

Loyalty and Obedience to God

H A R U N Y A H Y A

The Qur'an gives a detailed account of human nature. All the corruption and indecent personality traits of unbelievers are mentioned as well as the attributes of believers. The attributes of obedient believers off-returning to God, and into whom God breathed His Spirit, are what make up an exalted standard of character.

Surely, such a high standard of moral values pertaining to believers is in sharp contrast to that of unbelievers. Sincerity and trustworthiness throw into sharp relief the insincere and hypocritical nature of the unbelievers. Likewise, the generous, brave and modest attitude of believers is very different from the arrogant, ruthless and selfish behaviours of unbelievers. One feature which clearly distinguishes between these two groups- that is, between believers and unbelievers - is a sense of loyalty, or its absence. In its real sense, unbelievers can never remain true, solely due to the fact that they are motivated by self-interest: It often takes them just a matter of moments to turn away from a lifelong friend or a close relative. Likewise, they easily give up struggling or fighting for something they think as right.

However, the believers assume a totally different attitude. The criteria they apply to their deeds and lives plainly manifest themselves in the verse. Say:

"Truly, my prayer and my devotions, my life and my death, are (all) for God, the Cherisher of the Worlds." (Al-anam 162)

Consequently, those who have faith are considerate in their behaviours, aiming to attend the will of God, and remain committed to their people and purpose at any cost. On account of minor benefits, they never leave the righteous path and they demonstrate an unshakable and unswerving loyalty to believers and especially to the leader of believers. God describes the loyalty shown by the believers in the Qur'an as follows:

Among the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God: of them some have been true to their vows to the very end, and some still await their end: but they have never changed (their determination) in the least. (Al-Ahzap, 23)

Loyalty keeps all believers who fight for their faith directed towards one goal. This attribute, the essential characteristic of determination, is vital for any community of believers that is steadfast. A believer would fail to keep his self-respect if even once he demonstrated a minor neglect in his loyalty. Once one loses self-respect completely, one gradually approaches a point where one loses faith. Subsequently, things deteriorate very quickly and the backslider starts to behave in just the way an unbeliever or a hypocrite does. This is because unfaithfulness encourages a person to commit other significant kinds of deception. He first of all transgresses by trying to hide his disloyalty from other believers. Then he starts telling lies, making a sustained effort to deceive them. After a while, his 'talent' for telling lies, makes him feel that he can really dupe believers and starts to adopt a way of living based on deriving unfair benefits from them. This indicates a state of mind in which the deceiver feels no love for believers. In this mood, he seeks the pleasure of people rather than of God. That is why he strives after high prestige. He perceives anything likely to damage this prestige as a serious threat to his being and strives to protect himself by telling more lies. Meanwhile, as believers begin to detect his lies, he displays more of the traits of a hypocrite. At this point, he tries to exculpate himself. But this effort, turns him entirely into the type of a person who does not hesitate to form alliances with unbelievers and hypocrites.

The aforementioned sequence of events is striking in the sense that it reveals how certain disloyal kinds of behaviour, which are assumed to be minor and insignificant, can cause the individual to drift into unbelief. The truthful believers, on the other hand, steadfastly persevere in righteousness till the day of their death, since they owe their obedience to nobody but God. This fact is noted in the following verse:

He who obeys the Messenger, obeys God: But if any turn away, We have not sent you to watch over their (evil deeds). (An-Nisa, 80)

Being truthful is one of the most important subjects that a believer should be sensitive to. While informing us about hypocrites who are ever ready to escape from their obligations, God bids us give our attention to the pledge they take in the Qur'an about not turning their backs and accordingly states that such people bear a heavy responsibility.

And yet they had already sworn to God not to turn their backs in flight, and a covenant with God must (surely) be answered for. (Al-Ahzap, 15)

A pledge made to God is indeed a heavy responsibility. Hence, God commands the believers:

Nor sell the covenant of God for a miserable price: for with God is (a prize) far better for you, if you only knew. (An-Nahl, 95)

No doubt, the most significant sign of loyalty is obedience. Obedience is an essential attribute of believers, as stated in the Qur'an. It is actually the key to earning the mercy of God, to attaining Heaven and gaining a victory against unbelievers.

