

Luqman's advice to his son - 2: Rising from insignificance to greatness

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 17 December 2021

يُبْنَىٰ إِنَّهَا إِنْ تَكُ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِّنْ حَرْدَلٍ فَتَكُنْ فِي صَخْرَةٍ أَوْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ أَوْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَأْتِ بِهَا اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٦﴾

“My son, even if it is the weight of a grain of mustard-seed, even though it were in a rock, or in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth. Surely Allah is Knower of subtleties, Aware.” — ch. 31, v. 16.

In the last *khutba* I had reached v. 15 of ch. 31 in the section on Luqman's preaching to his son. In verse 16, the law of God is taught to man, that even the most insignificant and smallest thing can lead to a great and powerful effect and consequences. Applied to human deeds, it means that every action, no matter how insignificant, will produce a result. We must not think that a small good deed is worthless and won't benefit anyone and will not be counted by God. Similarly, we must not think that a small bad deed by us doesn't matter because it caused very little harm to anyone. By saying “even though it were *in a rock*”, what is meant are those small actions which remain hidden because they apparently bore no fruit, hit a dead end and couldn't break through. By saying “or in the heavens”, what is meant are those actions which were done for good or heavenly purposes, and by saying “or in the earth”, what is meant are those actions which were done for worldly purposes.

The principle taught here is that any action, however small and insignificant it may appear, whether done for spiritual or material purposes, will not just disappear somewhere, and make no difference. For a start, such actions contribute in shaping our character. Then, our actions may help and encourage others to go much further in the same line and become the basis for great achievements by others. As stated here, “Allah will bring it forth”, meaning He will make small actions bear results that are visible to all.

There are other senses in which this principle can be seen working. Consider the Covid-19 virus. According to a website, in size it is 1/600th of a grain of salt. The same website also tells us: “From COVID-19 to air pollution, lately some of the world’s biggest threats have been microscopic in size” ([Link](#)). Some have suggested that this virus leaked accidentally from a science laboratory where it was being studied. In that case, you could say it was within a rock, that is to say, in a secure place from which you would not expect it to escape. After that, if the virus goes anywhere outside, it spreads causing devastation. You could say that it went to heaven and came back to earth, because much of it was spread by passengers travelling by air who brought it from one country to another.

Another example is nuclear and atomic bombs. If (the nucleus of) one atom of a certain mineral Uranium splits by being hit by a particle called a neutron this results in a large amount of heat being produced and also more neutrons are released by the atom. These neutrons from one atom can then go and hit (the nuclei of) two or three atoms, producing more heat and releasing more neutrons. This process, called a nuclear chain reaction, will continue and generate a huge amount of heat very quickly. Uranium is found in rocks but more than 99% of it, called Uranium-238, is not the type in which atoms split in this way. Only a very tiny part of, called Uranium-235, is the type which produces a chain reaction. So from a little seed in a rock, the laws of God enable man to bring it forth as either an atomic bomb explosion or as electricity generated in a nuclear power station. You can also say that this seed, after being in a rock, goes to heaven because an atomic bomb is dropped from thousands of feet above the earth. And on the earth, the same seed can be used in a nuclear power station for generating electricity.

After my last *Khutba*, which was on the subject of Luqman’s preaching to his son, a member of our Jamaat in Holland sent me an article explaining these same verses, which was written in 1978 by Mr Naseer Ahmad Faruqui and published in our magazine *The Light* of Lahore. In it Mr Faruqui has made some other enlightening points. He writes that Luqman was a black slave in Africa, and was illiterate. By the tiny seed in the rock is meant an insignificant person like that, crushed by poverty and hardship.

He is blown about here and there, by adversity and deprivation, like a seed blown by the wind towards the sky and back to the earth. Yet Allah does not overlook and ignore him. Allah knows his hidden qualities and He can bring him forth to a prominent position in the world, so that he becomes a teacher of righteousness as happened with Luqman. This is why the verse ends: “Surely Allah is Knower of subtleties, Aware.” The concept of God, as presented by the Quran, is not only of a Being Who has great power and strength, but also One Who is subtle. He does things not just by using His force in every case, but also by working in subtle and delicate ways.

Before going further, I may point out that in this verse 16 and the next verse 17, Luqman addresses his son by saying **يَبْنِيَّ** or “O my son”. Earlier, when Luqman begins addressing his son in verse 13, he addresses him in this same way, as that verse says: “And when Luqman said to his son, while he instructed him: My son, set up no partner with Allah.” In the article by Mr Faruqi that I mentioned above, he points out that this is an affectionate form of address. This form, he says, is more likely to be acceptable to children, and is more effective than the way in which most parents speak to their children about moral and spiritual teachings, by commanding and ordering them, and then losing their patience and temper with the children.

I may also add here that, apart from instructing his son in a gentle, loving way, when Luqman taught his son to be thankful and do good to parents in verses 14 and 15 — which I discussed in the last *Khutba* — he did not do it for his own self-interest. He is the father but he doesn’t say to his son, “thank me because I did this and this for you”. Instead, he mentioned to his son the suffering and hardship that his mother underwent to bear him and bring him up. Then we also noticed that he did not teach his son blind obedience to parents. He told his son that God says: “And if they strive to make you set up partners with Me, of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them, and keep kindly company with them in this world, *and follow the way of him who turns to Me*; then to Me is your return, then I shall inform you of what you did.” That is to say, if the parents try to make you worship and follow someone other than

God in the way you should worship and submit to God, then don't obey them. You can see the principle that he puts to his son from God: *and follow the way of him who turns to Me*. As a parent he himself needs to be one who turns to God if he is going to be entitled to ask his son to obey him.

The next verse is as follows:

يُبْنِيْ اَقِيْمِ الصَّلٰوةَ وَاْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوْفِ وَاَنْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَاَصْبِرْ عَلٰى مَا اَصَابَكَ ۗ اِنَّ ذٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ

الْاُمُوْر ﴿٣١﴾

“My son, keep up prayer and enjoin good and forbid evil, and bear patiently whatever befalls you. Surely this is a matter of great resolution” (31:17).

If we believe God to be one, and that no one and no thing should be made a partner with Him, then our first duty is to pray to God. Otherwise, we are taking God to be like all other things which, we say, we shouldn't pray to. Prayer is the means of seeking help from God to enable us to follow His teachings. The next thing mentioned by Luqman is: “enjoin good and forbid evil”, i.e. inform people about what is right and what is wrong. By doing this, he wishes to raise other people to the same level that he himself has risen to and achieved. And just as Luqman is telling his son what is right and what is wrong, he is asking his son to continue that work to other people.

The next piece of advice, “and bear patiently whatever befalls you”, has a general meaning as well as a specific meaning in this context. Whoever we are, there are many things which happen to us, which befall us, in this world, over which we have no control and in the face of which we are helpless. This is where we have to exercise patience and persevere in the difficulties we find ourselves in.

The specific meaning of this advice in this context has been referred to in Mr Faruqui's article. I expand on it a little here. When you “enjoin good and forbid evil”, in other words, do the work of the propagation of Islam, you face opposition from some people who don't like what you are saying or they don't like the movement that you belong to. You even face persecution from those in power and authority. Others ridicule you and belittle your work, and some well-meaning friends advise you not to

waste your time. Your efforts seemingly bear very little fruit and you face apparent failure. In that situation you have to show patience and it is said here that “this is a matter of great resolution”. Showing patience requires very firm determination and it must not be abandoned out of disappointment.

بَارِكْ اللَّهُ لَنَا وَكُمُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعْنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ

مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-