

YAQEEEN INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC RESEARCH

40 HADITHS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

LECTURE NOTES

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YAQEEEN
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Chapter Nine "They are not our Teachers": Responding to Evil with Good

خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ

Hold to forgiveness, enjoin what is good, and turn away from the ignorant. [7:199]

Jabir (ra) narrates that when this *ayah* was revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ) he asked Jibril (as) "What is the meaning (*taweel*) of this verse and what are its implications?" So Jibril (as) said, "Allow me to ask my Lord and I will come back with more details on this matter." So he went and asked Allah (swt) and returned to the Prophet (ﷺ) and he said "Oh Muhammad, Allah commands you to forgive the one who wrongs you, to give to the one who withholds from you, and to maintain the ties of kinship with the one who cuts you off."

After hearing this the Prophet (ﷺ) stood up and said, "Shall I not guide to you the most noble of characteristics in this world and in the hereafter?" They (the companions) said, "And what is that, Oh Messenger of Allah?" He (ﷺ) said, "That you forgive the one who wrongs you, you give to the one who withholds from you, and that you maintain the ties of kinship with the one who cuts you off."

This is easy advice to give to someone else, but very difficult to take. If you have been wronged, had something withheld from you or had a family member cut you off, it is very difficult to put this into practice.

Most acts of injustice are perpetuated because someone failed to take the higher road. We sometimes fail in holding ourselves to higher standards so when we are wronged by others, we justify our reactions by saying, "Well since I was wronged in this manner, my reaction is justified." That is, we justify doing *thulm* to others, based on *thulm* that was done to us.

There's a famous story about the revelation of this *ayah* mentioned in Al-Bukhari by Ibn Abbas (ra).

Al-Hurr ibn Al-Qayys was a young man who had memorized the Qur'an and was on the *shura'* of Umar ibn Al-Khattab (those with whom he would consult). One day Al-Hurr 's cousin Uyaynah asked for permission to sit with Umar (ra). Umar (ra) gave him permission to sit in on the meeting. Uyaynah sat down and began to scream at Umar (ra) and say "Oh son of Al-Khattab, beware (woe to you), you neither give us sufficient provision nor do you judge amongst us with justice." This was an unfounded accusation and it made Umar (ra) angry.

Al-Hurr, noticing that his cousin's accusations had made Umar (ra) angry said, "Allah said to His Messenger (ﷺ):

خذ العفو وأمر بالعرف وأعرض عن الجاهلین

Hold to forgiveness and enjoin that which is good and turn away from the ignorant [7:199]

This man is ignorant so just turn away and ignore him." So Umar (ra) turned away from him.

Ibn Abbas (ra) commented on this and said that Umar (ra) was always a person who was held by the book of Allah (swt). He was conscious of the Qur'an and whenever he heard its verses, he would always abide by them. So in this situation his anger was immediately subdued by hearing this *ayah*.

It's mentioned in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad (a collection of aphorisms) that Abdullah ibn Az-Zubayr used to recite this *ayah* [7:199] when he was a khalifah and say on the pulpit, "By Allah we are commanded by this *ayah* to accept the character of the people and I will accept their character as long as I am amongst them."

How can we understand the meaning and implications of this *ayah*?

The scholars of Qur'an say that every person you meet will deal with you in one of two ways:

1. *Al-Ihsaan* (الاحسان)
They will do more than what is required of them (i.e., go above and beyond)
2. *At-Taqseer* (التقسير)
They will deal with you with deficiency (i.e., do less than they should)

The scholars reflect on this *ayah* and say that you should forgive the people of *taqseer* (deficiency); and, with regard to your dealing with others, you should embody excellence (*ihsaan*) in every way possible. There will always be people who you might deal with in an excellent manner, but they will still give you a hard time. In this *ayah*, Allah is telling us to turn away from them and to not let them drag us down to their level.

Hadith in Abu Dawud: Yusuf ibn Malik al-Makki said that he used to do accounting for a group of orphans. There was one orphan who was cheated out of 1000 dirhams. (The orphans would work and the guardians would collect the money and then give it to them). Yusuf was able to take 2000 dirhams from the guardian. The orphan then said to him that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: 'Honor the trust of the one who entrusted you with something and do not betray the one who betrays you.' So the orphan was essentially saying that just because this person stole from me does not mean that I can steal from him (get 2000 instead of 1000).

