

Immunity from Sin and Error

(Verses 7 – 8)

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ فِيكُمْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ لَوْ يُطِيعُكُمْ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ لَعَنِتُّمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَزَيَّنَهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ
وَكَرَّهَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْكُفْرَ وَالْفُسُوقَ وَالْعِصْيَانَ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الرَّاشِدُونَ. فَضَلَّأَ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَنِعْمَةً وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

“ (O’ Believers!) Know that surely the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad, blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) is among you. Had he (Muhammad, blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) obeyed you (took your advice and acted upon it) on many occasions, then you would have been in great trouble now. However, Allah has endeared the faith to you and He has made it attractive to your hearts and He has made disbelief, evil deeds and disobedience hateful to you. Such people (those who have faith and keep away from evil traits) are those who are rightly guided. This blessing (of faith) is a favour and blessing from Allah and Allah is the All-Knowing, All-Wise.”

The goal of these two verses of the Qur’an is to inform those who have true faith of two major ethical points. The first point is that that the Noble Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) is free from committing sins or errors and thus all of his orders and commands must be carried out completely. We are commanded to follow him and he is not required to follow us. The second point is that each and every person has innate ethical traits and qualities instilled within him.

Seeing as to how both of these issues carry their own significance and importance, we will discuss each of them individually.

Is there any level or status (that one can have in a society) that is greater and which holds more of a responsibility than leadership (of that community)? Is it possible for a person who lacks both the spiritual and physical qualifications to fulfil the task and responsibilities of a leader? What about the person who cannot even fulfil the role of a leader in matters related to one’s own life – how can he be a leader of the people?

Is it possible for a political leader who only leads the people in matters of politics; or those who are experts in the matters of economics and who are in charge of the economic and business affairs of the entire country be placed in these positions if they do not possess a series of moral and ethical values that would permit them to occupy such important positions? Can such people be placed within the framework of the political and economic affairs of a community?

The divinely appointed Messengers are true leaders of the people in all matters of their lives and thus they must possess the noble and grand qualities which would reflect their competence in the mission of leading the people and which would give the people a reason to follow them. Thus, we can summarize the traits and qualities that the Messengers of Allah must possess as follows:

1. Comprehensive knowledge and understanding. By this we mean that the Prophets of Allah must have complete and precise knowledge in relation to all matters that they have been commanded to convey to the people, such that not a single ruling from amongst the rulings of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) should be hidden or concealed from them. In addition, there should also be no question asked to them in relation to the religion that they would not be able to answer.
2. They must be protected from committing sins and going against the commandments of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) at all times in their lives – whether this be before their official appointment or after their official appointment (to the station of Prophethood).
3. They must be protected from committing any sort of mistake or error in relation to the propagation of the religion and the application of its' practical rulings.
4. They must be purified from all sorts of negative spiritual traits and physical defects which (if they possessed) may lead the people to develop an aversion and dislike for them. This would make the people keep their distance from them which would in turn lead to the Prophets and Messengers not being successful in their mission of conveying the message (of Allah) to the people.

In order to stress the importance of each of these points, the scholars of Islam and the specialists in Theology have gathered clear proofs and evidence¹ of which, to keep this discussion concise, we do not mention here.

Do not such distinctions (of these personalities) necessitate that in relation to matters of the religion, we must follow them and that we should never anticipate or expect that these Divinely sent teachers – since they have been granted `Ismat (protection from committing errors or sins) and are free from all errors and slips in relation to the Divine Commandments and leadership – would ever follow any incomplete and imperfect ideas and opinions?

A person who desires that the Heavenly teachings and Divinely appointed leaders should follow their own personal thoughts and desires and who feels that the wheel of the religious teachings should revolve around their own opinions, is lacking a correct understanding of the Prophets and the status and

rank of the Messengers, and has definitely not kept in mind the infallibility of these personalities.

In the verse of the Qur'an under discussion, Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) says:

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ فِيكُمْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ لَوْ يُطِيعُكُمْ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ لَعَنِتُّمْ

“(O’ Believers!) You should know that surely the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad, blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) is amongst you. Had he (Muhammad, blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) obeyed you (took your advice and acted upon it) on many occasions, then you would have been in great trouble now.”

The person who wishes to take precedence over Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) and His Messenger (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) and wants to place his own thoughts and ideas ahead of those of the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) has been reminded that since he has been given a Prophet that is free from sins and committing any sort of error, one must not place his own desires and ideas ahead of the revelation of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He).

In summary (you will recall that), in the beginning of this Surah, Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) addressed the believers by saying:

لَا تَقْدِّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ

“...do not give preference (to your own words and deeds) above those of Allah and His Messenger (the Prophet Muhammad, blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny).”

Continuing on in the verse under discussion, we have been commanded not to give preference to our own ideas in relation to the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) since he is a man who has been protected from all types of errors and sins and because of this, we must follow him.

In addition, it must be mentioned that this part of the verse relates to issues of the Islamic legislation and thus the thoughts of the common people cannot be accepted and followed (over the rulings of Allah, Glorified and Exalted is He). Therefore, we must take inspiration from the revelation of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) and just because the people may feel offended or insulted is no reason that the commands of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) should be changed.

An Infallible Prophet and the Subject of Asking Advice

Yes, in those issues related to the society and community which were not (directly) associated to the religion or Divine revelation that even the common people were able to differentiate between the truth and falsehood (in them), the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) was commanded

to ask advice from those around him. Thus, through asking advice from the common people, problems and difficulties can be solved.

