

Section 6: Gentleness in Dealing Enjoined

Surah Isra' – Verse 53

وَقُلْ لِعِبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَنْزِعُ بَيْنَهُمْ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ
لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوًّا مُّبِينًا

53. “And say to My servants to speak what is best. Verily, the Satan sows dissensions among them. Verily the Satan unto man is an open enemy.”

As the discussion in the foregoing verses centered around the issues of the origin and the resurrection and the proofs regarding these two main ideological beliefs, here the Qur'an instructs the manner of conducting a dialogue and disputation with the dissidents, especially the pagans, for, no matter how elevated in rank the school might be, the powerful logic will also be rendered useless, but if it is not coupled with correct methods, discussion and disputations, and instead of affection and favour harshness and rudeness prevail, it will be fruitless.

Therefore, the verse proclaims:

“And say to My servants to speak what is best...”

The best, in here, signifies what is most appropriate from the view point of content, eloquence, and that which is best in terms of ethical virtues and humanitarian methods, for, if one distances himself from what is best speech, and tends to rudeness and quarrelsomeness in his words, it recalls the Satan's interference and inciting corruption amongst them.

The verse says:

“...Verily, the Satan sows dissensions among them...”

Do not remain heedless of the fact that the Satan does not remain idle. The Satan is always round the corner, for he has always been an open enemy of mankind.

The holy verse continues saying:

“.. Verily the Satan unto man is an open enemy.”

Sometimes, the believers who had recently accepted the faith, following their previous ancient habits, used to provoke aggression against those who opposed them.

Moreover, those humiliating expressions of the dissidents towards the Prophet (S), some of which were mentioned in the previous verses, such as: sorcerer, insane, soothsayer, poet, etc... sometimes caused the believers to lose control of themselves and raise up against the opponents in a verbal attack, saying whatever they wanted.

The Qur’an seeks to hinder them from such things, persuading them to call with leniency and selection of softest words so as to prevent the Satan from inciting corruption.

Surah Isra’ – Verse 54

رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ إِنَّ يَشَاءُ يَرْحَمَكُمُ أَوْ إِنْ يَشَاءُ يُعَذِّبِكُمْ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكِيلًا

54. “Your Lord is more knowledgeable about you than yourself. He will have mercy on you if He pleases, or He will punish you (for your behaviour) if He pleases, and We have not sent you as a warden over them.”

In the previous verse, the stress was based on one’s manner of speech with soft words. In this verse, there are some of its aspects explained as follows: One must not regard himself as superior to others.

One must not humiliate others, not even calling the pagans as ‘hell-inhabitants’ while declaring oneself to be one of those who go to the Paradise, for such a manner leads to rebellion and sedition. Moreover, how on earth do we know about the happy ending of each of us? Allah is more knowledgeable; He excuses if He pleases and punishes if He pleases.

The verse says:

“Your Lord is more knowledgeable about you than yourself. He will have mercy on you if He pleases, or He will punish you (for your behaviour) if He pleases...”

In the end, concluding the verse, He addresses the Prophet (S) and, in order to console him for the extraordinary unease which he had suffered at the hands of the pagans as a result of their lack of faith,

He says:

“...and We have not sent you as a warden over them.”

So that you feel as the advocate of the people which compels you to make them definitely embrace the faith. It is your duty to openly take the message to them, and call them earnestly to the truth. If they embrace the faith, so much the better for them; otherwise, no harm will be done to you.

Surah Isra’ – Verse 55

وَرَبُّكَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَقَدْ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَ النَّبِيِّينَ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ
وَأَتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ زُبُورًا

55. “And your Lord is more knowledgeable than any one who is in the heavens and the earth; and, certainly, We have made some of the prophets excel others, and to David We gave ‘Zabūr’.”

In the previous verse, the issue in question involved the knowledge of Allah in connection with man. In this verse, the issue in question relates to His knowledge over all the beings whether the celestial or earthly ones.

The verse says:

“And your Lord is more knowledgeable than any one who is in the heavens and the earth...”

In other words, in this verse the meaning is beyond that, implying that Allah is aware not only of your status but also of that of all those who are in the skies and on the earth and He is the most aware of every one and knows their value better.

Then whoever He elects from among the angels and the prophets for a matter is not undue that merely He pleases it, but since He is aware of the true innate value of them and knows them eligible for the job, He elects them.

Then He adds:

“...and, certainly, We have made some of the prophets excel others...”

By saying:

‘We have made some prophets excel others’,

here is meant the ‘Ulul‘azm’, ‘prophets of the Book’.

