

Part 10 Surah 8 Al-Anfal Verses 45-49

Since all things are conducted by God and victory is granted by Him, while neither numerical strength nor superior firepower can resolve a confrontation or determine the outcome of a battle, the believers should remain steadfast and persevere when they meet unbelievers in battle. What they should do, however, is to have the proper equipment for the battle and take the measures that keep on the right footing their relationship with God who has the final say over all matters. It is He who grants effective support and commands all power and authority. They must also avoid the causes of defeat which led the unbelievers to be vanquished despite their great numbers and superior equipment. They must rid themselves of conceit, arrogance and falsehood. They should guard against falling prey to Satan's deception, for it was he who led the unbelievers to their destruction. They must place their trust in God alone.

45-47 Eliminating Causes of Failure

Believers, when you meet an enemy force, be firm, and remember God often, so that you may be successful. (45) Obey God and His Messenger and do not dispute with one another, lest you lose heart and your moral strength. Be patient in adversity, for God is with those who are patient in adversity. (46) Do not be like those who left their homes full of self-conceit, seeking to be seen and praised by others. They debar others from the path of God; but God has knowledge of all that they do. (47) Satan made their deeds seem fair to them, and said: 'No one can overcome you today, and I will stand firm by you.' But when the two hosts came within sight of each other, he turned on his heels and said: 'I am done with you, for I can see what you cannot. I fear God, for God is severe in retribution.' (48) The hypocrites and those in whose hearts there was disease said: 'Their faith has deluded these people.' But he who puts his trust in God knows that God is Almighty, Wise. (49)

In these verses we have a host of inspiring touches, rules, directives, scenes and attitudes; all relating to the battle. Ideas, feelings and inner thoughts are portrayed which normally need much greater space to describe, but they are all most vividly delineated here in the unique style of the Qur'an.

They start with an address to the believers, which is one of many in the *surah*, instructing them to stand firm when they meet their enemy. They should also try to acquire all that is needed to ensure victory.

Believers, when you meet an enemy force, be firm, and remember God often, so that you may be successful. (45) Obey God and His Messenger and do not dispute with one another, lest you lose heart and your moral strength. Be patient in adversity, for God is with those who are patient in adversity. (46) Do not be like those who left their homes full of self-conceit, seeking to be seen

adversity. All that they said was this: 'Our Lord! forgive us our sins and our excesses in our affairs. Make firm our steps, and give us victory over the unbelievers.'" (3: 146-147)

This type of education was well taken by the early Muslim community. They adopted the same attitude whenever they had to meet an enemy in battle. Later, the Qur'an speaks about those who suffered a reversal in the Battle of Uhud. When they were required to go on a new campaign the following day, they showed that they could rise to the highest level of steadfastness: "When other people warned them: 'A big force has gathered against you, so fear them,' that only strengthened their faith and they answered: 'God is enough for us; He is the best Guardian.'" (3: 173)

Remembering God at the time of encountering an enemy is useful in a variety of ways. To start with, it provides a direct link with the Power that can never be overcome. It is a demonstration of placing all trust in God who is certain to support His servants. At the same time it brings to the forefront the nature of the battle, its causes and goals. It is a battle for God, to establish His authority on earth and to overthrow all tyrants who try to usurp this authority. In short it is a fight to make God's word supreme. It has no motive of imposing the authority of any person, group or nation, or making any personal or national gain. It also emphasizes the importance of the duty of remembering God even at the most difficult time.

Obedience to God and His Messenger ensures that the believers go into the battle submitting themselves totally to God. There will be no room for any cause of conflict or dispute: "Do not dispute with one another, lest you lose heart and your moral strength..." (46) People fall into dispute when they have different authorities which they look to for leadership and guidance, or when desire is the ultimate factor that shapes people's views and ideas. When people obey only God and His Messenger, the main cause of dispute between them disappears, no matter how much their views differ over the question under discussion. Having different views is never a cause of dispute and conflict. What causes conflict is desire, making everyone insist that his view is the one to follow, even when it appears to be wrong. Desire causes 'self' to be placed in opposition to 'right' and attaching more importance to self in the first place. For this reason, Muslims are given this directive to obey God and His Messenger at the time of battle. It is a question of discipline that is essential in battle. It is an obedience to the High Command which reflects itself in a genuine obedience to the leader in command of the Muslim forces. Thus it is different from the rigid and superficial discipline in the ranks of armies that do not fight for God's cause, and in which loyalty to commanders is not based on loyalty and submission to God. The gulf between the two is great indeed.

and praised by others. They debar others from the path of God; but God has knowledge of all that they do. (47)

This includes a steadfast attitude, frequent remembrance of God to maintain their relationship with Him, obedience to God and His Messenger, avoidance of internal conflict and dispute, patience in adversity, perseverance in battle, and steering away from conceit, showing off and persecution of others.

