Faith Depends Upon Knowledge

An Expression of Faith

Hazrat Abu Talib (‘a) took the Holy Prophet (s) under his protection after his (s) grandfather died. He also happened to be the Chief of the Elders of the Quraysh of Mecca.

The Quraysh were constantly warning Abu Talib (‘a) to control his nephew from spreading monotheism and deriding their gods, but he would silence them in his own courteous, but firm, manner. Islam went on spreading from household to household, from street to street, from tribe to tribe, but not without immense difficulties and obstacles placed in the path of the Muslims. The Holy Prophet (s) was never deterred by the threats he faced. However, he (s) suffered when he (s) saw the tortuous suffering of the believers.

As time passed, the Quraysh got unnerved with the growing influence of Muhammad’s (s) message, and called Abu Talib (‘a) to another meeting of the Elders.

They said, ‘We have respected your word and taken no action against your nephew. Now things are getting out of hand. He calls our gods helpless pieces of stone and wood, thus humiliating them, us, and our ancestors. We will tolerate this no more. We have come to warn you for the last time. If you do not stop him, we will no longer respect your leadership of the Quraysh, nor you. We have come to declare open war against you and your nephew from this day onward. Stop him or face our wrath!’

The elders of the Quraysh had never before, spoken so harshly to Abu Talib (‘a). He was aging and did not want to destroy the Hashimites by getting involved in a war with the Quraysh.

He called the Holy Prophet (s) and shared the threats of the Quraysh with him. He suggested he (s) should cease his activities for a while, to quieten down the seething Quraysh.

The Holy Prophet (s) spoke quietly, but firmly, ‘Dear Uncle! All I can say is that, if these people place the sun on my right hand and the moon on my left, and then ask me to stop conveying the Message, I will refuse to do so. I will not stop delivering the word of God till it is known to all, even if I lose my life in the process.’ The tears flowed down his (s) cheeks as he spoke. He got up and walked towards the door.

His uncle called him back and said, ‘If this is how you feel, continue your work. By God, I will protect you till my very last breath’.

Pure Love

The summers had become unbearable because of the drought. No relief was visible. The people of Medina were found often staring at the sky, in the hope of spying some clouds, but were always disappointed. The scarcity of food and water was giving the Medinites a hard time.

To top it all, reliable sources informed the Holy Prophet (s) of an invasion by the Romans. The large Roman army was seen forging ahead towards Syria in the north eastern part of the Islamic state, and it was a power to be dealt with. The Holy Prophet (s) announced plans to meet them near Syria and told all the Muslims to prepare for war. They would set out immediately.

The Muslims, exhausted by the climatic conditions, agreed with no great zeal. The hypocrites made all kinds of excuses to be relieved of participation, hoping to enjoy the harvest season with its wealth of fruit and grain. However, no one was granted relief, and they all set out with their meagre supplies of food and water. There were fears that they would run out of supplies before reaching Syria, and that thought did no good to those already unwilling to engage in war at that time.

The thirty thousand Muslims trudged on in the merciless heat. On the way, some Muslims of weak faith started returning to Medina. Suddenly, some companions noticed Kaab ibn e Maalik turn his horse and trot homewards. They informed the Holy Prophet (s) of his departure. The Holy Prophet (s) wasn't upset. He just said, 'Let him go. If there is an iota of good in him, God will send him back to you. If he doesn't return, be convinced that God has saved you from his evil-intentions.'

A few minutes later they cried, 'Kararah ibn e Rabei has also left us, Ya Rasool Allah!'

'Let him go. If there is an iota of good in him, God will send him back to you. If he doesn't return, be convinced that God has saved you from his evil-intentions.'

A few minutes later, they cried, 'Hilal ibn e Ummayya has also left.'

The Holy Prophet (s) repeated the same words.

Meanwhile, Abu Dharr's camel suddenly stood still and refused to move. He desperately tried to urge it on, but to no avail. Not wishing to be left too far behind, he gathered his things and started on foot. On the way, the heat and the weight he was carrying drained him of all energy. He felt he could not go any further, but refused to give up. Suddenly, his foot struck against a rock. He looked and found a pool of fresh rain water. Looking up he saw some clouds moving away. He just tasted the water, and finding it palatable, filled his leather water bag with it. He was anxious to reach the rest of the army, so he walked faster, even though the weight on his back had increased considerably. However, faith was his guiding power and he did not lose

heart.