We have it in traditions that there have been one hundred and twenty four thousand prophets, some of whom have been appointed for all the people and possess ‘celestial Books’. some, also, were commissioned for a particular region or over a certain group of people and were under the command of a greater prophet, carrying out his mission.

In other words, although prophets were placed at the highest echelon of virtues, there was a hierarchy for them which ranked them at various levels, excelling some over the others.

This sentence is, in fact, an answer to one of the objections of the pagans, who used to claim in a humiliating tone of voice that: Had the Lord not any one else other than the orphan Muhammad (S) to appoint as a prophet? Moreover, what made him be the leading figure among all the prophets and the ‘Seal of the Prophets’?

The Qur’an implies that it is not astonishing that Allah is aware of the human values of every single individual and, hence, He has selected His prophets from among the bulk of the people. He has bestowed one with the title of “khalil-ullah” (the friend of Allah).

He has conferred the title of “Rah-ullah” on another one of His prophets. He has selected the Prophet of Islam (S) as “Habib-ullah” (the friend of Allah).

Briefly speaking, He has made some superior to others in His blessings in accordance with the criteria which He himself deems fit and His Wisdom so deems worthy of.

Although Dawood was in charge of a vast territory, the Lord does not regard this matter as his prime object of pride.

On the contrary, He regards the Book of ‘Zabur’ as what he must take pride in so that the pagans become aware of the fact that the glory of man does not depend on his wealth or property or his authority or his apparent domination. At the same time, being an orphan or being stripped off all of one’s belongings will not indicate to the blame of him.

The verse concludes:

“...and to David We gave ‘Zabur’.”

Surah Isra’ – Verse 56

قُلِ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ فَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ كَشْفَ الضُّرِّ عَنْكُمْ وَلَا تَحْوِيلًا

56. “Say: Call on those whom you asserted (to be your god) besides Him; so they shall neither

have the ability of removing the affliction from you, nor to change (it).”

To call on any one other than the Lord, and to put one’s hope into this matter, is merely a daydream, for no one else but Allah is able to remove the dangers or transfer them to another one or, to convert or to reduce them by any means.

Incidentally, one’s belief in intercession occurring by Allah’s saints of removing the difficulties and chastisement takes place by Allah’s permission, and is a different matter.

This verse, once again, deals with the pagans and, pursuing past discussions, the Qur’an addresses the Prophet (S) and declares:

“Say: Call on those whom you asserted (to be your god) besides Him; so they shall neither have the ability of removing the affliction from you, nor to change (it).”

In fact, this verse, as many of other verses of the Qur’an, obliterates the logic of the pagans in this way which holds that the worship of the idols is either for the sake of acquiring benefits or for the sake of repelling harms; but, they have got no power of their own to solve difficulties, nor would they be able to displace any of them.

The application of the Arabic pronoun /’allaḥina/ in this verse explains the point that the objective in here does not exclude all the worshipping objects other than ‘Allah’, but the aim expressed here refers to such objects of worship like angels, Hadrat Massih (as) and the like.

Surah Isra’ – Verse 57

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ يَبْتَغُونَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمُ الْوَسِيلَةَ أَيُّهُمْ أَقْرَبُ وَيَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَهُ
وَيَخَافُونَ عَذَابَهُ إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّكَ كَانَ مَحْذُورًا

57. “Those whom they call upon, themselves search for means of approaching their Lord which of them is nearer, and they hope for His mercy, and fear His punishment. Verily, the punishment of your Lord is to be dreaded of.”

Some commentators are of the opinion that the prophets who call the people to the path of the truth, they themselves seek some means of support, especially the ones who can make them nigh to Allah closer and in a speedier manner, or the mediation of every prophet who is in closer proximity to Allah.

In numerous quotations, we have it under this verse that the two sides of the balance between fear and hope must be paralleled, otherwise, the person who is being involved, will either become desperate or arrogant (as a result of being unduly hopeful).

Anyway, this verse in fact provides justification for what was mentioned in the previous verse. It implies whether you know why they are unable to solve your problem without the Lord's permission. The reason why they do such a thing is that they invoke to the Lord for solving their own difficulties. They try to approach His Pure Essence, asking Him for whatever they wish.

The verse says:

“Those whom they call upon, themselves search for means of approaching their Lord...”

“...which of them is nearer...”

“...and they hope for His mercy...”

“...and fear His punishment...”

The reason why it is so is that the punishment inflicted by Him is so grave in intensity that it is always to be avoided.

The verse continues saying:

“...Verily, the punishment of your Lord is to be dreaded of.”