It has been mentioned in the Qur'an that:

فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ

“So then (Muhammad, blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) forgive the people their slips and errors and seek forgiveness from Allah for them all and consult and seek council from them in matters (not relating to the religion or the teachings of Allah). So then when you are ready to make a decision (based on the advice of the others), then have trust in Allah (put a collective decision into practice).”³⁴

In addition, Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) testifies that one of the signs of a person with true faith is that he asks for advice from others in relation to performing a certain task:

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

“And as for those people (who are believers) and who answer the call of their Lord (Allah) and uphold the Salat and conduct their affairs through consultation with one another and (these are the people) who give out of their wealth (to the needy).”²

By the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) asking for advice as the very first step (in carrying out any task), this truly sets an example for others, that in matters relating to the society and community, we should not appear as despotic or authoritarian – rather we must give respect to the opinions of other people and ask for help and assistance through soliciting their opinions. Yes, the part of the verse that says:

فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ

“So then when you are ready to make a decision (based on the advice of the others), then have trust in Allah (put a collective decision into practice).”

shows us that the first stage that the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) would traverse was that of seeking advice, and then at the conclusion, the final decision would be left to him alone.

All of the democratic societies and free governments of the world resort to asking others in the society

for advice in deciding how to solve their problems, however at the same time they still have one leader who, after taking advice from others, makes his final decision. To an extent, asking advice from others helps remove the curtains and veils (that a person may have) and gives the person a proper outlook of events. However in the end, it is necessary for the person who will make the final decision to weigh the various opinions and then make one ultimate resolution.

Some people think that: “The only outcome that can come from asking others for advice is that difficulties will be prolonged and a group of people who do not possess one definitive leader and who instead resort to consultation and asking the general population for advice, cannot bring an issue or affair to closure once it has been started without a stoppage of work.”

However, the above quoted verse of the Qur’an goes against this opinion and conveys the fact and bears witness that a difference of opinion and diversity of beliefs actually leads to a standstill and stoppage of work. Thus in the end, it is incumbent that after the leader or person in charge has asked others for advice, he gives his own decisive judgment.

Due to this fact, after Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) commands the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) to seek council from other people, He (Glorified and Exalted is He) then states:

فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ

“So then when you are ready to make a decision (based on the advice of the others), then have trust in Allah (put a collective decision into practice).”

The life of the Prophet of Islam (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) clearly shows us to what level he respected the opinions of his companions. Even though the true face and reality of the actions was made known to the mirror of his heart (through Divine Inspiration) and he was completely aware of both the good and bad that would come out of every act, more so than others knew, still in many complex issues he would form a committee and ask his companions for their opinions and judgements. Take for example the following cases:

1. Before the Prophet went face to face on the battlefield of Badr with the armies of the Quraish, he formed a committee comprised of the Muhajirin and the Ansar and asked them for their advice in relation to the battle against the polytheists, which the companions saw as an uninhibited opportunity for them to expound their various beliefs. The Messenger of Allah (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) accepted and followed the opinions of the people and marched with his soldiers towards Badr.[3](#)
2. When the news reached the Prophet of Islam (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) while in Madinah that the forces of the Quraish – who had lost many people during the battle of Badr – were coming to exact revenge on those that were killed (thus, starting the war of Uhud), he examined the

situation by asking what the method of defence of the Muslims should be and if they should stay in the city or if they should all leave and fight the war outside (of the city). When the youth from amongst the Ansar suggested that they go out of the city of Madinah to fight the battle, he acted upon their suggestion.[4](#)

3. During the battle of Ahzab in which the forces of idolatry congregated like locusts from all parts of `Arabia and were making their way to Madinah to destroy the young religion of Islam, in his own particular way of fighting against this onslaught, the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) took the opinion of a great Iranian personality and put his ideas into practice.

It was Salman al-Farsi (may Allah be pleased with him) who suggested that those areas of Madinah which could be easily infiltrated should be fortified with a three metre deep trench and throughout the whole length of this ditch, rifle-pits should be placed separated by a small distance. This was suggested so that any time the valiant fighters from amongst the polytheists desired to fill the trench (to make their way across) or attempt to cross over the trench (on their horses), the soldiers of Islam would be able to catapult rocks and stones to push back the approaching soldiers.[5](#)

4. When trying to take over the fortified stronghold of the Jews in Khaibar, we see that the area where the soldiers of Islam invaded from, by following the orders of the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) was completely unthought-of of by the enemies (and thus, it caught them off guard).

One of the experienced warriors of Islam by the name of Habib ibn Mandhar who had in-depth knowledge of the area of Khaibar went to the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) and said to him, “Anytime the command comes from Allah to attack this area, I will not have even the smallest thing to say about it. However if this is an issue in which I am permitted to offer my advice, then I would say that I do not think this is a good place to choose as the base to keep the soldiers in, because this area is accessible to the enemies and is very close to the Fortress of Nistat. The archers from that Fortress will be able to hit our troops easily since there are no date trees or houses that would block their view.”

The Qur’anic principle that states:

...وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ

“So then consult with them (O’ Prophet) in your affairs.”

The Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) said that, “If in a particular issue, you are able to bring forth a better point, then we will choose that place as the area to travel towards.”

It is because of this discussion that took place and after studying the fortress of Khaibar, that the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) chose an area for his base that was behind the date

trees.6

- [1.](#) In discussing the importance of each of these traits, we have written a book entitled, “Universal Message of the Prophets” in which we have discussed these points in detail. Please refer to this book for more information.
- [2.](#) Surah al-Shuara’ (42), Verse 38.
- [3.](#) Sirah Ibn Hisham, Volume 1, Page 614.
- [4.](#) Ibid., Volume 2, Page 63.
- [5.](#) Sirah al-Halabi, Volume 2, Page 331.
- [6.](#) Ibid., Volume 3, Page 39.

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