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A Bad Name and Family

(Verse 11)

وَلاَ تَنَابَزُوا بِالأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الإِسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الإِيمَانِ وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ...

" ...***and do not defame one another by using bad names. How bad it is after having true faith that a person*** (***does these acts***) ***but does not turn in repentance*** (***to Allah***) ***so then surely it is these people who are the oppressors***."

Bad Names and Titles

The name and title of a person are the manifestation of the character of that individual. It is because of this fact that a good name and title are classified as being the value and goodness of a person, just like a bad name and title that a person possess are unpleasant things. Not only is this something that leads to one being made fun of, but it also takes away one's status and character and leads one to being self-conscious while amongst friends and within the society in general.

When the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) was officially appointed as a Messenger, a large number of cities and villages had very bad names. A lot of the tribes (of `Arabia) were also renowned for their obscene and repulsive titles and epitaphs. The `Arabs would choose names and titles for their children that were rude, repulsive and symbolized fierceness, plunder and pillaging!

One of the positive steps that the Noble Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) adopted on this path was to command his followers to change the names of many of the cities, villages and other parts of the town (that had bad names). He also ordered the tribes or people that had obscene or repulsive names to replace them (with something better).[1]

This noble personality went to such an extreme that he even commanded parents to choose beautiful names for their children and considered this as one of the rights and obligations that a father must fulfil

in respect to his children.

The Qur'an al-Majid considers calling one another by rude or obscene names or titles as a form of violation of the rights of another human being and has referred to a person who performs this act as being an oppressor and tyrant and by saying:

وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُوْلٰئِكَ هُمُ الظّٰالِمُونَ...

"...and whoever does not turn in repentance (back to Allah) is surely of those who are the oppressors."

The Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) was pleased and overjoyed whenever he heard a good name and would say, "Whenever you want to send a person to me, send one who has a good name."

1) One day, one of the workers in a temple of idol worshippers (in `Arabia) saw a fox urinating on top of one of the idols. This person thought to himself: "What sort of a thing do we worship that cannot even defend himself such that he does not even have the ability to get a fox to move away from itself?" This thought of his affected his soul to such an extent, that he composed this line of poetry in relation to what he saw:

أَرَبٌّ يَبُولُ الثَّعْلَبَانُ بِرَأْسِهِ لَقَدْ ذَلَّ مَنْ بَالَتْ عَلَيهِ الثَّعَالِبُ

"Is a stone idol who is being urinated upon by a fox one to be worshipped?
Anything that a fox is able to urinate upon is surely despised and infirm."

After witnessing this scene, he arrived in the company of the Prophet of Allah (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) and described what he had seen. The Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) asked this man what his name was and the man replied, "My name is Ghawi ibn Dhalim"[2] The Noble Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) immediately changed his name and said, "Rather (from today) your name will be Rashid ibn `Abdullah."

2) During the battle of Dhi Qard, the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) asked what the name of a particular body of water was – which was extremely sour – and the people replied that it was called Bisan. The Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) immediately replied that it is now changed to Nu`man.[3]

3) A man once came to the Noble Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) and when the Prophet met him, he asked him his name. The man replied, "My name is Baghidh (the hated or despised)." The Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) replied, "Your name is now

Habib (the beloved)" which was the exact opposite of Baghidh.[4]

4) The same thing can be seen in relation to another person that had met the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny). When asked his name, the man replied, "My name is `Abdus Sharr' (the Servant of Evil)." The Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) replied to him, "Rather, your name (now) is `Abdul Khair' (the Servant of Good)."[5]

5) In the same way, once a woman came to the Messenger of Allah (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) and when she was asked what her name was, she replied, "`Asiyah" (one who commits sins). The Prophet changed her name and said, "From today onwards, you will be known as 'Jamilah' (beautiful)."[6]

6) A man whose name was `Abdul Jan (Servant of the Jinn) came to the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) and by the command of the Messenger of Allah (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) his name was changed to `Abdullah (Servant of Allah).[7]

7) Some people who had names such as Jabbar or Qayyum which are names reserved for Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) were commanded by the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) to add `Abd to the beginning of them. Therefore, their names were changed to `Abdul Jabbar and `Abdul Qayyum.[8]

8) Those people who had names such as `Abdul `Izzah (Servant of Respect), `Abdul Shams (Servant of the Sun), `Abdul Lat (Servant of the Stone Idol named Lat) or even Shaitan (Satan) where all told to change their names and the new name of `Abdullah (Servant of Allah) was given to all of them.[9]

There are also other examples in these same instances which in order to keep our discussion short, we will not narrate here. The historian, Ibn Athir is his work, *Asadul Ghabah*, which is a commentary on the lives of the people around the Prophet of Allah (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) during the days of Ignorance (pre-Islam), has narrated many more examples of people who had repulsive names and by the commandment of the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny), their names were changed.

