

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله رب العالمين، و أفضل السلام و أتم التسليم على المبعوث رحمة للعالمين، سيدنا و مولانا و حبيبنا محمد النبي الأمي الأمين، صلوات الله عليه و على آله الطيبين الطاهرين و على أصحابه الغر الميامين و على التابعين لهم بإحسان إلى يوم الدين .

رَبَّنَا عَلَيْنِكَ تَوَكَّلْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ أَنبْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

To proceed,

Allah The Exalted in Might said in His Glorious Book:

اللَّهُ يَصْطَفِي مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَمِنَ النَّاسِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ

Allah elects messengers from among the angels and from among mankind; indeed, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. [22:75]

Indeed Allah has elevated the rank of the elect from among His creation- His messengers- sent from, and for, mankind. Their perfection is unrivalled due to a quality bestowed uniquely to them, عصمة, infallibility. Sinless and flawless, they represent the pinnacle of human accomplishment. Mankind are ordered to emulate them in order to attain the closeness and pleasure of Allah.

With the exception of the prophets, mankind are prone to sin and their actions are subject to error. No one is free from fault and deficiency.

The role of the messengers عليهم السلام was to call, guide, instruct, and advise their peoples to purify their creed from falsehoods, adopt the actions of righteousness, renounce the superstitions of their forefathers and abandon all forms of oppression.

This task is not restricted to the prophets, as Allah commanded His Messenger to declare that *dawah*, calling to Allah, is his vocation, and that of his followers. Allah said:

قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَى بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِي وَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

Say, “This is my way; I call to Allah with insight—I and whoever has followed me. And Highly Exalted be Allah, and I am not of those who associate (others with Allah).” [12:108]

The lofty station of the nation of Muhammad ﷺ is conditioned upon them enjoining good and denouncing evil, as Allah has said:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

You have been the best community that was ever brought forth for mankind: you command to what is fair and forbid what is deplorable and believe in Allah. [3:110]

The Messenger ﷺ set the example for his nation in not only accepting advice, but in loving the one who advises, or was the cause of him being directed by Allah.

On the authority of Anas رضي الله عنه who said:

Ibn Umm Maktoum came to the Messenger ﷺ while he was speaking to Ubay ibn Khalaf, and he (the Messenger) turned away from him (Ibn Umm Maktoum). Consequently, Allah revealed "He frowned and turned away" (chapter 80). Subsequently, the Messenger ﷺ would honour him (Ibn Umm Maktoum).

(مسند أبي يعلى) ((رقم/431/5)) (3123)

After concurring the reason of revelation, Al Qurtubi says, "Later, the Messenger ﷺ would spread his cloak for Ibn Umm Maktoum and greet him saying "Welcome to the one, because of whom, I was reproached by my Lord"."

The companions رضي الله عنهم loved their conduct to be corrected as is evident from our Master Abu Bakr's inaugural speech after the Messenger's passing:

Muhammad ibn Is-haaq said: Az-Zuhri reported to me that Anas ibn Maalik said: "When the people pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr in As-Saqeefah, the next day, Abu Bakr stood on the pulpit, praised Allaah and said: 'O people I have been appointed over you, though I am not the best among you. If I do good, then help me; and if I act wrongly, then correct me.'" (See Musannaf Abdur-Razzaq)

Perhaps the most fearful of falling into hypocrisy from among the companions was the Messenger's second minister, Umar ibnul Khattab رضي الله عنه, who famously said, "Allah's Mercy be upon the one who gifts to me my faults".

This was the way of our righteous predecessors, who valued *nasihah*, advice, and realised it's inseparability from Islam, as the Messenger ﷺ said,

On the authority of Tameem ibn Aus ad-Daree (ra):

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “The deen (religion) is naseehah (advice, sincerity).” We said, “To whom?” He (ﷺ) said, “To Allah, His Book, His Messenger, and to the leaders of the Muslims and their common folk.” [Muslim]

Accepting advice is obligatory on the condition that it is well placed- i.e. restoring a person to the boundaries of the Shari'ah, and delivered in accordance with the prophetic Sunnah. Sincerity alone is not sufficient, as Al-Fudail Ibn Iyaadh said in commentary of the verse from Surat Al Mulk, ((He is) The One Who created death and life to test who among you is best in deed) [67:2], "The "best deed" is the most sincere and accurate...Its sincerity is for it to be for Allah, and its accuracy is that it is upon the Sunnah".

Like our predecessors, I welcome sincere advice which places me on the path of those whom Allah جل مجده has bestowed His favour- the prophets, the upright in truthfulness (الصدّيقين), the martyrs and the righteous. Like them too, I am obligated to defend and clarify Allah's Shari'ah when it is attacked, undermined, distorted or misunderstood.

The personal attacks against me which have circulated recently, aim not only to malign my character, but question my very belief in Allah جل جلاله.

