

Fast 11: Justice towards all (2)

- Continuing the topic of the last two Studies, the teaching of Islam that Allah treats all human beings, Muslim or non-Muslims, with equal justice must be reflected in the **practical dealings** of Muslims with others **in this world**. Otherwise, it remains just an unsubstantiated claim!
- The principles of Islam in this respect are so excellent that they require Muslims to treat with justice not only ordinary non-Muslims who have done them no harm but also those who are their deadly and mortal enemies and inveterate foes:

“O you who believe, be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and do not let hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. Be just; that is nearer to observance of duty. And keep your duty to Allah. Surely Allah is Aware of what you do.” (5:8)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوِّمِينَ لِلَّهِ
شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّ شَنَاةُ
قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ آلَا تَعْدِلُوا ۖ إِعْدِلُوا ۗ هُوَ أَقْرَبُ
لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا
تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨﴾

The word used for “equitably” and “Be just” in this verse is based on the commonly used word *'adl* (عدل), whose meaning is known to all.

- Unfortunately, in what is regarded as “Islamic law”, the evidence of a non-Muslim is treated as of lesser weight than the evidence of a Muslim (or indeed of no weight at all). If a Muslim and a non-Muslim give opposite testimony, the word of the Muslim is accepted over the non-Muslim merely on grounds of religion! This is **absolutely and plainly contrary** to the teachings of the Quran. And in practice, the Holy Prophet Muhammad who judged cases between Muslims and non-Muslims took **no account** whatsoever of their religions and gave judgment based purely on facts and evidence.

It is obvious that such discrimination is contrary to the principle of this verse: “do not let hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably”.

- The above verse begins by saying that to maintain justice, to bear witness with justice, is a requirement of being “upright for Allah”. If Muslims do not maintain justice, they are not being upright, nor keeping Allah in mind. The verse then goes on to emphasise the point no less than three times: (1) “Be just”, (2) remain close to “observance of duty”, and (3) “keep your duty to Allah”. The word here for keeping your duty, both times, is *taqwa*. That term means, to put it simply, “religious behaviour”. Hence it is made part of Islamic behaviour to do justice to all.

- As to what is meant by “hatred of a people”, this is made clear just a few verses earlier:

“And do not let hatred of a people — because they hindered you from the Sacred Mosque — incite you to transgress. And help one another in righteousness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and aggression, and keep your duty to Allah.” (5:2)

وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ اَنْ صَدُّوْكُمْ
عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ اَنْ تَعْتَدُوْا ۗ وَ
تَعَاوَنُوْا عَلٰى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوٰى ۗ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوْا
عَلٰى الْاِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ ۗ

These were people who had expelled Muslims from their homes in Makkah, persecuted them and prevented them from performing their religious obligations. They no doubt had hatred for Muslims, and naturally Muslims may have felt hatred for them in return. Here Muslims are told **in general terms** not to be incited by this hatred “to transgress”, i.e., to go beyond the justified limits of retaliation, departing from civilized behaviour. The passage 5:8, quoted earlier, refers **specifically** to the doing of justice.

- What it is “to transgress” is also explained in this verse itself. It is when instead of urging each other to adhere to high moral standards, members of a community combine together to commit sins against those from other communities. It happens that an individual on his own might be reluctant to commit some misdeed or act of aggression against someone of a different community, but if such individuals are acting together as part of a group then they become emboldened to commit the same outrage. Then they feel secure and justified in their actions because other members of their group are doing the same and reinforcing them.

This verse requires that a Muslim must never join other Muslims in some wrongful action, just because they belong to his community and religion. Instead, he should stand up against his own people’s wrongdoing and correct them. This verse gives a Muslim, or a group of Muslims, **the right of dissent with the majority**. But it is not a destructive and negative dissent because the words begin by saying that when your co-religionists are doing good works you must co-operate with them in that task.

It is a great tragedy that so many Muslims today violate both aspects of this teaching. Seeing a group among them engaged in good work, they oppose and obstruct it, and try make it fail. But seeing groups among them engaged in wrong-doing, and bringing Islam into disrepute, they condone their actions and find excuses for their misdeeds.