

40 ON JUSTICE



The Prophetic Voice
on Social Reform

OMAR SULEIMAN

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



FOREWORD

ISLAM AS A religion is exemplified more than any other virtue by the quality of *rahma*, a word that is difficult to translate into English. The customary translation of “mercy” suggests hierarchy, but this is not necessarily the case in the Arabic original. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines mercy as: “Compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone whom it is within one’s power to punish or harm.” Scholars of Arabic have suggested that while this may be an appropriate way to understand how God relates to human beings, it is not suitable for characterising how humans relate to each other. In the latter case, they point out that a more appropriate way of understanding *rahma* is that it means tenderness (*riqqa*) towards others. The Turkish scholar, Recep Sentürk, prefers to translate *rahma* as love, a word that seems to do justice to its meaning and whose semantic range in English renders it appropriate for both human beings and their Creator Who describes His relationship with the believers in the Qur’an as being of mutual love—“*He loves them and they love Him*” (al-Ma’ida 5: 54).

In a millennium old tradition, the ulama frequently begin their teaching of a new cohort of students with the Hadith of *rahma* that, as part of this tradition, is the first Hadith a student narrates from his teacher. The Hadith reads in Arabic:

الرَّاجُونَ يَرْحَمُهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ إِزْهَمُوا مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَرْحَمُكُمْ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاءِ

In light of the fact that *rahma* may be rendered as “love,” this Hadith can be translated as follows:

“The people who exemplify love are loved
by the All-Loving One (al-Rahman).
Love those on the earth, may the One in the heavens love you.”¹

Justice as Love

But what does love have to do with justice? Love and mercy are often seen as the opposite of justice. We can either seek justice, or show mercy. But what if the two are in fact inseparable? The African-American philosopher Cornel West, offers us a different way of looking at the relationship between justice and love. In a pithy but powerful phrase, he declares: “Justice is what love looks like in public, just like tenderness is what love feels like in private.” The message rings true from an Islamic perspective, and our pursuit of justice as Muslims must be spurred by our love for our fellow human beings and our desire for their good. As the Prophet ﷺ said, “None of you truly believes until they love for their brother [and sister] what they love for themselves.”² We all desire to be treated with justice and fairness, and so we should try to make this a reality for our fellow human beings, whoever they are.

We live in an age in which, perhaps more than any time in the past, we can witness with our own eyes the injustices perpetrated by the powerful against the weak on a global scale. The Qur’an describes us as a community (*ummah*) that stands up for justice, even if it is against our own selves and our families (al-Nisa’ 4: 135). While *rahma* is the defining quality of our religion, the love and mercy it exemplifies cannot truly manifest without a concerted effort on our part to uphold justice. Ultimate justice is not to be had until the next life, but confronting injustice (*dhulm*) in this world is repeatedly enjoined in the Qur’an. The concept of *dhulm* is frequently coupled in the Qur’an with the worst of sins in Allah’s eyes, namely worshipping anything aside from Allah (*shirk*). The Qur’an describes all sins as forgivable except *shirk* (al-Nisa’ 4: 48). Elsewhere in the Qur’an, we are told that the Muslim *ummah* is one that is concerned with commanding right and forbidding wrong (Al ‘Imran 3:104). As the Prophet ﷺ explains, this is required at every level of our behaviour, even

at a psychological level. He informs us: “Whoever sees a wrong, let them set it aright with their hands. If they are unable to, then let them set it aright with their tongues (by speaking out against it). If they are unable to do even this, then let them set it aright with their hearts (by recognizing that it is wrong), and that is the lowest level of faith.”³

The scholars have recognised that each and every Muslim has the responsibility to correct the wrongs of their own behaviour, but also of those around them and their societies. However, this is not to be demonstrated by an unreflective and self-righteous anger or disdain towards those who perpetrate these wrongs. Rather, as the Prophet ﷺ himself exemplified over the many years of his Prophetic mission, the righting of wrongs, and the rectifying of injustice in the world requires a great deal of patience, wisdom, and indeed love and compassion. As the Prophet ﷺ once counselled our Mother, ‘Aisha, “Gentleness is never found in something except that it beautifies it, and it is never removed from something except that it renders it shameful.”⁴ Yet, when upholding justice required it, the Prophet ﷺ could demonstrate fortitude in pursuing justice even in just war. The Prophet ﷺ was the best example of the just human being and his actions are our guide to how we can confront injustice.

An age of injustice

We live in a time that is characterised by extremes of injustice on an epic scale. For the last several decades, we have witnessed major imperial wars and proxy wars by global powers with imperial ambitions. These in turn have given rise to great horrors in parts of the world in the form of rapacious regimes that are willing to kill hundreds of thousands of people in the quest to stay in power alongside an international order whose most powerful states either simply act as observers or actively support such bloodshed. Elsewhere, in the supposed name of fighting terrorism, emerging powers like China have recreated the worst horrors of the last century in the form of concentration camps for potentially millions of Uighur Muslims. Concentration camp like conditions are found in the effective Indian annexation and sealing off of Kashmir, and the decades old settler colonial project represented by the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine. All of these myriad injustices have given rise to a massive refugee crisis that has witnessed thousands of human beings drown in the

Mediterranean and the Bay of Bengal while the “civilized” world doesn’t simply look on, but its leaders often vilify those desperately trying to escape devastation and tragedy. Closer to home, in the West, and for many centuries rather than decades, the twin crimes of racism and colonialism have legitimated the dehumanisation of black and brown bodies in the Transatlantic slave trade and the colonial subjugation of more than eighty per cent of the globe by Western powers.

Besides this, humanity faces a climate crisis that is the inevitable product of a nihilistic global economic order whose systemic injustices have left no part of the world unscathed and produced massive inequality both within the populations of countries, and also between the Global North and South. Such inequality reflects not the just deserts of hard working rich countries over lazy poorer nations, but a global system of economic privilege that systematically redirects wealth from poorer nations to richer ones, and in the latter, siphons wealth into the top zero point one per cent who, in turn have the ability to corrupt democracies through lobbying politicians to perpetuate their privileged status while dispossessing some of society’s most vulnerable.

In these otherwise dark times, we can find solace and guidance in Prophetic teachings and the Prophetic example. Imam Omar Suleiman has for many years demonstrated his commitment to standing up for justice while drawing on the Prophetic example in guiding his personal practice and his advocacy on behalf of the dispossessed. In keeping with the Muhammadan example that Allah exhorts us to follow in the Qur’an, he has joined broad coalitions of activists dedicated to working towards a more just society. The present work grows out of a series of Hadith commentaries he has written and presented within his community at the Valley Ranch Islamic Centre in Dallas, Texas, alongside online broadcasts in partnership with the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research.