In other words, the verse means: those prophets and angels, whom you call gods, try to find access to Allah through praying and worshipping to be might to Allah so that it becomes transparent that whose position would be ranked as higher before the Lord.

That is, when the prophets, with the high rank and honour that they have with Him and are nearer to Him than you do not worship any one but Allah, and seek for a mean to approach Him, then why should you not be as such, you that are not nearer to Allah?

Therefore, the worship of the Lord alone, and the abandoning of polytheism and dualism in matters of worship are all more indispensable for you. Thus, the Lord seeks to urge the people to imitate the prophets.

Some, however, claim that the angels and Hadrat Massih etc, whom you are regarding as god, are only subservient to the Lord themselves and seek to approach Him and come into closer proximity to Allah through their acts of worship, thus coming into closer contact with His Mercy. Or else, they yearn to know which of them is in closer proximity to the Allah's grace.

Nevertheless, they try to seek forgiveness from the Lord, hoping for His mercy and grace through their obedience, and fearing His reappraisals because of unruly. Just like all of the servants of Allah, they, too, follow the path of worship.

Yes, the punishment of your Lord is too hard for you to bear, and all must avoid it.

Surah Isra' – Verse 58

وَإِنْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ إِلَّا نَحْنُ مُهْلِكُوهَا قَبْلَ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ أَوْ مُعَذِّبُوهَا عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا كَانَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْكِتَابِ مَسْطُورًا

58. “And there is not a town but We shall annihilate it before the Day of Resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement. That is written in the Book, (the Protected Table).”

The Arabic term /qaryah/ refers to the gathering place of people, whether it is a town or a village. The objective of the Qur’anic term /’al kit ab/ here is either the ‘Protected Tablet’ or the Qur’an in which the reasons for the fall and annihilation of the nations are explained.

Therefore, following our discussion about the pagans, which we noted concerning monotheism and resurrection in the foregoing verses, this noble verse, with an awakening tone, advises them and illustrates the end and the annihilation of this world in face of their rational vision, so that they may know that this world is a mortal one and the eternal world remains elsewhere, thus preparing themselves for the consequences of their behaviour.

The verse says:

“And there is not a town but We shall annihilate it before the Day of Resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement...”

Those who engage in evil acts and are oppressive, and the stiff-necked unruly, are to be wiped out by Allah’s punishment, and the rest will be annihilated by death due to the natural causes or by common accidents.

Eventually, this world will end and all will pave the path of annihilation. This is a decisively obvious principal which is registered in the Divine Book, (the ‘Protected Table’).

The verse remarks:

“...That is written in the Book, (the Protected Table).”

Surah Isra' – Verse 59

وَمَا مَنَعَنَا أَنْ نُرْسِلَ بِالْآيَاتِ إِلَّا أَنْ كَذَّبَ بِهَا الْأَوَّلُونَ وَعَاتَيْنَا ثُمُودَ النَّاقَةَ مُبْصِرَةً فَظَلَمُوا بِهَا وَمَا نُرْسِلُ بِالْآيَاتِ إِلَّا تَخْوِيفًا

59. “And nothing prevented Us that We should send the signs (requested by the people) save that the former nations rejected them; and We gave to Thamūd the She-Camel, a manifest sign, but they did injustice unto her; and We do not send signs (requested) but to warn.”

The pretext seeking pagans of Mecca used to ask the Prophet (S) for miracles frequently, among which was that they wanted him to turn some of the mountains of Mecca (the Saf a Mountain) into gold, or to displace mountains and agricultural land be made available in their place.

The Lord declares that, according to the historical experiences, the obstinate pagans would not embrace the faith by witnessing such signs either, and the system of creation will not be made subservient to the obstinate individuals.

If a miracle is performed according to the request of the people, and they still remain disbelievers, their worldly chastisement is certain to take place.

A camel is an animal. However, the Lord, with respect to the camel of Salih, says: /naqatullah/, (the She-Camel of Allah).

Since whatever relates to the Lord in some ways possesses sanctity. Even for the name of Abu-Lahab, because it is in the Qur’an, one can not touch it before making ritual ablution.

Miracles are of two types

Some miracles are such that, without them, one cannot acquire cognition of the prophecy. Obviously, such miracles must take place, whether the people embrace the faith or they do not.

Others are because of Allah’s grace, and may lead to the increase in one’s faith. These miracles are done by the grace of the Lord.

Those miracles which are outside the category of the two, are not shown by the Lord. Thus, He implies: We do not send Our verses for the fact that your forefathers had requested such verses to become believer and once We sent them, they refused to embrace the faith. You, too, follow their path, and will refuse to believe as they did.

