

Islam – Religion of Mercy

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Allah ﷻ sent this religion of ours, Islam into this world and told the people that there is no compulsion to follow it. But stated clearly that those who reject falsehood and choose the truth (Islam) have grasped a firm handhold that will never break.

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ
اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Baqara 2: 256. *There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower.*

Allah ﷻ mentioned Islam as the religion that He chose for all mankind – a Divine Religion sent as a gift by our Rabb to honor us. He called it the completion of His favor on Rasoolullah ﷺ.

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

Ma'ida 5: 3 *This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.*

So what is this religion?

Islam is not the name of an ideology. It is the name of a practice. In any practice you go from one stage to another and your development depends on how much you practice and how well. Time and thoughtfulness are both essential. Like any martial art your proficiency depends on how much time you spend in thoughtful effort. That is why the Salaf spent the entire night in Salah and Dhikr. Thoughtful practice in connecting with Allah ﷻ. The goal of this practice was defined by Rasoolullah ﷺ as: *To worship Allah ﷻ as if you can see Him and though you can't see Him know that He sees you.* And that is the meaning of Al-Ihsaan. Which brings me to the Ayah that we all hear in every Juma Khutba:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ
يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

Nahl 16: 90. Verily, Allah enjoins Al-Adl (justice) and Al-Ihsan [mercy, excellence], and giving (help) to kith and kin and forbids Al-Fahsha' (all shameful deeds), and Al-Munkar (all sins), and Al-Baghy (oppression), He admonishes you, that you may take heed.

So what is Ihsaan after Adl? What is excellence after justice? Excellence after justice is what Allah ﷻ has mentioned many times in the Qur'an in the context of crime and punishment:

وَكَتَبْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ فِيهَا أَنَّ النَّفْسَ بِالنَّفْسِ وَالْعَيْنَ بِالْعَيْنِ وَالْأَنْفَ بِالْأَنْفِ وَالْأُذُنَ بِالْأُذُنِ
وَالسِّنَّ بِالسِّنِّ وَالْجُرُوحَ قِصَاصٌ فَمَن تَصَدَّقَ بِهِ فَهُوَ كَفَّارَةٌ لَّهُ وَمَن لَّمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ
فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

Ma'aida 5: 45. And We ordained therein for them: "Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal." But if anyone remits the retaliation by way of charity, it shall be for him an expiation. And whosoever does not judge by that which Allah has revealed, such are the Zalimun

Justice is equal retribution. But mercy is Ihsaan and Allah ﷻ promised to forgive sins – meaning that there is a reward in the Aakhira for the one who shows mercy even though he is entitled to retaliate. Islam is a religion of mercy. A religion that substituted man-made laws which promote oppression, discrimination and feudalism with a Divine Law which promotes, equality and justice.

Allah ﷻ said about Himself:

وَإِذَا جَاءَكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا فَقُلْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ أَنَّهُ

مَنْ عَمِلَ مِنْكُمْ سُوءًا بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ تَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَنَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

An'aam 6: 54. When those who believe in Our Ayat (revelation) come to you, say: "Salamun 'Alaikum" (peace be on you); your Rabb has written Mercy for Himself, so that, if any of you does evil in ignorance, and thereafter repents and does righteous good deeds then surely, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Rasoolullah ﷺ told us about the mercy of Allah ﷻ:

On the authority of Anas bin Malik ؓ, who said: I heard Rasoolullah ﷺ said

Allah ﷻ has said: "O son of Adam, so long as you call upon Me and ask of Me, I shall forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind. O son of Adam, were your sins to reach the clouds of the sky and were you then to ask forgiveness of Me, I would forgive you. O son of Adam, were you to come to Me with sins nearly as great as the earth and were you then to face Me, ascribing no partner to Me, I would bring you forgiveness as great as that."

Salman Al-Farisi reported: Rasoolullah ﷺ said, "Verily, Allah has one hundred portions of mercy. From one portion the creation has been given mercy between themselves and ninety-nine portions are reserved for the Day of Resurrection." (Muslim 2753, Sahih)

And Allah ﷻ said about His Forgiveness:

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

Zumar 39: 53. Say: "O 'Ibadi (My slaves) who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah, verily Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

And then Allah ﷻ does Ihsan and says:

إِلَّا مَن تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ

Furqan 25: 70. *Except those who repent and believe (in Islamic Monotheism), and do righteous deeds, for those, Allah will change their sins into good deeds, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.*

Punishing sins is justice. Forgiving sins is mercy and Ihsaan but what do you say to your Rabb who not only forgives but turns those sins into good deeds? That is Ihsaan in keeping with His Majesty and Grace. Nobody but Allah ﷻ can do such a thing.