Yaqeen is a pioneering institution, of which Imam Omar is president, that seeks to address the intellectual challenges faced by Muslims in the modern world through a recognition that Islam possesses rich resources for addressing the concerns of humanity in an age of extremes and widespread injustice. Imam Omar’s exemplary leadership, spiritual, intellectual, communal and societal is exemplified in his myriad engagements in both his teaching and his activism which can inspire a new generation of Muslim leaders who recognise their duty to the Prophetic imperative to speak truth to power. He seeks to channel the Prophetic voice to

enlighten our minds, hearts and souls so that we can be better prepared to confront injustices in our spiritual lives, our personal relationships, in wider society, and globally. We would do well to heed his call.

وَصَلِّ اللّٰهُمُّ عَلٰى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلٰى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلِّمْ

Usaama al-Azami
University of Oxford
January, 2021



THE GRAVITY OF INJUSTICE IN ISLAM

On the authority of Abu Dharr al-Ghifari (may Allah be pleased with him) from the Prophet ﷺ is that among the sayings he relates from his Lord (may He be glorified) is that He said: O My servants, I have forbidden oppression for Myself and have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another.

I WANT TO BEGIN this chapter by starting off with a wonderful quote by Syed Ja'far Raza, who authored a book called *The Essence of Islam*: "If I am asked to summarise the principles of Islam and the essence of Islam, I would say it is justice. Islam is synonymous with justice. Justice to the Creator by worshipping Him and obeying His injunctions and mandate. He is Justice. Justice to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by following him as he represents the authority of God on earth.

Justice to oneself by keeping it secure from sinfulness and egotism. Justice to the body by keeping it healthy and free from undue exertion and illness. Justice to the soul by keeping it pure with piety.

Justice in the matrimonial sphere, justice to the parents as they have been instrumental in gifting our existence. Justice to the spouse who shares the burden of raising a family. Justice to the offspring as they are the extensions of our own lives and motivating them to take the right decisions in life. Justice to our neighbours by sharing with them in their moments of trial.

Justice to the sick by assisting them in restoring their health. Justice to the downtrodden and poor by supplementing their basic needs.

Justice to the motherland by enjoying the fragrance of its soul and loving and promoting its prosperity and being ready to sacrifice for it. Justice to humanity by contributing to its development. Justice to knowledge by spreading it far and wide for by enabling mankind to enjoy its fruits without discrimination. Justice therefore is the foundation of Islamic principles and occupies a place next to the Oneness of God.”

I find that this quote gives a comprehensive view of the importance of justice in Islam and how it encompasses everything we do on a daily basis. It is a fitting way to introduce the subject that we will cover in this chapter: the gravity of social injustice.

This topic is based on a Hadith Qudsi (the strongest form of Hadith; narrated directly by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ on behalf of Allah).

Abu Dharr reported that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “Allah Almighty said: Oh my servants, I have forbidden oppression for myself and I have forbidden oppression amongst you, so do not oppress one another.”⁵

This Hadith powerfully conveys that any form of oppression is not accepted by Allah – for Himself or for His creation.

Imam Ahmad, may Allah have mercy on him, went on to say regarding this Hadith that it is the most noble Hadith that was ever narrated by the people of Shaam (Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon are all part of Shaam). He also mentioned that when some scholars such as Abu Idris used to narrate this Hadith, they would be on their knees as a means of showing humility and vulnerability in the sight of Allah. The Hadith itself sets a paradigm of God being good with us, therefore we are expected to be good to one another.

There are also many other lessons that we can learn from this Hadith, in addition to the obvious message of oppression being forbidden, as we will cover below:

- If anyone was to have the right to wrong, it would be Allah. Nobody can set limitations or restrictions upon Him. Allah is infinite in His power.

Who can mandate anything upon Allah except Himself? He chooses not to oppress, He has forbidden oppression for Himself; He has forbidden Himself from wronging any of His creation. And in His glory, He has only mandated two things for Himself. One is for Him and His Angels to send their peace and blessings (*salawat*) upon the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. And as this is mandated upon Allah and His Angels by Himself, we are also expected to send peace and blessings upon the Messenger ﷺ; it is a strong statement that puts Allah's mandates in perspective for us. We cannot have any argument against sending *salawat* upon the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. And the second is that which has already been mentioned: Allah has forbidden oppression for Himself and forbidden us to oppress one another.

Ibn Rajab explains to us that there are three approaches to any situation: transgression, justice and grace. Allah has denied Himself transgression; even when dealing with the worst of His creation (for example the Pharaoh who wronged an entire nation!)

As for justice, Allah uses it and will use it when necessary. On the Day of Judgement for example, those who will be receiving punishments will be dealt with complete justice; there will be no element of transgression or extra punishment. They will be punished accordingly for the wrong that they have committed – Allah will not wrong anyone of that Day, nor will He allow the wrongdoing that was done against anyone to be forgotten.

And lastly, grace is something that Allah loves. Allah gives extra grace to those who are righteous and aim to obey Allah as best they can. He has made it easier for us to multiply our rewards with our good actions, all thanks to His Grace.

There is a Hadith narrated in Abu Dawud in which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ sums this up perfectly: "If Allah were to punish all of the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth, then He would punish them without being unjust to them and if Allah shows mercy to them, then His Mercy is always better than their deeds."

Although we may initially be taken aback by the words "if Allah were to punish all of the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth," it is

important to remember that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was explaining to us that we cannot match what Allah does for us, yet Allah has chosen not to punish everyone.

- Another lesson we can derive from this is the meaning of oppression (*dhulm*) and what Islam says about it. The word *dhulm* in the technical meaning within the Arabic language means injustice, and in Islam it means to misplace rights. Or in other words, putting something in a place in which it does not belong.

Linguistically, *dhulm* is of two types: going too far or excess, or withholding too much or deficiency. The first could be going too far in a dispute for example and resulting in violence or other forms of oppression, whilst the second could be withholding the rights of the spouse. There may not be violence or continuous fighting in a marriage, but not showing compassion towards your spouse is a form of oppression as Allah has mandated compassion for us in the marriage contract.

Islamically, the greatest form of oppression is to associate a partner with Allah, as Allah has mentioned in *Surah Luqman*, verse 13 Allah has created us; therefore, it is His right to be worshipped. To associate someone with Him is to put the creation in the place of the Creator. This goes to show that the concept of justice and injustice is deeply embedded in our theology.

- We learn the reasons behind Allah referring to us as *ya ibadi* (oh my slaves) in the Hadith Qudsi.

Firstly, it puts into perspective our relationship with Allah; if we do not properly understand the reality of our relationship with our Creator, then it becomes difficult to understand our relationship with society.

Secondly, the words *ya ibadi* show love from Allah. He calls upon us in a compassionate way to help us connect with Him better as well as to humble us. The one who is oppressing someone else is losing the spirit of love, or *muhabbah*, as it is known in Arabic. Our *fitrah*, or natural disposition, is one of kindness, compassion and mercy and not of cruelty or harshness. And it is in the way that Allah addresses us in this Hadith that we are truly able to understand the importance of compassion.

