heart and "save" Ismail or to follow the order of God and "sacrifice" him! He had to choose one! "Love" and "truth" were struggling inside him (love which was his life and truth which was his faith)! Had Allah asked for his own life, it would have been much easier! Ibrahim gave his life for the cause of Allah and this was why he felt "obedient" to God. This was"selfishness" and a "weakness" for him. What is good and beautiful for certain people is considered bad and ugly for an honorable man like Ibrahim. He was the closest to God. (Note the relativity of moral values in Ibrahim's school! What a different interpretation.)

Oh Ibrahim, "give up your Ismail"! "Doubt" – how killing and dangerous it is! As a result, one seeks refuge in an "explanation and justification". This happens when the heart hates but the faith loves! His "responsibility" wants him to give up his son, but it is very difficult to do. He tries to find a means of evasion. What is worse than a wrong "interpretation" is the right "explanation" (i.e. to rely on one "fact" and to deny another "fact")! And more disastrous is when "falsehood" has "wisdom" as a sword in one hand and "religion" as a shield in the other!

"SACRIFICE YOUR ISMAIL" – How do I know the meaning of this command? How can I be sure that the word "sacrifice" does not have a figurative meaning like "sacrifice your soul" which means do not be the slave of your instincts and avoid their temptation! How do I know that the pronoun "you" in "your Ismail" is referring to me and I am the receiver of this call? Why is not this a collective call which in figurative meaning is an individual call? How do I know "Ismail" refers to "my Ismail" and it is not again a figurative word?'

How do I know that from a grammatical point of view, in the phrase "sacrificing Ismail", Ismail is not a

noun in the genitive case which replaces the noun governing the genitive and the latter omitted? This very often happens in the Arabic language as well as in the Holy Qur'an. For example, "asked the village" means "asked the people of the village" and here to "sacrifice Ismail" means to "sacrifice for the love of Ismail".

Let us suppose all these possibilities are impossible; none of the given meanings are correct and the command is as simple as everyone understands it. "Sacrifice your Ismail" – how do I know this has to be done right away? There is no time limit in this order as any written law. It is the duty of wisdom to choose the time taking into consideration the circumstances, policies, possibilities and potentials. The Holy Qur'an says to participate in Holy War but the time and form of this war depends on circumstances adopted by wisdom. Another example is the tradition where one is ordered to search for knowledge.

"Searching for knowledge is a must for every Muslim man and woman."
No one is forced to do it at a given time; even if he does it at the very last hours of his life when he is in bed dying he has obeyed the command and performed his duty! Another example is the Hajj which is the duty of every Muslim. Many wait until they have lived their life freely; towards the end of it, they may decide to perform Hajj. This is a duty which can be fulfilled at anytime. These believers think it is a responsibility they have towards the hereafter, not towards life. They feel most religious laws are for the blessing and forgiveness in the after–life, not for the benefit of their education progress and perfection in the life before death.'

How do I know, from a methodical point of view, that this imperative sentence "sacrifice your Ismail" is a "must" and not a recommendation? Most likely it is the latter one! This is not like the order of "and give the poor due "where everyone should give the needy his share.

Rather it is like this verse of the Qur'an 2: 188
***And eat not up your property among yourselves in vanity nor seek by it to Sain the hearing of the judges that ye may knowingly devour a portion of the property of others wrongfully.***
It is a despicable action in the eyes of God. The order in this verse is for our guidance. This type of order, the order of revelation, is to remind us of the judgment of our wisdom.

If we disregard all the explanations and interpretations stated above, it is obvious from His command that the Almighty God wants to remind us that the love for a child is nothing. To submit to the truth, you must give up all interests which pre–occupy your thoughts and prevent you from communicating with God. Since Ibrahim's love for Ismail kept Him busy and may have caused him to forget his responsibility, Allah ordered him to "Sacrifice Ismail" so that he would submit totally to the will of Allah. As was said earlier, to SACRIFICE YOUR ISMAIL means to disregard the joy and love of Ismail. The same essence may be derived from the following verse of the Holy Qur'an VIII: 28: ***And know that your possessions and your children are a test.***
After all these wise and legitimate explanations, examples of verses, stories, measures of methodical science and rationalizations for all purposes of good, it is a sin to kill someone!!! One cannot attribute

such a sinful command to the most merciful and exalted Allah!

Yes an "explanation “to find an "escape" is used when it is hard to accept the fact; and to accept the responsibility is contrary to one's wishes and dreams. When "fact" and "justice" are only "by–standers of life", many men will speak of "justice" and "human rights". They may justify themselves by doing "some good deeds" along with their daily routines, continuing their business and living their happy life without disturbances! When "fact" and "justice" are "concurrent with life", they are used as a capital, a tool, a fame, a rank, a job and a license for living. People not only speak of justice, but consider themselves righteous and wish to serve others.

BUT when "truth clashes with one's daily life", then the supporter of the truth and justice is going to be in trouble and in danger ... He has to shoulder a very heavy responsibility, find his way through the dark and stormy night and face all the hazards and pitfalls. The farther he goes in this way, the fewer his companions become until he is left with a few friends or none at all! He has to leave behind whatever and whoever is an obstacle in his way, especially those who live in the darkness of oppression and are used to it.

Almighty Allah is ordering you to sacrifice your life and your love and to go on; but evil temptations force you to stay and follow them how? – By the explanations! That is, by making alterations in your faith in order to cope with worldly demands. As such you will not be accused of being an unbeliever or rebellious against God and disloyal to people! Here "explanation" means "to certify the false as truth". You may call it whatever you want – a social, moral, scientific, psychological, dialectical or intellectual explanation. What difference does it make? But in Hajj and in the biography of Ibrahim the great who was victorious in all his trials honest, righteous, sincere and struggled in Jihad to defend the "absolute truth", Allah called it – "the evil explanation"! Ibrahim’s clear and strong wisdom was weakened by these questions – How do I know? How can it be? I only heard this message in my "dream", he said. Satan strengthened the "love for his son" in his heart and made him rationalize a means of "escape"! This was the first time, the First Jamarah and he refused to sacrifice his son!

