

VIOLENCE: The Second Forbidden Tree

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Introduction

God created the first pair of humans - Adam and Eve and settled them in paradise. There was however one condition for their stay that they must not go near the *forbidden tree*. But Adam and Eve could not resist the continuous incitement by Satan for long and eventually ate the fruit of *the forbidden tree*. Soon after eating it, both of them realized that they had committed a sin and implored to God to seek repentance for their wrong-doing. The All-Merciful Lord forgave them but as per the condition they were now ousted from paradise and sent on Earth, though for a short period of trial. Basis the performance during this testing period God would take some into paradise and cast the evil doers into hell. This was the *first forbidden tree*, indulging in which led to man's expulsion from paradise.

The following instance is worth noting at this juncture. When the sons of Adam and Eve, Abel and Cain, got into a controversy, Abel got killed by his brother. At this the following verse was revealed in the Quran,

"Whoever killed a human being...shall be regarded as having killed all mankind and that whoever saved a human life shall be regarded as having saved all mankind." (5:32)

This verse clearly alludes to the fact that violence is the second forbidden tree and just as the condition for remaining in paradise was that man must not eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, the condition for getting back into paradise is that man must not do violence of any kind as any such act would be *haraam* in the absolute sense of the word.

The second forbidden tree

According to a tradition, a Companion once asked Prophet what they were to do if the enemy got into their house and attacked them. This question is repeatedly raised by Muslims world over today (be it Palestine, Kashmir etc). This seems to be their only point of discussion. In my opinion, indulging in such a conversation is utterly futile. This is because political disturbances shall always exist and never can there be an ideal political system therefore an imperfect political system can never be taken as an excuse for indulging into any sort of violence.

In reply to the question raised by the companion, Prophet Muhammad said that political deterioration is as per the law of nature and would therefore certainly creep into the system. He however advised him to

become the *good* son of Adam. He said this in the backdrop of the following verse of the Quran which is a conversation between the two sons of Adam before one killed the other:

*"If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you.
I fear god, the Lord of all worlds." (5:28)*

This verse indicates that it is preferable for a man to die at the hands of the aggressor instead of picking a fight. In other words, being killed would be a lesser evil than fighting. One who has the fear of God in his heart would not retaliate even in the face of a looming death threat. This clearly puts forth the point that evils are bound to occur in the society but one must not revolt against it. Seen in the light of the Creation Plan of God, freedom has been given to man with a choice to either use or misuse it. No man can abolish this God-given freedom of another man. Therefore, disturbances will always be there but they should in no way make believers resort to violence. Approaching the second forbidden tree of violence would tantamount to losing the ticket of paradise, *forever*.

Justifying the second forbidden tree

According to a tradition, Prophet Muhammad observed,

"In times to come, my community (qaum) will indulge into illegitimate acts"
(Musnad Ahmad)

This was said in reference of intake of liquor. When asked how, Prophet explained that people would consume alcohol and justify it by giving it a different name. The same is happening today. World over, violence is being perpetrated in the name of Islamic jihad. This amounts to justifying the second forbidden tree by calling it *jihad*. This is a very crucial scenario because by doing so man is putting his re-entry into paradise at stake. According to a verse from the Quran,

"And God calls to the Home of Peace." (10:25)

This means that God calls *peaceful people* to the Home of Peace. No where does the Quran say that paradise would be Darul-Unf (*'unf* means violence in Arabic) but those perpetrating violence consider paradise to be home of violence. It is pertinent to bear in mind that only those men and women would be allowed entry into paradise who have lived peacefully during the trial period on Earth and proven themselves as peaceful creatures before God.

Types of violence

There are two kinds of violence, *active* and *passive*. According to a Hadith, Prophet Muhammad said,

“By God, he is not a believer (3), whose nuisance (passive violence) disrupts the peace of his neighbour.” (Sahih Muslim)

The ill-feelings of hate, intolerance, revenge and being a nuisance in the society comprise *passive violence*. *Active violence* is the depicted in the bomb and gun culture. God will mete out similar punishment for those who indulge in any of these two types of violence and such persons would be debarred from receiving God's grace and mercy. Adam's act of eating the fruit of the forbidden tree was passive violence and Cain's act of killing Abel was active violence. Anyone who indulges in any of the two shall face eternal deprivation from paradise.

