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Section 16: Abraham Praised – His Faith Made an Ideal

Surah An-Nahl – Verse 120

إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ حَنِيفًا وَلَمْ يَكُ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

120. “Verily, Abraham was a nation (by himself) obedient to Allah, upright, and he was not of the polytheists,”

Allah has taken ‘Ibrahim to be an entire nation by himself in this holy verse and each and every commentator has presented his own version and interpretation for this sentence, among them we may select the following:

As ‘Ibrahim belonged to a school to which no one else belonged, therefore, he was an entire nation by himself¹.

He possessed the good qualities and the perfection which one may expect all the individuals of a nation to possess; that is, in him alone one might find the good traits which might belong to each of the diverse righteous individuals².

The Arabic term /‘ummat/ sometimes signifies the instructor of the good; thus it signifies that he was the instructor of all the good things³.

The Arabic term /‘ummat/ sometimes means, ‘leader’ and hence, it targets the leading figure, ‘the Imam’ of all the worshippers of Allah⁴.

The personality and the spectrum of his unique existence measured up to the scope of a nation, as he was one of the pillars of the strength of the whole nation⁵.

As he (as) was knowledgeable, he would lead an entire nation, as he is required to do so.

As he initiated a movement, he did what an entire nation was supposed to do, without having any companions, he rose alone and all by himself.

It is certain that the number and the quantity is not so important; rather it is the quality which counts and the initiation of the movement is what matters.

Therefore, this holy verse deals with a perfect example of a thankful servant of Allah, i.e. 'Ibrahim' who is the champion of monotheism. This is particularly important for the Muslims, in general, and for the Arabs, in particular, and it is also inspiring for them who regard him to be their leader and their earliest object of identification figure.

From among the outstanding characteristics of this great man, one may cite four attributes in this verse:

At first, the Qur'an says:

"Verily Abraham was a nation (by himself)..."

Certainly, 'Ibrahim was 'a nation', a great leader, a nation-building man; and in those days when no one spoke of monotheism, he was the champion of monotheism.

Another attribute of 'Ibrahim was that he was the obedient servant of Allah.

"...obedient to Allah..."

He was constantly following the 'straight path of Allah' and the 'path of the truth':

"...Upright..."

He was never in the path of the polytheists, and his entire existence and all points of his heart were filled only with the light of Allah.

"...and he was not of the polytheists,"

Surah An-Nahl – Verses 121 – 122

شَاكِرًا لَّانْعُمِهِ اجْتَبَاهُ وَهَدَاهُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

وَأَتَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

121. “(He was) thankful for His blessings; He selected him and He guided him to a straight way.”

122. “And We gave him good in this world, and in the Hereafter he will definitely be among the righteous.”

Allah has cited five types of perfection for ‘Ibrahim in these verses, and then He offers him five favours and positions:

He was a ‘nation’.

He was obedient (to the Lord).

He was not among the polytheists.

He was ‘upright’ and was clear of all involvements in deviation matters.

He was grateful.

As for the five kinds of grace and positions which Allah had accorded him, they were as follows:

Allah selected ‘Ibrahim for His prophetic mission and for the conveying of His message.

“(He was) thankful for His blessings; He selected Him...”

Allah led him to the right path and protected him from all types of misdemeanor and deviation.

“...and He guided him to a straight way.”

“And We gave him good in this world...”

which in its broadest sense signifies all of what is good, including a wide range of meaning in connection with the prophetic mission as far as the ‘House of Ka‘bah and a long-lasting life, alongside the acceptance of his call by Allah, enormous wealth, decent sons, as well as a host of other blessings.

“...and in the Hereafter he will definitely be among the righteous.”

The Prophet of Islam (S) was ordered to follow his way of life.

The Arabic term /‘ijtaba/ is derived from /jababah/, which signifies ‘collecting’ and ‘assembling’. ‘Allah’s collecting’ means that Allah assembles individuals from a diversified range of different approaches, protecting and purifying them for Himself.

Surah An-Nahl – Verse 123

ثُمَّ أُوحِيَٰنَا إِلَيْكَ أَنْ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

123. “So We revealed to you that you follow the creed of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not of the polytheists.”

Certainly the methods and the conditions of the prophets have not been identical, yet the path of the prophets has been similar and they were commissioned to follow the foregoing prophets and to preach monotheism.

The frequent praising and eulogizing with the same interpretations alongside verses aligned with one another, reflect the utmost sincerity and the position of ‘Ibrahim.

Thus, in this last verse, the latest privilege which was accorded to ‘Ibrahim by Allah because of those prominent attributes, was the fact that his school was not only to be set up and flourishing during his own time but also it was destined to be for people at all times, especially for the nation of Islam as an inspiring school, as the Qur’an says:

“So We revealed to you that you follow the creed of Abraham, the upright one...”

