

Right n. 48: The Right of Him Who Wrongs You

حق من ساءك

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ مَنْ سَاءَكَ الْقَضَاءُ عَلَى يَدَيْهِ بِقَوْلٍ أَوْ فِعْلٍ فَإِنْ كَانَ تَعَمَّدَهَا كَانَ الْعَفْوُ أَوْلَىٰ بِكَ لِمَا فِيهِ لَهُ مِنَ الْقَمْعِ وَحُسْنِ الْأَدَبِ مَعَ كَثِيرِ أَمْثَالِهِ مِنَ الْخَلْقِ، فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَقُولُ [وَلَمَنْ انْتَصَرَ بَعْدَ ظُلْمِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ مَا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ سَبِيلٍ. إِنَّمَا السَّبِيلُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ يَظْلِمُونَ النَّاسَ وَيَبْغُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ، أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ. وَلَمَنْ صَبَرَ وَغَفَرَ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ لَمِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ] وَقَالَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ [وَإِنْ عَاقَبْتُمْ فَعَاقِبُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا عُوقِبْتُمْ بِهِ وَلَئِنَّ صَبْرَتُمْ لَهِيَ خَيْرٌ لِلصَّابِرِينَ] هَذَا فِي الْعَمْدِ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ عَمْدًا لَمْ تَظْلِمْهُ بِتَعَمُّدِ الْإِنْتِصَارِ مِنْهُ فَتَكُونُ قَدْ كَافَأْتَهُ فِي تَعَمُّدِ عَلَىٰ خَطِيئَةٍ. وَرَفَقْتَ بِهِ وَرَدَدْتَهُ بِالطَّفِّ مَا تَقْدِرُ عَلَيْهِ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ.

And the right of him who wrongs you¹ is to put an end to the matter by word or deed. If he did it intentionally, it is more appropriate for you to pardon him. This would eliminate bad feelings, and it is the polite way to treat most such people. Indeed God says: *“But indeed if any do help and defend themselves after a wrong (done) to them, against such there is no blame. The blame is only against those who oppress men with wrongdoing and insolently transgress beyond bounds throughout the land, defying right and justice: for such there will be a Penalty grievous. But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs”* (42:41–43).

The Almighty the High also says: *“And if ye do catch them out, catch them out no worse than they catch you out. But if ye show patience, that is indeed the best (course) for those who are patient”* (16:126).

This is so if it was intentional. But if he who wrongs you has done it unintentionally, then you should not oppress him by intentionally insisting on retaliation, lest you would be punishing him intentionally for what he has done unintentionally. You should be gentle with him and respond to him as kindly as you can. And there is no power but in God.

In short, we can say that if someone wrongs you, he has either done so intentionally or unintentionally. You should pardon him if he has done so intentionally. Hopefully he will not take advantage of your pardoning him. If he has wronged you unintentionally, it is not proper to punish him intentionally. Rather you should be kind to and gentle with him.

Invitation to Pardon

Very few people are able to totally avoid violating the rights of others whether intentionally or unintentionally. If people are urged to take revenge whenever they can do so, then there will be an escalation of harsh social encounters. Attacks for taking revenge are of an unpredictable nature and no one can control their severity. Usually they will be harsh. Even if they are measurable and controllable, they never seem to be exactly equal to compensate for the wrong that was done from the views of both parties involved.

Therefore, even if one side wants to be fair and exactly punish the other side in an amount equal to the original misdeed, the other party does not agree and will be urged to take revenge himself. Thus, the fighting will continue on and on. The only possible way to stop this chain of revenge taking is forgiving.

If we think we will realize that there is no real benefit in taking revenge, since it will only bring temporary relief for us. Yet the satisfaction we can get from pardoning the other party is much more spiritually rewarding and long-lasting. This issue has been delicately addressed in the Holy Qur'an and Islamic literature, and pardoning has been declared an important duty for Muslims. First, let us consider the Qur'anic verses that Imam Sajjad referred to.

