

Fast 24: Holy Prophet's generous treatment of the enemy

- The Holy Prophet was told the following about those who rejected him:

“You have no concern in the matter whether He turns to them (mercifully) or punishes them; surely they are wrongdoers. And to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. He forgives whom He pleases and punishes whom He pleases. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.” — 3:128–129

لَيْسَ لَكَ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ شَيْءٌ أَوْ يَتُوبَ عَلَيْهِمْ أَوْ يُعَذِّبَهُمْ
فَأِنَّهُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴿١٢٨﴾ وَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي
الْأَرْضِ يُغْفِرُ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَاءُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ
غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢٩﴾

As a mortal the Holy Prophet might have sometimes desired a severe punishment for his enemies; but he is told that it was not his concern, for Allah might as well forgive them, even though they deserved punishment. The all-comprehensiveness of the mercy of God expressed in this verse is unique in any sacred literature.

The words “He forgives whom He pleases and punishes whom He pleases” mean that no human being whosoever, whether a prophet or not, can claim to know that certain people will be forgiven by God and certain other people will be punished. We can only mention the *ways* which lead to forgiveness and those which lead to punishment.

- Some seventy prisoners were taken by the Muslims at the battle of Badr. The following verse addresses the Holy Prophet about them:

“O Prophet, say to those of the captives who are in your hands: If Allah knows anything good in your hearts, He will give you better than what has been taken from you, and will forgive you. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.” — 8:70

يٰٓأَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِّمَن فِيْ أَيْدِيكُمْ مِّنَ الْأَسْرَىٰ ۖ إِن
يَعْلَمِ اللَّهُ فِيْ قُلُوبِكُمْ خَيْرًا يُؤْتِكُمْ خَيْرًا مِّمَّا أُخِذَ
مِّنْكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٧٠﴾

“What has been taken from you” is the amount some of them had to pay the Muslim community for their release. This was sent by their relatives from Makkah. The Holy Prophet released all these prisoners of war in the following ways: Any of them who could read and write could earn his freedom by teaching ten Muslim children to read and write, others had to make a payment if they could afford it, and those who were poor were just released freely. This battle, the first one, was the only occasion when the Holy Prophet sought such compensation for the Muslim community. In later battles, the prisoners were released without anything being demanded in return. They were not punished or tortured or enslaved by the Holy Prophet.

In this verse the prisoners are promised that if they have good intentions and behave well, i.e. if there is anything good in their hearts, they will suffer no loss as a result of having had to pay for their freedom. The meaning is that God will turn their hearts towards Islam. So, although they had to pay to gain their freedom from captivity, yet as a result of that *same* captivity they had the opportunity to see Muslims and true Islam close at hand, and some of them were attracted to accept it.

Among the prisoners captured at Badr was one Suhail ibn Amr, a spokesman of the Quraish and a skilful orator who used to make speeches against the Holy Prophet by means of his public speaking talents. He was brought before the Holy Prophet and someone suggested that his front teeth should be pulled out “so that he would never be able to exercise his oratory against you.” The Holy Prophet replied without hesitation:

“Certainly not. I will not mutilate anyone, for God would mutilate me as a punishment even though I am His Prophet.”

- In the story of Joseph in the Quran, the brothers of the prophet Joseph conspired against him, but years later when Joseph was holding a position of great power and the brothers were helpless against him, he forgave them:

“He said: There is no reproach against you this day. Allah may forgive you, and He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy.” — 12:92

قَالَ لَا تَثْرِيْبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ يُعْفِرُ اللهُ لَكُمْ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّحِيْمِيْنَ ﴿٩٢﴾

They had conspired against him and succeeded in removing him from his father when he was yet young by abandoning him in a wilderness. As a result, Joseph spent years first as a slave and later in prison. Now he had reached the high position of being a minister of the king in Egypt and could punish them. But he forgave them.

When the Holy Prophet conquered Makkah, after eight years spent in exile at Madinah, he had before him, in his power, those people who had persecuted him and other Muslims for years, tortured and killed many of them, driven them out from Makkah, and waged war against them repeatedly. They had tried to murder him many times. He now addressed them and asked them: “What treatment do you expect from me?” They replied that they hoped for good because he was of a noble character. The Holy Prophet declared: “I say as my brother Joseph said: ‘There is no reproach against you this day’.”

This act of unconditional forgiveness of your blood-thirsty foes, when they are completely in your power and submitting before you, has no parallel in world history.