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The Twenty Second Talk

1. Forgiveness And Forbearance

The topic for discussion today is forbearance and overlooking faults. If the element of love is lacking in any household, forbearance and forgiveness can ameliorate the situation. Forgiveness is a divine word. When a person thinks of forgiving, he feels a radiance around him. Forgiveness is such a sweet and divine word that it is equal to love. The Holy Quran speaks highly of forgiveness and overlooking shortcomings, and divides it into two categories. The first category of forgiveness is that when a person notices a fault or shortcoming, he forgives for the sake of Allah or humanity.

خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَ أْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَ أَعْرِضْ عَنِ الجَّهِلِين

Keep to forgiveness, and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant. (***Sura al-'Araf, 7: 199***)

The Holy Book exhorts Muslims to adopt the habit of forgiveness and leniency. They should enjoin the inhabitants of their homes to be kind and merciful with others. Therefore, the first stage of this attitude is that when one notices a wrongdoing or fault in anyone, he forgives him.

The second stage is higher than the one mentioned above. The Quran wants us to attain a status where we can see no wrong. A person at this stage perceives no fault in his wife or other members of the family, so there is no question of forgiving them. This is called *'forbearance and forgiveness'.*

The Holy Quran expects Muslims and human beings to cultivate the trait of forgiveness. If one notices a defect in anyone, he should forgive the person as if he is not aware of the fault! The Holy Quran asks Muslims: Don't you want Allah to forgive you on the day of Judgement? Allah pardons those who practice forgiveness and forbearance. He forgives them in this world itself. On the Day of Judgement, Allah will not expose the faults of those who turn a blind eye to the faults of others. You must have heard that some persons will enter the Heaven without giving any account of their deeds. Their attitude of forbearance and forgiveness is the cause of their smooth entry into the Heaven. Some persons will have to account for their deeds, and then they will be forgiven so that they can enter Heaven. But some

people will not give an account at all. Thus the Quran states that if you want to be pardoned on the day of Judgement, you too should pardon others in this world. At home, one should be a person who forgives and forgets others' faults. If you do not want to be questioned about your deeds on the Day of Judgement, then don't rebuke anyone when you notice his faults and failings. The husband should forgive and forget the wife's mistakes; the wife should have the same attitude with her husband. In a poem said to be composed by Amir al Mu'minin (a.s.), he says that he forgave and pardoned a degraded person who had harmed him. In the closing verses of Sura Al-Furqan, 25, the Holy Quran describes the qualities of a *mu'min*, and says that pious souls behave in such a way with the evil, ignorant and foolish persons as if they were totally unaware of their faults. When a man enters his house and finds it untidy, the children are not clean, the wife has not bothered to freshen herself, because he is a good man, he overlooks these things. He forgives and turns a blind eye to these things. A husband ill-treats his wife, and behaves irresponsibly but she forgives him and turns a blind eye to his failures. She is patient and bears with him. It is these qualities that have been described at the end of Sura Al-Furqan, 25, but in different words. These verses should be taken to mean that *Mu'minin* should practice forgiveness, and overlook shortcomings in others, in the same way they would overlook it if their one year old were to slap them in the face. According to the Quran, a *mu'min* should reach this stage. If he expects Allah to forgive him, and desires to enter Heaven without having to give an account for his deeds, he should have the qualities of forbearance and forgiveness in himself. The verse bears witness to the fact that one who doesn't forgive, and answers evil with evil, cannot expect Allah to forgive him on the day of Judgement. Thus the second stage is to forget the evil done to him. But the Quran does not stop here. It expects more, especially from the people associated with the pulpit and the prayer niche, and those who are proud to be Shias. This is the third stage of forbearance and forgiveness. The Holy Quran says:

وَ يَدْرَءُونَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ السَّيِّئَةْ

.....and they repel evil with good..... (***Sura al Qasas, 28: 54***)

This means that when someone wrongs you, you should do good to them. In fact this verse has been repeated in the Holy Quran at several places. When a person tries to harm you, do good to him. The Prophet of Islam (s) has said that be (particularly) good to a person who has been bad to you. In Sura Yusuf we have been exhorted to cultivate this trait.

