

## When Sane People Follow Insane People

Choosing to experience a hardship can go so far as to affect a person's perception of the discomfort or pain he or she felt. Zimbardo<sup>344</sup> and his colleagues showed that when subjects volunteered for a procedure that involved their being given electric shocks, those thinking that they had more choice in the matter reported feeling less pain from the shocks. More specifically, those who experienced greater dissonance, having little external justification to account for their choosing to endure the pain, described it as being less intense. This extended beyond their impressions and verbal reports; their performance on a task was hindered less, and they even recorded somewhat lower readings on a physiological instrument measuring galvanic skin responses. Thus the dissonance-reducing process can be double-edged: Under proper guidance, a person who voluntarily experiences a severe initiation not only comes to regard its ends more positively, but may also begin to see the means as less aversive: "We began to appreciate the long meetings, because we were told that spiritual growth comes from self-sacrifice." (Mills, 1979)

This explains why Muslims are even grateful for the tortures they undergo voluntarily and consider them to be a blessing. All these hardships are seen as little sacrifices for achieving a bigger reward. The bigger the sacrifice, the greater will be the reward. An extreme form of this devotion can be seen during the month of Ashura, when the Shiite Muslims beat themselves on the chest and lacerate their backs with a bundle of chains, and even cut their foreheads with machetes to bleed profusely. Thus, covered in their own blood, they march in processions that bring to mind Dante's description of hell. Apart from five times per day obligatory prayers, one month fasting and abstaining from water, during daylight hours, and other taxing rituals, the believer is required to give one fifth of his income to the mosque as *Khoms*, (tithes) and in addition he is encouraged to make donations in the form of *zakat* (alms).

Muhammad instructed his followers to wage jihad and plunder the wealth of non-believers. This might have concerned some of his followers, still mildly in touch with their humanity. Is the wealth earned through plundering pure? They must have wondered. Muhammad's response was that it would become pure if they paid one fifth of the spoils to him. He put the following verse in the mouth of his sock puppet god, ordering him to:

Take alms from their wealth in order to purify them and sanctify them with it.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Zimbardo, P. *The cognitive control of motivation*. Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foreman, 1969.

<sup>345</sup> Qur'an, Sura 9, Verse 103

## Understanding Muhammad

As stated earlier, Medina after the banishment and genocide of the Jews was no longer an industrious and productive town. Its entire wealth came from the pillaging and plundering of other Arab tribes. The Muslims depended solely on looting from their continuous raids orchestrated by Muhammad. *Khoms* was instituted by the Prophet to “purify” ill-gotten gains and of course to fill the coffers of the holy Prophet and supply his bed with new flesh. Even today, Muslims who earn their living through honorable professions are required to pay *khoms* and *zakat*. There are constant reminders to believers to “spend of your substance in the cause of Allāh”(Q.2:195) and exhortations to “fight for the Faith, with their property and their persons.” (Q.8:72)

Muhammad offered an orgiastic paradise filled with all sorts of carnal delights to anyone who believed in him and made *jihād* for him. All one has to do is stop reasoning and believe in whatever he said and this would guarantee him access to paradise and eternal sex. Once someone becomes involved in Islam or any cult for that matter, he is gradually asked to give whatever he can from his money and time. Soon he finds that he is so involved that it becomes difficult and indeed, dangerous to walk away. The pain of acknowledging that one has been duped is so intense that he'd rather not face the truth and continue to defend his faith.

Osherow explains: “Once involved, a member found ever-increasing portions of his or her time and energy devoted to the People’s Temple. The services and meetings occupied weekends and several evenings each week. Working on Temple projects and writing the required letters to politicians and the press took much of one’s ‘spare’ time. Expected monetary contributions changed from ‘voluntary’ donations (though they were recorded) to the required contribution of a quarter of one’s income. Eventually, a member was supposed to sign over all personal property, savings, social security checks, and the like to the Peoples Temple. Before entering the meeting room for each service, a member stopped at a table and wrote self-incriminating letters or signed blank documents that were turned over to the church. If anyone objected, the refusal was interpreted as denoting a ‘lack of faith’ in Jones. Each new demand had two repercussions: In practical terms, it enmeshed the person further into the People’s Temple web and made leaving more difficult; on an attitudinal level, it set the aforementioned processes of self-justification into motion. As Mills (1979) describes: ‘We had to face painful reality. Our life savings were gone. Jim had demanded that we sell the life insurance policy and turn the equity over to the church, so that was gone. Our property had all been taken from us. Our dream of going to an overseas mission was gone. We thought that we had