If not for the gross misunderstandings of Divine texts, the Prophetic statements, and the sayings of this ummah's scholars, I would have continued to ignore every malicious accusation levelled against me. But under the instruction of my mashayikh- who have made clear that my silence is an injustice to the Shari'ah- I am now compelled to make this statement in defence of the Allah's immaculate Deen.

On the 15th September '22, I delivered a short speech at a commemoration event for the late Queen Elizabeth II in the Regent's Park Mosque. In the speech I quoted the following words of the Messenger ﷺ, “You are Allah's witnesses on earth”. The full wording of the hadeeth is as follows:

Anas (May Allah be pleased with him) reported:

Some Companions passed by a funeral procession and the deceased was praised. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "It is confirmed." Then they passed by another funeral procession and they censured the deceased. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "It is confirmed." `Umar bin Al-Khattab (May Allah be pleased with him) said: "(O Messenger of Allah,) what do you mean by `It is confirmed?" He (ﷺ) replied, "You praised the first person, so Jannah was confirmed for him; and you censured the second, so the Fire was confirmed for him. You are Allah's witnesses on earth."

[Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

In light of my referencing of this hadeeth, I have been accused of apostasy and/or hypocrisy, which we seek refuge in Allah from. The following clarifies the meaning of being "Allah's witnesses", in addition to the ruling of praising a non-Muslim before and after their death.

What is *shahadah*?

Testimony, or *shahadah*, is one's account of another's condition based on what is apparent of that person's overt actions, and can only be detected through the five senses. *Shahadah* does not unveil what is hidden by nature from all the creation, including the angels.

The Shari'ah is clear in that people do not admit anyone into paradise or hellfire simply by virtue of testimony to their piety or corruption, respectively, rather it is Allah alone who decides the fate of His creation.

Kharijah bin Zaid bin Thabit narrated:

Um Al-'Ala', an Ansari woman who gave the pledge of allegiance to the Prophet (ﷺ) said to me, "The emigrants were distributed amongst us by drawing lots and we got in our share 'Uthman bin Mazh'un. We made him stay with us in our house. Then he suffered from a disease which proved fatal when he died and was given a bath and was shrouded in his clothes, Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) came I said, 'May Allah be merciful to you, O Abu As-Sa'ib! I testify that Allah has honoured you'. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, 'How do you know that Allah has honoured him?' I replied, 'O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)! Let my father be sacrificed for you! On whom else shall Allah bestow His honour?' The Prophet (ﷺ) said, 'No doubt, death came to him. By Allah, I too wish him good, but by Allah, I do not know what Allah will do with me though I am Allah's Messenger (ﷺ). (Um Al-'Ala' continues) By Allah, I never attested the piety of anyone after that."

[Bukhari:1243]

Muslim narrated in his chapter title "The Prohibition of Making Others Despair of the Mercy of Allah" that Jundub reported that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) stated that a person said:

Allah would not forgive such and such (person). Thereupon Allah the Exalted and Glorious, said: Who is he who adjures about Me that I would not grant pardon to so and so; I have granted pardon to so and so and blotted out his deeds (who took an oath that I would not grant pardon to him).

[Muslim:2621]

What does it mean to be "Allah's witnesses on earth"?

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا

And it is thus that We appointed you to be the community of the middle way so that you might be witnesses to all mankind and the Messenger might be a witness to you. [2:143]

It should be made clear in light of the above verse and others, that this Hadith is an extension of it. All of the Ummah is witness on the face of the earth. The witness should testify the truth as to what they see apparently. Witnesses are tasked with supporting any good, regardless of who actions it, and object to any wrong, regardless of who commits it.

The claim that referencing the hadeeth in question can only mean one thing is not only simplistic, but grossly ill-informed, or worse, a deliberate distortion of the meanings deduced by Islamic scholars over the ages. No consensus or agreement has ever been reached by scholars on the meaning of the hadeeth as it apparently conflicts (متعارض) with agreed upon principles of the Shari'ah derived from the aforementioned hadeeths. The range of meanings listed by Ibn Hajar and others include: the hadeeth is specific to the testimony of the companions who gave it; the testimony is specific against the two deceased men; the companions' testimony happened to coincide with the Divine Judgement; Allah inspires to the righteous the state of those who have died, in which case it is revealed to them, not determined by them; the hadeeth is abrogated by the unequivocally clear texts; praise and censure bear no effect; praise and censure do bear an effect like intercession does; among other sayings of the scholars over the centuries. See:

فتح الباري ج ٣ ص ٢٧٠

عمدة القاري ج ٨ ص 194 -

The simple claim that our testimony on a person's outer state is a final determination of their fate in the hereafter is not only erroneous, but inconsistent with a corpus of texts of the Shari'ah. Abu Huraira narrated:

