

Luqman's advice - 3: (i) Religious teachers must show humility

(ii) Luqman and Jesus

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 31 December 2021

وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرْحًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ ﴿١٨﴾ وَأَقْصِدْ فِي مَشْيِكَ
وَاجْضُ مِنْ صَوْتِكَ إِنَّ أَنْكَرَ الْأَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتُ الْحَمِيرِ ﴿١٩﴾

“And do not turn your face away from people in contempt, nor go about in the land exultingly. Surely Allah does not love any self-conceited boaster. And pursue the right course in your going about and lower your voice. Surely the most hateful of voices is braying of donkeys.” — ch. 31, v. 18–19.

These are the last verses of the advice given by Luqman to his son. In the verse immediately before this, verse 17, which I discussed in my *Khutba* of 17 December, two weeks ago, he advises his son to “keep up prayer and enjoin good and forbid evil, and bear patiently whatever befalls you”, and treat this as a matter of great resolution and determination.

The qualities mentioned here apply generally to everyone in all circumstances. But they have a particular relevance in the context of Luqman giving advice to his son. In my *Khutba* of 17 December, I explained that Luqman indicated to his son that even if something is the most insignificant and smallest thing in this world, which people can't even see and whose value they don't know, God can bring it out as a great thing before the world. Luqman was a poverty-stricken black slave, a disadvantaged and illiterate person, but God raised him to the high standing of a righteous teacher of the finest moral values. Here Luqman warns and cautions his son about how such a person should behave when he reaches a high position. Having been raised high, he must not look down upon people, or go about displaying his pride in his position, or boasting. He must not shout at people, as if he is high and mighty above them, giving them orders.

While this applies to everyone who reaches a high position from a very low one, the high position which Luqman reached was not a worldly rank but a position of receiving guidance from God and knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. He wants his son to continue his mission of preaching goodness, and his advice applies particularly to such persons. They are liable to consider the ordinary people as beneath them, and to walk and behave with an air of superiority. You may recall the incident mentioned in the Quran, ch. 80, when the Holy Prophet frowned and turned away from a blind man who interrupted him when he was engaged in preaching Islam to important leaders of the Quraish. Although this was an understandable and natural reaction of the Holy Prophet, but God Himself pointed out in revelation to the Holy Prophet, in clear and unmistakable words, that this was unworthy of the Holy Prophet.

The advice by Luqman to his son to “lower your voice”, and not bray like a donkey or ass, also applies of course to one’s general behaviour towards other people. You should not try to dominate the conversation with a loud voice or try to draw people’s attention with an ugly voice which startles them. Here this advice applies in particular to the voice of a preacher of good values. Regarding donkeys or asses, it says in the Quran: “The likeness of those who were charged with the Torah, then they did not observe it, is as the likeness of the donkey carrying books” (62:5). Here the religious leaders whose duty was to observe and convey the teachings of their religious scripture, revealed by God, but who neglected this duty, are compared to an ass loaded with books. The ass only bears the weight of the books placed upon it. The value of the books lies in their contents, and the ass cannot possibly understand or act on them, but it can certainly take and transport the books anywhere.

In the Gospels we find that Jesus also condemned the religious leaders of the Israelites for not observing the Torah as they should have done. The Quran calls them “those who were charged with the Torah” and Jesus called them “the scribes and the Pharisees who sit in Moses’ seat” (Matthew, 23:2). Jesus condemned them for displaying the bad qualities mentioned here by Luqman. He says that they like to show off in front of people, give the appearance of being superior and very religious before them, and want to be looked up to for their knowledge and righteousness. He said:

“They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’ ” (Matthew, 23:6–7)

Jesus added: “And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew, 23:12). In the verse of the Quran which I quoted at the beginning, Luqman taught his son: “Surely Allah does not love any self-conceited boaster. And pursue the right course in your going about and lower your voice.” This is the same teaching as that of Jesus. To say that God does not love any self-conceited boaster is the same as Jesus saying “whoever exalts himself will be humbled”; God will bring him down. And pursuing the right course and lowering your voice, as Luqman teaches to his son, is the same as Jesus saying that “he who humbles himself will be exalted”.

Just as **the Quran says**, in the other verse that I quoted from ch. 62, that the Israelite religious priests and scholars of religious law did not observe the Torah, **in the same way Jesus said** to these priests and scholars: “you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered” (Luke 11:52). According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said to them: “hypocrites! You shut up the kingdom of heaven against people; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in” (23:13). They closed the door of righteousness to people. How? By claiming that only they possessed the truth, and that people can only act correctly on religion through them. As the religious leaders themselves did not act on the true religion, their followers could not act on it either, because the followers could only go through the religious leaders as their guides. They were not allowed to follow the teaching of the religion independently of the scholars.

After advising his son to lower his voice, Luqman said: “Surely the most hateful of voices is braying of donkeys”. This is a harsh and ugly voice which repels, startles and frightens people. It conveys no knowledge except to remind people very strongly of the presence of the person or animal making the noise, and to draw attention to the source of the noise. To such speakers their voice is the most important to be heard and they want to dominate others. I mentioned in my *Khutba* of two weeks ago the article

published in 1978 by Mr Naseer Ahmad Faruqi on these verses. He writes that the braying of donkeys reminds him of the extensive use of loudspeakers at mosques and religious gatherings. To quote him, the loudspeakers: “are used to broadcast, at the loudest possible pitch of sound, and to inflict whatever is said, sung or played behind them on people for miles around, whether they be sick, or wanting to sleep after a hard day’s work. Is this fair? The sage of Africa had the good sense to disapprove of it, thousands of years ago, when the nuisance was not so bad. Let us be as good-mannered and considerate of others as the sage of Africa was.”

When modern implements such as loudspeakers first came into use, the Muslim *Ulama* declared them as tools of the devil and forbidden for the transmission of any religious talk and recitations. Then when they realized that they could use them for their own purposes of making their voices reach further, and be dominant over the people of a larger area, they adopted those modern implements.

Finally, I may point out that the humility taught by Jesus in the Gospels was also taught by Luqman, the African. This shows that the concept of these finer qualities is not limited to the religions of the nations which are advanced in their worldly knowledge and power, but these qualities were also taught in the religions of the nations which are derided and looked down upon as uncivilised.

Also, Luqman’s basic teaching in these verses, of not setting up any partner with God and of thanking God, are reflected in the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus said: “it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” (Matthew, 4:10; Luke 4:8). Jesus was once asked by a literate and educated man: “Which is the first commandment of all?” He replied:

“The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Gospel of Mark, ch. 12, v. 29–31)

Here, after mentioning that God is one, Jesus says that you must love God with all your heart, etc. This is akin to the teaching revealed to Luqman to thank God. To

thank God is to love Him, and to love God is to thank Him. Luqman also taught his son: “bear patiently whatever befalls you”. That is also a part of loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, that despite whatever befalls you, you persevere with it patiently, resigning yourself cheerfully to God’s will.

The question is sometimes raised in modern times whether Jesus was white or black. It is asked: Why is he portrayed as white in Western Christian art? Is it to instil the idea that such exalted teaching could only be given by a white person and that people can only accept a white person as their religious founder? It seems that the Quran has provided an answer. Whatever colour Jesus may have been, the Quran tells us that the fine teachings which he received from God to convey to people were also bestowed by God on a black African to convey to people.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَكُنْمُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعْنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ

مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-