In this noble verse, He again reemphasizes that:

‘Ibrahim was not from among the polytheists.

“...and he was not of the polytheists.”

This refutation sentence is meant mostly for the ‘Quraysh polytheists’ who used to trace back their ancestral line to ‘Ibrahim despite their paganism and worshipping of the idols.

Surah An-Nahl – Verse 124

إِنَّمَا جُعِلَ السَّبْتُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَيَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ

124. “The Sabbath was appointed only for those who differed about it, and verily your Lord definitely will judge between them on the Day of Judgment in what they used to differ about.”

The Jews were repeatedly punished for their obstinacy and hostility by Allah, one of which was proclaimed in verse 118 of this Surah, stating:

“And for those who were Jews, We prohibited what We have already related to you...”

The designation of the Sabbath as a holiday, which is explained in this verse, is also another punishment, in which case, certainly, some groups have expressed their appreciation and others have been ungrateful, resorting to dirty tricks, for which they got entangled to harsh cases of punishment.

The verse says:

“The Sabbath was appointed only for those who differed about it...”

Considering the previous verse, the meaning of this verse might be: O’ Prophet! Follow the path of the nation of ‘Ibrahim; holidays on the Sabbath were designated as exclusive to the Jews, which was a type of punishment for them. Nonetheless, the Jews even differed on this day which was selected by themselves.

Therefore, at the end of the verse, the Qur’an says:

“...and verily your Lord definitely will judge between them on the Day of Judgment in what they used to differ about.”

However, there are some Islamic traditions which denote Friday is a great day for Muslims, and it is also a festival and holiday for them.

Surah An-Nahl – Verse 125

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

125. “(O’ Prophet!) Call (mankind) to the path of your Lord with wisdom and good admonition, and dispute with them in the better way. Verily your Lord knows better of him who has gone astray from His path, and He knows best those who are guided.”

There are ten interesting ethical decrees issued from this verse to the end of the Surah for social association with others.

This holy verse provides a comprehensive order for all those responsible instructors, professors as well as religious scholars, which calls them to be well-equipped with the various methods to be successful

when confronting their different audiences, for one can not invite all those addressed with a single method.

Every body has got a delicate way which must be addressed with a certain capacity through the medium of which he must be communicated with.

The elect ones, who require exclusive ways of handling and reasoning, must be dealt with in their own way, while the common folks should be addressed with some acceptable exhortations. The dissidents should also be addressed with more convenient ways of disputations.

A good advice is the one that the preacher acts and practices according to what he says, and acceptable disputations are those ones in which wrong provocation of feelings and insulting do not permeate:

Therefore, the first duty of the prophets is their 'Calling'.

“(O’ Prophet!) call (mankind)...”

All Callings Must Be Divinely-Orientated

“...to the path of your Lord...”

Every single invitation has got a hierarchy. (Wisdom, preaching, and acceptable disputation, in which case wisdom provides the rational method and preaching paves the emotional way.)

“...with wisdom and good admonition...”

Preaching must be done in a friendly manner; however, disputation must be carried out in a friendlier manner, that is, it must be friendly both in its content and form as well as in its methods of expression.

“...and dispute with them in the better way...”

The exposition of the impacts and blessings of what is good, as well as the statement of the pathological effects and dangers of whatever is evil, are included as methods of the calling. (Wisdom signifies being acquainted with the good and the evil of matters by the means of knowledge and reasoning.)

You are liable to perform your duties and you are not responsible for the consequences of whatever happens.

Wisdom and demonstration are always decent means for convincing other people. Nevertheless, preaching and disputation might be done either with the good method or with the bad one. (The terms 'good' and 'better' are not used in case of wisdom.)

Islam offers its followers both mental nourishment (with wisdom), and 'spiritual enrichment' (good

admonition) while it entertains logical methods when encountering the opponents.

‘Virtue’, in its broadest sense, including facing the opponents, means when one is facing the enemy he must observe the principles of the Islamic ethics.

“...and dispute with them in the better way...”

Generosity and goodness are the two basic methods in all campaigns if shown at the right time and proper place.

In conclusion, these ten-fold duties and important ethical and rational decrees can be employed as tactical principles in every campaign against the opponents of Islam, and may be used as a general rule in whatever kind of circumstances and under whatever conditions and times.

Were Muslims to implement such programs which are comprehensive, we should probably witness the glory of Islam as widespread throughout the world today, or at least in the main parts of it.