Sura Yusuf is a very interesting Sura. The Holy Quran calls it *Ahsan al Qasas* or the best of stories. This Sura presents us with a character, which if we adopt, we can become perfect. In Sura Yusuf several subjects have been dealt with. One of these concerns our talk. The Holy Quran says that Zuleikha pestered Yusuf (a.s.) so much that he was forced into imprisonment, for several years. Even when he was released he refused to leave the prison and sent a message to the king asking why had the ladies cut their fingers when they saw him? Why had Zuleikha troubled him so much? Then a committee was

constituted and the women were called to depose before it. These women bore witness to the innocence of Yusuf (a.s.). Now Zuleikha too confessed that she was at fault and that Yusuf (a.s.) was among the truthful. She admitted that Yusuf (a.s.) was innocent and that she made false allegations against him. It was only then that Prophet Yusuf (a.s.) came out of the prison. He said that he had made the women confess their guilt only to prove his innocence. He said that he now wished to become the *Aziz* of Egypt and hold the reins of the government in his hands. This would not have been possible as long as he carried the stain of false accusations on his character. If it were not for this he would have overlooked the evil of Zuleikha and the heartache of having to spend ten years in prison.

The Holy Quran says that Prophet Yusuf's brothers came and felt ashamed on recognizing their brother. When he found them humiliated, Prophet Yusuf (a.s.) asked them to forget the past and reminded them that Allah was the most Merciful, He would forgive them. It is said that Yusuf (a.s.) even served them dinner and took good care of them. This was despite their very bad treatment meted out to him. They had tried to harm the innocent child and pushed him into a deep well. When Prophet Yusuf (a.s.) was rescued from the well, he was sold as a slave. Remembering their past ill treatment, the brothers could not eat their dinner. Hadhrat Yusuf (a.s.) said, "Don't feel ashamed! It is because of you that I have reached here. If you had not put me into the well, I too would have come from Kanaan to Egypt in search of a little quantity of wheat like you! Today that I am the *Aziz* of Egypt – it is only because of you!" This was one aspect of the attitude of Prophet Yusuf (a.s.) with his brothers. The second aspect of the attitude of Yusuf (a.s.), as narrated by the Holy Quran, was manifested when he went to receive his parents. He made his parents sit on a throne with due respect and showed great respect to his brothers as well. The Holy Quran says:

وَ قَالَ ادْخُلُواْ مِصْرَ إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ ءَامِنِين

And he said, "Come into Egypt safe, if Allah wills!" (***Sura Yusuf, 12: 99***)

Prophet Yusuf (a.s.) told his brothers that they had honoured him by coming to Egypt and that they were welcome to Egypt to live in peace and comfort. This was Yusuf (a.s)'s second attitude towards his brothers. He overlooked their faults and rewarded their evil with good. The third attitude of Prophet Yusuf (a.s) really manifests his greatness. The excellence of Yusuf (a.s.) manifests from the moment when he made his father ascend the throne. Elaborate arrangements were made to receive his father along with the brothers. A tent was pitched and a throne was placed in it. A retinue went to receive the guests. When his father sat on the throne and relaxed, Hadhrat Yusuf (a.s.) said, "O my revered father! This is the outcome of the dream that I had once seen! See the status we have achieved! The enmity that Satan had created between me and my brothers has enabled me to acquire this status. Hadhrat Yusuf (a.s.) wanted to tell his father not to become angry with his brothers for pushing him into the well. It was not their fault; it was Satan who was to blame. It was Satan who had put his enmity in the hearts of his brothers. It was because of his brothers' doings that he acquired this position. This is the perfect man.

Don't be under the impression that the Quran just wants to narrate a story. No, the Quran is telling the Muslims to emulate the character of Prophet Yusuf (a.s.). You should not stop at forgiving and turning a blind eye to the faults of others. You should go a step further and return good for evil. At several places the Holy Quran uses words which can have more than one meaning. The commentators interpret it differently, while the scholars of ethics and the moralists give it another meaning. For example:

وَ جَزَ ؤُاْ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِّثْلُهَا

The guerdon of an ill-deed is an ill the like thereof. ..... (***Sura al Shuuraa, 26: 40***)