"A man called Rifa`ah bin Zaid, from the tribe of Bani Ad-Dubaib, gifted a slave named Mid'am to Allah's Messenger. Allah's Messenger headed towards the valley of Al-Qura. When he reached the valley of Al-Qura an arrow was thrown by an unidentified person, struck and killed Mid'am who was making Allah's Messenger's camel kneel down. The people said, "Congratulations to him (the slave) for gaining Paradise." Allah's Messenger said, "No! By Him in Whose Hand my soul is, for the cloth which he stole from the spoils before its distribution on the day of Khaibar, is now burning over him." When the people heard that, a man brought one or two *shiraks* (leather straps of shoes) to the Prophet. The Prophet said, "One strap of fire", or he said, "Two straps of fire."

[Sahih Bukhari Book: 83, Hadith: 6792]

The companions witnessed to what they knew from the man's outward state, but in this case were corrected only through revelation. They were not reprimanded by the Messenger ﷺ for testifying to what they saw, as crucially, **shahadah is not judgement**.

Does praising a non-Muslim amount to approval of their disbelief?

There is no legal text prohibiting the praise of worthy qualities possessed by a non-Muslim. In fact, there is an overwhelming number of accounts in which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ praised non-Muslims, both during their lifetime, and after their death. It was the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah, Sayyiduna Muhammad ﷺ to state any goodness which was found in even a non-Muslim.

Praising non-Muslims who died upon disbelief

The Messenger ﷺ loved and adored his non-Muslim uncle Abu Taalib and grieved after his death. Ibn Sa'd reports that our master Ali رضي الله عنه informed the Messenger ﷺ of Abu Taalib's death, to which he wept. He then said "Go wash him, enshroud him, and bury him. May Allah forgive him and have mercy on him". Ali said, "I did so, while the Messenger ﷺ proceeded to perform *istighfaar* for him for days, remaining in his house out of sadness." This was before the prohibition revealed in At-Tawbah during the final phase of the Prophet's mission.

[طبقات ابن سعد ج 1 ص 123 طبعة بيروت سنة 1376]

The year in which Abu Talib and our mother Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her) died is famously known as the "Year of Sorrow".

The Messenger ﷺ also praised men who had died upon shirk including Al Mut'im ibn 'Adiy who had granted him safe passage into Makkah after losing his uncle Abu Taalib who had provided him protection until his death. Jubair the son of Al Mut'im narrated:

The Prophet ﷺ talked about war prisoners of Badr saying, "Had Al-Mut'im bin Adi been alive and interceded with me for these mean people, I would have freed them for his sake."

[Sahih Bukhari: 3139]

Commenting on this hadeeth, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bin Baaz said:

والمطعم كانت له يدٌ على النبي ﷺ؛ حين رجع من الطائف دخل في جواره إلى مكة، فأمصته قريش، وقالوا: مثلك لا يخفر. فكانت يدًا بيضاء للمطعم؛ ولهذا قال النبي ﷺ: لو كان حيًّا ثم كلمني في هؤلاء لتركتهم له.

هذا فيه شرعية مجازاة مَنْ له عليك يدٌ كريمة، وإظهار استحقاقه لذلك بعد وفاته....، وهذا من كرم الأخلاق: أن يُجازى المحسنون، وأن يُشكروا على إحسانهم، وأن تُذكر لهم هذه اليد الطيبة ولو بعد وفاتهم، من باب التشجيع على مكارم

الأخلاق، حتى ولو كان فاعلها كافرًا، من باب التشجيع على مكارم الأخلاق ومحاسن الأعمال والنفع لمن يستحق النفع. انتهى.

[شرح بلوغ المرام (الشرح القديم) 49 من حديث (لَوْ كَانَ الْمُطْعَمُ بْنُ عَدِي حَيًّا، ثُمَّ كَلِمَنِي فِي هَؤُلَاءِ النَّتْنَى لَتَرَكْتَهُمْ لَهُ]

The Messenger ﷺ also spoke so highly in praise of the *Hilful Fudool*, the Alliance of Virtue, a pact he witnessed pagan Arabs enter into, to defend the weak and oppressed.

Talha ibn Abdullah reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “I witnessed a pact of justice in the house of Abdullah ibn Jud’an that was more beloved to me than a herd of prize red camels. If I were called to it now in the time of Islam, I would respond.”

[As-Sunan al-Kubraa: 13080]

A further example of praise and consideration given to the laudable qualities of someone who had died upon disbelief is that of the Messenger's ﷺ testimony of the lofty character of Hatim at-Taa'i. When brought to the Messenger ﷺ after capture, Hatim's daughter invoked the high station her father had occupied among the Arabs for his impeccable service of all those in need (see Al-Bayhaqi's narration below). The Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم was touched by her words and said, "Release her. For her father used to love the best manners, and Allah loves the best manners".