Similarly, if we were to admonish someone sharply for being harsh or committing wrong towards others, then that person would probably become harsher and make the problem worse. Allah knows this, so He shows us the correct way to give advice to one another whilst at the same time giving us advice not to oppress one another.

Thirdly, Allah is reminding us through the words “Oh my slaves,” that He has created us to worship Him and that we were sent to Earth to serve and fulfil His purpose. We are mere slaves of Allah and we do not have the right to act arrogantly in the world. Allah will say on the Day of Judgement that He is the King, and He will call upon those who claimed that they were kings and all-powerful on Earth. This admonition is drilling home the truth that we have not been given the authority to wrong others. Allah gives us countless blessings, and going against what He asks of us is equal to ingratitude and disobedience. If Allah has blessed us with certain advantages, we cannot use them to cause injustice to others.

Fourthly, scholars say that it shows ingratitude on our part if we oppress others. Allah gives us blessings, yet we use those blessings as a means to oppress or wrong somebody else. We would have to be in a certain position in order to cause injustice to someone, and this phrase “Oh my slaves” is a reminder that we must not be ungrateful with the blessings that Allah bestows upon us, and we should never use them to commit evil.

Lastly, Allah does not address Muslims alone, He addresses all human beings through the words *ya ibadi*. It is not just Muslims who are slaves of Allah, but all of humanity, and He has ordered everyone to deal justly with one another.

At the end of *Surah Fatihah* we are asking Allah to “*not let us be amongst those who have earned Your Wrath nor those who have gone astray.*” However, this supplication is negated when we transgress through our deeds as Allah also says in the Qur’an that He does not love the oppressors. By oppressing others, we sacrifice the love (*muhabbah*) of Allah. We cannot be guided by Allah if we mistreat His creation!

- The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ warned us against oppression as it is a form of darkness. Oppression will not only cause darkness in the oppressors’ hearts, but also cause darkness for them on the day of Judgement. Allah says regarding

the Day of Judgement in *Surah Ta-Ha*, verse 111 that, “*he will have failed who carries injustice.*” This is the weight of injustice; anyone who has oppressed will bear the ultimate loss on the Day of Judgement.

The Prophet ﷺ also mentioned that on the Day of Judgement, people will witness the proceedings of the animals and the way in which Allah will deal with the injustice amongst animals. Such will be the justice of Allah, that even the horned goat that attacked the one that did not have horns will have its retribution. Watching the judgement of the animals will cause fear in the hearts of the oppressors and disbelievers who will wish that they could be reduced to dust before their own deeds are accounted for.

- The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ says in a Hadith reported by Safwan, may Allah be pleased with him: “Whoever wrongs someone we have a treaty with or who is under our protection, or diminishes his rights, or overburdens him beyond his capacity, or takes away something from him without his consent, then I will be his prosecutor on the Day of Judgement.”⁶

The weight of this Hadith is immense in that it clearly shows the seriousness of oppression in Islam. Causing oppression or injustice is such a grave sin, that the beloved Prophet ﷺ will stand against those from his own followers (*ummah*) who oppressed non-Muslims. If we will have our Prophet ﷺ arguing against us and asking Allah to punish us for the deeds that we committed against non-Muslims, then what hope do we have of making it to Paradise? The treaties that were made at the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ may not exist anymore, but we still do not have a right to wrong anyone, be they Muslim or non-Muslim.

As narrated by Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As, may Allah be pleased with him, the Messenger ﷺ said: “Whoever kills someone protected by Muslims will not smell the scent of Paradise; it is so strong that it can be smelt from a distance of forty years away.”⁷ Such are the grave consequences of causing injustice to others in this life. Being unjust leads us

away from Paradise (*Jannah*), so far in fact that even smelling the beautiful scent of Paradise will not be possible for us.

Ibn al Qayyim said that the strongest verse in the Qur'an about justice is in *Surah al-Ma'idah*, Verse 8: *And do not let the hatred of others prevent you from being just. Be just, for that is closer to righteousness. And be mindful of Allah; indeed Allah is well aware of all that you do.*

We may dislike, or hate someone for a very good reason, yet Allah warns us not to let that hatred lead to wronging that person. It is better for us to act fairly and responsibly, whilst remembering Allah at all times.

- “Allah loves those who act justly” (*Surah al-Mumtahanah*, verse 8). The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is the most beloved of Allah and he was constantly worried about the possibility of wronging someone. A fine example of this can be found in *Sahih Bukhari* where it is narrated that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ sent Mu'adh ibn Jabl, may Allah be pleased with him, to be the governor of Yemen with the following words: “Fear the supplication of the oppressed, for there is no veil between that invocation and Allah, even if the one making the supplication is a disbeliever.”

Yemen at the time was a very diverse place, with people of different religions co-existing together. Mu'adh, may Allah be pleased with him, was given a great responsibility, and he had to ensure that he dealt justly with all the inhabitants of Yemen – not just the Muslims. It is very clearly stated in the Hadith that if a non-Muslim made a supplication against Mu'adh because he wronged them, then it would be accepted by Allah.

Another powerful Hadith that reinforces the prayer of the oppressed is narrated by Abu Hurairah in which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “There are three whose supplication is not rejected: the fasting person when he breaks his fast, the just leader, and the supplication of the oppressed person.”⁸

However, the Prophet ﷺ was not just worried for his Companions and followers (*ummah*), he was so afraid of wronging someone himself that Umm Salamah, may Allah be well pleased with her, relates that he in fact never left the house without looking up at the sky and making a

supplication to Allah, “Oh Allah, I seek refuge in You from being astray or leading someone else astray, or that I might slip or make someone else slip (off that path) or that I might be wronged or wrong someone, or that I would oppress or suffer oppression, or that I would do wrong or have wrong done to me.”⁹ If the Messenger ﷺ was so fearful of causing injustice to anyone, where does that leave us?

One particular incident that has been narrated was of a time when the Prophet ﷺ saw a young man laughing during an otherwise serious setting (one narration suggests it was the Battle of Badr), and he poked the shirtless young man in the stomach with a stick. The young man said to the Prophet, “You have harmed me, I want my revenge.” The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did not show any arrogance or anger, but instead bared his own stomach by lifting his shirt and asked him to poke him back with the stick to take revenge. The young man then kissed the Prophet’s stomach and said, “That is all I wanted from you, oh Messenger of God.”¹⁰ Even in the midst of a battle, the Prophet’s concern was not to have wronged this young man in the slightest.

