

Justice and Moral Principles in Islam are above physical relationship (2)

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 4 December 2020

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا ﴿٥٨﴾

“Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to those worthy of them, and that when you judge between people, you judge with justice. Surely Allah instructs you with what is excellent. Surely Allah is ever Hearing, Seeing.” (The Quran, 4:58)

I am continuing with the subject of last week to show the importance placed by Islam on the concept of *judging with justice*. This verse lays down the fundamental principle of government of a state or community in Islam. The people of the nation or the community entrust some among them with governing the affairs of the entire nation or community. They must take care to entrust those persons with authority who are worthy of holding this responsibility. Being worthy includes the qualities of integrity, truthfulness, conscientiousness and reliability, and also the capability of performing the necessary duties. Someone once asked the Holy Prophet about the hour of judgment, i.e., when a nation meets its doom. The Holy Prophet replied: When the trust is wasted, wait for the doom. The man asked: How will the trust be wasted? The Holy Prophet replied: When government, or rule, is entrusted to those unworthy of it, then wait for the doom (Bukhari).

Worthiness is not just about honesty and a good, virtuous and righteous character, but as I said above, having the qualities to perform the task. This is illustrated in the Quran with reference to the histories of previous prophets. The Israelites, sometime after the time of Moses, asked a prophet of theirs to appoint a king over them who may lead them in battle. When that prophet appointed a king called Saul, or Talut in Arabic, they objected that he was from a lower ranking family nor did he possess

much wealth. The prophet replied: “Surely Allah has chosen him above you, and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and physique” (2:247). He had the most righteous character, excelling them all, and he also had knowledge and physical strength, required to lead and fight the enemies. When the prophet Joseph asked the king of Egypt to appoint him to look after the finances of the country, he said to the king about his qualification: “Surely I am a good keeper and have knowledge”, *hafīz* and *‘alīm* (12:55). Again, when Moses was on the run in a foreign country and he helped two sisters to water their sheep, whose father was too old to do it, one of them suggested: “My father, employ him; surely the best of those that you can employ is the strong, the faithful one” (28:26).

There was a just Muslim ruler at the end of the first century *Hijra*, by the name of Umar ibn Abdul Aziz. He said that someone who is to be appointed as a judge, and this includes persons you choose to rule you, should have all of five qualities. He must be: intelligent, tolerant, of pure character, firmly truthful and just, and knowledgeable as well as a seeker of knowledge.

Anyhow, the above verse goes on to say: “when you judge between people, judge with justice.” The first duty of the rulers or the authorities is to dispense justice to the people. By “people” here (*nās*) are meant everyone under their rule, and not just Muslims. Justice is done by looking only at the facts and the evidence. If in your decision making you are influenced by any prejudice, for or against anyone who is seeking justice, then your decision is not justice. The Quran calls that as “following your low desires”. It mentions a command given to the prophet David about justice, which is in fact meant for the Holy Prophet Muhammad and all Muslims:

“O David, surely We have made you a ruler in the land; *so judge between people justly*, and do not follow desire that it should lead you astray from the path of Allah.” (38:26)

The word translated here as “justly” is literally “with truth” (*bil-ḥaqq*). Every effort must be made to avoid one’s own prejudices and views influencing one’s judgment,

against the actual facts. Of course, mistakes can be made in judgments. So the Holy Prophet has said that when a judge passes a verdict, *after applying his faculty of reasoning*, and he comes to the right judgment, he will have a double reward. But if, *after applying his faculty of reasoning*, he comes to a mistaken judgment, there is still a reward for him in the sight of Allah.

In the last *khutba*, I have already quoted the verse of the Quran (4:135) which addresses Muslims and orders them to be maintainers of justice, that is, not only to do justice to another person at an individual level, but to keep up a system of dispensing justice for the entire community. The verse told them to bear witness on behalf of God, that is to say, give evidence which is true as far as you know, just as God knows all the truth, and remember that you will be held accountable by him. The verse added that you should give this true evidence even if it goes against yourself or any close relative. In another place the Quran says: “And when you speak, be just, even (against) a relative” (6:152). The verse 4:135 also went on to say: “So do not follow (your) low desires, that you deviate.” Low desires are to favour your own interests or the interests of your relations and friends unjustly, and also to disadvantage other people whom you don’t like or who are not from among you. This second point is mentioned in another verse, 5:8, which is similar to 4:135:

<p>“O you who believe, be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for Allah, even if it is against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives — whether he is rich or poor, Allah has a better right over them both. So do not follow (your) low desires, that you deviate.” (4:135)</p>	<p>“O you who believe, be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and do not let hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. Be just; that is nearer to observance of duty. And keep your duty to Allah. Surely Allah is Aware of what you do.” (5:8)</p>
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The opening words of both verses are the same but in a different order. Both say that Muslims must be *qawwāmīn*. This word is translated as “maintainers” in 4:135 because it is followed by the word “justice”, and it is translated as “upright” in 5:8 because it is followed by the word “Allah”. While 4:135 requires that you should not

favour anyone who belongs to your side by *giving false evidence in their favour*, 5:8 says that you must not be unfair to those whom you dislike, *by giving false evidence against them*. So the two verses complement one another and cover everything that goes against justice.

It is not only in matters for which people go to courts of law, such as deciding who has done harm to whom, that justice has to be observed. In matters of religious beliefs also, we have to exercise justice as to where other people are wrong and where they are right. The Holy Prophet is told preach Islam to others in the following way:

“To this then go on inviting, and be steadfast as you are commanded, and do not follow their low desires, and say: I believe in what Allah has revealed of the Book, *and I am commanded to do justice (‘adl) between you*. Allah is our Lord and your Lord. For us are our deeds, and for you your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. Allah will gather us together, and to Him is the eventual coming.” (42:15)

What is meant by not following their low desires? These low desires were to believe that you could commit evil with impunity because you belong to God’s true and preferred religion and He will always favour you and forgive you. You are held in special regard by God, over and above how He looks upon other human beings. The Holy Prophet must not stoop to their low desires and preach an Islam of this kind. Instead he should say to them that Allah is our Lord and your Lord. He applies the same rules of reward and punishment to us as to you. “Low desires” may also have other meanings. For example, the Holy Prophet should not become a priest like their priests who require blind obedience from their followers, and who claim to be intermediaries between man and God.

The Holy Prophet should say to them that he is commanded to do justice between other religions, to recognize good wherever found and to denounce evil wherever found. It is the height of justice to say to them: “For us are our deeds, and for you your deeds”. God will judge us and you by our practical behaviour, applying the same

principles to us and to you. This is the most perfect level of justice, to say that people will be judged not by who they are but by what they do.

بَارِكْ اللَّهُ لَنَا وَكَرِّمِ الْقُرْآنَ الْعَظِيمَ، وَنَفَعْنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-

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