And obey God and the Messenger, so that you may obtain mercy. (Al-E-Imran, 132)

Those are limits set by God: those who obey God and His Messenger will be admitted to Gardens with rivers flowing beneath, to abide therein for ever and that will be the supreme achievement. (An-Nisa, 13)

You who believe! Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to God and His Messenger, if you do believe in God and the Last Day. That is best, and most suitable for final determination. (An-Nisa, 59)

We sent forth messengers, to be obeyed, by men in accordance with the will of God. If they had only, when they were unjust to themselves, come to you and asked God's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God indeed Forgiving and Most Merciful. But no, by the Lord, they can have no real faith, until they make you judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against Your decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction. (An-Nisa, 64-65)

All who obey God and the messenger shall dwell in the company of those whom God has favoured with His Grace: the prophets who teach, the sincere lovers of Truth, the witnesses who testify, and the Righteous who do good. Ah! what a beautiful companionship! (An-Nisa, 69)

Under all circumstances, believers should be committed to obedience for all time. Hypocrites, too, can be obedient, but only when the conditions are not so tough and demanding. However, in times of difficulty and trouble, only true believers persevere in their obedience. In the Qur'an, God informs us that hypocrites living in the time of the Prophet find the fight for faith to be difficult. However, they join believers in their struggle when they find that it means "immediate gain and an easy journey".

Go forth, whether unarmed or well-equipped and strive and struggle, with your goods and your persons, in the cause of God. That is best for you, if you but knew. If there had been immediate gain in sight, and the journey easy, they would all without doubt have followed you, but the distance was long, and weighed on them. They would indeed swear by God, "If we only could, we should certainly have come out with you:" They would destroy their own souls; for God knows that they are certainly lying. (At-Tawba, 41-42)

One of the main attributes of believers is to maintain their obedience in every situation and under all circumstances. The Qur'an informs us about the different attitudes of believers and hypocrites.

They say, "We believe in God and in the messenger, and we obey." but even after that, some of them turn away: they are not (really) believers. When they are summoned to God and His messenger, in order that He may judge between them, behold, some of them decline (to come). But if the right is on their side, they come to him with all submission. Is there a disease in their hearts? or do they doubt, or are they in fear, that God and His Messenger will deal unjustly with them? No, indeed, it is they themselves who do wrong. The answer of the believers, when summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, is no other than this: they say, "We hear and we obey." it is such as these who will attain felicity. It is such as obey God and His Messenger, and fear God and do right, who will win (in the end), They swear their strongest oaths by God that, if only you would command them, they would leave (their homes). Say: "Do not swear Obedience is (more) reasonable; truly, God is well acquainted with all that you do." Say: "Obey God, and obey the Messenger: but if you turn away, he is only responsible for the duty placed on him and you for that placed on you. If you obey him, you shall be rightly guided. The Messenger's duty is only to preach the clear Message. (Al-Nur, 47-54)

Obedience to the messenger should come from deep within the heart and with full commitment. The believers should acknowledge that the decision of the messenger is righteous and, accordingly, never have any doubts about their obedience. This is an extremely important issue, since obeying reluctantly is described in the Qur'an as a sign of disbelief:

"But no, by the Lord, they can have no (real) Faith, until they make you judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance to Your decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction. (An-Nisa, 65)

Obedience is a sure sign of one's faith in God and his total willingness to be a servant to Him. This is surely the only way to man's salvation. As God states in Surat' Al-Anfal, 24: "O you who believe! Give your response to God and His Messenger, when He calls you to that which will give you life." The messenger calls man to his eternal salvation. In another verse God states that the Messenger summons the believers to salvation, freedom, contentment and avoidance of evil.

In verse 157 of Surah Al-Araf God says:

"I will show mercy to those.....who follow the messenger, the Ummi whom they find mentioned in their own (scriptures),- in the law and the Gospel;- for he commands them to do what is just and forbids them to do what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); he releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. So it is those who believe in him, honour him, help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him, who will prosper." (Al-Araf,157)

The believers' victory over unbelievers is also dependent on their obedience to the Messenger and those charged with authority among them. In response to their obedience, God supports believers and grant them a glorious victory. The reverse is also true. In case of disobedience, they lose their power over unbelievers. God relates such an incident that took place in the prophet's time. in the following verse:

God did indeed fulfil His promise to you when, with His permission you were about to annihilate your enemy, until you flinched and fell to disputing about the order, and disobeyed it after He brought you in sight (of the booty) which you covet. Among you are some that hanker after this world and some that desire the Hereafter. Then He diverted you from your foes in order to test you, but He forgave you, for God is full of grace to those who believe. (Al-Imran, 152)

Salvation can be achieved only through obedience. Those who do not obey the Messenger and follow a path other than the one leading to righteousness, will eventually go to Hell. God makes this fact plain in the Qur'an as follows:

If anyone contends with the Messenger even after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, and follows a path other than that becoming to men of faith, We shall leave him on the path he has chosen, and consign him to Hell, what an evil refuge! (An-Nisa, 115)