Ibn Taymiyyah said that Allah will uphold a just nation even if it is a disbelieving nation, and Allah will destroy an unjust nation even if it is a believing nation. This statement is extremely powerful: it very plainly explains that Allah will allow just non-believers to thrive and unjust Muslims to fail. As mentioned by his student Ibn Qayyim, throughout the Qur’an, whenever Allah mentions the destruction of a nation, He says that He destroyed them because they were oppressive, they transgressed and were aggressive towards the Prophets and their followers. It wasn’t simply because of their choice to reject the message the Prophets brought, but it was also punishment for their unjust acts.

Yet if associating equals with God (*shirk*) is the most unforgiveable of sins, how can Allah reward the unbelievers who are just in this world? A central and agreed-upon legal maxim (*qa’ida*) in Islam is ‘if the right of the Creator and the rights of the creation are in conflict, fulfil the right of the creation.’ This may seem confusing, but there are credible reasons for and examples of this. For instance, if the month of Ramadan has arrived, but you are too ill to fast, the right of your body takes precedence over Allah’s right upon you. He allows you to recover your health and fast later to make up for it. Allah is the Most Merciful and Most Just; He does not want His creation to suffer and He has given us these dispensations.

If God is the Greatest and Most Worthy of worship, then how do we reconcile this with the legal maxim that in case of conflict the rights of creation are preferred over the rights of Allah? The scholars make three arguments here:

Firstly, Allah continues to grant us respite, delays His punishment and allows us the opportunity to turn back to Him in repentance until our moment of death. That is not to say that we should deliberately delay our repentance, but Allah's Grace is such that He will continue to give us chances up until our time of death.

Secondly, Allah is not in *need* of rights as He is Independent and the Greatest, but we, His slaves, are in need of our rights. His Mercy is encompassed within the scope of legislation; one such example is that if we wish to perform Hajj but we also have a debt to pay, then we must pay the debt back first. Allah does not need our Hajj at that point, but the person who we borrowed money from has the right to their money back before we consider fulfilling the rights of Allah. Allah has forgone His rights to ensure that the rights of His people are fulfilled.

Thirdly, Allah is the One who has given us these rights. Therefore, if we take the rights of people, it is a compounded offence because we not only wronged them but have also disobeyed Allah by dishonouring them when He honoured them with rights. That is why on the Day of Judgement we will see our acts of worship disappear, even if they were done for the sake of Allah, as they are given to anyone we have wronged, or withheld from, or harmed in some way without redress. This is the gravity of injustice in Islam.

May Allah protect us and save us from oppression (*dhulm*), allow us the grace to daily seek His protection from wronging anyone, and to never consciously wrong anyone, and to realise the gravity of injustice in this life and its consequences in the next. Amin.





RESPONDING TO EVIL WITH GOOD

Jabir (ra) narrates that when verse 7:199 was revealed to the Prophet ﷺ he asked Fibril (as) “What is the meaning (taweel) of this verse and what are its implications?” So Fibril (as) said, “Allow me to ask my Lord and I will come back with more details on this matter.” So he went and asked Allah (swt) and returned to the Prophet ﷺ and he said “Oh Muhammad, Allah commands you to forgive the one who wrongs you, to give to the one who withholds from you, and to maintain the ties of kinship with the one who cuts you off.”

IN THIS CHAPTER I want us to look at a story that is narrated in the explanation (*tafseer*) of a well-known verse in *Surah al-A'raf* 7:199, “Hold to forgiveness, enjoin what is good and turn away from the ignorant.” This particular verse is special as it involves many Hadiths and narrations from the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ.

We will begin with a narration given by Jabir, may Allah be pleased with him, who said that when this verse was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, he asked Jibreel “What is the meaning (*taweel*) of this verse and what are its implications?” So Jibreel said, “Allow me to ask my Lord and I will come back with more details on this matter.” He then went and asked Allah and returned to the Prophet ﷺ to say, “Oh Muhammad, Allah commands you to forgive the one who wrongs you, to give to the one who withholds from you, and to maintain the ties of kinship with the one who cuts you off.”

So, after hearing this, the Prophet ﷺ stood up among the people and said, “Shall I not guide you to the most noble of characteristics in this world and in the Hereafter?” They (the Companions) said, “And what is that, Oh Messenger of Allah?” He replied, “That you forgive the one who wrongs you, you give to the one who withholds from you, and that you maintain the ties of kinship with the one who cuts you off.”⁴⁹

This is a very difficult Hadith; it is very easy to give this advice to someone else, but very difficult to put it into practice ourselves. We will almost certainly try to find a way to avoid doing any of these three things if we are in the position of having been wronged by someone, or having something withheld from us, or been cut off by a family member. It is important to remember that most acts of injustice are perpetuated because we fail to hold ourselves to higher standards, and when we are wronged by others we justify our reactions by saying, “Since I was wronged in this manner, my reaction is justified.” This results in us justifying our lower standards of behaviour and injustice (*dhulm*) towards others, based upon injustice that was done to us, and this is something that we must be wary of as it sustains a sense and practice of injustice in society.

Now, moving onto the story about the revelation of this verse, it is narrated in Bukhari by Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him: al-Hurr bin al-Qayys was a young man who had memorised the Qur’an and was on the council (*shura’*) of Umar bin al-Khattab (those with whom he would consult). One day al-Hurr’s cousin Uaynah asked for permission to sit with Umar and Umar gave him permission to sit in on the meeting. Uaynah sat down and began to scream at Umar saying, “Oh son of al-Khattab, beware, you neither give us sufficient provision nor do you judge amongst us with justice.” This was a severe and unfounded accusation and it angered Umar, may Allah be pleased with him. Al-Hurr noticed

that his cousin's accusations had made Umar angry and said, "Allah said to His Messenger ﷺ: '*Hold to forgiveness and enjoin that which is good and turn away from the ignorant.*' This man is ignorant so just turn away and ignore him." So, Umar turned away from him.

Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, commented on this and said that Umar was a person who was always held by the book of Allah. He was conscious of the Qur'an and whenever he heard its verses, he would abide by them, and so even in this situation, his anger was immediately subdued on hearing this verse.

There is also another incident mentioned in *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad* (a collection of good mannerisms and characteristics), that Abdullah bin az-Zubair used to recite this verse (*ayah*) when he was Caliph and say on the pulpit, "By Allah, we are commanded by this *ayah* to accept the character of the people and I will accept their character as long as I am amongst them."

I would like to discuss how we can understand the meaning and implications of this important verse. The scholars of Qur'an say that every person that you meet will deal with you in one of two ways:

1. *Al-Ihsaan*; they will do more than what is required of them, or in other words, go above and beyond.
2. *At-Taqseer*; they will deal with you with deficiency, or in other words, do less than they should.

The scholars reflect on this verse and say that you should forgive the people of deficiency (*taqseer*), and with regard to your dealing with others, you should embody excellence (*ihsaan*) in every way possible. What they mean to say here is that there will be people who will give you a hard time despite you dealing with them in an excellent manner, but Allah has told us to turn away from them and to not allow them to drag us down to their level.