قالت: يا محمد إن رأيت أن تخلي عني ولا تشمت بي أحياء العرب فإني ابنة سيد قومي، وإن أبي كان يحمي الذمار ويفك العاني ويشبع الجائع ويكسو العاري ويقري الضيف ويطعم الطعام ويفشي السلام ولم يرد طالب حاجة قط، وأنا ابنة حاتم طيء، فقال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: يا جارية هذه صفة المؤمنين حقًا لو كان أبوك مؤمنًا لترحمنا عليه، خلوا عنها فإن أباه كان يحب مكارم الأخلاق والله تعالى يحب مكارم الأخلاق، فقال أبو بردة بن نيار فقال: يا رسول الله والله يحب مكارم الأخلاق، فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: والذي نفسي بيده لا يدخل الجنة أحد إلا بحسن الخلق.

رواه البيهقي في "دلائل النبوة" (5 / 341)، ومختصرًا في "شعب الإيمان" (6 / 241).

The Messenger's testimony of these men's commendable and meritorious qualities constitutes praise of what is deserving of praise, and by no means implies his approval of their disbelief, which is an unspeakable assumption and vile insinuation.

The companions, too, were fair in their description of others, even if they were at war with them. When asked by the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab to describe the Romans, Amr ibn Al 'Aas listed four exemplary qualities of theirs, as Imam Ahmad and others reported from authentic chains that he said:

“They are the quickest to advance after retreat; they are the best people towards the needy, poor and weak; they are the gentlest people during social disorder/strife; and the fourth is a beautiful merit- they are the most resistant of people against the oppression of kings.”

[قال شعيب الأرنؤوط: إسناده صحيح على شرط الصحيح]

Praise of non-Muslims who died upon Islam

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ wed his daughter Zainab to Abu Al-`As bin Al- Rabi` who was a non-Muslim at the time. After Zainab migrated, Abu Al-`As bin Al- Rabi` joined in battle with Qureish in Badr against the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Despite this, the Messenger ﷺ praised him for his upright character. Al-Miswar bin Makhrama narrated:

“I heard him (The Messenger of Allah ﷺ) saying, "To proceed! I married one of my daughters (Zainab) to Abu Al-`As bin Al- Rabi` before Islam and he proved truthful in whatever he said to me." Muhammad in Amr ibn Halhalah reported from Ibn Shihab from Ali that 'Al-Miswar further said: “I heard the Prophet talking and he mentioned a son-in-law of his belonging to the tribe of Bani `Abd-Shams. He highly praised him concerning that relationship and said, “(Whenever) he spoke to me, he spoke the truth, and whenever he promised me, he fulfilled his promise.””

[Sahih Bukhari Book: 62, Hadith: 3775]

The Messenger ﷺ instructed his noble companions to escape persecution at the hands of the Meccans and head to a land where no one is treated unjustly. Such a description of Negus (*An-Najashi*) constitutes praise, as is inferred from the hadeeth of Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with her):

“Indeed in the land of Abyssinia is a king, under whom, no one is oppressed.”

[Al-Bayhaqi: 18190; Al-Albani, As-Silsalah as-Sahihah: 3190]

As we know, Allah willed for these two men to enter Islam and die as Muslims, but the praise they received was during their state of disbelief.

In his seerah, Ibn Ishaq mentions the story of Mukhayriq, a Jewish man who upheld his covenant with the Messenger ﷺ and died in battle against the Meccans. And when Muhammad ﷺ, who was seriously injured in that battle, was informed about the death of Mukhayriq, he confirmed, "He was the best of Jews." (See also: 502 /1 طبقات ابن سعد)

To clarify: my praise of the late Queen Elizabeth II was intended in the same spirit as our Master Muhammad's ﷺ praise of Mukhayriq. Any potential ambiguity in my speech can only be elucidated by myself- the speaker. Any judgement made is based on the intentions of the speaker, not the listener, as is known from the principles of the Shari'ah. But if there has been any shortcoming in my delivery or quoting, yes I apologise for this.

Conclusion

Universal principles and virtuous values are deserving of praise, regardless of who is characterised by them. Admirable qualities do not belong exclusively to one group of people to the exclusion of the rest of mankind.

Praise is not limited to friends and members of the same religious fraternity, but extended to those we differ with too. Justice is putting everything in its rightful place, and giving credit when credit is due, even to your detractor. Allah said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَا نُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۗ اْعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do. [5:8]

We ask Allah to inspire us with wisdom and guide us to His Path.

و صل اللهم وسلم وزد وبارك على سيدنا ومولانا وحبينا وقدوتنا وشفيعنا محمد و على آله و أصحابه و سلم.
سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ الْعِزَّةِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿١٨٠﴾ وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٨١﴾ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٨٢﴾

Mohammed Mahmoud

31st October 2022