

Forgiveness in Islam

An attribute which has received due attention in Islam and which has been extensively discussed in the Holy Quran, hadiths (Islamic traditions), and narrations relates to the issues of "Forgiveness" signifies overlooking the offense and sin of a person who has purposefully or mistakenly done you wrong, such as insulting you by his words, beating you up or exacting your property. Ignoring all these issues and not castigating the person who has committed this wrong is called "forgiveness". Forgiveness is of two types:

- We forgive someone when we are unable to take vengeance. This kind of pardon is, in fact, tantamount to patience and forbearance and not to forgiveness. In other words, it is a kind of helplessness and debility.
- We forgive someone when we have the power to take revenge. The forgiveness desired by Islam and its leaders relates to this kind.

In most utterances of our immaculate Imams (peace be upon them all), the word "Power" has been used wherever the issue of forgiveness has been raised.

We cite several such examples hereunder:

- Ali (a.s) said: "The most deserving person to pardon others is the one who is most powerful in punishing others".^{[1](#)}
- In his last will while addressing Hareth Hamedani, Ali (a.s) stated: "Subdue your anger and forgive a guilty person while you are in power."
- When you gain power over the enemy, consider forgiving him as a sign of your gratitude for your power.^{[2](#)}
- Imam Sadeq (a.s) stated: "Pardoning others while one is in authority is consistent with the policy of the prophets and the abstemious people."^{[3](#)}

You can note that in all the aforementioned utterances, the word "Power" has been expressed: therefore,

the forgiveness that Islam has in mind refers to pardoning others while one has the power to take vengeance; otherwise, a pardon arising out of lack of power, as mentioned earlier, is a sign of helplessness and debility. In other words, it is "a kind of tolerance."

With more deliberation into the meaning of the divine verses, we realize that Allah Almighty enjoins on His prophet pardon and connivance. Allah recommends him to observe good behavior while guiding the people, and keeps him away from getting involved with ignorant elements.

To make his "Messenger" completely successful, Allah warns him against paying heed to satanic temptations which are the biggest barrier before man in performing good deeds. To save His messenger, Allah commands him to seek refuge in him.

It becomes evident that granting pardon to an oppressor and abstaining from taking vengeance are not so simple tasks. Man needs a greater spiritual power with which to kill his carnal desires and sense of vengeance, and to grant "Pardon" while he has the ability to take revenge. For this reason, Allah Almighty introduces "the restraint of anger" as one of the attributes of a believer. This attribute pertains to people who suppress their anger and forgive others.

Allah Almighty also states:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

Thus it is due to mercy from Allah that you deal with them gently, and had you been rough, hard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you; pardon them therefore and ask pardon for them, and take counsel, with them in the affair: so when you have decided, then place your trust in Allah; surely Allah loves those who trust. (3: 159)⁴

This holy verse has been revealed about those who violated the Holy prophet's order in the Battle of Uhud thus leading to the defeat of the Muslims. These people were fifty two in number whom the Holy Prophet (S) stationed at the entrance to valley and said to them, "If we come out triumphant or if we face defeat, you should not move a step from this place."

This particular "tactic" of the Holy Prophet (S), coupled with the favor of Allah and the self-sacrifice shown by the Zealous Muslim youths, defeated the enemy and forced it to flee. The Muslims pursued the enemy forces and started gathering booty after their plight from the battlefield.

As soon as these fifty two people saw that the Muslims have gained victory and are engaged in gathering booty, all but twelve of them left their post despite their commander's pleas not to disobey the Holy prophet's orders and not to go after the booty.

At this time, Khalid Ibn Walid, a commander of the army of the polytheists, seized the opportunity and climbed up the valley with two hundred riders. They killed the remaining twelve men and attacked the army of Islam from behind. In this battle, seventy of the best warriors of Islam, including Hamzeh Ush Shuhada (the leader of the Martyred), the uncle of the Holy prophet, and Mas'ab Ibn Umair, were martyred and many of the combatants of Islam, including the Holy Prophet (S) and Ali Ibn Abi Taleb, were wounded.

In fact, violation of the order by those few persons led to a major defeat for the Muslims. People expected the Holy Prophet (S) to strongly punish those violators; however, the following holy verse was revealed:

"... Pardon them therefore and ask pardon for them, and take counsel with them in the affair... (3: 159)"

By revealing this verse, Allah issues this pardon order to the Holy prophet, "O Messenger, pardon them and ask pardon for them ..."

- [1.](#) Nahjl Balagheh of Abdoh, page 266.
- [2.](#) Ibid, page 103.
- [3.](#) Safinat Ul Bahar, Volume 2, page 207.
- [4.](#) Ibid, Verse, 159.

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