

The Spirit of Volunteering in Islam

Introduction

All praise is due to Allah. We praise Him, we seek His help and His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil of our souls and from the consequences of our deeds. Whomsoever Allah guides, no one can misguide, and whomsoever He leaves astray, no one can guide. I bear witness that there is no god except Allah alone without partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad ﷺ is His servant and His Messenger.

O servants of Allah! Fear Allah as He deserves to be feared, and do not die except in a state of Islam. Reflect upon your responsibilities, not only towards your worship, but also towards the creation of Allah. Islam is not a religion confined within the walls of the masjid; rather, it is a living message that manifests in our character, our dealings, and our service to humanity.

Dear respected brothers and sisters, we live in a time where success is often measured by wealth, status, and personal comfort. People are busy building their own lives but neglecting their responsibility towards others. In such an environment, the spirit of selfless service and volunteering is slowly fading from our communities. Today, we must revive an essential question: Are we living only for ourselves, or are we living as servants of Allah who bring benefit to His creation? Because true success in Islam is not only in worshiping Allah, but also in serving His creation with sincerity and compassion.

1. Volunteering Has a Strong Foundation in Islam

Islam is not limited to rituals. It is a complete way of life that demands active goodness and service to others.

Allah commands:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ارْكَعُوا وَاسْجُدُوا وَاعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمْ وَافْعَلُوا الْخَيْرَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

“O you who believe! Bow down, prostrate, worship your Lord, and do good so that you may be successful.” (Surah Al-Hajj 22:77)

Notice how Allah connects worship (ركوع، سجود) with serving others (وَأَفْعَلُوا الْخَيْرَ). True success is not only in prayer, but also in benefiting humanity.

What is Volunteering in Islam?

Volunteering in Islam is known as التطوع (At-Tatawwu‘), which means to perform good deeds willingly, without compulsion, solely for the pleasure of Allah.

It is to dedicate one’s time, effort, wealth, and skills for the benefit of others, without expecting any worldly return. Allah says:

فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ

“Whoever volunteers good, it is better for him.” (Al-Baqarah 2:184)

In simple words:

التطوع هو: بذلُ الجهد والوقت والمال لخدمة الناس ابتغاءَ مرضاةِ الله دونَ إلزامٍ أو مقابلٍ دنيويٍّ

“Volunteering is to offer one’s effort, time, and wealth in serving people, seeking the pleasure of Allah, without obligation or worldly return.”

This concept transforms ordinary actions into acts of worship.

2. Islam Spread Through Volunteerism

Islam did not expand merely through preaching, but through living examples of sacrifice, service, and compassion.

The companions of the Prophet ﷺ did not wait to be told what to do. They took initiative, served others, and sacrificed their comfort for the sake of Allah.

Their volunteer spirit is built:

- Strong communities
- Deep brotherhood
- Trust among people

This is why Islam entered hearts before it entered lands.

Example 1: Construction of Masjid Nabawi

When the Prophet ﷺ migrated to Madinah, the first project was the building of Masjid Nabawi. The Prophet ﷺ himself carried bricks, and the companions worked side by side.

This was not paid labor. It was pure volunteerism for the sake of Allah. It created unity, brotherhood, and a center of spiritual and social life.

Example 2: Brotherhood in Madinah

When the Muhajirun migrated from Makkah to Madinah, they left behind:

- Their homes
- Their wealth
- Their businesses

They arrived with almost nothing.

At that moment, the Ansar of Madinah showed an extraordinary example of voluntary service and sacrifice.

Allah describes their character:

يُحِبُّونَ مَنْ هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَا يَجِدُونَ فِي صُدُورِهِمْ حَاجَةً مِّمَّا أُوتُوا وَيُؤْثِرُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ

They love those who migrated to them, and they do not feel any desire for what has been given to them, and they prefer others over themselves, even if they are in need.
(Al-Hashr 59:9)

The Prophet ﷺ established Mu'akhāt (brotherhood) between individuals from the Muhajirun and Ansar.

- One companion offered half of his wealth to his brother.
- Others shared homes and businesses.
- They treated them like family, not guests.

This was not forced.

This was not charity with pride.

This was pure voluntary sacrifice (ایثار), giving preference to others over oneself.

This spirit of خدمت and اخلاص became the foundation of a strong Islamic society.

3. The Sufi Tradition: A Living Model of Volunteering

Dear brothers and sisters,

When we speak about service to humanity, we do not need to look outside our tradition. Our own Islamic heritage, especially the Sufi tradition, is filled with remarkable examples of selfless service.

The Sufiya understood a very profound reality:

”خدمتِ خلق ہی دراصل عبادت ہے“

Serving the creation is, in reality, a form of worship.

They did not limit their religion to worship alone. Along with Salah, fasting, and dhikr, they dedicated their lives to:

- Feeding the hungry
- Helping the poor
- Serving travelers
- Comforting the broken-hearted

Khanqah System: Centers of Service

Throughout history, Sufi Khanqahs were not just places of spiritual training. They were centers of human service.

- Anyone could come and eat, without being questioned
- Travelers were given shelter
- The needy were helped with dignity
- People of all backgrounds were welcomed

This was all done voluntarily, purely for the sake of Allah.

Example: Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (رحمہ اللہ)

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (رحمه الله), known as *Gharib Nawaz* (Benefactor of the Poor), spread Islam in the Indian subcontinent not through power, but through service and compassion.

He taught:

“Develop river-like generosity, sun-like affection, and earth-like hospitality.”

His khanqah fed thousands of people daily.

He served humanity regardless of religion, caste, or background.

And it was through this character and service that he won the hearts of millions.

4. Be Greedy for Good Deeds

In worldly matters, people are greedy for wealth. But a believer should be greedy for good deeds. Why?

Because you never know which action will be accepted by Allah.

The Prophet ﷺ told us about a man who saw a thirsty dog. He went down a well, filled his shoe with water, and gave it to the dog.

The Prophet ﷺ said about that person:

فَشَكَرَ اللَّهُ لَهُ، فَغَفَرَ لَهُ

“Allah appreciated his deed and forgave him.”

The companions asked: *“Is there a reward for serving animals?”*

The Prophet ﷺ replied:

فِي كُلِّ كَبِدٍ رَطْبَةٌ أَجْرٌ

“In every living being, there is reward.” (Bukhari: 2363)

Subhan Allah. A simple act. A small effort. Yet it became a means of forgiveness.

Even though a dog is considered impure in Islamic law, the act of mercy was so عظيم that it led to forgiveness.

So, how many opportunities do we ignore daily?

- Helping a neighbor.

- Feeding someone.
- Supporting a community project.
- Volunteering in the masjid.

Any of these could be the deed that saves us.

Conclusion:

Dear brothers and sisters,

Let us understand this clearly: on the Day of Judgment, our success will not depend only on how much we prayed, but also on how much we benefited others. Salah connects us to Allah, but service connects us to His creation, and both are essential for complete faith.

Do not underestimate any good deed. A smile, a kind word, helping someone in need, supporting your masjid, feeding a hungry person, or even giving water to an animal. You do not know which action Allah will accept and make it the سبب of your forgiveness. Be greedy for goodness. Fill your life with acts of service, because every opportunity to help someone is, in reality, an opportunity to come closer to Allah.

Let us make a sincere intention today: that we will not live فقط for ourselves, but we will live as servants of Allah who bring benefit to His creation. Let our homes, our masajid, and our communities become centers of compassion, service, and mercy. May Allah make us among those who serve humanity sincerely for His sake, accept our worship and our voluntary deeds, and grant us success in this world and the Hereafter.