The verse concludes:

“... Verily your Lord knows better of him who has gone astray from His path, and He knows best those who are guided.”

Surah An-Nahl – Verse 126

وَإِنْ عَاقَبْتُمْ فَعَاقِبُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا عُوقِبْتُمْ بِهِ وَلَئِنْ صَبَرْتُمْ لَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لِلصَّابِرِينَ

126. “And if you punish then punish as you were punished with; but if you are patient, decisively, it will be best for the patient ones.”

Up till now, the issue in question dealt with the matter as to how one must engage in a logical dialogue or an emotional or rational disputation with the opponents.

Nonetheless, if the worst comes to worst and there is an entanglement involved, and they take up arms and invade, the Holy Qur’an orders in implication that If you are supposed to retaliate, your retaliation must be with what you have suffered and not more than that.

However, if you do not lose patience and have a forgiving attitude, this would be best for those who are patient.

The verse says:

“And if you punish then punish as you were punished with; but if you are patient, decisively, it will be best for the patient ones.”

In some quotations, we have it that this verse was revealed during the 'Uhud Battle' when the Prophet (S) witnessed the painful plight of the martyrdom of his uncle Hamzat-ibn-Abdul-Muttalib, in which case, the enemy was not content with killing him.

They tore up apart his chest and side with utmost atrocity, taking out his liver or heart, and cut off his nose and ears, which made him (S) quite upset.

Then he said:

“O’ My Lord! You are worthy of praise and I take up my case to you and you are my help and of assistance in whatever I notice.”

According to the comments made in Majma‘-ul-Bayan, Jawami‘-ul-Jami‘, Burhan, Safi etc, the Muslims, witnessing the scenario, declared:

“If we get access to them, we shall amputate them all.”

Nonetheless, in other commentaries like: ‘Ayyashi, Durr-ul-manthar, and other commentaries, this quotation has been attributed to the Prophet (S) himself. At this moment the revelation of the above verse took place, upon which occasion, the Prophet (S) declared:

“O’ Lord! I shall be patient, I shall be patient.”

This was, perhaps, the most painful moments in the life of the prophet, he controlled his nerves once again, selecting the second way which consisted of “forgiving.”

And as we note in the history of the conquest of Mecca, the day when the Prophet (S) overcame those stone-hearted people, he declared a general amnesty to them and kept to his words in the Battle of 'Uhud.

Truly speaking, if one wants to witness superior examples of manhood and those of humane affections, he should try to put the story of 'Uhud alongside that of the Conquest of Mecca and make a comparative study of the two.

It is probable that no other nations in a conquering position, has ever treated the conquered one which the Prophet (S) did after the Muslims conquest of the pagans of Mecca considering the situation where retaliation and hatred were the rule of the game within the fabrics of the society and of the social order.

In such a situation, hatred and hostilities were passed down from one generation to the next and a stop to the will to taking revenge was considered as a great defect.

As a result of all this magnanimity in character, amnesty and forgiveness, such a backwardly illiterate and obstinate nation was so moved and then awakened where, according to the Qur'an, groups after groups embraced Islam, the religion of Allah.

Surah An-Nahl – Verse 127

وَاصْبِرْ وَمَا صَبْرُكَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا تَكُ فِي ضَيْقٍ مِّمَّا يَمْكُرُونَ

127. “And (O’ Prophet!) be you patient and your patience is not but by (the assistant of) Allah, nor grieve over them and do not distress yourself at what they devise.”

Such an amnesty, forgiveness, and patience will only take effect decisively when no returns are expected.

That is, they are all done for Allah’s sake, and, therefore, the Qur’an adds:

“And (O’ Prophet!) be you patient and your patience is not but by (the assistant of) Allah...”

Can man indeed resist when confronting all such heart-breaking scenarios, which dominate him all over, without having the Divine assistance and without benefiting from a spiritual motive while entertaining within himself all the discomfort and pain and yet not lose his patience? It is, of course, possible in case that all is done for Allah and with the benefit of His succour.

Once all efforts in the domain of the propagation of faith and calling towards Him in connection with forgiveness and perseverance did not take effect, one should not yet feel depressed, losing patience with a far outcry. On the contrary, the process of propagation must go on patiently and in a state of calmness.

Therefore, towards the end of the holy verse, He declares:

“...nor grieve over them and do not distress yourself at what they devise.”

Such a sorrow and grief are due to their lack of faith and can cause one of the following two phenomena to occur: either it makes one depressed for ever and altogether, or it may make one impatient and cry all the time.

Therefore, to dissuade one from having grief and getting depressed or feeling in distress has its origin in both cases; that is, once you are calling towards Allah, you should neither be upset nor should you feel hopeless.