Allah ﷻ sent Rasoolullah ﷺ as a Mercy to all the worlds, not only mankind and said:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

Anbiya 21: 107. *And We have sent you (O Muhammad) not but as a mercy for the 'Alamin (all that exists).*

Ayesha (RA) had been falsely accused or wrongdoing. Then Allah ﷻ revealed Ayaat declaring her innocence and prescribing punishment for those who wrongfully accuse chaste people. One of those was a poor relative of Abu Bakr Siddique ﷺ who was financially supported by Abu Bakr ﷺ. Quite naturally when his role was revealed in the sorry affair, Abu Bakr Siddique ﷺ cancelled his stipend. Allah ﷻ then revealed this Ayah defining the forgiveness which we should practice, even when wronged and said;

وَلَا يَأْتَلِ أُولُو الْفَضْلِ مِنْكُمْ وَالسَّعَةِ أَنْ يُؤْتُوا أُولِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

Noor 24: 22. *And let not those among you who are blessed with graces and wealth swear not to give (any sort of help) to their kinsmen, Al-Masakin (the poor), and those who left their homes for Allah's Cause. Let them pardon and forgive. Do you not love that Allah*

should forgive you? And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Abu Bakr Siddique ﷺ immediately reinstated the stipend. This was the nature of the Sahaba who obeyed every command of Allah ﷻ not blindly but with understanding – understanding who Allah ﷻ is and what their own relationship with Him was.

Allah ﷻ called forgiveness a sign of the Believers and said:

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَاطِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ
الْمُحْسِنِينَ

A'al Imraan 3: 134. Those who spend [in Allah's Cause] in prosperity and in adversity, who repress anger, and who pardon men; verily, Allah loves Al-Muhsininun

Hasan ibn Ali ﷺ was making Wudhu and his slave was pouring the water when due to inattention, water fell on his clothes. He looked up at the slave angrily. The slave recited the above Ayah and Hasan ﷺ freed him.

Rasoolullah ﷺ was in the Battle of Uhud. Uqbah bin Abi Waqqas threw a rock which hit Rasoolullah ﷺ in the face, drove two links of his chain mail into his face, broke his teeth and he fell back with concussion. The Sahaba thought he had died. When he regained consciousness, he was bleeding profusely from his face and was in severe agony. The Sahaba implored him and said, 'Ya Rasoolullah ﷺ surely now is the time for you to make dua against these Kuffar.' Rasoolullah ﷺ raised his hands and the Sahaba waited with baited breath to hear the dua of the Nabi. A dua that would bring down the wrath of Allah ﷻ on the enemy and completely destroy them. But instead what did they hear? Allahumaghfirli qawmi fa innahum la ya'lamoona

O Allah ﷻ, forgive my people for they do not know.

Rasoolullah ﷺ refused to make dua against his enemies who had harmed him.

And then finally when he entered Makkah as a conqueror he forgave everyone. When Sa'ad bin Obada ﷺ raised the slogan, 'Al Yawma Yawmul Malhama', (this day is a day of slaughter); Rasoolullah ﷺ countered it by declaring, 'Al Yawma Yawmul Marhama' (This day is a day of Mercy). Rasoolullah ﷺ destroyed his enemies by destroying enmity and taking away the moral imperative from them. That took the wind out of their sails and neutralized all causes for hatred. The result was that nobody could raise a voice favoring vendettas.

Finally, one of the most beautiful stories of the Seerah how Rasoolullah ﷺ corrected Abu Mahdura ﷺ when he was making fun of Sayyidina Bilal bin Rabah ﷺ making Adhaan during the campaign of Hunain.

Uqbah ibn Amir ﷺ reported: Rasoolullah ﷺ said: O Uqbah, reconcile whoever cuts you off, give to whoever deprives you, and pardon whoever wrongs you. (Bukhari, 2018, Sahih)

My brothers and sisters – Extraordinary goals inspire extraordinary effort. Nobody rises to low expectations. People rise to high expectations. Climbers standing at the base camp of Mount Everest don't need motivation speeches. The mountain motivates them. So now that you have heard all this, what do we intend to do in our lives to make mercy as part of how we deal with people? Because it is only in the action that the beauty of Islam is revealed.

Today, the task of joining hearts is like climbing Mount Everest. It is daunting, very difficult and perhaps even dangerous. But it is a task that is worth doing. It is a task at the end of which you can stand on the pinnacle and watch the expanse of this Ummah joined together on the same principles on which it was built when Allah ﷻ said:

إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ

Anbiya 21: 92 Truly! This, your Ummah [Brotherhood of Faith] is one Ummah, and I am your Rabb, therefore worship Me (Alone).

وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

Muminoon 23: 52 And verily! This your Ummah is one Ummah, and I am your Rabb, so have my Taqwa.

United in who we worship and who we try to please. United in our allegiance to Muhammad ﷺ from whom we take the way to please Allah ﷻ - the Sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ. United in concern for one another. United in standing up for one another. United in spreading good all around us to all those who share this planet with us – human or not. United in presenting the true image of Islam to a world which is steeped in ignorance about Islam, faced with negative people who claim that their actions which are against Islam are a reflection of it and so are hostile to a religion that is based on mercy.

My brothers and sisters, as I started this lecture, so shall I end it by reminding myself and you that Islam is the name of a practice. It is visible only in action. You can talk about Islam until the cows come home but nobody is interested in it. But if you live Islam and show the world what Islam really means for them and how it helps them to create societies based on compassion and mutual benefit, then and only then will people see Islam for what it really is, a religion of mercy.

It is up to us to show the mercy of Islam in our speech, actions, choices, communities and society. If we do that, then a day will surely come when our greatest defenders will be those who oppose us the most today. I ask Allah ﷻ to make us those who will live lives such as to enable that day to dawn very soon.