

Perfection in all things | Shaykh Mikaeel Smith

There are certain narrations of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) that are a source of great inspiration and which force one to discover a higher purpose and the deepest of meanings and lessons in the most trivial actions. These narrations, when continually contemplated upon and kept at the forefront of one's mind, can create a very profound sense of mindfulness and presence throughout one's day-to-day affairs. Throughout our day to day life we have to do a number of seemingly mundane actions for our personal well-being and the well-being of those around us. But there is a single narration that teaches us that there is no such thing as a trivial action or a mundane affair for the believer. Everything has a purpose. The Prophet Muhammad [saw] once said,

“Indeed Allah has ordained perfection and excellence in every matter. When you fight, do so with excellence. When you slaughter an animal do so with excellence. Sharpen your knife because this will make it easier for the animal.” (Muslims #1955)

Everything in life is a chance to strive for perfection and thereby fulfill one's duty to his or her creator and sustainer. While this narration inspires people of all fields to be the best at what they do, the Prophet ﷺ mentions two specific examples where excellence should be sought. One is in war and situations of conflict and the other is the ritual sacrifice, which takes place at the time of the pilgrimage. It should be noted that perfection just like beauty is highly subjective. Therefore as Muslims, we look to the sunnah or way of Muhammad to define perfection for every affair.

The sacred month of the pilgrimage is getting close and so we are approaching the time to remember and imitate the sacrifice of Ibrāhīm (AS). We imitate him because he is the quintessential example of submission. By imitating his unparalleled level of submission we become pupils to this great teacher. Imitation is the first step for every student. Secondly, we must understand that imitation is the highest form of flattery.

It is not the meat or blood of this sacrifice which Allah desires from us — rather obedience. That being said we should learn how to do this sacrifice is the best way.

My personal opinion as an American Muslim who desires to see Islam as an intrinsic aspect of American religious life, I strongly encourage Muslims in America to personally do their sacrifice themselves instead of sending money for their sacrifice to be done overseas. I am completely aware that there are brothers and sisters who need meat more than ourselves. But this train of thought completely misses the objective of this great act of imitation. If a person wants to help poor Muslims around the world one should do so. But not at the expense of teaching their own family the significance of this day. By outsourcing your *ibadah* we lose the spiritual

impact and meaning. We essentially deprive our children and family of participating in the primary act of worship on this great day. Now let us look at some of the religiously recommended actions that one should observe when doing the sacrifice. Striving for excellence in all things, as Muslims, means first and foremost setting one's moral compass to the "Prophetic North" by reviewing the Prophetic teachings surrounding this great worship.

Below I have listed a few of the etiquette of this sacrifice:

Internal Aspect

1. One should internally remember the significance of this sacrifice and what it represents. Study the life of Abraham [alayhis] and internalize how he was able to overcome his own moral judgments when he was commanded to sacrifice his own son.

Pre-Sacrifice Aspects

2. One must use a very sharp knife. This is done so that there are no complications and delays in the process of slaughter.
3. The sharpening of the knife should be done away from the field of vision of the animals.
4. The animal should be given water before the sacrifice.
5. The animal should be gently brought to the place where it will be slaughtered.
6. The animal should be slaughtered out of the field of vision of the other animals.
7. The animal should be gently placed on its left side.
8. The one doing the slaughter should face the Qiblah.

During the Sacrifice

9. The slaughter must be as quick as possible.
10. Before the slaughter one should say, "Allah is the Greatest" thrice followed by the statement, "In the name of Allah".
11. The two major arteries should be cut along with the windpipe.

Post Sacrifice

12. It is recommended that the first thing that one eats after the Eid prayer is meat from the sacrifice.

It is important to keep in mind that the things mentioned above are not mandatory aspects. This means that if someone was to leave out one of these things the

sacrifice would still be legally valid, while at the same time lacking the level of perfection that we as Muslims should strive for.

Through this sacrifice, we are reminded of our pursuit of excellence for the sake of our Creator in all that we do. We perfect our skills, trades, and academic pursuits and all that we do for our love of our creator. Whether one is studying for an exam, or striving to be an athlete, excellence for the sake of Allah is our goal.