Despite all the foregoing qualifications, the obstinate enemy might yet not stop planning his conspiracies

and might go on with his dangerous strategies.

In such cases, the true strategy to be adopted is what the Qur'an proclaims:

“Do not distress yourself at what they devise.”

No matter how well calculated and widespread such conspiracies might be while being dangerous, you must not let yourself down and be driven out.

Do not imagine you are cornered and surrounded or entrenched, for your support is Allah, in which case, you are able to counteract and nullify all the conspiracies and undo them altogether by provoking the forces of Faith, persistence, wisdom and insight.

Surah An-Nahl – Verse 128

إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ

128. “Verily Allah is with those who keep from evil, and those who are good-doers.”

Allah is with those who lead a life of virtue. “Virtue” here signifies the performance of one’s obligatory rituals and the distancing one-self from all those which are prohibited by the religious laws.

Nonetheless, the Qur’anic term ‘virtue’, in all its dimensions and in its broadest sense, includes in the sense of being of virtuous even when one is confronting the opponents.

This means that even against one’s enemies, one must adopt the Islamic ethics; treat with the prisoners and captives according to the rites of Islam; do justice with those who are deviants and in a polite manner; to abstain oneself from lying and falsely accusing of others.

Even in wartime situations and in battlefields, one must observe the principles of wartime, instructions available in Islam and Islamic criteria.

One must avoid attacking the defenseless ones; one must not engage in violating the children and disabled old people; even the four-footed animals must not be hurt, while fields of agriculture must not be destroyed; water supply must not be cut off from the enemy and, in the final analysis, virtue must be observed and principles of justice must be applied to both the friends and enemies in general.

The verse says:

“Verily Allah is with those who keep from evil...”

As the Qur'an says in other verses, at times, one must return and show a positive reaction in exchange for an evil act, by which one can make the enemy shameful about what he has done. This procedure may turn the most hostile of the enemies into kind friends.

Generosity and kindness can serve as the best techniques for conducting a warfare campaign if achieved correctly, and the Islamic history provides plenty of examples in this connection.

The conduct of the Prophet (S) with the pagans of Mecca after its conquest, the way he dealt with Wahshi, the murderer of Hamzah; his conduct with the prisoners of the Battle of Badr, his ways of dealing with those Jews who hurt him in all kinds of way, as well as similar treatments in the biographies of Ali (as) and other religious leader reflect the methods included in the Islamic commandments with regard to this.

Interestingly, we read in Nahj-ul-Balaqah, through the famous sermon of 'Hammam' who was a pious, devout, and intelligent man, asking Amir-ul-Mu'mineen (as) for a comprehensive decree with regard to the attributes of the devout people, the Imam confined himself to citing only this verse, saying:

Lead a life of virtue, and act in a decent way for Allah is with those who are pious and act decently.

Although this interrogator was such a truth-loving that was not fully satisfied with this short answer and the Imam was necessarily required to provide a more detailed account and offered the most comprehensive speech concerning the attributes of the pious people, which exceeds a hundred qualities, one may infer from the Imam's first short answer that this verse reflects, in fact, all the attributes of the pious people.

In conclusion, we know that the calling through wisdom, preaching, and good disputation is no easy matter, for some are being obstinate and do not accept the call, while others engage in conspiracies, and a third group get involved in the counter activities, and, to achieve their vicious goals they do not stop doing any thing short of false accusations, ridiculing, threatening, fabricating rival factions, economic embargo, wars, as well as all kinds of torture and hurt.

Thus, these two verses provide a kind of comfort, compassion and guidelines which the blissful Prophet (S) had so as not to be obstructed by any obstacles in his mission.

Last Words and Remarks on Surah An-Nahl

As we pointed out from the beginning of the Surah, what stands outstanding from among all the verses of the Surah is the explanation of the various blessings, irrespective of the material and spiritual ones; the apparent and the latent ones; and those which are individual and social. The fact that the name of the Surah is selected as the 'Surah of blessings' is for this very reason.

A careful study of the verses of the Surah indicates that approximately forty blessings, including the

great and the small ones, as well as the spiritual and material ones, have been cited throughout the verses of this Surah.

The objectives of this Surah have been: first, to provide instructions concerning lessons on monotheism and the splendor of the Creator. Secondly, to reinforce the love of the human beings with regard to the Creator of such blessings and the provocation of their sense of gratitude towards Him.

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1. Tafsir-i-Safi
 2. Tafsir-i-Mar aghi
 3. Tafsir-i-Tabari
 4. Tafsir-i-Forq an
 5. Tafsir-i-Jawami'-ul-Jami' and Majma'-ul-Bayan

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