**********

Ibrahim "you must sacrifice your son"! The message was clearer. This created struggle inside the great hero of human history. Because of Satan's temptation, he felt doubt, fear and weakness. He was defeated in the conflict between Allah and Satan. In the depth of human nature there exists a contradiction between love and wisdom, life and faith for one's self or for God

... This is the nature of man – a phenomenon between human and animal, nature and God, instinct and wisdom, heaven and earth, this world and the hereafter, love for one's self and love for God, reality and truth satisfaction and perfection, being and becoming, slavery and freedom, carelessness and responsibility, belief and disbelief, for "me" and for "us" and finally the one "who is" and one "who should It was the second day. Ibrahim weighed his love for Ismail against his responsibility to Allah. Ismail's life

was in danger. Satan attempted to deceive Ibrahim just as he persuaded "Adam to eat from the "forbidden fruit" in the Garden! As any man with dialectic potentials – mud and the spirit of God – Ibrahim was in doubt whether he should choose his "son" or the "message".

***And inspired it*** (***with consciousness***) ***what is wrong for it and right for it.*** Qur'an 91: 8

– Oh Prophet of God, the message is your responsibility!
– Oh Prophet of God, do you want to remain a father to your son?
– Do I have to sacrifice Ismail with my own hands?
– Yes! I must sacrifice my son for the cause of Allah.
– Emotional obligations are the least important when compared to my ideology.
– Shall I remain the father of Ismail or carry on the message?

Satan tried again: "But I hear this message in my dream; how could it be real?" And this was the second time he refused to sacrifice his son Ibrahim, SACRIFICE YOUR SON ISMAIL. This time the message was so clear that it was difficult to rationalize by any type of "explanation". He had no choice; the call was as plain as black and white. Satan, with all his intelligence and skill, could not do anything to change it. Denying the message would be obeying Satan. He was at the edge of a very deep valley; should he fall off. Should Ibrahim, who destroyed the idols, was a great prophet founded Islam, led the Umma (nation) ..., fall from the glorious height of tawheed to the depth of the valley of disbelief ... Not disbelief, but belief in many gods and worshipping others along with God! ! !

The Qur'an describes Ibrahim standing in Mina, facing Allah and Satan. He cannot side with both and he cannot ignore them. What a fearful story – "man" the representative of God who can act similar to God to do almost anything he wants and rule the whole world here is so weak and disabled! He has the spirit of God, yet he has weakness.

***For man was created weak.*** Qur'an 5: 28

In this world, no one is safe from falling. Like a child who has just learned to walk, you must be careful not to fall! Had not the last prophet of God been careful, he would have fallen and he would no longer have been innocent.

Qur'an XXXIX: 65
***If thou ascribe a partner to Allah thy work will fail and thou indeed wilt be among the losers.***
At the end of his life, Ibrahim, the father of the great prophets of Islam, the most exalted by human spirit and God's love, was led to the edge of this pitfall because of "his natural love for Ismail". After being a righteous and true believer for a hundred years, Ibrahim was about to be cheated by Satan.

Ibrahim, "there is no choice for you", Allah and Satan are at your right and left. Which one are you going to choose?!? Now there is no doubt about the message. The searcher of truth hardly makes a mistake just as the honeybee finds his hive in the dark, in the storm in the desert or on the distant mountain. No,

Ibrahim who lived a long and trustworthy life was not going to be cheated by Satan! Accepting the message was like jumping into a fire; and Satan, the enemy, was trying to put it out. You cannot tell an enemy from a friend by what he does; this judgment should not be based on self interest.

It was obvious what Ibrahim had to do. His previous doubts stemmed from the extreme love he had for Ismail. The poor, old father desperately waited for a son for many years. It was painful, very painful! Oh, such a fearful tragedy! Ibrahim's responsibility was beyond the tolerance of an old and lonely father who had to sacrifice his son. It would have been much easier had Ibrahim been sacrificed by Ismail. Easy and joyful, but no – the young Ismail to die and the old father to survive, lonely and sad ... with his old and bloody hands!

When Ibrahim thought about the message, he was absolutely obedient, but when he thought of sacrificing Ismail, he felt an intolerable pain, breaking his bone and leaving a sad expression on his face. Satan who saw Ibrahim in such a miserable state, tried to cheat him again! Satan is the enemy of man! Wherever and whomever there is a sign of fear, weakness, doubt, jealousy, disparity, stupidity and even love, he appears to do his evil job. He entertains and keeps you from your duties so that the truth of the message will not be realized.

***Even the love for your son is a way of "testing" you!.*** Qur'an 8: 28

The love of Ismail was a test for Ibrahim; this was his only weakness when he was confronted by Eblis (Satan). Ibrahim knew it was a clear revelation and that he had to sacrifice his son. He was sad and broken hearted. This is how Satan had the opportunity to deceive him. Taking advantage of the situation, Satan appeared before Ibrahim and whispered the same thing–"I heard this message in my dream". "No, that is enough, that is enough", Ibrahim said to himself! He made his decision and his choice was obvious – "absolute freedom of obedience to Allah" (i.e. to sacrifice Ismail). This was the last obstacle in the way of his freedom. Ibrahim decided to share the message with Ismail, so he called him. Ismail came and his father looked at him from his head to his toe. He was a victim and such a great sacrifice.

---

**Source URL:** https://www.al-islam.org/hajj-pilgrimage-ali-shariati/sacrifice-ismail#comment-0