The verse says:

“And nothing prevented Us that We should send the signs (requested by the people) save that the former nations rejected them...”

Then, the Qur’an points the finger to a clear example of the issue by saying:

“...and We gave to Thamūd the She-Camel, a manifest sign...”

It was the same camel which came out of the mountain upon Allah’s command, for they had requested

such a miracle: an illuminating miracle. Nonetheless, they refused to become believers, so they did harm to that she-camel, and killed her.

The verse says:

“...but they did injustice unto her...”

In principle, it is not Allah’s procedure that everyone who requests a miracle, the prophet submits to his request, and He does not send the verses and the miracles except for inspiring awe in people and delivering an ultimatum to them.

The verse says:

“...and We do not send signs (requested) but to warn.”

In other words, Allah (s.w.t.) makes His verses and miracles apparent through the prophets so that, by witnessing them, the people receive instructions, fearing Allah’s punishment and embrace the faith.

Explanations

The prophets were always entangled with obstinate individuals despite having various miracles.

“...save that the former notions rejected them...”

Allah is all-powerful in every situation, though His procedure is based upon wisdom, and not that of the gratification of the people’s desires.

Sacrilege and the denial of the miracles will lead to the Divine fury and chastisement.

“...and We gave to Thamūd the She-Camel, a manifest sign, but they did injustice unto her...”

Miracles serve as the means for the people’s cognition, enlightenment, and as warning for them.

“...but to warn.”

Surah Isra’ – Verse 60

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لَكَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ أَحَاطَ بِالنَّاسِ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الرُّؤْيَا الَّتِي أَرَيْنَاكَ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلنَّاسِ
وَالشَّجَرَةَ الْمَلْعُونَةَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ وَنُخَوِّفُهُمْ فَمَا يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلَّا طُغْيَانًا كَبِيرًا

60. “And (remember) when We said to you: ‘Verily your Lord encompasses the people;’ and we did not make the dream which We showed you and the cursed tree in the Qur’an, save (as) a trial

for the people; and We cause them to fear, but it only increases them in great insolence.”

Now, the Lord, addressing His Prophet (S), states that he should remember the time when He told him: his Lord is knowledgeable about the state of the people and their good and bad deeds, and He knows who merits rewards and who deserves punishments.

He is All-powerful for the punishment and reward of the people. Therefore, all are within the range and scope of His power, and no one is capable of exceeding the limits of His Will and Providence.

The holy verse says:

“And (remember) when We said to you: ‘Verily your Lord encompasses the people;’...”

Thus, Allah encourages the Prophet (S) to go on with his process of propagation, and He promises him that He will save him from the harm of the people, and, eventually, He will conquer Mecca for him.

Incidentally, the issue involved in the previous holy verse concerned the killing of Salih’s she-camel, and in this verse, the issue in question deals with the whole damned lot who were the murderers of ‘Ahl-ul-Bayt’, the ‘Prophet’s household’.

The verse continues saying:

“...and we did not make the dream which We showed you and the cursed tree in the Qur’an, save (as) a trial for the people...”

We have it in the quotations that the Ahl-ul-Bayt remarked:

*“We are no less in position than the Salih’s she-camel. Any insult to us would lead to annihilation.”*¹

In the blissful Qur’an, there are several dreams cited for the Prophet of Islam (S), one of which has been cited at the time of the outbreak of the ‘Battle of Badr’, in which, the Lord degraded and minimized the enemies in the sight of the Prophet (S) so that the Muslims would not lose courage. ²

Another dream came upon him when he dreamed about the victorious arrival into Masjid-ul-Haram. ³

A third dream was the one which is referred to in this verse. The first two dreams took place after the Hejrah and in Medina, while this third one came about in Mecca. Of course, some ascribe the dream in relation to ‘Mi’raj’ (Muhammad’s ascension to Heaven) while the ‘Mi’raj’ took place in full awakening state but dreams come about while one is asleep.

That dream and the state of that cursed lot (the cursed tree) are the same and identical, for their end-result is one and the same. That is, they both provide the roots of evil for the people.

The Lord indicated this ‘cursed tree’ and their acts in dream to the Prophet (S) while he was asleep,

saying that this is the cause of the evil of your people, and with the holy sentence:

“... ‘Verily your Lord encompasses the people;’...”

