

The Politics of Using the Qur'an

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Lessons from the use of the Qur'an by Muslims who wish to profit from it whenever sanctimoniousness increases and it becomes fashionable to display one's piety. Excerpted from *Polarization around the Character of Ali ibn Abi Talib*.

It is now some thirteen centuries that the politics of "holding the Qur'an upon a spear" has been more or less prevalent among the Muslims. It becomes especially rife among those who wish to profit from it whenever sanctimoniousness and exotericism increases and it becomes fashionable to display one's piety and asceticism. There are two lessons to be learnt from this.

Firstly, whenever the ignorant, the unknowing and the uninformed put on a show of sanctity and piety, and people take them to be the symbol of the practicing Muslim, an excellent tool is available for unscrupulous schemers.

Such schemers always turn these people into an instrument for their own ends, and make their presence a strong hindrance to the ideas of real reformers. It is quite common to see anti-Islamic elements making quite open use of this means, that is to say, setting the power of Islam itself to work against Islam.

Western colonialism has had much experience in the use of this means, and has in its turn profited from deceitful arousal of the sentiments of the Muslims, especially in the field of the creation of schisms between them. What a disgrace it is when, for example, afflicted Muslims plan to drive out foreign influence, and then see the very people they wanted to save turn into a barrier in their path in the name, and under the banner, of religion. Indeed, if the masses of the people are ignorant and uninformed, hypocrites will use the fortress of Islam itself.

In Iran, where the people have the honour to love and follow the Household of the Prophet (Ahlu'l-bayt), hypocrites are creating a fortress against the Qur'an, Islam and the Household of the Prophet to help the usurping Jews, out of the holy fortress of love of the Household of the Prophet, and in their sacred name, and this is the most abominable part of the injustice against Islam, the Qur'an, the Prophet and his Household. The Prophet said:

I am not anxious about the incursion of poverty among my community; that about which I am afraid for them is crooked thinking. That which poverty of thought will bring my community is much worse than that which economic poverty will bring them.

Secondly, we must try to make our methodology of derivation from the Qur'an a true one. The Qur'an is a leader and a guide when it is subjected to true reflection, when it is interpreted wisely, when guidance is taken from the people who really know the Qur'an, who are firmly rooted in the sciences of the Qur'an.

As long as our methodology is wrong, and as long as we do not learn how to benefit from the Qur'an, we shall not derive any profit from it. Profiteers or ignorant people sometimes read the Qur'an, and then follow up an incorrect possibility. Just as you have probably heard in the words of Nahjul Balaghah: " they say the word "truth", and then set their minds of falsehood ! "

This is not practicing the Qur'an or bringing it to life, this is putting it to death. The Qur'an is put into practice when it is understood with a true understanding.

The Qur'an always presents its project in a general and fundamental form, but the deduction and harmonization of the particular to the universal depends on our correct understanding and conceptualization. For example, we do not find written in the Qur'an that in a war that took place on a certain day between 'Ali and Mu'awiyah, 'Ali was in the right; all we find in the Qur'an is that;

If two parties of believers fight, put things right between them; then, if one of them is insolent against the other, fight the insolent one till it reverts to Allah's commandment. (al-Hujarat, 49 - 9)

This is the Qur'an and its way of explanation; but it does not say in such-and-such a war so-and-so was in the right and the other was in the wrong.

The Qur'an does not spell out names; it does not say: after forty years, more or less, a man called Mu'awiyah will appear who will fight with 'Ali, and you should fight in that war for 'Ali. And neither should it enter into particulars. The Qur'an's task is not to make a list of subjects and point out which is right and which is wrong; such a thing would be impossible.

The Qur'an came to stay forever, so it has to make fundamental and universal things clear, so that falsehood can take its place face to face with truth in every age and people can act according to the criterion of these universalities. It is therefore a duty for people to open their eyes to the basic advice: "of two parties of believers fight. . .", and distinguish between the party doing the terrorizing and the one that

is being terrorized; and to accept if the unruly party ceases to be unruly.

But if they stop, and try to be cunning so as to save themselves from defeat, and prepare themselves for a new attack, and become unruly again, and, in the words of the Qur'an, "if one of them is insolent against the other", be firm, and do not give way to their cunning.

It is up to the people themselves to discriminate in all these matters. The Qur'an seeks that the Muslims should be intellectually and socially mature, and a necessary consequence of such intellectual maturity is the ability to differentiate between the just man and the unjust man.

The Qur'an did not come to be always for people like a guardian over a juvenile, to carry out the particular details of their lives like a personal protector, and to specify each special case by a material sign and indicator.

Actually, knowing people, the degree of their competence, the limits to their fitness for, and relationship to, Islam and Islamic realities is itself a duty, and frequently we neglect this duty.

'Ali, may peace be upon him, said:

You will never know truth and follow the right way unless you know the person who has abandoned it.

Knowing the principles and the generalities is alone not enough unless their correspondence and reference to particulars has been found, for it is possible that, through an error of judgement concerning persons and individuals or through ignorance of the situation, one will act in the name of truth and Islam and under the banner of Islam against Islam and truth and for falsehood.

Injustice and the unjust, justice and the just are mentioned in the Qur'an, but their applications must be sought out. We must not mistake injustice and justice for injustice, and then cut off the head of justice and truth in the name of what we imagine to be a universal principle and the judgement of the Qur'an.

Reference: *Polarization around the Character of Ali ibn Abi Talib*, by Murtaza Mutahhari. W.O.F.I.S World Organization For Islamic Services, Tehran – Iran.

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