In addition to this, there is another famous Hadith in which we see how the Companions and their children nurtured themselves with the traditions of the Prophet ﷺ with regards to their dealings. Yusuf bin Malik al-Makki said that he used to undertake accounting for a group of orphans. There was one orphan who had been cheated out of a thousand dirhams. The orphans would work and the guardians would collect the

money and then hand it to them. Yusuf was able to obtain two thousand dirhams from the guardian, but instead of taking this amount the orphan told him that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Honour the trust of the one who entrusted you with something and do not betray the one who betrays you.” The orphan was essentially saying that because this person stole one thousand from him, it did not give him the right to take two thousand in return.⁵⁰

This is mentioned in many different narrations and it poses many interesting issues of jurisprudence, as well as issues of social justice and how we understand transactions in Islam. There were times that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would allow people to take from someone when they were withholding from their rights. A well-known incident is of when Hind came to the Prophet ﷺ and complained that her husband was tight-fisted and did not give her enough money to cover expenses. The Prophet ﷺ told her that she could take her right, by taking what she needs for herself and her child but not anymore, in other words, take in a way that is reasonable. In this situation, there was an established right that was not being fulfilled. The Prophet ﷺ gave us permission in the jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that when there is no grey area, and someone withholds something that we are entitled to, we can take our right. However, we cannot take something that we are not entitled to as that involves treachery (*khiyana*), and we must not stoop to the level of the one who wrongs us.

Imam Ibn-Taymiyyah also commented on the narration of the orphan, saying that if someone is wronged, the first thing that they should do is go to the authorities to try and receive their rights; they should not attempt to take it back in an unlawful way such as stealing because it perpetuates problems in society.

When Uthman, may Allah be pleased with him, was assassinated, Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, emphasised that they needed to make sure that the people that killed Uthman were held accountable but to ensure that only those who were definitely and directly involved were punished. What we learn from this is that we should not become vengeful and become like the one who wronged us. On some occasions we may even be able to forgive the person, however, we should not enable their injustice. The first thing that the Prophet ﷺ mentioned in the Hadith was that we forgive the one that wrongs us, but this doesn't mean that we allow the one who wronged us to go unaccounted. If we

do not hold that person to account, we are in essence enabling them to oppress others.

The Prophet ﷺ also said in the Hadith that we should spend on those who withhold from us. The scholars provided many different connotations to describe this:

1. If we find ourselves in a situation where we are in need and someone withholds from us, but then the situation changes and they are in need, we should not withhold from them.
2. Within the family dynamic a person who is responsible for others does not fulfil their obligation in the way that they should, but as time goes on, we find ourselves in the position of obligation, we should not withhold their rights.
3. We try to uphold the ties of kinship with someone who cuts us off, unless there is a fear that by maintaining the relationship, we open ourselves up to abuse.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught us these ideals and we see them exemplified in his life (*Sunnah*). One example is of trust (*amaan*); the Messenger ﷺ was entrusted with the possessions of Abu Jahl, Uqba bin Abu Moeet and Amr bin Aas, before he began calling to Islam. After he became a Prophet, they placed a bounty on his head and wanted him killed, however, when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was going to migrate to Madinah from Makkah, he ensured that his son-in-law Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, returned the possessions to their rightful owners. We should not betray the one who betrays us, nor should we deal with them in the way that they dealt with us.

A more recent example of these ethics is seen through Umar Mukhtar, the Libyan warrior who fought imperialism in the early twentieth century. They had captured two Italians during battle and one of his generals said to him, “Why don’t we make an example of them like they do to us?” Umar Mukhtar replied, “We are not people who kill our prisoners.” The general then said, “But they do it to us,” to which Umar replied, “They are not our teachers.” What he meant by this was that we do not learn our ethics from people who wrong us, if we did, we would become just like our enemies.

We also saw this when the Prophet ﷺ conquered Makkah and he stood upon Mount Safa with an army behind him; and the army consisted of the same Companions (*sahabah*) who had lost family members and much more at the hands of the *Quraysh*. The Prophet ﷺ asked the *Quraysh*, “What do you think I should do with you?” They did not have any real answer to give him, and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ then told them, “Go, for you are free. There is no blame on you today.”

Ibn Qayyim commented on this and said that by asking the *Quraysh* this question, the Prophet ﷺ first established the proof (*hujjah*) against them, and then he chose to pardon them, responding with excellence (*ihsaan*) by letting them know that they would not face any act of vengeance.

When reading or listening to such stories, many beautiful aspects get lost because we unfortunately have a habit of cutting to the chase. We do not look into the processes, such as why the Prophet ﷺ said certain things or did certain things, and thus we miss out on the profound wisdom behind his decisions that also highlight a lot about his character.

There is another wonderful story of a man named Ghawrath who held a sword over the head of the Prophet ﷺ and said, “Oh Muhammad, who will stop me from killing you?” The Prophet ﷺ replied confidently and said, “Allah.” Ghawrath was extremely surprised by his fearlessness, and he dropped the sword. The Prophet ﷺ then picked the sword up and held it over Ghawrath and said, “And who will protect you from me?” Ghawrath replied, “Be generous,” to which the Prophet ﷺ told him to go free.⁵¹ This is yet another prime example of “they are not our teachers,” as we should not drop to the level of those who have wronged us, we set higher standards for ourselves and provide lessons in good character.

Similarly, when Salahuddin had conquered Jerusalem, he set an example for the Muslims and non-Muslims alike by not treating the Crusaders in the manner that they had treated Muslims. He did not allow mutilation or rape or any such action against them. By choosing this approach, not only did he win Jerusalem, but he also won the hearts of everyone who heard about him.

Before we go on to conclude this chapter, it is fitting to mention here something that Ibn Qayyim said which is very deep. He said that sometimes a person wrongs you and you have no idea how or why they wronged you, and you may ask yourself what you did to that person to deserve such treatment. Ibn Qayyim then goes on to say that every person you have ever met or interacted with, has either been shown

excellence (*ihsaan*) or deficiency (*taqseer*) from you, and it is possible that Allah is purifying you for a deficiency that you showed to someone else or an *ihsaan* that you took advantage of, by having deficiency shown to you in order to balance the scales. We never know how Allah is working to balance the scales, and we should be thankful to Him for keeping us away from major transgressions. Something that most of us can relate to is when parents say to their children that they did not behave in such a way when they were younger; however, when we think more deeply, the parents may have said or done something to displease their own parents when they were younger without a second thought at the time.

Thus, we have learned in this chapter that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and his Companions suffered greatly at the hands of the *Quraysh*, but he did not treat them like for like. He taught us that we should never respond to injustice with injustice. Abu Jahl tortured and mutilated Sumayyah, may Allah be pleased with her, but Abu Jahl was not treated in the same way even in battle. As Muslims we must always take the higher moral ground. We cannot use an act of injustice that was done to us as an excuse to behave unjustly towards others who are blameless, nor towards the person who wronged us. We cannot allow injustice (*dhulm*) that was done to us, to make us unjust (*dhaalim*).