The meaning that is generally attributed to this verse is that, for example, when a person cuts the hand of another, the judge orders a hand of the perpetrator cut. The other meaning is that if someone harms you, you harm him. That is: an eye for an eye. In my opinion the youth prefer the first meaning over the second. But I am sure you will like the third interpretation that I am giving here. This interpretation is drawn from the Sura al Qasas that says "*if someone wrongs you, do good to him!"* The Prophet of Islam (s) stayed in Makka for thirteen long years after the proclamation of Prophethood and bore immense hardships heaped on him by his enemies. This is the reason that in that period about forty to fifty persons accepted Islam. In 8A.H, the Prophet (s), marched to Makka with a contingent of 12,000 troops, and brought Makka under his control without spilling a drop of blood. The first thing that the Prophet did was to enter the Kaaba, purify it by asking Imam Ali (a.s.) to demolish the 360 idols housed within the Kaaba. Then he came to the door of the Kaaba, which exists even today, and sat near it. The people assembled around him, and *Dua-e-Wahdat* was recited. *Masjid al Haram* was full of people. Who were these people? These were the people who used to stone the Prophet (s). These were the people who had injured his forehead. These were the people who had fought nearly 74 small and big battles with the Prophet (s) and his small band of devoted companions. While the Prophet (s) was reciting the *Dua-e-Wahdat*, these people were shaking like leaves, because they were expecting the Prophet to order Imam Ali (a.s.) to slay them any minute. When the prayer was over, the Prophet (s) turned towards them and asked, "Tell me! How should I deal with you?" Abu Sufian, Hinda and their like spoke out, "O Prophet of Allah! You may punish us the way you wish to! You can kill us and cut us into pieces!" At this juncture the Prophet (s) said, "Let the past remain in the past. I have forgiven all of you! May Allah forgive you too!" When these people declared their faith, the Prophet accepted it although he knew that some people like Abu Sufian and Hinda were incapable of accepting the faith. The Prophet (s) knew very well that they had not really accepted faith, they were only paying lip-service; still he accepted their proclamation. Even before entering Makkaa, the Prophet (s) had gone to the extent of declaring Abu Sufian's house as the place of security: Anyone taking refuge in Abu Sufian's house would not be touched. Abu Sufian wanted a position, he was a chief of Makka, and hence the Prophet (s) gave him such a position.

We read in history that when the Prophet (s) entered Makka, one of his men went around the city, with a

standard in his hand, shouting that this was the day of battle and that they had come to take revenge against the enemies! When the Prophet (s) learnt about this, he was very angry and ordered Hadhrat Ali (a.s.) to go and take away the standard from the hands of the person and proclaim in the streets of Makka that today is the Day of Blessing, today is the Day of Kindness.This was the character of our Prophet (s) and his Holy Descendants (a.s.)!

The Holy Quran wants us to be forbearing. It says that if someone harms us, we should forget it, and strive to do good to him! The Prophet (s) used to say that a good neighbour is not the one who is good to his neighbours – this is the duty of every Muslim. A good neighbour is one who bears with patience the ill treatment meted out to him by his neighbours! An elderly person was ill. When his neighbour came to visit him, he found the old man lying on a moist floor. Half the walls were also moist. The visitor found that the moisture was seeping into his neighbour's house from the wall adjoining his own house. The neighbour was much perturbed and told the old man, "Why didn't you tell me. I could have made you comfortable and got rid of all this moisture seeping through your walls". The old man said, "I didn't inform you because it would have inconvenienced you!" Islam requires people to have such an attitude towards others in their neighbourhoods! It expects the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law to be more affectionate and loving than this, rather Islam expects "*Repelling evil with good"* from them.

Friends! Please remember that true happiness doesn't come from wearing good clothes and jewellery! Neither do these things dispel sadness, nor do these create eternal love! It is this verse which dispels sadness and creates happiness. Write this verse and hang it in the house where the husband, the wife and the children can see it. Gradually, they will learn to forgive. Shame on the wife who is misbehaves with her husband because he got angry with her. It is also a matter of shame for the husband who fights with his wife because she misbehaved with him. In the view of the Quran a good wife and a good husband is one who follows "*Repelling evil with good!"* If someone treats them badly, they repay them with kindness and mercy. If a fight erupts between a husband and wife, they hasten to make peace. The Prophet of Islam (s) told a woman, "If ever there is a fight between you and your husband, it is your duty to make up with him!" The woman said, "Even if he is cruel? Even if he is at fault?" The Prophet (s) replied emphatically, "Yes! You must take the first initiative because you are a woman! A woman has to be the epitome of love for her husband! She should totally shun any ill feelings!" In a nutshell, if there is seventy percent compatibility in our families, we can make it a hundred percent with the adoption of the attitude of forbearance and forgiveness! In the view of the Holy Quran the environment at home should be one *"for attaining peace in it".* May Allah make our homes the abodes of peace!

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