

No person can pass responsibility for his actions to another

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 14 January 2022

مِنْ اهْتَدَى فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ ۗ وَمَنْ ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا ۗ وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ

“Whoever goes aright, goes aright only for the good of his own soul; and whoever goes astray, goes astray only to its detriment. And no bearer of a burden can bear the burden of another.” — ch. 17, v. 15.

This verse that I have read occurs immediately after the verses which I recited at the beginning of last week’s *khutba*, which were: “And We have made every human being’s actions to cling to his neck, and We shall bring forth to him on the day of Resurrection a book which he will find wide open. Read your book. Your own soul is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day” (17:13–14). The next verse, which I have now recited, tells us that the person who walks on the right path and performs good deeds, brings benefit to his own soul, to his character. His soul after death will be happy to read his own book. The person who goes on the wrong path and commits misdeeds damages his own soul and character. He will be unhappy to read his own book.

And it is added here: “no bearer of a burden can bear the burden of another”. Each human being is burdened, so to speak, with the duty of walking on the right path. It takes effort to do so. No one can place his burden of duty on someone else. You cannot shirk your duty of prayer, fasting, charity and doing good to people by passing on your duty to someone else to do it for you. Each human being is also burdened by the weight of the wrong things he has done. He is carrying around with him the burden of guilt and shame and culpability. He cannot relieve himself of this burden by placing it on someone else to bear. He has to make amends for it himself, and to seek forgiveness from God, and if his misdeeds have harmed other people then it is a priority for him to ask forgiveness from them and to practically undo the harm to them that he has done.

This principle, that “no bearer of a burden can bear the burden of another”, is repeated four more times in the Quran. The same words *لَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَى* are used in: 6:164, 35:18, 39:7 and 53:38. The word *wāzīrah* means ‘the bearer of a burden’. The well-known word *wazīr*, meaning a government minister, is related to it because he bears the burden of duties of the state. The most glaring example of violating this principle is the Christian doctrine that the burden of mankind’s sins was placed on Jesus, the son of God, to take away from people, and Jesus through his suffering on the cross suffered the punishment for everyone’s sins, so that all those who accept that he died for their sins are relieved of the responsibility for their own sins of the past and future. Although this doctrine is stated in words, it is doubtful that any righteous Christian actually feels in his heart that he is not responsible and accountable for his sins.

But that is not the only example of violating this principle. There is also the reliance on priests to get your sins forgiven. Among Muslims also there are people who believe that some holy man, *pir*, or spiritual leader can save them from being held accountable for their sins. It is believed that because of his holiness and high status in God’s eyes, all those who follow him will be forgiven by Allah. About this attitude, Dr Basharat Ahmad writes: “These spiritual leaders, *pirs* and *khalifas* then teach their followers: You don’t need to worry about what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. That is our job. Only we possess that knowledge. Your work is to obey all our commands blindly, like an object in our hands.”

In one place in the Quran where this expression occurs, i.e., “that no bearer of burden bears another’s burden”, it is followed by the words: “and that man can have nothing but what he strives for”. In our worldly lives and our religious lives, we cannot gain anything without striving or working for it. In the religious sense what it means is that you cannot achieve anything by putting your duty, which you should be carrying out, on to someone else. And this applies both to the duty of doing good and the duty of seeking forgiveness for having done something wrong. When we ask

someone to pray **for** us, it doesn't mean that he prays **instead of** us and is relieving us of our duty of prayer. His prayers for us are only assisting our own prayers for us.

In another place in the Quran this expression occurs as follows: “And no bearer of a burden can bear another's burden. And if one weighed down by a burden calls another to carry his load, nothing of it will be carried, even though he be near of kin (i.e., close relative)” (35:18). In this world, of course, and especially in our Muslim societies, if a person wants to get a job or to pass an exam, and he has a relative who has some influence with the interview board or the examination department, then that person asks his relative to help him. The relative may well succeed, but that person will not be deserving of the job or of the qualification, and will not have a feeling of any personal achievement. It will be a great injustice to others. An even more serious example is that a person charged with a crime and is guilty of it may have a close relative who is wealthy or holds a high position, and that relative may be able to have the charge dropped and get him a lighter punishment. But the burden of guilt will still remain in his mind. So even in this world, getting others to carry your load or to remove it from your shoulders, only works in a superficial way. In God's judgment it will not work at all. We should not be doing something in this world which doesn't work in the hereafter. If in this world we are used to calling on others to step in and help us unfairly, we will be lost in the hereafter when we find ourselves helpless.

This verse mentioned close relatives. There is another verse of the Quran which addresses the Holy Prophet as follows: “And warn your nearest relations” (26:214). The Holy Prophet was a “warner” or *nadhīr* to all, to warn them of the consequences of following the wrong path. He is told by God that he has also been appointed to warn his own relatives. In this world, when someone reaches a high worldly position, such as the leader of a country, usually it is good news for his relatives because they can now expect to receive all kinds of favours. They are congratulated by other people for being so lucky, that all sorts of doors will now open for them. But the Holy Prophet does the opposite. He doesn't say to his relatives that now I have been made a prophet by God, be happy and rejoice that I can get your sins forgiven and get you free entry into paradise. On the contrary, he issues warnings to his relatives just as he

does to anyone else. It is reported in Hadith that when this verse was revealed to the Holy Prophet at Makkah, then that famous incident took place that he stood on top of the Safa hill and called the various tribes of the Quraish to gather. He then asked them: If I told you there was an army of your enemies on the other side of the hill, waiting to attack you, would you believe me? They said: Yes, because we have always found you speaking the truth. Then he told them that he was sent as a warner to them of a great punishment if they continued in their evil ways. (Bukhari, hadith 4770).

This incident is well known even to children. But it is also reported in Hadith that the Holy Prophet, standing on that hill, addressed *by name* his own tribe, Quraish, his own kinsmen the Abd Manaf, and his close relatives, and warned them to do good deeds to save themselves from God's punishment because: "O people of Quraish ... I cannot save you from Allah's punishment at all; O Bani Abd Manaf! I cannot save you from Allah's punishment at all; O Abbas, son of Abdul Muttalib! I cannot save you from Allah's punishment at all; O Safiya, the Aunt of Allah's Messenger! I cannot save you from Allah's punishment at all; O Fatima, daughter of Muhammad! Ask me anything from my money, but I cannot save you from Allah's punishment at all" (Bukhari, hadith 2753). If these people do evil, they cannot avert God's punishment from themselves by claiming that they are close relatives of the Holy Prophet. They cannot shift their own burden on to him. As Fatima's father, because of this physical relationship, the Holy Prophet can help her with his own money, but forgiveness from God and protection from God's punishment is not something he can hand out to her. No doubt, he can warn and guide his relatives, as he is doing, but what they choose to do is up to them and they will have to bear the consequences.

There is another hadith in which the Holy Prophet has mentioned that on the Day of Judgment certain Muslims, who would be carrying the burden of neglecting good deeds, will call to him for help, saying: "O Muhammad". He said he will give them the reply: "I can do nothing for you. I had conveyed to you the message" (Bukhari, hadith 1402).

Unfortunately, anyone looking at Muslim societies and countries will get the impression that Islam does not give any such teachings about a person's own responsibility for his actions and that it has nothing to say about unfair favouritism and nepotism.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَا وَتَكْرَمَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رُؤُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ-