

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَل لَّكُمْ فُرْقَانًا وَيُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ

سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٢٩﴾

Al-Anfal (The Spoils of War) 8:29

O You Who Believe!

- If you fear Allah.
- He will grant you a criterion (to judge between right and wrong).
- Remove from you (all) evil (that may afflict) you.
- And forgive you.
- For Allah is the Lord of grace unbounded.

Commentary

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR)

God says, "O you who believe! If you fear Allah, He will grant you a criterion (to judge between right and wrong), remove from you (all) evil (that may afflict) you, and forgive you: for Allah is the Lord of grace unbounded".

- Furqan or the criterion means to create a difference or distance between two things and in the verse being discussed,
- it stands for the difference in standard of piety and the difference between the right and the wrong.
- Whether it is the stage of faith or worship, the criterion differentiates belief from disbelief.
- In the practical field it differentiates between practices of good and done for the pleasure of God, from the deeds that are evil and the source of the punishment from God.
- The criterion differentiates between the good thoughts from evil ones.
- These are the fruits and the rewards from the tree of piety.
- Even in this verse, the word criterion's application is not limited to just a few kinds but encompasses all things.

Despite having enumerated the good and evil in the previous verse, in this verse the criterion is present in all kinds of good and evil because every one requires a criterion. The verse - *And unto everyone who is conscious of God, He [always] grants a way out of unhappiness; and provides for him in a manner beyond all expectation; and for everyone who places his trust in God He [alone] is enough,* also reiterates the same.

The meaning of Takfir, disbelief or idolatry has already been discussed earlier. The verse actually means to simplify the pros and cons that have been mentioned in the earlier verse. " If you fear God, then God in his pleasure will not hold you accountable or punishable, and those dos and don'ts that we have mentioned will not be intertwined. God will hide your sins and forgive your sins if you fear Him. It is well established that God has the greatest benevolence.

The Decisive Discussion

The Book Usul Kafi on its own authority has recorded that Aqeel Khazai has quoted a tradition from Hazrat Ali (AS) as saying,

It is shameful in religion to be afraid to fight those with whom we should fight, those who help each other in infamy. It is also a shame and ignominy in this world, for this makes the Muslims deserving the fire of Hell because fear of an enemy makes a person flee the battlefield. God has decried this shameful action as "O you who believe! When ye meet the Unbelievers in hostile array, never turn your backs to them."

Ibn Shazan on his own authority has recorded in the book Kitabal Faqih and A'llal Sharai that replying to questions in this regard Imam Ridha (AS) had responded to his letters by saying that,

God has declared it Haram to desert the battle because it creates a lethargy in helping the religious leader and weakens their authority and is like helping the enemy. This is the cause of punishment, because through this action God has based the acceptance of his supremacy, and his impeccable justice. This entails giving up oppression and trampling all mischief. If this is not done then it becomes the reason for the enemy to overpower the Muslims. This action, desertion, becomes the cause of the annihilation and the enslavement of the Muslims as well as denies the truth of God's own religion plus other weaknesses.

Compiler's comment

There are umpteen traditions from the Ahlulbait that explain that it is a great sin to desert the battle and it leads to (moral) death. I have raised objections against some great sins when I have commented on the verse 31 of Surah Nisa which is as follows: " If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden to do, We shall remit from you your sins, and admit you to a noble entrance." It is recorded in the fourth Arabic volume.

There are many traditions regarding this in the books of the Ahle Sunnah e.g. one that Sahih Bukhari has recorded on the authority of Abu Hurera that the Messenger said,

Avoid the seven sins that morally destroy you. Some one asked what they were and he answered,

- Polytheism- Do not make partners for God.
- Do not kill anyone unjustly for God has banned such an action, but if you kill for the truth of Islam it will be permitted.
- Sorcery
- Usury
- Usurping an orphan's legacy
- Desert your army on the day of battle and
- Accusing pious women of adultery.

There are umpteen other traditions quoted by Ibn Abbas that declare desertion from the battle to be a great sin.

Why does this verse, *"For the present, Allah has lightened your (task), for He knows that there is a weak spot in you: But (even so), if there are a hundred of you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred"*, be revealed when we know the Muslims were fewer in numbers than the disbelievers describing desertion of the battle as Haram?

It has been recorded in the Books of the Ahle Sunnah on the authority of Umar Bin Khattab, Abdullah bin Umar, Ibn Abbas, Abu Hurera and Abu Saeed Hazari that desertion from the battle has been declared haram in this verse but it has limited on the day of Badr. Durre Manthur has also recorded this tradition in the same words. It may have been assumed that this verse revealed on the day of Badr and the words *yawmaizin* in the clause *If any does turn his back on such a day* points towards the day of Badr but what can the reader do if the background gives the proof that this verse was revealed after the day of Badr and the word *on such a day* refers to that particular day and not Badr. Even if we suppose that the verse was revealed on the day of Badr, the specialty of the conditions does not affect the generality of its effect. This is also the case in many other verses where the special condition or the peculiarity of the situation does not change the verse and its general or common application.

Al Manar has written in his commentary that we can take this verse to be referring to the day of Badr under the then prevalent situation, if the majority of the commentators say that this verse was revealed before Badr because there are other conclusive proofs.

- The first is that the Battle of Badr was the first battle of the Muslims, and if they had deserted on that day despite the Messenger being present amongst them, then it would have completely weakened the growing structure of Islam forever.
- Secondly, the angels had helped the Muslims in this battle and

- Thirdly, God had clearly promised to help the Muslims and to put fear and awe in the hearts of the enemy.

When we take all the proof and specialties into account for assuming the significance of the term "Nahi" then we learn that this claim that this verse, which derides promises made for wrongdoings, is related to Badr can only be so in the eyes of such claimants. God has tested the companions of the Messenger twice for desertion from the battle.

Once it was on the day of Uhud when He said, " Those of you who turned back on the day the two hosts met, it was Satan who caused them to backslide because of some (sins) they had earned. But god indeed, has forgiven them. Surely God is oft-forgiving most forbearing." (Al Imran-155) and then on the day of Hunayn when He said, " Truly, God has given you victory on many battlefields and of the day of Hunayn when you rejoiced at your great number but it availed you naught and the earth, vast as it is, was straitened for you, then you turned back in flight." (Tauba-25).

There is no conflict here if we say that desertion of the battle is Haram and is a great sin but this does not mean that all types of retreat is haram due to the two conditions explained in the verse Anfaal. Any one who deserts the battle will be severely punished excepting for the two conditions (mentioned), and his fate will be in Hell. It is possible that we can think of situations where in there is no such severe punishment like the verse on weakness (due to injury) and the verse on possible death as in Surah Baqara which has been discussed earlier. Any tactical withdrawal to avoid possible death and destruction is justified to admonish people who endanger their lives unnecessarily. This has come in Surah Baqara and details will be discussed shortly.

Every one including Ahmad and the authors of Sanan, but excepting Nisai have quoted the words of Ibn Umar wherein he said,

I was present in one of the battles (sirya) in which the Messenger was never present when people fled the battle and I was one of them. I asked myself, *What should I do now and what was it that I have done, for I have made myself deserving of God's wrath?*

It was then I decided to go to Madina to stay theRe in the night then another thought struck me, *How will it be if I tell my condition to the Messenger? If this sin is redeemable then I will repent or else will return to the battle. Then I did this and met the Messenger before the Fajr prayers.*

The Messenger came out and asked, *Are you among the deserters?* I answered, *Yes I am. I have fled the battle.* He then said,

You have returned to go back and attack the enemy with great fervor and I encompass you and all the other Muslims.

Ibn Umar then adds, *I neared the Messenger and kissed his hands on hearing these words.*

Abu Daud has narrated this tradition in these words:

We decided, let us go to Madina; we will pass the night there but we should be alert that no one sees us and we did the same. When we entered Madina we thought, how would it be if we presented ourselves to the Messenger and tell him about our conditions? If repentance will be accepted then we will stay back in Madina but if it is not accepted then we will return to the battle. We sat on the way to wait for the Messenger's arrival. We met him when he came out of his house and told him that we had deserted the battle.

This is how some scholars have tried to interpret this incidence but it is incorrect in the linguistic sense or because this behavior was caused by fear.

Tirmizi too has called this tradition to be reliable or "hasan" but the authenticity of Yazid bin Abi Ziyad is disputable. The traditionists have generally regarded him as unreliable. Ibn Hayaan has said that he was a truthful person but with the old age, his memory often used to fail him and his condition changed so much that he used to relate unreliable things as hadith. All the traditions heard from him before this change, are reliable.

The view of Sahib Al-manar in short is that this hadith is unreliable both in its text and its authenticity. This compiler has said earlier that certain facts prove that it is incorrect to say that the issue of desertion is limited to Badr, because Badr was the first battle of Islam and because the Messenger himself was present in it. This argument stands valid for Badr but also Uhud, Khandaq, Khybar and Hunayn. Moreover, all these battles took place at a time when Islam needed warriors who were steadfast in battle. The Messenger himself was present in all these battle and in all of them God had promised to aid the Muslims. He even sent the angels to help them and to put the fear of God into the hearts of the enemies.