The companions of the Prophet (s) made another announcement. 'Abu Dharr cannot be seen. He seems to have also left, Ya Rasool Allah!'

The Holy Prophet (s) sighed, and repeated the same words once more.

The path being rough and uneven, Abu Dharr's mouth was absolutely parched, but he saw the rear end of the army, and filled with joy, started running towards them.

The people at the rear end saw somebody trying his best to reach them. They stopped and announced, 'One of them is coming back, Ya Rasool Allah!'

'Dear Lord, let it be Abu Dharr.'

'It is Abu Dharr, it is Abu Dharr!' they cried in unison.

'Forgive him, my Lord, he is unparalleled in truthfulness,' prayed the Holy Prophet (s).

Abu Dharr reached the Holy Prophet (s), who had covered part of the distance between them, and collapsed at his (s) feet.

'Bring some water,' ordered the Holy Prophet (s).

'I have water with me, Ya Rasool Allah,' gasped Abu Dharr.

'Why did you not drink it and quench your thirst, Abu Dharr?'

'May my parents be accepted as ransom for you, Ya Rasool Allah. I struck a rock on the way and found fresh water behind it. When I tasted it and found it good, I thought of you, and vowed to drink it only after you had quenched your thirst with it.'

A Little Knowledge is a Dangerous Thing

Imam Jafar al-Sadiq ('a) heard of a person who everyone thought was very pious, honest, noble and God-fearing. In fact, he had earned a lot of fame because of his good deeds. The Imam ('a) was keen to meet him, so he went to his place, and found a huge crowd of disciples sitting there. In a glance he realized they were all ignorant, simple hearted folk.

Suddenly, the pious man left the crowd and went outside. The Imam ('a) followed him to observe his greatness himself.

The man stopped at a bread baking oven and picked up two loaves of bread and hid them under his cloak when the baker was not looking. The Imam ('a) giving him the benefit of doubt, thought he must have prepaid for them or would pay him later, but then the reason for hiding them from the baker left him wondering.

Still wondering, he saw the man stop at a fruit seller's shop and pick up two pomegranates, hide them under his cloak and walk on. The fruit seller remained unaware, unpaid.

The Imam ('a) was spellbound when he saw the man hand over the loaves of bread and the

pomegranates to an ailing person. He went to the man and accosted him, 'Excuse me, I have been watching you for the past few minutes and found your behavior extremely strange.' He explained why.

The man looked at him boldly, and said, 'You are Jafar ibn e Muhammad, aren't you?'

'Indeed, I am.'

'I admit that you are the progeny of the Holy Prophet (s) and as such, worthy of respect, but I'm afraid you are not only ignorant but foolish as well.'

'What makes you say that?'

'Your question itself is evidence of your ignorance and folly. You aren't even capable of understanding the simple mathematics of religion. Have you not read in the Holy Quran, "Every good deed will be multiplied by ten, whereas, an evil deed will be counted as one." Now listen. I stole two loaves of bread and two pomegranates. I committed four sins. On the other hand, I gave all four to an ailing person. Multiply four by ten and you get forty good deeds. I scored four sins and forty good deeds. If I subtract the sins from the good deeds, I still score thirty six good deeds. It is as simple as that! Now tell me, was your question foolish or not?'

'May Allah punish you with death! You are the one who is ignorant. You seem to have missed the Verse in the Holy Quran that says, "Allah accepts the deeds of only those who fear God." This simple mathematics is enough to reveal your miscalculations. You have admitted four sins yourself. You then distributed the property of others, stolen by you, as charity and alms. Four more sins have been added to your account making them eight, and not one, single good deed.' Saying this, the Imam ('a) walked away, leaving the man, with a little knowledge, dumbfounded.

Imam Jafar al-Sadiq ('a) related this incident to his friends himself. He further clarified it, saying, 'Personal interpretations and explanations, without sufficient knowledge and understanding, lead, not only you, in the wrong direction, but also continue misleading others'.

The Sound of Music

The sound of music and dance could be heard in the street. One could visualize the atmosphere within. Wine and women were satisfying the baser instincts of man.

A person, whose entire demeanour presented him as God-fearing, habituated to long late-night prostrations, passed by. A maid stepped out of the house to dispose the garbage in the corner of the street. The man stopped the maid and asked, 'Is the owner of this house a free man or a slave?'

'Free', she replied.

‘He is certainly free! Had he been a slave, he would not have disobeyed his Master, the Creator of the universe so boldly, and organized such a sinful gathering.’