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Sometimes the Prophet (ﷺ) would allow people to take what was owed to them without permission. A famous example is the story of Hind who complained that her husband was stingy and did not give her enough money to cover expenses. The Prophet (ﷺ) told her that she could take her right *بالمعروف* (i.e., take what you need, but not more; that is, do it in a way that is reasonable). In this situation, there was an established right that was not being fulfilled. The Prophet (ﷺ) gave us permission in *fiqh* that when there is no grey area then we can take our right. If someone withholds something from you that you are entitled to, you have the right to take it; but you cannot take something else that you are not entitled to because that involves *khiyana* (treachery). You don't stoop to the level of the one who wrongs you.

When Uthman (ra) was killed, Ali (ra) emphasized due process and that they should punish only those who were definitely and directly involved.

When you are wronged, you should not become vengeful and become like the one who wronged you. Sometimes, you can even forgive the person. However, you should not enable their *dhulm*.

If someone refused to help you in your time of need, that doesn't mean that you can refuse to help them in their time of need.

- تصل من حرمك

This doesn't mean that if someone is abusive you have to remain close to them. However, you should leave the door open and not completely cut your family off.

There were 4 Qurashis who put a bounty on the Prophet. The Prophet (ﷺ) was at that in charge of some of their valuables. When the Prophet (ﷺ) left, he told Ali (ra) to stay behind so that he could return those valuables (to people who were trying to kill him!).

Umar Mukhtar (the Libyan warrior who fought imperialism) had two Italian captives. One general said to him, "Why don't we make an example of them like they do to us". Umar Mukhtar said, "We are not a people who kill our prisoners. The man said, "But they do it to us." Umar Mukhtar responded, "**They are not our teachers.**" That is, we do not learn our ethics from people who wrong us. If we did we would become just like our enemies.

When the Prophet (ﷺ) returned to Makkah victoriously, he was standing on Mt. Safa with an army behind him. These were the same Sahabah who had lost family members and so much more because of the Quraysh. The Prophet (ﷺ) asked Quraysh, "What do you think I should do with you?" They did not have a real answer. The Prophet (ﷺ) told them, "Go, for you are free. There is no blame on you today." Ibn Qayyim said that by asking them the question, he first established the *hujjah* (proof) against them. Then the Prophet (ﷺ) chose to pardon them, doing *ihsaan* and letting them know that they would not face vengeance.

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There is also the story of the man (Ghawrath) who held a sword over the Prophet (ﷺ) and said, "Oh Muhammad, who will stop me from killing you?" The Prophet (ﷺ) said confidently, without any fear, "Allah." Ghawrath was so surprised by his confidence and lack of fear that he dropped the sword. Then the Prophet (ﷺ) picked it up and held it over him and said, "And who will protect you from me?" Ghawrath said, "Be generous..." and the Prophet (ﷺ) told him to go free. This is yet another example of "They are not our teacher." We don't sink to the level of those who wrong us. We set different standards for ourselves and do not allow ourselves to respond in like manner.

Similarly, when Salahuddin conquered Jerusalem, he did not treat the Crusaders like they treated the Muslims: no mutilation, no rape, etc. He not only won Jerusalem, he also won the hearts of everyone who heard about him and how he behaved during this conquest.

Think about the following very deeply! Ibn Qayyim says that sometimes a person wrongs you and you have no idea how or why this happened to you. You might ask yourself what you did to that person to deserve this. Ibn Qayyim said that every person you ever met or interacted with, you either showed them *ihsan* or *taqseer*. It is possible that Allah is purifying you for a *taqseer* you did to someone else by having *taqseer* done to you by another person (to balance out the scales). Or maybe you took advantage of someone's *ihsaan* to you so Allah allowed someone else to take advantage of you. All of this may be a means of balancing things out.

We must never respond to injustice with injustice. Abu Jahl tortured and mutilated Sumayyah (ra) but the Muslims did not treat Abu Jahl in the same way. We need to always ask ourselves: Are we taking the higher moral ground?

Even worse than doing *dhulm* to the one who wronged you is to become a *dhalim* to other people (who did nothing to you and were blameless) while blaming the *dhulm* that happened to you.