

Lesson 15

6-2-10 The Open School Class: Explanation of Forty *Ahadith* Text: Jalali, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn. Sharh al-Arba'in al-Nabawiyah. Arabic edition 1987, pages 451-454.

Summary

The Qur'an is a revelation sent by God (the All-Mighty) to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family). Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the last revelation to mankind. Allah (the All-Praiseworthy) says via **Qur'an (3:4-5)**,

"He has sent down to you the Book with the truth confirming what was [revealed] before it, and He had sent down the Torah and the Evangel before as guidance for mankind, and He has sent down the Criterion."

The Qur'an brings a message of guidance and social justice. With no discrimination based on gender, race, nationality, age, etc., Allah (the All-Wise) says via **Qur'an (5:15-16)**,

"Certainly there has come to you a light from Allah, and a manifest Book. With it Allah guides those who follow [the course of] His pleasure to the ways of peace, and brings them out from darkness into light by His will, and guides them to a straight path." 70

Now, the Qur'an, like the Old Testament, includes several verses of law. When I was younger, I had a hard time understanding how the Qur'an can have verses of peace, forgiveness, mercy, and brotherhood and, at the same time, have verses of harsh punishment, such as flogging and cutting of the hand (fingers). My first reaction was that the scholars are misinterpreting the verses and such "cruel" punishment is not possible in Islam.

However, as I grew and read more, it became clear that the verses did relate to severe punishments. I did not truly appreciate the significance of such verses until I studied American criminal law. Every society that wants to progress must enforce criminal laws to keep the society safe from danger and corruption. For example, India may have many laws, but a lot of times those laws are not enforced or are

circumvented, and because of this, India is still experiencing a lot of corruption and bribery on many levels (which prevents the growth and good health of the society).

Now, truly understanding the conditions required for the respective punishments¹ the ways or means of enforcing Islamic laws of punishment, and when to apply such laws (if at all during the Major Occultation) is beyond me, but I do understand why the Qur'an includes them. They are practical in maintaining social justice (which is a mercy for the society). Also, the existence of the laws or enforcement thereof is a strong deterrent and may also help in rehabilitating criminals (e.g., through tough punishment, they may see and adhere to the right path). The truth is that the revelation of the Qur'an has changed humanity. Whether you are a Muslim or not, you cannot deny the impact of Islam. For example, of all the communities as a whole (not certain individuals) that converted to Islam, how many of those communities have reverted back to their old ways? Societies are adhering to Islam and the Qur'an, and this is a sign of the existence of truth. The **Qur'an (17:88)** states,

“Say, „Should all humans and jinn rally to bring the like of this Qur'an, they will not bring the like of it, even if they assisted one another.”

This is a tremendous claim. I thought about this a lot, and with no disrespect to the Qur'an, I challenged my faith with some straight forward questions. I first asked, what is so special about the Qur'an in terms of language and expression? One can look at the Qur'an as a mere book. In light of such questions, Sayyid Khu'i gives a beautiful explanation of the miraculous quality of the Qur'an.²

For example, at the time the Qur'an was revealed, the expert poets and masters of language were shocked and at awe by the beauty, symmetry, and language of the Qur'an. This shows that there is something extraordinary about the Qur'an and it must have come from a Special Source. Ok, but what about now? Why is it not possible for someone to make verses similar to the Qur'an? One can change some words around or paraphrase the Qur'an using modern language techniques. However, this is just imitation, not creation or bringing the like of the Qur'an. If someone plagiarizes a paper and just changes some words, then that product is not truly an original work, it is just a copy.

Also, every word of the Qur'an has a special and deep importance, and so even changing a word would make the imitated work an inferior product. Furthermore, the Qur'an has many levels (such as outer and inner levels). One may try to imitate the external language, but the deeper and hidden truths will still be beyond him or her. Our knowledge is dependent on what Allah (the All-Knowing) allows us to know. If Allah does not allow us to know the deeper and higher levels of knowledge, it is not possible for us to even try to express such knowledge. Also, the Qur'an contains truths that may be beyond our comprehension, and so how can we ever bring the like of it.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said that *whoever searches for salvation without the Qur'an is astray*. The right path is the Qur'an. For example, we recite so many times daily, **Qur'an (1:6-7)**,

“Guide us on the straight path, the path of those whom You have blessed – such as have not incurred Your wrath, nor are astray.”

This is universal and applies to everyone. You can break down every action in life into the three categories: 1) the straight path, 2) the path of those who go astray, and 3) the path of those that incur the Lord’s wrath. For example, if I wanted to make money to support my family, I can find Islamically permissible work (a straight path), or I can find work that involves bad acts or is harmful (going astray), or I can avoid work and just steal for the rest of my life (incurring wrath). In every little action, one must find the straight path and take it (*i.e.*, knowledge and action). As Muslims, we should read the Qur'an every day. But, how should we read?

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him and his family) said that *I do not like someone who reads the Qur'an in less than one month.* (Jalali, page 453). Why? One can answer the question with another *hadith* (tradition) from Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him and his family). He said that *the Qur'an should not be read fast but, rather, should be read with pondering and meditation.* It is important to not just move our tongues to make the sounds but to also comprehend and think.

When I was younger, I memorized some of the shorter chapters of the Qur'an so that I can recite them during *salah* (Islamic ritual prayer). Arabic not being a native language for me, I was just happy to be able to pronounce the chapters in a halfway decent manner. One day I thought to myself that I should really know what I am saying. Standing before the Lord (all praise is due to Him) and reciting without understanding did not seem right. Accordingly, I forced myself to understand the meanings of the chapters I memorized via English translations.

Truthfully, when I started praying with the understanding of the words, my prayer felt more sincere and I felt more content. If we believe that the Qur'an is truth and guidance, then we must ponder and attempt to comprehend it for our own benefit. Furthermore, there are some etiquettes and recommendations when reading the Qur'an. (Jalali, page 454). For example, 1) be pure (in heart and body), 2) recite *ista'adha* (seeking Allah's protection from Satan) before reading, 3) recite *basmalah* ("In the Name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful") before reading, 4) ponder while reading, 5) do *du'a* (supplication or call to God (the All-Merciful)) after you finish reading, and 6) read with a good voice.

1. After reviewing some of the numerous identified conditions required for respective criminal punishments, I realized that they entail a great deal of mercy. See Shirazi, Sayyid Abdul Husayn Dastghaib. Greater Sins. Trans. Sayyid Athar Husayn S.H. Rizvi. Qum, Iran: Ansariyan Publications, Second Reprint 2007, pages 237–239 and 420–423.

2. Khui, Sayyid Abu al-Qasim. The Prolegomena to the Qur'an. Trans. Abdul Aziz Sachedina. Qum, Iran: Ansariyan Publications, Second Reprint 2007, pages 69–81.

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