Seeking Help from the Believers

Seeking help from other believers is one of the signs of believers. The Holy Qur'an says:

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَهُمُ الْبَغْيُ هُمْ يَنْتَصِرُونَ

“And those who, when an oppressive wrong is inflicted on them, (are not cowed but) help and defend themselves.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Shura 42:39]

What we can learn from this verse is that those whose help is sought are duty-bound to help. That implies that both the believer who is being oppressed and other believers are responsible to help defend against the oppressor. This is also stated in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

وَإِنِ اسْتَنْصَرُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ فَعَلَيْكُمُ النَّصْرُ

“... But if they seek your aid in religion, it is your duty to help them.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Anfal 8:72]

This responsibility placed on the believer’s shoulders to help each other at times of oppression warns the oppressors. They will then know that other believers will not sit idle if a believer is oppressed. In another verse, the response to injuries is clearly stated to be an equal injury:

وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِّثْلُهَا فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ

“The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from God: for (God) loveth not those who do wrong.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Shura 42:40]

What an oppressor does to a believer is inflicting an injury. The recompense is an equal injury and is considered a bad deed even though the original injury is a bad deed. We also read in another verse of the Holy Qur’an:

الشَّهْرُ الْحَرَامُ بِالشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ وَالْحُرُمَاتُ قِصَاصٌ فَمَنْ اعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ فَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا اعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

“The prohibited month for the prohibited month, – and so for all things prohibited, – there is the law of equality. If then anyone transgresses the prohibition against you, transgress ye likewise against him. But fear God, and know that God is with those who restrain themselves.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2: 194]

It is also not wrong to seek help or help defend others as we read:

وَلَمَنْ اتَّصَرَ بَعْدَ ظُلْمِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ مَا عَلَيْهِمْ مِّنْ سَبِيلٍ

“But indeed if any do help and defend themselves after a wrong (done) to them, against such there is no cause of blame.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Shura 42:41]

Forgiving: a Better Way

Imam Sajjad cited the following verse:

وَلَمَنْ صَبَرَ وَغَفَرَ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ لَمِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ

“But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Shura 42:43]

He also cited the following verse:

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

“And if ye do catch them out, catch them out no worse than they catch you out: But if ye show patience, that is indeed the best (course) for those who are patient.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Naḥl 16: 126]

In some traditions, it is stated that this verse was revealed in the Battle of Uhud when the Prophet of God saw the body of his noble uncle, the Blessed Hamzeh, torn into pieces. He got upset and said:

اللَّهُمَّ لَكَ الْحَمْدُ وَإِلَيْكَ الْمُشْتَكَى وَأَنْتَ الْمُسْتَعَانُ عَلَى مَا أَرَى.

“O God! Praise is for you. I bring my complaint to You, and seek Your help regarding what I see.”

Then the above verse was revealed and the Prophet said: “I will be patient. I will be patient.”²

The Difference between Forgiving and Overlooking

We read the following verse in the Holy Qur’an regarding forgiving and overlooking:

وَلَا يَأْتَلِ أُولُو الْفَضْلِ مِنْكُمْ وَالسَّعَةِ أَنْ يُؤْتُوا أُولِي الْقُرْبَى وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

“Let not those among you who are endowed with grace and amplitude of means resolve by oath against helping their kinsmen, those in want, and those who have left their homes in God’s cause: let them forgive and overlook, do you not wish that God should forgive you? For God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Nur 24:22]

The difference between simply forgiving, and forgiving and overlooking is that one who forgives and overlooks will no longer blame and remind the other person of his mistake.

Doing Good in Return for Evil

A more important stage that is beyond forgiving and overlooking is responding by doing good in return for evil. Undoubtedly this is one of the excellent manifestations of human spirit, and requires moral

training and spiritual refinement. It is also the best lesson one can teach those who engage in an evil deed. Therefore, this kind of response to an evil deed is considered the best way to end animosities. We read in the following verse:

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ

وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا نُوحًا عَظِيمٌ

“Nor can goodness and Evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with what is better: Then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate! And no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint, – none but persons of the greatest good fortune.” [The Holy Qur’an, Ha-Mim 41:34-35]

Therefore, we are reminded of the magic power of “repelling evil with what is better.” We learn that we can use this form of behavior as a means of converting our worst enemies into friends. We are also told that achieving this requires the “exercise of patience and self-restraint” which is only possible if we have faith, piety, moral and scientific nobility, patience and self-restraint against negative human tendencies.