May Allah protect us from becoming wrongdoers and oppressors, and from becoming like those that have harmed us. We ask Allah to allow us to choose the higher moral ground in all situations, so that we may do what is pleasing to Him. Amin.





EVERYBODY ELSE DOES IT

Hudhaifa narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: “Do not become ‘yes-men’ saying, ‘If the people do good then we will do good, and if they do wrong then we will do wrong.’ Instead, make up your own minds: if the people do good then you will do good, and if they do evil, then you will not behave unjustly.”

WE SHOULD NOT be influenced by those who transgress; we cannot let someone with bad character teach us their ways, nor can we use their injustice towards us as an excuse to cause injustice to them. The Prophet ﷺ said that we should fulfil the trust of the one who entrusts us with something, to not betray the one who betrays us and to not deceive the one who deceives us. The idea of mercy and tolerance is to stop a person from stooping down to the level of the one who wrongs them, and this is one of the most profound lessons we learn from the biography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

The Hadith that we will cover in this chapter will highlight the point of not becoming involved in wrongdoing because everybody else around us is, and at the same time, not doing good while everybody else around is doing good.

Hudhaifa narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Do not become ‘yes-men’ saying, ‘If the people do good then we will do good, and if they do wrong then we will do wrong.’ Instead, make up your own minds: if the people do good then you will do good, and if they do evil, then you will not behave unjustly.”⁵²

Most of the injustice that is committed in society is because that behaviour has become normalised with the concept of ‘everyone else is doing it.’ For example, if a society functions on bribes, then it is likely that everyone will think of it as normal despite it being impermissible (*haram*), the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ cursed the one who bribes and the one who accepts a bribe. However, it is unfortunate that people resign themselves to the notion of, ‘if you can’t stop them, join them’. Acts of injustice become far easier to justify when the majority of people are engaged in them. One such act is cheating with weights (*tatfeef*) which is a corrupt business practice that people are still involved in even today, so others around them think of it as acceptable too and do the same.

An example from recent history is that of Allen Brooks, a sixty-five-year-old black man from Dallas in America who was lynched publicly in 1910. A crowd gathered around him and took photos, which were then used as postcards. This was how normalised public lynching had become in the south of the United States; families would come out and have a picnic whilst watching someone being lynched. They had lost their sense of sympathy and empathy towards other humans and would not think of the oppression towards black people as an injustice. It shows that the standards of a society dictate the behaviour of the people living within it, causing evil to become normalised, and this is why the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught us that the least we can do is to hate acts of evil in our hearts.

Even if an evil is common in society (regardless of whether it is a moral sin or a transgression against someone else), our hearts should not be comfortable with it, nor should we conform to it. There may be a system that is based on interest (usury) which buries people in debts, and thus paves the way for more problems such as suicide or stealing; but this does not allow us as Muslims to accept it or to become a part of it. Yet, most people become affected by widespread sins and oppression and eventually cave in and say, “I will have to do this to get by”.

Allah also says in the Qur’an in *Surah al-An’am* 6:116: “*And if you obey most of those upon the earth, they will mislead you from the way of Allah.*”

This message is in our creed, but it also transfers into our daily practices. Our tongues can easily succumb to transgression; if those around us are involved in lying or backbiting, we could also fall into the same trap because it has become normalised behaviour.

Imam Ibn Qudama, may Allah be pleased with him, reiterated this in his book *Mukhtasar Minhaj al-Qasideen*: “Through frequent exposure, a person begins perceiving corruption as trivial, and its effect and gravity fades. Thus, whenever a person regularly sees another person committing a major sin, he belittles the minor sins he himself commits... Similarly, if a scholar is seen wearing a silk garment or a gold ring, the people would aggressively denounce that. Yet, they can watch him sit in a long gathering where he does nothing but backbite people, yet they are not offended by that. Backbiting is far worse than wearing gold, but because of how frequently it is witnessed, hearts become desensitised to it.”

This is a powerful paragraph, clearly stating that we become so desensitised to major sins because of how commonly they are committed, whereas we pay attention to and passionately object to trivial things, or matters that are of doubt even if we are not entirely sure if they are prohibited (*haram*).

Ibn Mas’ud, may Allah be pleased with him, said: “You should accustom yourself so that if everyone on the face of the earth disbelieved, you should still believe.” What is meant here is that we should get ourselves out of the mindset that if everyone else is doing something, we are free to do the same. We cannot let others set low standards for us, we must set higher standards and ideals for ourselves and not let ourselves get carried away by what surrounds us. Also we must not allow ourselves to get accustomed to seeing others being wronged, as that normalises such behaviour and enables it further in society.

There is another important Hadith that I would like to mention here, in which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: “Beware of belittling sins. Imagine a group of people who descend into a valley and they each bring their sticks. They all begin to throw their sticks into a fire until the fire becomes so huge that it consumes them all.”⁵³

He used this metaphor to explain that when every person contributes a small sin (and deems it insignificant), the whole of society suffers as a result.

Ibn Abbas relates: “There is no major sin if you seek forgiveness for it and there is no minor sin if you insist upon it.”⁵⁴ Allah can pardon major

sins if you seek forgiveness from them, but if we insist and repeat minor sins then it becomes a bigger offence. We should not think of minor sins as irrelevant, as they add up and can cause more damage than a single major sin.

Furthermore, we allow evil to become common within society by enabling it to happen in the first place. And regarding this, Al ‘Urs bin ‘Amirat al-Kind narrated from the Prophet ﷺ: “When a sin is committed, he who saw it and disapproved of it will be like the one who was not present; but he who did not see it but approved of it will be like he who was present when it was committed.”⁵⁵ This Hadith highlights the need to take a hard stance against injustice by at least condemning it, so we don’t enable it in any way.

Abdullah bin Mas’ud, also narrated from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: “The first defect that destroyed Banu Israel was that a man (of them) met another man and said, ‘Oh so-and-so, fear Allah and abandon what you are doing, for it is not lawful for you. He then met him the next day and that did not prevent him from eating with him, drinking with him and sitting with him. When they did so, Allah mingled their hearts with each other.”⁵⁶

This Hadith shows that the man did not take a strong stance against the evil, his disavowal was not serious, and he took the sin lightly. We should not be like this man; instead, we should stand firmly against injustices and not allow ourselves to become desensitised to them.

When looking at it from a jurisprudence (*fiqh*) perspective, we may wonder if it is permissible to sometimes participate in something that is disliked in Islam, but has become common in the society that we live in. It is permissible; however, it is only permissible under certain conditions:

1. In times of dire need or necessity.
2. If our life is in danger.
3. To avert a greater evil. For example, you may be in a position where you have to choose between two evils, and you engage in the lesser evil.
4. If you cannot escape the evil entirely, so you only engage in it to the extent necessary and do not enthusiastically embrace it.