The manifesto of human rights has mentioned that a child's right to have a name is the same as his right to possess a nationality – however it has never been mentioned that the child must possess a decent, righteous name. Islam has a very precise attitude and view point in relation to the life of a child – whether it is before his birth or even after birth – such that even while the child is in the womb of his mother, he is given the right to have his own character. In addition, the individual and societal rights have also been designated for him.

The strict attention that the teachings (of Islam) lay down in relation to the child are to such an extreme that the father and mother have been commanded to name their child even before it is born and if they do not know if the child is a boy or a girl, then they are advised to choose a name that is acceptable to

either sex.[10]

What is important is the name that is chosen for a child. Keeping in mind the love that the father and mother feel for their child, they will strive to choose a good name for him/her. However, how unfortunate it is that sometimes they make a mistake in choosing a name for their children and give them a name that in the opinion of others is not a praiseworthy name, even though from the view point of the father and mother, they feel that they have given their child a good name.

From the point of view of Islam, when choosing a name for one's child, the parents must keep in mind the various points of upbringing and nurturing and must not opt for a bad name that will resemble the child or will always stay with him. A bad name will act as an impediment (for the person) and every time the person who has been given a repulsive name hears his name called out, he will be put through pain and suffering.

Due to this, in the history of the Noble Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) we read that whenever he came across an area or a person who had a repulsive or bad name, he changed it.

A man once asked the Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny), "What is the child's right upon me?" The Prophet (blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny) replied, "You must give him a good name and bring him up in a good way. His right on you is also that you keep a good job or profession in mind for him."[11]

How good it truly is that a name is chosen for the child which indicates the servitude of Allah![12]

1. Qurb al-Isnad, Page 45.
2. Ghawi is in the meaning of one who has been deluded or lead astray, while Dhalim means an oppressor or tyrant. (Asadul Ghabah, Volume 2, Page 149).
3. Sirah Halabi, Volume 3, Page 377.
4. Asad al-Ghabah, volume 1, Page 202.
5. Ibid., Volume 2, Page 63.
6. Ibid., Volume 2, Page 76.
7. Ibid., Volume 3, Page 174.
8. Ibid., Volume 4, Page 362 and Volume 5, Page 250.
9. Ibid., Volume 3, Page 232, 240, 271 and Volume 4, Page 362.
10. In a tradition from the Prophet, it is mentioned that he has said:

سَمُّوا أَوْلاَدَكُمْ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُوْلَدُوا! فَإِنْ لَمْ تَدْرُوا أَذَكَرٌ أَمْ أُنْثى فَسَمُّوهُمْ بِالأَسْمَاءِ الَّتِي تَكُونُ لِلْذَّكَرِ وَ الأُنْثَى

"Name your children before they are even born! So then if you do not know if you will have a boy or a girl, then name them with a name that is appropriate for both a boy and girl." (Al-Kafi, Volume 6, Page 18).

11. The hadith states:

قَالَ رَجُلٌ: يَا رَسُولَ 9للّٰهِ! مَا حَقُّ ابْنِي هٰذَا؟ قَالَ: تُحَسِّنُ اسْمَهُ وَ أَدَبَهُ و تَضَعُهُ مَوْضِعاً حَسَناً.

"A man said, 'O' Messenger of Allah! What is the right of my son?' The Prophet replied, 'Give him a good name and train him well and choose a good job or profession for him."

12. The hadith states:
سَمِّهِ بِأَسْمَاءِ مِنَ الْعُبُودِيَّةِ! فَقَالَ: أَيِّ الأَسْمَاءِ هُوَ؟ قَالَ عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ

“Name (your children) with the name of servitude and worship (to Allah). They said, “And what name is this?” He said, “`Abdul Rahman.”

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