Allah Sought to Console Him

The Arabic term /šajarah/ signifies both ‘a tree’ as well as whatever else has got branches and offshoots. Therefore, it also refers to ‘a tribe’. The Prophet (S) also remarked:

*“Ali and I are both from one tribe (the same ‘pedigree’ and ‘line’).”*⁴

This term also points to the chain of blood relations and race as in the case of ‘family pedigree’ which is called ‘genealogical tree’. Therefore, the idiomatic expression ‘the cursed tree’, signify a whole lot of ‘branches’ and a well-rooted tribe which has got off-shoots as well, and which is cursed.

At the end of this verse, we have it that the Divine warning as for this ‘cursed lot’, or cursed tree, has brought no results except an increase in their viciousness and rebellion.

The holy verse says:

“...and We cause them to fear, but it only increases them in great insolence.”

The phrase: /tuqy anan kabir/ “great insolence”, has only been mentioned once in the Qur’an and only in this verse. Therefore, one must look out for a “cursed lot” and a tribe in the Qur’an which has been Muslim in appearance but dissident and rebellious inwardly and in the real sense with a kind of hypocrisy which causes the trial and sedition for people.

There are numerous causes of condemnation and cursing in the Qur’an such as: the Satan, the Jews, the hypocrites, the pagans, and the scholars who cover-up the truth as well as those who inflict harm on the Prophet (S).

However, it is only the hypocrites who accompany the Muslims and cause them the maximum injury by their hypocrisy, for the Satan, the people of the Book, and the pagans indicate clearly what they are, while the hypocrites, apparently Muslims, have always been the agents for sedition. 5

Some have held the opinion that the ‘cursed tree’ consist of the ‘tree of Zaqqūm’ which, in Hell, is the means of the Divine chastisement.

But there are also other things which have been used as the Divine punishment as well, and they do not provide sings for the condemnation of those means, like the River Nile, which drowned Pharaoh, or the angels who inflicted punishment on certain peoples, or the believers who served as the arms of Allah in punishment and annihilation of the pagans.

“Fight them (and) Allah will punish them at your hands...”⁶

Alameh Tabataba'i (q.s.), in his discussion dealing with the quotations concerning 'Surah Al-Qadr, No. 97', quotes from some outstanding of Sunni sources such as: Khatib Baqad adi, Turmathi, Ibn-Jarir, Tabar ani, Bihaqi, Ibn Mardooyah, as well as Shi'ah sources such as Kafi, etc, that the blissful Prophet (S) dreamed of panthers climbing his pulpit and it saddened him greatly.

Gabriel descended when the Prophet (S) recounted his dream for him.

Gabriel ascended to the heaven, and, on his return, He brought along with him the following verses:

"Have you then considered if We let them enjoy themselves for years."

"Then there comes to them that with which they are threatened,"

"That which they were made to enjoy shall not avail them?"⁷

This dream also caused the descending of Surah 'Al-Qadr' so as to comfort the Prophet (S) that if the 'Umayyads' ruled for a thousand months, We provided you with the Night of 'Qadr' in exchange, which is better than a thousand months.

The issue concerning the dreaming about the panthers, which overtook the government and were climbing the pulpit of the Prophet (S), has also been quoted from Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq (as) ⁸

The Sunni and Shi'ah commentators regard the 'Umayyads' as the 'cursed tree'.

Imam Sajjad (as) remarked: Gabriel adapted the panthers to the Umayyads. The Prophet (S) asked:

"Does this event take place during my era?"⁹

From among the Umayyads, the person who was most rebellious, and caused the advent of Karbala to come about, was 'Yazid', and this calamity was the greatest rebellion throughout history.

Explanations

The Lord uses the dreams at times to reveal some facts to the prophets and others.

Every event, even interpretation of dreams, can be used as a means for the testing of the people.

Those tribes and groups who incite deviations are the '***cursed tree***'

"...and the cursed tree in the Qur'an save (as) a trial for the people..."

Issuing warnings to the people, even to the cursed tribes and the 'cursed families' is among Allah's ways of treatment.

Warnings will have no impact on the tenacious people who are obstinate. 'An iron nail will not penetrate

stones’.

“...but it only increase them in great insolence.”

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1. Bihar, vol. 28, p. 205, and vol. 50, p. 192
 2. Surah Al-’Anfal, No. 8, verse 43
 3. Surah Al-Fath, No. 48, verse 27
 4. Bihar, vol. 38, p. 309
 5. Tafsir-Al-Mizan, under this verse.
 6. Surah At-Taubah, No. 9, verse 14
 7. Surah Ash-Shu’ara, No. 26, verses 205–207
 8. Tafsir-i-Tibyan
 9. Tafsir-i-Lahiji

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-8/section-6-gentleness-dealing-enjoined>