

Forgiving your own side by the Holy Prophet Muhammad

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 19 March 2021

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ ۗ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ ۗ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ ۗ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ ﴿١٥٩﴾

“Thus it is by Allah’s mercy that you [O Prophet] are gentle to them. And if you had been rough, hard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you. So pardon them and ask protection for them, and consult them in (important) matters. But when you have determined, put your trust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who trust (in Him).” (The Quran, 3:159)

The last Friday *khutba* dealt with the forgiving and kind treatment extended by the Holy Prophet Muhammad towards the prisoners of war taken by the Muslims after their victory in the battle of Badr. The next battle, that of Uhud, provided examples of showing forgiveness to one’s **own** side. That is not easy to do either. Perhaps it is more difficult than forgiving an enemy. You blame some of the people on your own side for your side’s failures.

The opponents of Islam at Makkah sought revenge for their defeat at Badr and the next year they set out to attack Madinah itself with an army of 3000 soldiers. They camped at the foot of mount Uhud, only three miles from Madinah. In Madinah the Holy Prophet, as was his usual practice, consulted his followers about what they should do in response. He and the mature ones among the Companions suggested that Muslims should remain within Madinah and defend it from the inside. But the majority, who were younger, wanted to face the enemy bravely in the open battle field. The Holy Prophet accepted the majority opinion, and led a Muslim army of about one thousand out of Madinah. Later events showed that the majority were wrong.

Before the battle itself, the Holy Prophet had stationed fifty archers at an opening in the rocks behind the Muslims to guard their rear. He instructed them strictly not to

leave their position, no matter how the battle progressed. During the battle, Muslims eventually gained the upper hand and the Makkans started to run away. As the Muslims chased them, the archers asked their commander's permission to join in the chase. Even though the commander refused to allow them to move from their position, most of the archers disobeyed and joined the pursuit of the Makkans in order to gain plunder from the retreating army. However, when a Makkan commander saw that the archers had largely abandoned their rear defensive position he turned around and led a detachment through the vacated position to launch a surprise attack on the main pursuing Muslim army from behind. The Makkan army which was running away saw the Muslims being attacked from behind and they turned round towards the Muslims, so that the Muslims were now surrounded from the front and the back. They were also scattered about and no longer in one organized body. In this confusion some Muslims even fled the field of battle and went back to Madinah.

Seeing this situation, the Holy Prophet shouted out loud to all the Muslim soldiers to gather around him. He could have fled the field of battle without attracting the enemy's attention, but his concern was only for the whole body of the Muslims. By gathering around the Holy Prophet, and joining him in a more secure place, the Muslims were able to close their ranks and consolidate themselves. The enemy attacked them repeatedly, especially since now the enemy knew where the Holy Prophet was to be found. But the Muslims were able to repulse them and the Makkans eventually retreated from the field and left for Makkah. The next day, after the Muslims had returned to Madinah, the Holy Prophet was still able to gather a group of them to pursue the Makkans as they were still encamped a few miles from Madinah. When the Makkans heard of this, they marched off back towards Makkah.

It is alleged by the critics of Islam that Muslims were converted to Islam either by force or by the offer of worldly inducements by the Holy Prophet. If this was true, they could never have shown such loyalty and faithfulness to the Holy Prophet at a time when both he and they were in such a precarious position. Anyone who had become a Muslim through fear of force or temptation of greed would have abandoned Islam and, most likely, joined its enemies who were bent on destroying it.

Turning to the verse quoted at the beginning, it begins: “Thus it is by Allah’s mercy that you [O Prophet] are gentle to them. And if you had been rough, hard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you” (3:159). The word for “you are gentle” here is *linta*. This, in fact, is the same word as “lenient” in English. It was because the Holy Prophet had been gentle and lenient towards his followers that they stayed with him through thick and thin. If he had dealt with them in a rough and harsh manner, not caring for their feelings, they would have gone away from him. And since it was this quality of the Holy Prophet that kept them attached to him at the battle of Uhud, he should continue to show this same quality towards them.

The Holy Prophet is **not** told: perhaps you were too gentle towards them, so look what happened now — the archers disobeyed your instructions and some of your army fled the field. Instead, it is the loyalty shown by most of them in rallying to his call which is pointed out, and that is said to be the fruit of his gentle treatment of them. So he must continue with that treatment.

Both the acts of disobeying military orders and of fleeing the field of battle are grave offences. Soldiers are court-martialled for it. During the First World War (1914–1918), British military authorities court-martialled and executed their own soldiers who showed “cowardice”. There were more than 300 such executions. Their widows and children, if any, bore the stigma of that “cowardice” and desertion, and they were denied the army pension due to them. It was ninety years later, in 2006, that the executed soldiers were granted posthumous pardons by the British government.

Yet the Quran, as regards those who fled the field, had already said, in a verse four verses before the one that we are looking at: “Those of you who turned back on the day when the two armies met, **only the devil** sought to cause them to make a slip on account of some deeds they had done, and certainly Allah has pardoned them; surely Allah is Forgiving, Forbearing” (3:155). And in the verse we are looking at, it says to the Holy Prophet: “So pardon them and ask (God’s) protection for them, and consult them in (important) matters.” They were pardoned what they had done, and the Holy Prophet prayed for them to be protected from committing such misdeeds again.

The part about consulting them means that their wrong actions during the battle should not be held against them, and used as a reason to exclude them from participating in consultations on national affairs. But it also relates to another group. As I said at the beginning, when the Holy Prophet held a consultation with his followers before this battle on how to respond to the Makkah army, he accepted the majority view, which was to go out to meet this army on the field of battle. His own opinion was in the minority, that they should stay within Madinah and defend it from the inside. The battle proved that this view reached by consultation had been wrong. But this verse says that the practice of consultation must continue, despite it leading to a wrong decision in this case.

There is a verse of the Quran in which it is said that one of the qualities of those who shall enter paradise is that they “restrain (their) anger and pardon people” and that Allah loves such doers of good (3:134). We usually quote this verse as applying generally, which is true of course. But significantly, this verse occurs in the group of verses relating to the battle of Uhud. On that occasion the Holy Prophet, and the Muslims who had obeyed him, restrained their anger and pardoned those who had been disobedient, when the natural reaction would have been the opposite. This verse, 3:134, urges the restraining of anger, and the other verse, 3:159, tells Muslims to continue allowing these people to participate in consultations. Both occur in the same context. It seems there is a connection between **restraining anger** and **holding consultations**. Somewhere else, the Quran says that it is a quality of the true believers that their “affairs are (decided) by counsel among themselves” (42:38). If we read before and after these words, their other qualities are mentioned, and one of these is: “whenever they are angry they forgive” (42:37). Consultations do give rise to anger against other people of our own group or community who are participating in the consultation. Just look at what happens in the parliaments and legislatures of the world. The Quran asks Muslims to forgive others with whom they may be angry because of some difference of opinion with them.

It should be added that the main verse under discussion, 3:159, after saying “consult them in (important) matters”, goes on to say: “But when you have

determined, put your trust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who trust (in Him)”. Once a course of action has been decided by consultation, there should be no uncertainty, hesitancy or indecision. It should be carried out by all with full commitment, trusting in God.

Anyhow, the battle of Badr presented an example of how Muslims should treat the enemy after achieving victory over them, and the battle of Uhud presented an example of how Muslims should act towards those members of their own community who, while being basically sincere, in the heat of the moment or the suddenness of the situation get carried away by their lower desires and make a misjudgment.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَا وَنَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-
