

The first one of those prayers I mentioned in the last *Khutba*: “Save us from the punishment of the Fire. Our Lord, whomsoever You make enter the Fire, him You indeed bring to disgrace.” Then they say that they have heard a crier calling to faith saying: *Āminū bi-rabbi-kum* — “Believe in your Lord.” This Caller to Faith is, of course, the Holy Prophet Muhammad. All prophets called people to believe in their Lord, the Lord of the prophets themselves and of the people.

According to the Quran, all prophets invited people to serve God and none asked people to serve him: “It is not (allowed) for a mortal that Allah should give him the Book and the judgment and the prophethood, then he should tell people: Be my servants besides Allah’s; but (he would say): Be worshippers of the Lord because you teach the Book and because you study (it); nor would he command you to take the angels and the prophets for lords” (3:79–80). The word here for “worshippers of the Lord” is *rabbāniyyūn*, which is the plural of *rabbānī*. Every prophet said to his people: Each one of you should become a *rabbānī*, or a worshipper of the *Rabb*, or one devoted and dedicated to the *Rabb*; and you become this by teaching and studying the book which I have brought you. Teaching and studying are linked to each other by an unbreakable connection. When you teach to others, you also in that process learn something yourself. And when you study something and understand it, you have the urge, and in fact the duty, to teach it to others. The word *Rabb* for Allah means that He nourishes us and enables us to rise from one stage to the next in a process of development, just like a mother brings up a baby and child. The word *rabbānī* indicates that this servant of the *Rabb* is using what Allah has given him to make progress, to rise to higher and higher stages in knowledge, good deeds and closeness to Allah.

So no prophet taught his followers that they should leave Allah aside and instead serve only that prophet because he is the gateway to God. What the followers must do is learn and understand and teach what God revealed to that prophet and make God as their Lord. Every prophet wanted his followers to develop the same experience of closeness to God, on their own level and scale, as the prophet himself had developed on his much higher level.

Of course, every prophet required it as essential that people believe in him as a true prophet. Otherwise, how can they believe that what he claims to be his revelation and his book has come from God, if they don't believe in that man? They must also believe in and obey the prophet because he is a practical example of how people should follow his revelation. A prophet is the first one to act on his revelation and he is the leader and the most devoted one in doing this. We see, for example, that the Holy Prophet Muhammad prayed far more, fasted far more and was far more charitable than any of his followers. In fact, he forbade his followers to do as much as he was doing. So while every prophet called people **to believe in their Lord**, as stated in the verse that I am dealing with here in the words: "surely we have heard a Crier calling to the faith, saying: **Believe in your Lord**. So we do believe", that belief was only possible by following the teachings and the example of that prophet.

These verses tell us that, after remembering Allah constantly and reflecting on His creation and how it works, the people who do this respond to the man calling them to faith, and become believers in their Lord. They then pray as follows: "Our Lord, grant us protection from our sins and remove our evils and make us die with the righteous." They then want to act according to their belief, because the belief of a person should not just be an idea in his mind or a statement which he makes in words. They ask God for strength to stay away from wrong-doing and that any shortcoming they have should be suppressed and removed by God so that it does not hold them back. The further prayer to "die with the righteous" is the desire in fact to live like the righteous. You don't die with the righteous by dying in the same place, or on the same day, that some righteous person died, or by being buried alongside a righteous person. The only way of dying with the righteous is to spend your life living like the righteous. It is also a prayer that, after having found faith and responded to the Caller to faith, we may remain steadfast for the rest of our lives.

The prayer then moves on to the following: "Our Lord, grant us what You have promised us by Your messengers and do not disgrace us on the day of Resurrection. Surely You never fail in (Your) promise!" What God has promised us through His messengers is that by acting on their message we shall have success and honour in this

world, not failure and disgrace. By following the right moral values of honesty, truth and faithfulness, we will succeed in our worldly lives as well as in our spiritual development. Disgrace on the Day of Judgment doesn't suddenly come out of nowhere. It is a continuation of the dishonour in which people hold us in this world if we commit misdeeds and behave wrongfully towards them. If someone has power, position and wealth in this world, and is misusing it, he will still see that people are bowing before him, praising him and paying him homage, but in their hearts they have no respect for him as a person. And their low opinion of him also become Allah's judgment of disgrace on him on the Day of Judgment.

The last verse in this group, v. 195, says that "their Lord accepted their prayer, (saying): I will not let the work of any worker among you to be lost, whether male or female; each of you is as the other." God's reply shows that the people who are praying to Him by the prayers that I have mentioned are both men and women. If you recall, this group of verses began with v. 190 mentioning that there are signs in God's creation for "those who have understanding", the *ūlu-l-albāb*, those who possess the highest level of intellect, who remember God and reflect on His creation, i.e. do *dhikr* and *fikr*. They then present these prayers and petitions before God. God replies by saying: I accept the prayers and the work of everyone of you, whether you are a man or a woman. This shows clearly and conclusively that the Quran does not consider *ūlu-l-albāb* to be only men but includes women among them as well. It dispels the notion that Islam has declared women to be defective in their intellectual ability as compared to men. In fact, there can be highly intelligent women just as there are highly intelligent men.

Moreover, after Allah says "whether you are male or female", He adds this: "each of you is as the other" — *ba 'du-kum min ba 'd*. These words are usually translated as "you are from each other", and they are taken to mean that males and females are born from each other. If you are a man, you have a mother who is a female, and if you are a woman you have a father who was male. But Maulana Muhammad Ali, in his Urdu commentary of the Quran, points out that these words can also mean: You are both the same, or you are like each other. So this is a plain statement in the Quran that Allah

Himself is saying to the believers that their men and women are the same and He does not distinguish between them in accepting their prayers and making their work and their sacrifices bear fruit. He expects both men and women to apply their intellects, to engage in His remembrance, to have belief in Him, and to pray to Him. Their sacrifices are mentioned further along as having to flee from their homes because of being driven out from them, bearing pain and persecution in Allah's way, and then later on having to fight and being killed.

So may Allah enable us, both males and females, to be among those people whose works, prayers and efforts are accepted by Him — *ameen*.

بَارِكْ اللَّهُ لَنَا وَكُمُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعْنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-