According to a Hadith,

“God grants to non-violence what He does not grant to violence.” (Sahih Muslim)

This means that God's blessings are for those alone who live peacefully in this world despite facing conditions of passive or active violence. This is tantamount to agreeing to God's scheme of things. It is an acceptance of the fact that since God has given total freedom to man which was a pre-requisite to man's trial. Therefore the misuse of his freedom by man is also governed by the mandate of God, which consequently leads to provocation. However, upon being provoked, a believer must exercise patience and not retaliate. In so doing, he would prove himself as a peaceful person before God.

According to a verse in the Quran,

“God will say, ‘This is the Day when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness. They shall dwell forever in Gardens through which rivers flow. God is pleased with them.’ (5:119)

This verse indicates that one who shall agree to the creation plan of God will find entry into paradise. This would be because being peaceful is an arduous task. It means that you exercise patience even when someone has created an unfavorable situation by misusing his freedom. That is, one would not resort to violence under any circumstance as that does not an option for a true believer.

Two illustrations

There are many examples in history which illustrate how violence has yielded nothing and that any result-oriented activity has been a result of peaceful endeavours. Let me cite two examples here. One is of the tataari tribe and the other of British rule in India.

The tataari tribe

In the 13th century, the tataari tribe completely overthrew the Abbasid Empire and brought a huge territory within its reign. Being a barbaric tribe, they went to the extent of destroying all mosques, killing the Caliph and enslaving hordes of Muslim men and women. According to *Ibn Aseer* (in *Al-kamil fit-tareekh*), the devastation caused by the tataaris was unprecedented. But then the unthinkable happened. In less than 50 years' time, the whole of tataari tribe embraced Islam and rebuilt the mosques they had destroyed and prayed there. How did this miracle happen?

In fact, tataaris were so dominant a race in those days that no one could imagine that they would become so overwhelmed by the religion of those whom they devastated and enslaved. This was because as tataaris overpowered the whole Empire, peace got established under compulsion. (For more, please refer to *Preachings of Islam* by *T.W.Arnold*). No one had the power to question the tataaris as to why did they enslave those men and women. It was these Muslims who became passive preachers and arouse the inquisitiveness among the taataris about Islam. Since tataaris had no religion of their own, they became influenced by the teachings of Islam and gradually hordes of their fellow tribesmen embraced Islam. Giving an account of this revolutionary change, an Orientalist has written that *the religion of Muslims conquered where the arms had failed*. This was the miracle of peace.

The British Empire in India

British Empire established itself in India during 1857 and ruled for a period of two hundred years. All the Muslims revolted against the British rule but their struggles yielded no result. The Empire disintegrated by itself as a result of the aftermath of the Second World War as it had left them drained – financially and militarily. Therefore the result-less ‘jihad’ undertaken by Muslims and their ulema only led to loss of lives and Muslims becoming disloyal in the eyes of British.

VIOLENCE THEREFORE IS HARAAM IN ISLAM IN THE ABOLUTE SENSE OF THE WORD. The only exception is that when an aggressor launches an offensive on an established state, the latter must make every attempt to negotiate and try all means of averting the war. If nothing works only then can the state alone (*no non-government organization*) use its prerogative to declare a defensive war (*sawafil umra*) in a very limited sense. This is the domain of the ruler alone and no common man or a non-governmental body has *any* right to take up arms or resort to violence of any kind.

The above stated matter needs serious attention. If any individual or any non-government organization resorts to violence, it does so at the grave risk of being expelled from paradise. The only option for them is to resort to peaceful struggle.

Conclusion

It is important to bear in mind that only those shall enter paradise who prove in this world that they were not involved in any kind of violence – active or passive and were free from all negative complexes. This is because violence leads to perpetration of greater evil in the world. And *nothing* justifies violence. According to a tradition, a companion said,

“One who does not tolerate the lesser evil by a person will have to tolerate greater evil perpetrated by him.” (Al-Tabrani)

Because evil-free society does not exist, one therefore must tolerate lesser evil in this world or else be ready to face the effects of greater evil. I fully agree with the UNESCO dictum that *violence begins from the mind*. When mind becomes a victim of negative thinking and anger it leads to provocation on small issues. If

inconsequential issues can be diffused immediately, they would never take up a harmful form. But if they are mulled over on a continuous basis, only negative result can be produced from it.

History is replete with examples of how violence has never led to any constructive outcome. According to a tradition of Umar Farooq,

"A wise man is not one who knows what is good or bad but one who knows which is lesser evil out of the two." (Al-Tabrani)

Therefore we do not have a choice between evil and evil-free society but between lesser and greater evil. Involving oneself in violence tantamounts to taking a huge risk. So, we must diffuse negativity and manage so that we do not land at the doorstep of hell!

May God give us the guidance to manage the lesser evil and save ourselves from the fire of hell!