The answer to his assumption is that separate verses have been revealed on the desertions at Uhud and Hunayn. The meaning of this verse does not prove that the desertion due to fear is not about Muslims. What is wrong if we include them too in its meaning, because this verse is complete, all encompassing and nothing suggests that it should be limited. What is surprising is that the author of Al-manar has admitted that the desertion of the Muslims in Uhud and Hunayn was Haram but says that it is not necessary that the deserter can be punished and sent to Hell without these two reasons. However, it is necessary to think of reasons when desertion of the battle is not Haram and the greater sin is that sin for which God's punishment is Hell.

The thing that is stranger than this is that he says that arrangement and the leave due to weakness will be included in it and the verse of *Tihalka* which has already been discussed in Surah Baqarah will be limited in generality. The verse about retreating from the battle as a tactical measure against heavy odds while facing the enemy condones this excuse only when the enemy's numbers are more than double.

If the word (nahi) that prevents the soul from being destroyed has more general application than the verse about weakness then this assumption will stand void as admitted by the author of al-manar if the words that if we deem the words "when will this decision be" to be correct then the verse will be rendered frivolous and purposeless. There is no alternative but to let the verse be taken on its face value.

Imam Musa Kazim (AS) is recorded in Tafsir Ayyashi as saying,

It means that he should return to his companion and not that he should desert the battle, for whoever flees to this extent will be far from his friends and will be subjected to the wrath of God.

The Compiler

This tradition highlights a special feature of the verse and that is, showing one's back to the enemy, for this may also be fleeing the battle or deserting it. There are two kinds of showing one's back,

- to betray and run away and
- to retreat so that one reaches his comrades in arms.

But these two meanings are now separate so whatever other meanings are left are connected with "Nahi". Therefore, showing one's back to the enemy for any other reason, even though there numbers are less than double will be considered Haram.

Tafsir Burhan records on the authority of Shahar Ashub, Thalibi, Zahak, Akrama and Ibn Abbas that the words *and it was not you who cast [terror into them, O Prophet], when you did cast it*, revert to when the Messenger asked Hazrat Ali to give him a fistful of pebbles, who complied. The Messenger took them and threw them at the army of the Quraysh and there was none amongst them whose eyes were not filled with pebbles.

The Compiler

Ayyashi through Muhammad bin Kalib Asadi, and he through his father who quoted Imam Jafar Sadiq (AS) while Durre Manthur has quoted, Tabrani, Abi Shaykh and Ibn Abbas, have recorded this tradition about Hazrat Ali giving the pebbles to the Messenger. In another record the narrator is Hazrat Ali himself.

Durre Manthur records, Ibn Jarir, who records from Muhammad bin Qais and he in turn quotes Muhammad bin Ka'ab as saying,

When the two hosts of Islam and the idolaters confronted each other the Messenger took a fistful of sand and threw it at the enemy saying, *May your faces be disfigured!* The sand filled their eyes and the companions of the Messenger started killing them. The cause of the enemy's defeat was that fistful of sand, which the Messenger had thrown at them. God revealed the verse *and it was not you who cast [terror into them, O Prophet], when you did cast it*, in this context.

Mir Ahmed Ali (AR) and Aqa Mahdi Puya (AR)

Those who safeguard themselves against evil with full awareness of divine laws receive guidance from Allah to distinguish between good and evil, so that they may follow the right path-the path of deliverance. Then, even if they have sinned but turn repentant unto Allah sincerely, Allah forgives them their sins.

Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani and a Group of Muslim Scholars *Commentary*

The current criterions of recognizing right from wrong are numerous. Among them are the followings:

A) Prophets and saints of Allah are criterions. An Islamic tradition says: “ *He who leaves Ali (AS) has really left Allah.*” (The index of *Ihqāqul-Haqq*, vol. 4, p.26)

B) The Book of Allah is a criterion. By adapting things with the Qur'an, the right can be recognized from wrong.

C) Piety is another criterion. When the storm of instincts, accompanied with love and enmity that are nourished from impiety, arrives, piety is dismissed and impiety hinders the recognition of facts:

The ability of the recognition between right and wrong is a knowledge given by Allah, and it does not merely depend on the ability of reading and writing or necessarily on the standard of knowledge.

The verse says:

“ O you who have Faith! If you be in awe of Allah He will assign for you a discrimination (between right and wrong) , and absolve you of your misdeeds, and forgive you, and Allah is the Lord of Mighty Grace.”

Fakhr-i-Rāzi has explained:

The expiation of sins is a concealment in this world, while ‘forgiveness’ is a deliverance from the punishment of Allah (SWT) in Hereafter.

According to the statements of some other commentators of the Qur’an, ‘expiation’ is to wipe out the social and psychological effects of sins, while forgiveness is a remission in respect to Hell.

Therefore, those who put aside the mental desires will recognize the truth, and their piety causes a proper insight to come forth in them and a great virtue and reward to be obtained.