Those who oppress always expect retaliation and revenge from the other side. They even consider themselves worthy of such retaliation due to their sub-conscience. This is the reason why responding with goodness in return for their evil deeds is like a shock to them, and it can turn them into friends instead of foes. Once, unexpectedly they are treated nicely in return for their evil behavior, their conscience is awakened and they change their opinions regarding their enemies.

Forgiving When in Power

We can only say one has forgiven another person’s wrong-doing if he is in a position of power and can take revenge but quenches his anger and does not do so. However, when one who is wronged is in a weak position, and cannot take revenge, he cannot claim to have forgiven the other party.

Joseph Forgave

This point has been clarified in the Holy Qur’an in the story of the Blessed Joseph and his wrongdoing brothers. When they went to Egypt for the third time and they got to know their brother Joseph:

قَالُوا إِنَّكَ لَأَنْتَ يُوسُفُ قَالَ أَنَا يُوسُفُ وَهَذَا أَخِي قَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّقِ وَيَصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“They said: “Art thou indeed Joseph?” He said, “I am Joseph, and this is my brother. God has indeed been gracious to us (all): behold, he that is righteous and patient, – never will God suffer the reward to be lost, of those who do right.” [The Holy Qur’an, Yusuf 12:90]

Then Joseph reminded them of their wrongdoings and asked them what they deserved. They acknowledged their wrong deeds and accepted that they deserved to be punished, but asked Joseph to forgive them. Joseph replied:

قَالَ لَا تَنْزِيبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ يَغْفِرُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

“He said: “This day let no reproach be (cast) on you: God will forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy!” [The Holy Qur’an, Yusuf 12:92]

Here Joseph is in the position of power and can punish them in any way he wishes to, but he forgives them – a true case of forgiving.

The Prophet Conquers Mecca and Forgives

The Prophet Muhammad conquered Mecca in the 8th year after his immigration to Medina. He entered the city and went to the Masjid ul-Haram (The Haram Mosque). He recited this verse:

وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا

“And say: “Truth has (now) arrived, and Falsehood perished: for Falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish.” [The Holy Qur’an, Bani Israil 17:81]

Then he ordered the idols to be destroyed and said: “There is no god but God the One and Only.” Then he turned to the people of Mecca and said: “What do you say and suspect?” They said: “We say good things and have good thoughts. A noble brother, the son of a noble brother has now become victorious.” Then the Prophet said: “Now I will say unto you what my brother Joseph said: “This day let no reproach be (cast) on you. God will forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy. I free you all. You can go.”

We see that the Prophet , who was in total power and could kill them all, did not do so. He only punished a few who had committed major crimes, and forgave all others.”³

Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib said:

عِنْدَ كَمَالِ الْقُدْرَةِ تَظْهَرُ فَضِيلَةُ الْعَفْوِ.

“The nobility and true value of forgiving will be demonstrated when in total power.”⁴

This emphasizes the fact that true forgiving is limited to cases where one has the power to take revenge. One who does not have any power has no choice but to forgive. He also said:

أَحْسَنُ الْعَفْوِ مَا كَانَ عَنْ قُدْرَةٍ.

“The best form of forgiving is one rooted in power.”⁵

He also said in *Nahjul Balaghah*:

إِذَا قَدَرْتَ عَلَى عَدُوِّكَ فَاجْعَلِ الْعَفْوَ عَنْهُ شُكْرًا لِقُدْرَتِكَ عَلَيْهِ.

“Once you overcome your enemy, make your forgiveness of him a way of being grateful to God for your victory over him.”⁶

The noble spirit of free men deems it proper to forgive others and abandon taking revenge when they are in total power, thereby changing their enemies from within.

- ^{1.} In the other version it continues: “is that you pardon him. But if you that your pardon will harm him, you should defend yourself. God says: ‘Whosoever defends himself after he has been wronged – against him there is no way’”. [Shura., 42:41]
- ^{2.} Tafsir-i-Namunah, v. 11, p.457.
- ^{3.} Tarikh Payambar-i-Islam, p.324.
- ^{4.} Sharh Ghurar wa Durar, v.4, p.324.
- ^{5.} Ibid. v.2, p.435.
- ^{6.} Nahjul Balaghah, Subhi Salih, Hikmat no. 11.

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