

Fast 18

Holy Prophet's extraordinary gentleness towards his followers -1

Lest we be tempted to think that any leader is bound to be gentle towards his followers, please ponder whether it is ever actually the case with religious and national leaders or battle commanders. The Holy Quran says to the Prophet Muhammad:

“Thus it is by Allah’s mercy that you are gentle to them. And if you had been rough, hard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you. So pardon them and ask (God’s) forgiveness for them, and consult them in (important) matters. But when you have determined, put your trust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who trust in Him.” — 3:159

Notes: This verse was revealed in connection with events of the battle of Uhud. A group of Muslim archers was posted by the Holy Prophet to protect the Muslim army from the rear, with strict instructions not to leave their position under any circumstances. But seeing the enemy retreating, the archers joined in pursuing them. The enemy forces took advantage of this and were able to attack the Muslims from behind, scattering them and placing them in jeopardy along with the Holy Prophet himself. Some Muslims fled the field of battle. The Holy Prophet himself was wounded and rumoured to have been killed.

The Quran here calls attention to the Prophet’s gentle dealing with those around him when speaking of his experience in the field of battle as a general, a capacity which required him to be very strict in punishing any delinquency. He was the ablest general in leading his men, yet his gentle manners and his forbearance in dealing with his friends as well as foes stand in remarkable contrast with his capacity as a commander in the field of battle. After the Uhud trouble he did not speak even a harsh word to those who were guilty of disobeying his orders or those who had fled. This verse teaches us the following lessons:

- 1) It was *a mercy from Allah* that the Holy Prophet was gentle to his followers. It was not weak leadership, the examples of which we see sometimes. The word for “gentle” here is *lint*, from which the English word *lenient* is derived.
- 2) If a leader is rough and uncaring to those around him then he won’t be able to keep them together. Notice how it was the Holy Prophet’s gentleness, and not fear of his authority, which attracted his followers to him and made them deeply devoted to him. At the battle of Uhud itself, when the Holy Prophet became a target of enemy attack, his followers surrounded him to shield him from attack with their bodies. This was the time when they would have abandoned him if he had kept them as his followers through force, intimidation or offering them some gain.
- 3) The Holy Prophet is told by God to pardon them himself, as well as to pray to Allah for them to be forgiven by Allah.

- 4) He is told to “consult them” in important matters. Before the battle of Uhud the Holy Prophet had decided, after a consultation, to follow the view of the majority and go out of Madinah to confront and fight the enemy. His own view was that of the minority, that they should not meet the enemy in the open field but remain in Madinah to defend themselves. It seemed that by following the majority view the Muslims had faced the trouble they did at Uhud. Yet, at this juncture, the Holy Prophet received revelation reaffirming the principle of consultation.
 - 5) “But when you have determined, put your trust in Allah.” — Once a course of action has been determined by means of consultation, the course must be followed, unitedly and whole-heartedly with full conviction, trusting in Allah.
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