

“Killing one innocent person is like killing all mankind” – 2

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 4 February 2022

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا
قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ثُمَّ
إِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنْهُمْ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْأَرْضِ لَمُسْرِفُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

“For this reason We prescribed for the Children of Israel that whoever kills a person, unless it is [as punishment] for killing or for mischief in the land, it is as though he had killed all mankind. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved the lives of all mankind. And certainly Our messengers came to them with clear arguments, but even after that many of them commit excesses in the land.” — ch. 5, v. 32.

Continuing with this verse which I discussed last Friday, another objection raised is that it contains an exception about killing in the words: “whoever kills a person, *unless it is [as punishment] for killing or for mischief in the land*, it is as though he had killed all mankind.” The objection is that this is weakening and nullifying the principle that to kill someone is like killing all mankind, because it makes an exception to allow some kinds of killing. The answer to this objection is that the killing which it allows is for the purpose of preventing more killing. Let us look at the many countries which have abolished the death sentence for murder. The police and the armed forces of those countries still find themselves having to kill people whom they regard as a threat to life. Statistics show that in the UK, since 1990, there have been 77 fatal shootings by the police, despite the fact that capital punishment, or the death sentence handed down by courts, was abolished in the 1960s. So the exception mentioned in this verse of the Quran is a recognition of the practical reality.

Why does it mean, that to kill an innocent person is like killing all mankind? I discussed last week that this principle is mentioned in the Jewish scriptures.

According to their interpretation of this principle, each human is like Adam. If someone had killed Adam before he had any offspring, it would have been like killing all mankind because he would not have had any descendants. So their interpretation is that by killing one person you have killed all those who would have descended from him.

A general meaning could be that any murder encourages other murders to take place. As a result, this crime becomes more prevalent, so that everyone is placed at risk of being murdered. One murder leads eventually to many killings.

Another meaning may be that a human being is a representative of the whole human species, and to kill just one of them is to attack all mankind. This is rather like, for example, an official or a soldier of a country is a representative of that country, and to kill one of them constitutes declaring war on that country itself. If we look at how the First World War started in 1914, it started with the murder of a dignitary of the Austro-Hungarian empire while he was visiting Serbia. That single assassination led to one European country declaring war on another, and then other countries joined one side or the other, so that the war it led to became known as the 'Great War'.

You may like to consider the point that it is only in our modern age, since the end of the Second World War, that deadly weapons have come into existence, for the first time in history, which can wipe out the entire mankind. At an individual level, one person kills another person because of jealousy, greed and personal animosity. It is then extended to the community level, and communities kill one another for the same sort of reasons. It then reaches the national level, and a country makes war on another country. Then national resources are used to develop more and more destructive weapons, until we reach the present situation when the entire mankind can be destroyed.

On a smaller scale, a murder can lead to retaliation by the victim's family or community. Then the murderer's family or community joins on his side, and this escalates into communal killings. Again, one murder becomes the cause of many killings.

As regards the part about “whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved the lives of all mankind”, in our times there are save and rescue organisations of all kinds, governmental and voluntary, medical and non-medical, which have become widespread. They will try to save any human being whose life is in danger. So they are saving all mankind because they are saving people, not on any personal, family or national connection with them, but because those people belong to mankind. Whenever they save one life, they learn from that experience about how they can improve their life-saving techniques, which helps in saving more lives in the future. In developing medical treatments and medicines, tests are conducted on a small number of volunteers with, for example, new medication and vaccines. If the results are successful, the new treatments can be delivered to all mankind. So, saving a few lives leads to the ability to save hundreds of millions of lives. It is because mankind is one species that a treatment which works on a few them also works on a huge number of them.

Another interpretation given to this verse is that in the words “whoever kills a person” and “whoever saves a life”, by the killed person or the saved life is meant the Holy Prophet Muhammad. To kill him, as many people tried to do, and thus destroy his mission, would be to leave mankind without guidance. That is equivalent to killing all mankind spiritually. To save the Holy Prophet’s life, that he may complete his mission, is to save all mankind because then his message would reach all mankind.

There may be yet another interpretation. The “mankind” mentioned here may be the Muslim *Ummah*. By killing a person is meant declaring a Muslim as a *kafir* and unbeliever. There is a hadith which says: “And whoever accuses a believer of *kufir* (disbelief), then it is as if he killed him” (Bukhari, hadith 6047), and “And whoever accuses a believer of *kufir* (disbelief), he is like his murderer” (Tirmidhi, hadith 2636). Declaring one Muslim, or one Muslim group, as *kafir* leads to this practice becoming widespread. This is because if a Muslim can make up some reason to declare another Muslim as *kafir*, then other Muslims will also similarly find reasons to declare some Muslim as *kafir* whom they don’t like. This creates a situation in which **each and every Muslim in the world** has been declared as *kafir* by someone or other.

In Pakistan in 1953–54 a government enquiry was held which, among other matters, questioned the *Ulama* of various sects to give their definition of a Muslim, and the enquiry also examined their *fatwas* against one another calling one another as *kafir*. In their Report, which is commonly known as the Munir report after the name of the presiding judge, the enquiry came to this conclusion: “The net result of all this is that neither Shias nor Sunnis nor Deobandis nor Ahl-i-Hadith nor Barelvīs are Muslims and any change from one view to the other must be accompanied in an Islamic State with the penalty of death if the Government of the State is in the hands of the party which considers the other party to be *kafirs*. And it does not require much imagination to judge of the consequences of this doctrine when it is remembered that no two *ulama* have agreed before us as to the definition of a Muslim” (p. 219).

If one of the *Ulama* considered a certain person to be ‘Muslim’, the other *Ulama* considered that person to be a *kafir*. Each of these sects had issued *fatwas* against other sects, declaring them as *kafir* and as apostate, and consequently as deserving the death penalty. Taking all their *fatwas* together, all the Muslim *Ummah* are *kafir* and should be sentenced to death! And all this starts if even just one Muslim, or just one Muslim group, is declared *kafir*.

Under this interpretation, what is the meaning of “whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved the lives of all mankind”? Let us look at these two verses of the Quran: “O you who believe, respond to Allah and His Messenger, when he calls you to that which gives you life” (8:24) and: “And from among you there should be a community who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful” (3:104). What gives Muslims “life” is acting on the Quran and following the Holy Prophet. The second verse requires that Muslims should have a group among them who do this very work. The same word *da‘wah* is used in both these verses for “calls you” and “who invite”. The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement regards itself as a community and organisation established in accordance with this second verse. Its work is to save the lives of Muslims spiritually by calling them to the real teachings of the Quran. Many Muslims were losing faith in their religion due to the attacks upon Islam by its critics and detractors, against which they

had little defence. The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement has worked to save and protect their faith in their own religion. Even if our Movement has worked on a small scale and saved only a few lives, the arguments, the knowledge and the literature that it has produced to save those lives can be applied on a larger scale to save all Muslims and indeed all mankind.

May Allah enable us to continue the work along these lines, on whatever scale we can do it, ameen.

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