

Fast 7: Religious principles taught to Israelites also applicable to Muslims (1)

- In the second chapter of the Quran, immediately after the story of the appearance of man and woman on earth, the Israelites are addressed and reminded of the basis of the religion taught to them. It was one of the earliest examples of God's guidance to a nation. This account begins as follows:

“O Children of Israel, call to mind My favour which I bestowed on you and fulfil (your) covenant made with Me, I shall fulfil (My) covenant made with you; and Me, Me alone, should you fear.” — ch. 2, v. 40

يٰۤاَيُّهَاۤ اِسْرَآءِيْلَ اذْكُرُوْا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِيۤ اَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاَوْفُوا۟ بِعَهْدِيۤ اَوْفِ بِعَهْدِكُمْ وَاِيَّاىَ فَاَرْهَبُوْنَ ﴿٤٠﴾

The “covenant made with Me”, made with God, lays down the duties which a person commits himself to perform. The “covenant made with you” are the promises of God to man. The favour bestowed on them was the guidance they received through Moses. If they fulfilled their side of the bargain by adhering to that guidance, God would fulfil His promise to make them successful, materially and spiritually, and a great nation in the world.

This is meant, in fact, as a reminder for Muslims, who are subject to the same principle that applied to the Israelites before them. God will only grant them success if they fulfil the duties which they have agreed to carry out as Muslims.

- These duties must be done fearing God *alone*. If religious obligations are carried out from fear of other people, society, religious leaders, the state, etc., then they are done only for show and not out of belief. Their performance does not create faith or conviction in the heart. The moment you are out of reach of such authorities, or if they lose their power, you stop doing your duty.
- The question then arises: Does God make people act on His guidance through a reign of fear? Fear is a natural human (and animal) instinct. It can be used by a dictator or a criminal to terrify people into submission. On the other hand, all kinds of organizations, as well as the legal system, use it to warn people of the dangers of doing something which is harmful to them or to others. Once you realize that those things are harmful, you don't need to be made afraid by some human agency. God employs fear for this second purpose.
- By “fear of God” in this verse is meant fear of a breakdown of your relationship with God. The words “and Me, Me alone, should you fear” mean that you should have a greater fear of the breakdown of your relationship with God than your relationship with anyone else. Fear of God **does not mean** that God is a Being that you want to

run away from, because His very mention terrifies you.

- The Quran repeats some fifteen times that for those who obey God’s guidance, “they shall have **no fear** nor shall they grieve”. In fact, just two verses prior to the above verse a general principle is laid down for mankind:

“... then whoever follows My guidance,
no fear shall come upon them, nor shall
they grieve.” — ch. 2, v. 38

فَمَا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَن تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

This clearly gives us to understand that a person who continues to follow God’s guidance reaches a stage where he has no fear that he might be on the wrong path, and looking back he has no regret that he followed that path. This is the stage where he realizes that the duties required by God are a source of nourishment for him that keep him alive. Such people **lose the fear** that they may be on the wrong path, but they **have the fear** of drifting away from that path.

- An objection is raised that preachers, clerics and *maulvis* keep people trapped in religion by making them fear God’s punishment, sometimes for small acts of deviation. The teaching of the Quran that we must remember is that one should fear *only* God. When we hear “fire and brimstone” kind of speeches, we must remember that the speaker is not God or His spokesman. Anything he says must be tested by what God has revealed. In the Quran, God says that He is the most merciful of those who show mercy and that He forgives sins altogether. Even in these very verses, running from 2:40 to 2:74, which go through the history of the repeated transgressions of the Israelites, God’s mercy and forgiveness for them is mentioned many times:

“Then We pardoned you after that so that
you might give thanks.” —v. 52

ثُمَّ عَفَوْنَا عَنْكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

“So He turned to you (mercifully). Surely
He is the Oft-returning (to mercy), the
Merciful.” — v. 54

فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

“and make petition for forgiveness. We
will forgive you your wrongs” — v. 58

وَقُولُوا حِطَّةٌ نَّغْفِرْكُمْ خَطِيئَتِكُمْ

- Fearing **God alone** means fearing none in the world, and this leads to moral elevation. A person who sticks to his principles, regardless of fear of anyone, is in fact fearing God alone, even though he may not recognize it. All progress and reform in the world has been brought about by people who feared nothing, except that their own shortcomings and errors may hamper their cause. This is like fearing nothing except that one may lose the path to God.