An example of this could be interest (*riba*); as Muslims we are prohibited from directly engaging in interest, but due to where we live, we may have to engage in that system to some extent, whether we like it or not.

Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allah be pleased with him, also said: “Hearing is not like listening.” What this means is that we have no control over what is being said, but we can control whether we are paying attention to it or not and we can hate it in our heart like the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ told us to.

I would like to mention here a very interesting Hadith narrated by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ about an event that took place before he received the revelation of the Qur’an:

Zayd bin Amr bin an-Nufayl never worshipped idols, he was a follower of Ibrahim, may the blessings of Allah be upon him. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: “I remember sitting in a gathering where they would eat meat sacrificed for the idols and I would not partake of that meat.” When they presented the food to Zayd, he stood up and said, “Allah created you, provides for you and for your animals and yet you sacrifice for other than him.” The Prophet ﷺ was amazed watching Zayd take on the powerful people at that time. Similarly, when the Arabs were making tawaf around the Kaaba, Zayd would stand with his back to the Kaaba and say, “None of you is upon the religion of Ibrahim.” He would also cry and say, “Oh Allah, if only I knew the best way to worship you I would, but I do not know.”⁵⁷

He died before Muhammad ﷺ received prophethood, but he died as a monotheist; he believed in Allah and was searching for the truth. However, Zayd’s son Saeed became one of the first people to accept Islam and is one of the ten promised Paradise. Saeed, may Allah be pleased with him, asked the Prophet ﷺ about his father’s fate, and the Prophet ﷺ replied, “On the Day of Judgement Zayd will be standing all by himself as his own nation.” Zayd was the opposite of a ‘yes-man’ – he didn’t care about the norms of society, he chose not to partake in their acts of ignorance and instead searched for the truth sincerely and earnestly. He is a noble example to whom we should look to for guidance in terms of not conforming to what everyone else may be doing in society without thinking about our words and actions.

The story of Zayd shows us how monotheism and natural inclination (*fitrah*) lead a person to justice. Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, said that when the Arabs went to bury their daughters, Zayd would go to rescue the girls and bring them to his home to raise them until they reached the age of marriage, after which he would marry them off. Zayd was doing this before Allah revealed that female infanticide was prohibited (*haram*) and unjust; he knew this practice was wrong and he did not accept it. He took whatever action was necessary in order to stop innocent girls from being buried alive as he did not conform to the evil norms of his society, and the Prophet ﷺ praised him for this behaviour.

The Hadith narrated by Hudhaifa at the beginning of this chapter gives way to many different events and statements that enable us to understand the importance of not conforming to injustice. One very powerful statement is from Ibn Taymiyyah who said: “Whoever assists an oppressor will one day be tested by that same oppressor.” (*Majmu Al-Fatwa*) We may enable a form of oppression because it is of benefit to us, but it will eventually come back and haunt us.

I would like to end this chapter by sharing another wonderful story with you that really hits home the message of the Hadith mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It is narrated by Abdullah bin Zubair bin Aslam (Aslam was the son of Umar bin al-Khattab, and so Abdullah was Umar’s great-grandson): “Aslam said, ‘While I was in disguise with Umar bin al-Khattab in Madinah during one of his frequent night patrols to survey the condition of his people, we overheard a milkmaid refusing to obey her mother’s order to dilute the milk with water and sell adulterated milk. When her mother insisted that Umar would be none the wiser, the girl replied, ‘Oh mother! By Allah! I would never obey him in public and disobey him in private. For if Umar will not come to know it, the Lord of Umar surely knows!’ Upon hearing this conversation, Umar gave instructions for the door of their house to be marked and for enquiries to be made as to who they were and if the daughter was married or not.’ Aasim was the only son of Umar who was not married at that time.

The following morning, Umar said, ‘Oh Aslam, pass by that house and purchase from the girl to see if she kept her resolve,’ and so he did and learned that the milk was unadulterated as she had vowed. Umar summoned the girl and her mother to his court and told them what he had heard. As a reward, he proposed to marry the girl to his son Aasim.

She accepted and from this union a girl was born who was named Layla, who would in due course become the mother of Umar bin Abd al-Aziz.”

We can clearly see here that the girl refused to do what everybody else was doing because she knew that Allah was watching, and it was wrong to cheat. Her piety and truthfulness had earned her a wonderful husband in the form of the son of the Caliph. She was rewarded with a place in the household of the head of the state after being in a poor situation, and she also went on to become the grandmother of another head of state. Our intentions and our actions can reap rewards in our life here on earth, and most certainly in the Hereafter.

May Allah grant us sincerity and piety, and allow us to resist the urge to conform to the evils in society. Amin.





GREED – THE ROOT OF ALL SOCIAL INJUSTICE

Jabir b. Abdullah (ra) reported that Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: Be on your guard against committing oppression, for oppression is a darkness on the Day of Resurrection, and be on your guard against stinginess for stinginess destroyed those who were before you, as it incited them to shed blood and make lawful what was unlawful for them.

IN THIS CHAPTER we will move towards a more spiritual dimension of justice and injustice. The Hadith that we will be looking at speaks about the foundation of justice and how greed causes a deep void in our chests.

The Hadith is narrated by Jabir: “The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, ‘Beware of injustice because it will result in darkness upon darkness upon darkness on the Day of Judgement. And beware of greed (*shuh*) because greed is what destroyed those before you. It drove them to spill each other’s blood.’”¹¹⁵ Greed was the reason that nations were destroyed, and it

was greed that led those people to kill each other and violate each other's sanctities.

Another Hadith of the Prophet ﷺ was said during one of his sermons: "Beware of greed. It destroyed those that came before you. First it caused them to spill each other's blood, and then it caused them to break off family relationships. And oppression is darkness upon darkness on the Day of Judgement."

Lastly, there is a Hadith which connects the two Hadith above together and is narrated in multiple books: "Had the son of Adam been given a valley of gold, then he would try to use that valley of gold to attain another valley of gold. And if he was given a second valley of gold, then he would use those two to attain a third valley of gold. Nothing would fill the mouths of the sons of Adam except for dirt."¹¹⁶ What he meant here was that nothing would stop a person from pursuing more except for death (his mouth being full of dirt).

