

Fast 26: Prophets and Messengers — their submission to God (3)

- The Prophet Muhammad himself is said in the Quran to be following the simple religion of Abraham and submitting to God like him:

“Then We revealed to you (O Prophet):
 Follow the faith of Abraham, the upright one; and he was not of those who set up partners (with Allah).”
 (16:123)

ثُمَّ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ أَنْ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۗ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

It is here, two verses later, that the Prophet Muhammad is directed on how to preach:

“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord knows best him who strays from His path, and He knows best those who go aright.” (16:125)

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ۚ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿١٢٥﴾

He is to preach his message in words of wisdom, words that are full of knowledge and depth of understanding, and by giving good advice which benefits people. Any argument is to be conducted in “the best manner”, i.e., presenting your case with the best and most convincing evidence, in polite language, behaving with courtesy, and having consideration for the feelings of others. It has always been the case, not only these days on social media, that arguments easily descend into insults, rudeness, sarcasm and even threats. This verse teaches the exact opposite. A great and successful debator of Islam, Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, who in debates had to deal with the most hostile, vile and abusive critics of Islam, gave this advice: Answer your opponent in such a way that you convey your points fully, but without hurting his feelings.

The closing words of the above verse tell us that it is not our concern to determine who is on the wrong path and who is on the right path, or who accepts our arguments and who doesn't. That is only known to God, and a matter between those people and God. Our task is only to convey the message with reason and good manners.

- Since Islam reverts back to the simple faith of Abraham, it puts forward the following proposal to the followers of the other religions which revere that great Patriarch:

“Say: O People of the Book, come to an equitable word between us and you, that we shall serve none but Allah and

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا

that we shall not set up any partner with Him, and that some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah. But if they turn away, then say: Bear witness, we are Muslims.” (3:64)

يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا
فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

This shows the reform that Islam is trying to bring about, and the fundamentals that it draws attention to as being most important. And it does so by pointing out certain basic beliefs to others which they, in a sense, already accept but which they have deviated from.

The first is serving or worshipping none but God, and addressing prayers only to Him. Praying “through” or “in the name of” anyone else is contrary to this, and to do so is the crudest form of serving others than God.

The second is not to set up any partner with Him. This means not to assign God’s attributes and powers to anyone else, such as the belief that a certain human being is above and beyond being a mortal, he is actually a partner with God in the works of God, and he bears a relationship like son to God.

The third is not to take others for lords besides God. This is a more subtle form of deviation from belief in one God because people are not actually worshipping these lords nor believing that physically they are above mortality. What people are doing is to obey these lords so implicitly and blindly that they feel no need to check or test whether their orders and pronouncements are in accordance with the word of God or not. These lords are taken as God’s spokesmen on earth, and anything they proclaim and command is followed as if it comes with unquestionable Divine authority.

The last statement, “bear witness, we are Muslims”, is to inform them that these are the things Muslims don’t do because they follow Abraham. So Muslims themselves must be the most careful and conscious of all in not doing such things, as they are calling upon others not to do them! Bowing at tombs of saints is contrary to “serving none but Allah”. To pray through prophets or saints is to set up partners with Allah. And to give up using your own sense and reason, and instead blindly follow religious leaders, is the same as taking others for lords besides Allah.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad, towards the end of his life, sent letters to the monarchs of neighbouring countries inviting them to Islam by quoting the above verse. His message to them, consisting of the words of this verse, showed that he was not trying to subjugate them to his personal rule or threatening them to embrace Islam but his purpose was to draw them away from wrongful and damaging beliefs and practices.