

The Tolerance and Forgiveness of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 30 October 2020

وَلَا يَأْتَلِ أُولُوا الْفَضْلِ مِنْكُمْ وَالسَّعَةِ أَنْ يُؤْتُوا أُولِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

“And the possessors of grace and abundance among you should not swear against giving to the near of kin and the poor and those who have fled in Allah’s way; and pardon and overlook. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.” (24:22)

I have quoted this verse because of the occasion on which it was revealed. It so happened in the year 5 A.H. that four persons spread an accusation of immoral conduct against the Holy Prophet’s wife Aishah. There was no evidence of such misconduct whatsoever. Their allegation was ultimately shown to be nothing but a false slander, as stated in the Quran in ch. 24. One of these persons spreading the allegation was a man called Mistah, a relative of Aishah. He is said to be either her cousin or her father Hazrat Abu Bakr’s cousin. He was poor and used to receive financial assistance from Hazrat Abu Bakr. It is reported in Bukhari (hadith 2661) that after this unsavoury incident Abu Bakr swore never again to help Mistah. In consequence of this, the above verse was revealed to the Holy Prophet. Hearing the words “pardon and overlook. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you?”, Abu Bakr exclaimed: “Indeed, I certainly love that Allah should forgive me.” He then resumed providing assistance to Mistah, exactly as he used to do.

As this allegation was made against a wife of the Holy Prophet, it would have seriously undermined the sanctity of his holy household, the household which was meant to be a model of purity for all Muslims. It would have damaged the good name of Islam itself. Yet despite all this, the Quran advised Hazrat Abu Bakr to forgive the man who had impugned the character of his daughter Aishah, and going beyond

forgiveness, it advised him against stopping assistance to him because the man was poor, he was a relative, and he was one of the emigrants from Makkah to Madinah. Three grounds are mentioned in this verse as making that man deserving of help. These cancel any grounds for stopping to help him. This tolerance and forgiveness is quite extraordinary. You can search the pages of all human history to see if you can find a similar example of a woman's father and her husband treating a man with such kindness who had spread slander against her character.

The hadith of Bukhari from which I have quoted above is related by Aishah herself. In it Aishah tells how, after this allegation was made, eventually a revelation came to the Holy Prophet clearing her. This revelation begins: "Surely they who concocted the lie are a group from among you" (24:11). She says: "When that state of revelation of the Messenger of Allah was over, he was smiling and the first word which he said was to me. It was: 'Aishah! Thank Allah, for Allah has declared your innocence.' My mother said to me: 'Get up and go to the Messenger of Allah (and thank him).' I replied: 'By Allah I will not go to him and I will not thank anyone but Allah'."

This shows how direct and bold Aishah was, like in fact many Muslim women of that time, in speaking out the real teachings of Islam. Told by her mother to go and thank the Holy Prophet, she replies that she will thank Allah only, as He sent the revelation. In today's Muslim societies anyone saying such a thing would be accused of insulting the Holy Prophet and face possibly the death sentence.

I may mention here another incident. There are several slightly differing versions of this incident in various books of Hadith. One is as follows:

"Two men, a Muslim and a Jew, quarrelled. The Muslim said: 'By Him Who gave Muhammad superiority over all the people!' The Jew said: 'By Him Who gave Moses superiority over all the people!' At that the Muslim raised his hand and slapped the Jew on the face. The Jew went to the Prophet and informed him of what had happened between him and the Muslim. The Prophet sent for

the Muslim and asked him about it. The Muslim informed him of the event. The Prophet said: Do not give me superiority over Moses.” (Bukhari, hadith 2411).

In some versions of this report, it is related that when the Muslim told the Holy Prophet what had occurred: “The Prophet became angry (i.e., with the Muslim), till anger appeared on his face, and said: ‘Do not give superiority to any prophet amongst Allah’s Prophets’.” This does not mean that the Holy Prophet is not superior to all other prophets. It means that we should not make it a matter of dispute and quarrel with people of other religions, leading to inappropriate behaviour by us. Such a heated argument on this point might lead a Muslim to find faults in another prophet, and to offend his followers. A Muslim, by losing his temper and slapping a non-Muslim, is not proving the Holy Prophet to be superior to that person’s prophet. This applies even more to the incidents we hear about these days. A Muslim, by killing someone because that person was disrespectful to the Holy Prophet, is not proving the Holy Prophet to be a great and true Prophet. On the other hand, if a Muslim follows in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet and emulates his moral qualities and responds to abuse in the way that the Holy Prophet did, then this will certainly demonstrate in practice that the Holy Prophet was the most superior of all moral teachers.

A point to note here is that the Jew in this incident was living under the protection of Muslim rule in Madinah. He took his complaint to the Holy Prophet Muhammad as he had confidence in the Prophet, that he would do justice. It was by doing justice between his own followers and his opponents that the Holy Prophet proved his superiority.

Another guidance which the Quran conveys to us is as follows:

“And do not abuse those whom they call upon besides Allah, in case, exceeding the limits, they abuse Allah through ignorance. Thus to every people have We made their deeds seem good; then to their Lord is their return so He will inform them of what they did.” (6:108)

Moving up from the teaching that a Muslim must not denigrate other prophets in order to prove the Holy Prophet Muhammad to be superior, this relates to those who are worshipped as gods in other religions, and of course the idols of the Arab idol-worshippers. Muslims are forbidden to use abusive language about them. The deeds of those people were good in their own eyes, as stated here. They persisted in them without applying any thought. “Then to their Lord is their return”. Returning here means they turn to Him either in this life or in the Hereafter. Only Allah knows which of these two it will be. He will then inform them of their wrongs: either in this world by giving them understanding of what they were doing or by informing them in the Hereafter. A Muslim must not become frustrated and start abusing their sacred figures.

In response to the recent killing of a teacher in Paris, carried out in the name of Islam as retaliation for the display of the cartoons of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, it appears that many in France, including it seems their President, believe that they have the right to abuse any sacred figure in religious history. These are *their* standards. *Our* standard as Muslims is that we must not abuse any such sacred figure. Those who abuse, mock, ridicule and scoff are only showing their own bad manners and their lack of any rational argument. The Quran repeatedly tells us that messengers of God have always been mocked:

“And never did a messenger come to them but they mocked him.” (15:11)

“Alas for the servants! Never does a messenger come to them but they mock him.” (36:30)

“And how many a prophet did We send among the ancients! And no prophet came to them but they mocked him.” (43:6–7)

Being mocked and ridiculed is part of the mission of the prophets. The Quran teaches us, in addition to what I mentioned in last Friday’s *Khutba*, the following:

“And the servants of the Beneficent are they who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, Peace!” (25:63)

“Resort to forgiveness and enjoin good and turn away from the ignorant.”
(7:199)

“And when they (i.e., the believers) hear idle talk (i.e., mocking or ridiculing), they turn aside from it and say: For us are our deeds and for you your deeds. Peace be on you! We do not desire the ignorant.” (28:55)

Some people may be proud of their talent and skill in mocking and satirising other nations. Those are *their* deeds. *Our* deeds ought to be in accordance with the sublime and uplifting teaching of the Quran given to Muslims, which is:

“O you who believe, do not let a people laugh at (another) people, perhaps they may be better than they” (49:11).

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَا وَنَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ،

إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رُؤُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ۔