This conversation delayed the maid, so, on her return, her master asked her, ‘What took you so long?’

She related the entire conversation to her master. The words, ‘Had he been a slave he would have respected his Master’s wishes,’ resounded in his ears. He was filled with horror, and ran towards the door and into the street, not even stopping to put on his shoes. He wanted to see the person who had said those words.

Gasping, he reached him at the end of the street next to his. To his horror, he stood before Imam Musa al-Kazim (‘a). He wept bitterly, and apologizing for his sinfulness, promised never again to indulge in such gatherings.

Never again, did he put his foot into any slipper or shoe. He wanted to remain in that state of repentance forever, the state he stood in, that day, before the Imam (‘a).

His name before this incident was Bashir ibn e Harris ibn e Abdur Rahman Maruzi. But after this incident he was given the title of ‘ Barefooted’, which later merged with his name and became Bashir Barefooted.

Never again, did he fall into the same sins and never did he break his pledge. Originally, he was considered one of the ‘rich and spoilt,’ but for the rest of his life he was seen as one of the .’’God-fearing and pious

Wine

Mansoor, the Abbasid ruler, invited Imam Jafar e Sadiq (‘a) to Iraq more than often. He was afraid of a revolt initiated by the followers of the Household of the Holy Prophet (s), so he wanted to keep an eye on the Imam (‘a). Often, he would not allow him to return to Medina for days on end.

During one such visit, the commander in chief of the army held a banquet to celebrate the circumcision of his son. All the senior officials of the royal court were invited, including Mansoor, the ruler. The Imam (‘a) was also invited.

The tablecloth was laid and all the guests seated on both sides. Dinner was served. Everyone started eating. A guest asked for water. Instead of water, he was handed a glass of wine. As soon as the Imam (‘a) saw the wine, he got up and left.

While he (‘a) was on his way out, he was urged to return, but he refused saying, ‘The Holy Prophet (s) has said that a person who sits before a tablecloth where wine is being served will .’invoke the curse of Allah upon himself

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It was the reign of the Abbasid ruler, Mutawakkil. He was notorious for his tyrannical behavior and vicious habits. One night, he was enjoying the company of his confidantes with wine in plenty, when one of them mentioned the regard and respect the Muslims had for Imam Ali an Naqi al Hadi (‘a). The mere mention of his (‘a) name drew an angry look from the king. He was always being informed by people how the Muslims obeyed the Imam (‘a) and how there were chances of a rebellion being planned in his house.

Mutawakkil, intoxicated with power and wine, ordered his assassins to take some guards and search the house and person of the Imam (‘a) immediately.

The royal guards set off, well armed to carry out the search. They reached the house of the Imam (‘a). They found him on his prayer mat, spread on the hard stony floor, communicating with his Lord. However, they first searched him and then every nook and corner of his house. They found nothing at all. Disappointed, they insisted that the king had summoned him to his court.

They reached his palace and took him to the drinking parlour. Everyone was relaxing with a glass of wine in hand. Mutawakkil ordered them to make the Imam (‘a) sit next to him. The Imam (‘a) sat down. Mutawakkil offered him a drink. He refused, saying he had never touched it in his life.

‘Let’s hear some verses of poetry from you, then.’

‘I am not a poet, but I do remember some verses of a poet, if you insist.’

‘It doesn’t matter whose verses they are, I want to be entertained, so go ahead.’

The Imam (‘a) recited the following verses:

Their homes they built, walls high and strong,
Heavily armed guards to protect them along;
But, all stood helpless before death, you know!
And lost in their struggle to survive, you know!
Dragged into graves from those castles were they
Into narrow, dark depths where, unfortunate, they lay;
‘Gone is your glory, your splendour, O where?’
Cried a voice, ‘your throne, your crown, O where?’
Luxury and lust were certainly not new
Thick parlour curtains always hid them from view;
Defeated, despised, stinking corpses today
In graves of dust, were they left to decay;

The dust they spat on, now above them lay,
Those faces of lust, just buried away;
Their bellies they filled with rich sumptuous food,
Now graves they filled, recording nothing good;
Gluttonous they remained for years on end,
Now for their deeds, in the grave, they fend!

The effect of these verses was devastating. The intoxicated company lost its pleasurable feelings and started sweating with fear. Mutawakkil threw his glass on the floor and burst into tears. The Light of truth showed them their true selves, but for how long? Impurity within can .be washed only by submitting to the truth, not silencing it