

## FORGIVENESS, TOLERANCE AND MAGNANIMITY

This section highlights narratives detailing instances where the Prophet Muhammad (p) chose to forgive those who had wronged him, particularly non-Muslims, even when he had the power to pursue justice.

### Case 9

#### The Prophet (p) Forgave the Jewish Lady who Poisoned Him

In an incident reported by Anas bin Malik, while the Prophet (p) was in Khaybar, a Jewish lady by the name of Zaynab bint al-Harith brought a piece of roasted sheep which she had poisoned for him. He ate it, and then realized that it was poisoned. *The Prophet (p) called for her, and she was brought to him. The companions asked him, "Shall we kill her?" He said, "No", thus pardoning her. Anas bin Malik said that he continued to notice the effect of the poison on the palate of the mouth of the Messenger of Allah (p)."*<sup>1</sup>

#### Supporting Texts

Allah says: *"And the food of those who were given the scripture (Jews and Christians) is permissible for you, and your food is permissible for them."* (Quran 5:5)

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<sup>1</sup>*Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol.3, Book 47, hadith no.786; *Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Sunan al-Kubra*, hadith no.15784; *Sunan Abu Dawud*, hadith no.4510; *Sahih Muslim*, hadith no.5834.

Allah also says, *"The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah: for (Allah) loves not those who do wrong."* (Qur'an 42:40)

*"... Let them pardon and forgive. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."* (Qur'an 24:22)

*"...and the Hour is surely coming, so overlook (O Muhammad (p)) their faults with gracious forgiveness."* (Qur'an 15:85)

*"...whoever then (injures or) acts aggressively against you, (it is permissible to) inflict injury on him proportionate (or similar) to the injury he has inflicted on you, and be careful (of your duty) to Allah, and know that Allah is with those who guard (against evil)."* (Qur'an 2:194)

Ali was reported to have said, *"If you hear the Jews and Christians dedicating their slaughtered animal to other than Allah, do not eat it; but if you did not hear them, eat it; for Allah has permitted their slaughtered animal, and He knows what they say."*<sup>2</sup>

The companion of the Prophet Muhammad (p), Abu Abdullah Al-Jadali said that he asked Aishah, the wife of the Prophet (p) about his character, and she replied, *"The Prophet (p) was not indecent, he was not obscene, he would not shout in the markets, and he would not respond to an evil deed with an evil deed, but rather he would pardon and overlook."*<sup>3</sup>

Someone said to Prophet Muhammad (p), *"Pray to Allah against the polytheist and curse them!"* The Prophet (p) replied, *"I have not been sent as an invoker of curses; I have only been sent as a mercy."*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ahmad bin Ali al-Razi al-Jassas, *Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1405AH, vol.1, p.155.

<sup>3</sup> *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, hadith no.2016.

<sup>4</sup> *Sahih Muslim*, hadith no.1192.

## Comments

Regarding the permissibility of eating the food or slaughtered animals of the People of the Scriptures (Christians and Jews) as clearly exemplified by the Prophet (p) in the hadith above, Ibn Qayyim said: *“The earliest generation of Muslims (salaf) were in unanimous agreement that the verse (i.e. Qur’an 5:5) refers to the slaughtered animals of the People of the Book – Christians and Jews.”*<sup>5</sup>

Related to this discussion, and while commenting on Qur’an 42:39, Ibn Kathir said: *“The Messenger of Allah forgave the eighty people who intended to harm him during the year of Al-Hudaibiyya, camping by the mountain of At-Tan`im. When he overpowered them, he set them free, even though he was in a position to take revenge on them. He also forgave Ghawrath bin Al-Harith who wanted to kill him and unsheathed his sword while he was sleeping. The Prophet woke up to find him pointing the sword at him. He reproached him angrily and the sword dropped. Then the Messenger of Allah picked up the sword and called his Companions. He told them what had happened, and he forgave the man. He also forgave Labid bin Asam who did magic to him; The Prophet (p) did not harm him when he overpowered him, and he forgave the Jewish lady who poisoned him on the day of Khaybar.”*<sup>6</sup>

## Implications and Lessons

The explicit permission by Allah in the Qur’an, and the example set by the Prophet (p) by accepting and eating meat from a non-Muslim, is evidence that Islam permits goodwill and friendship between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Also, as is clear from the hadith the Prophet (p) forgave the Jewish woman who attempted to murder him by poisoning the food, despite his having the power to punish her. This shows his

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<sup>5</sup> Muhammad bin Abi Bakr bin Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Ahkam ahl al-Dhimmah*, Dar Ibn Hazm, Beirut, 1418AH, vol. 1, p.502.

<sup>6</sup>Abu al-Fida’ Ismail Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Azim*, Dar al-Tayba li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi’i, Medina, 1999/1420AH, vol.7, p. 211.

magnanimity, readiness to forgive, and his level of tolerance for an offence done to him personally as grave as an attempt on his life by a non-Muslim.

This shows us that while seeking justice or equitable retribution for grievous wrongdoing is permissible in Islam, the Qur'an and examples from the Prophet's (p) life emphasize the preference for forgiveness and magnanimity where possible, especially when Muslims are in positions of power and authority. Where the pursuit of justice or retribution may be the most sensible and appropriate course of action, the Qur'an makes it categorically clear that such retribution or punishment must be proportionate to the wrong done. It is therefore prohibited for a Muslim to exact a punishment in the name of justice that is worse or more severe than the offence committed.<sup>7</sup>

This counters the argument held by some that Muslims in positions of authority and power should always be harsh, vengeful and intolerant towards people of other faiths who have shown enmity or hostility to them.

While it may not be easy to forgive in such difficult circumstances, Muslims should always try to be forgiving towards those who insult or try to hurt them, even if the wrong done was as serious as an attempt on life.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, Dar al-Taybah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'i, Medina, 1999/1420AH, vol.7, p.212.