When looking at greed from the perspective of social injustice, the Prophet ﷺ told us that greed is the starting point and it manifests itself in every aspect of our lives. Greed causes us to wrong the people that are most precious to us; it causes us to disregard another person to the point that we may even take that person's life. Greed, when it remains unchecked, destroys our relationships, our communities, and leads to the unlawful killing of others and destroys us spiritually.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also said in regards to this hated trait, "By Allah, it is not poverty that I fear for you, but I fear that this world will be opened up with its wealth for you as it was opened to those before you; and you vie with one another over it as they did and eventually it will ruin you as it ruined them."¹¹⁷ Greed puts us in a situation where we try to attain as much wealth and power as possible, which then makes us look at everyone and everything as either something that can help attain that wealth, or as a hindrance for us attaining it. Greed stops us from seeing people as people; we lose empathy and consciousness all in this lust for wealth, for which Allah has said, "*You have been destroyed by quantity.*" (102:1) The destruction is not just limited to us, but it extends to our families and communities; greed is the greatest enemy of social justice.

The Prophet Adam, may the blessings of Allah be upon him, wanted one more tree, even though he had access to every other tree, which is what caused him to slip in Paradise. Adam's son wanted that one more thing that his brother had and he did not. Iblis wanted that one rank above

man. When we look at the first parties in the story of human creation, we see that it is greed that manifested itself in some form; it leads to envy, hatred, rivalries and pride. A point that must be clarified here is that while it was desire that caused Prophet Adam and his son to sin, in the case of iblis it was his pride that caused his ongoing doom.

When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ spoke about greed (*shuh*) he said: “The dust in the cause of Allah (battle) will not be combined with the fire of Hell. Faith and greed can never be combined in the same part of man.”¹¹⁸

The second part of this Hadith is essentially saying that greed expels faith (*iman*) out of the heart. Whilst greed makes one see every person as expendable in the pursuit of wanting more, faith involves the constant renewal of wanting Allah’s pleasure. *Iman* is at risk of diminishing without this renewal and greed overtakes the heart, resulting in the love and pursuit for Allah to vanish. We should not allow greed to overtake faith, but rather faith should overtake greed. We should realise that we should not be attached to this worldly life in the first place; this pursuit of the world at the expense of our relationship with Allah, can be tamed through *iman*.

The resources of this world are finite, there is a limit and we cannot have it all, this often results in people taking something from someone else. Those who already have wealth are more likely to become greedy, they become afflicted with greed (*shuh*) and want more. The richest Companion of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Abdul Rahman bin Awf, had so much wealth that when he would enter the city of Madinah, there were so many camels that came with him that the people would think it was an opposing army. Yet, it is known that he made an entire circumambulation (*tawaf*) around the Ka’aba whilst supplicating to Allah and saying, “Oh Allah protect me from the greed within me.” He knew the dangers of greed; he knew that his wealth could deceive him into pursuing more of it and in turn lead him away from Allah.

Those who are corrupt and as a result of that corruption are filthy rich, will use anything and everything to grow their wealth. Even whilst owning ten billion in currency, and not knowing what to do with it, they will be willing to kill people to gain another ten billion. Countries – let alone individual people – are drowned in debts, different crises are created globally, all in the name of pursuing more. Greed leads to destruction and affects so many innocent people.

The Prophet ﷺ said that greed afflicts those who have more than those who do not have, and in essence, it is the mercy of Allah that He does not allow some of us to become rich. He protects us from ourselves because He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows that we could fall into the trap of greed if we were given wealth. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ also said that the greatest trial or fitnah of this *ummah* is money, and when we look at corporate crimes, we find that they are driven by the greed and the want of more money.

Moving on slightly, we will now look at the difference between stinginess (*bukhal*) and greed (*shuh*). On many occasions whilst reading the translations of the Arabic texts, we can see *shuh* translated as stinginess as both words can be used interchangeably. However, many scholars have said that if we look closely at the Arabic language, there is a distinction between the two words. Ibn Qayyim said regarding this that *shuh* is the extreme keenness of something and becoming restlessly impatient to attain it. *Bukhal*, or stinginess on the other hand is protectiveness of something after having attained it. He also said that greed precedes stinginess, but if we have a lot and we find it easy to let it go or part with it, then it shows that we have conquered greed. By overcoming our stinginess, we have defied our greed and are not intoxicated by power or wealth. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ described the person who is constantly in a state of giving as someone who gives with their right hand in such a way that their left hand does not even know, this indicates the quality of a person who has overcome their greed and hence is not miserly in spending their wealth.

A well-known incident during the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ shows us this aspect of giving freely. It is narrated by Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, who said: “A man came to the Prophet ﷺ and was clearly in need. The Prophet ﷺ sent a message to the homes of his wives and they said that they don’t have anything to feed the man with except water. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ then asked the people, ‘Who is going to take this man and entertain him as his guest?’ One of the people of Madinah said that he will take him, and so he went home and told his wife to generously entertain the guest of Allah’s Messenger ﷺ. She said that they have nothing to eat except for some food for the children. The man said, ‘Prepare the meal, light your lamp and keep stirring the pots until the children fall asleep. When the man sits down, turn off the lamp and put the food in front of him. Put plates in front of all three of us, but only put food on his plate so he will think that we are eating too.’ After

the Fajr prayer in the morning, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said to the *Ansari* man, ‘Allah laughed at one of your actions and revealed the verse in *Surah al-Hashr* 59:9: *‘They prefer others to themselves even if that is to their own detriment. And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul – it is those who will be successful.’*”

This verse was revealed in connection to this incident and it tells us that stinginess is the fruit of greed, whilst charity is the fruit of selflessness. People who prefer others over themselves, even if it means less for them, are truly successful in this world and the next.

Furthermore, Allah says in *Surah al-Adiyat* 100:6: *“Indeed mankind, to his Lord, is ungrateful.”* He says that He is a witness to this lack of gratitude as our pursuit of this world, or wealth becomes violent and intense. Our greed and pursuit of wealth becomes so severe that we do not let anything, or anyone get in the way. We do not stop until we are in the grave; we may collect all the wealth in the world and pile it on top of our grave, but in the end, we will become part of the dirt.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ also said, “The worst two qualities a man can have are an alarming level of greed, and unrestrained cowardice.”¹¹⁹ There is wisdom behind this saying of his as there is a relationship between these two qualities. Both of these qualities result in us going into self-preservation; when we are called to give for the sake of Allah, we become stingy and when we are called to an occasion of courage, we become cowards. When we are overcome by greed, we lose all sense of integrity as greed does away with principles. The lack of principles affects the way that we deal with everyone, including our families and ourselves, and it is down to us to conquer greed within ourselves.

May Allah make us from those who are selfless, and never allow us to pursue this world to the extent that it disconnects us from Him, our families and the people around us, or from the potential good that He has put within us. May Allah allow us to be people of charity, generosity and people who long for Him and not for this material world. Amin.



JUSTICE is essential to the survival and flourishing of any civilization. The words of God and His Messenger ﷺ remind us of the centrality of justice in our lives and our societies. Injustice (*zulm*) is condemned repeatedly in the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ.

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Omar Suleiman is the Founder and President of the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research and Professor of Islamic Studies at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, USA.



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