

Leave the problem pending

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

All the verses revealed in the Quran have some background, knowledge of which is very often necessary for a full understanding of the Quranic message. Certain verses of this kind appear in the chapter entitled Al-Muddaththir (Wrapped in his Cloak). This chapter was revealed when the Prophet was in Mecca. The city was at that time under the domination of idol-worshippers, who had placed 360 idols in the Kaba, a place of worship of the one God built by the Prophet Abraham.

The Prophet found this situation highly objectionable, but the first thing revealed to him was not the injunction: "Purify the Kaba of idols." On the contrary, the Prophet received the following verses in the chapter entitled Al-Muddaththir: "You, wrapped in your cloak, arise and give warning! Proclaim the glory of your Lord; purify your garments; shun uncleanness; do not bestow a favour in the expectation of receiving more in return; and for the sake of your Lord, be patient" (74:1-7).

The message of these verses was very clear: Remain patient, ignore the problem and spread the message of God by keeping the peace unilaterally. This piece of wisdom can be summed up thus: Avail of the opportunities and leave the problem pending.

Here "pending" means: "Waiting for something to happen." In terms of the situation, it meant that although the presence of idols was undesirable, the idols should not be touched. Instead all efforts should be made to peacefully spread the ideology of monotheism.

This formula revealed in the Quran was apparently religious in its application, but it applies equally to secular problems. Based on the law of nature, it gives us a proper starting point, the most important aspect of any problematic situation. The right starting point leads you to your goal, while the wrong starting point leads you nowhere.