Steadfastness is the first step to victory, and the party that is more steadfast is the one which has the upper hand. Although the believers cannot tell, their enemy may be suffering even more than what they themselves are suffering. Their enemy may even be enduring more pain, although that enemy could not hope to receive support from God as they hope to do. It may be that if the believers only remain steadfast for a moment longer, their enemy will collapse and be vanquished. Why should the believers ever feel shaken when they are certain that they will have either one of the best two alternatives: victory or martyrdom? Their enemy, on the other hand, aims at nothing further than the life of this world. This explains why unbelievers are so keen to achieve material superiority in this life which is the ultimate they hope for, since they have no hope in the life to come.

Frequent remembrance of God at the time when an encounter with the enemy is imminent is a constant directive to believers. It is a consistent teaching that becomes well engraved in the hearts of believers. Indeed the Qur'an shows it as a feature of the community of believers in their long history. The Qur'an tells us about the sorcerers Pharaoh gathered for a contest with Moses. When they submitted to the faith after they had realized that it represented the truth, Pharaoh issued them with a highly frightening warning outlining the punishment which he would inflict on them, unless they abandoned their new faith. Their response was: "You want to take vengeance on us only because we have believed in the signs of our Lord when they were shown to us. Our Lord, grant us abundance of patience in adversity, and let us die as people who have surrendered themselves to You." (7: 126) The Qur'an also mentions the case of a small band of believers among the Children of Israel who were facing the might of Goliath and his army: "When they came face to face with Goliath and his troops, they prayed, 'Our Lord, grant us patience, make firm our steps, and grant us victory over the unbelievers.'" (2: 250)

In the Qur'anic accounts of the attitudes of believing communities as they were fighting their battles we read the following statement: "Many a Prophet has fought with many devout men alongside him. They never lost heart on account of what they had to suffer in God's cause, and neither did they weaken nor succumb. God loves those who are patient in

Steadfastness and patience in adversity are also essential in any fight, whether internal within oneself, or on the battlefield: "Be patient in adversity, for God is with those who are patient in adversity." (46) Being with God will certainly ensure success and victory for those who are steadfast.

The last directive is given as follows: "Do not be like those who left their homes full of self-conceit, seeking to be seen and praised by others. They debar others from the path of God; but God has knowledge of all that they do." (47)

The purpose of this directive is to protect the community of believers against going out to fight, with an attitude of conceit, keen to show off, boasting of their own strength and using the blessing of power God has granted them for a purpose other than that of which He approves. Believers go out to fight for God's cause, to establish His authority and Lordship over human life, and to ensure people's submission to Him alone. They seek to destroy the tyrants who usurp God's authority and claim sovereignty for themselves, having no basis for their claim in the form of a permission granted by God or His law. They fight to declare the liberation of mankind throughout the world from any bondage to any authority, since such bondage represents a humiliation of man. Believers fight in order to protect people's rights, freedom and integrity, not to humiliate other races and peoples through the abuse of the power God has granted them. They go out to fight seeking no personal gain whatsoever. Victory brings them nothing other than having obeyed God's command to go on jihad, to establish the code of living He has revealed, to make God's word supreme and to seek His grace and pleasure. Even the spoils of war that believers may gain are viewed as an aspect of grace bestowed by none other than God.

47-48 False Pretences, False Promises

The believers had just seen the Quraysh leave their homes full of self-conceit, eager to be praised by others. They also witnessed the consequences of such an arrogant demonstration. The Quraysh mustered all their pride, power and prestige to defy God and His Messenger. By the end of the day the Quraysh returned home with their pride tarnished, their prestige shattered and their might totally destroyed. Here God reminds the community of believers of a recent situation that gave them much to think about: "Do not be like those who left their homes full of self-conceit, seeking to be seen and praised by others. They debar others from the path of God; but God has knowledge of all that they do." (47)

All the arrogance, self-conceit, and praise-seeking were clear in what Abu Jahl, who commanded the Quraysh forces in the battle, said to Abū Sufyan's messenger. The latter was the leader of the trade caravan the Muslims sought

to intercept in compensation for their property confiscated by the Quraysh. When he and his caravan managed to escape unharmed by his Muslim pursuers, he sent a message to Abu Jahl asking him to return with the Quraysh army, as there was no longer any reason for the Quraysh to fight the Muslims. Abu Jahl said: "No. By God we will not go back home until we have reached Badr. We will stay there for three days, slaughtering camels for food, feeding whoever comes to us, drinking wine and listening to music and singers. The Arabs will then hold us in awe for the rest of time." When Abū Sufyan's messenger told him of Abu Jahl's answer, he said: "Pity to my people. This is the action of 'Amr ibn Hisham (i.e. Abu Jahl). He does not wish to come back because he put himself at the helm and acted unjustly. Injustice brings shame and bad omen. If Muhammad wins the fight, we will be humiliated." Abū Sufyan was a man of foresight: Muhammad (peace be upon him) scored a great victory and the unbelievers were badly humiliated as a result of their arrogance, injustice and debarring of other people from God's path. The Battle of Badr was a very severe blow to them. "God has knowledge of all that they do." (47) Nothing escapes Him. Nor can their might stand up to His power. He overpowers them and knows all their actions. The *surah* goes on to describe how Satan persuaded the unbelievers to go out for a fight that led to their defeat and humiliation: "*Satan made their deeds seem fair to them, and said: 'No one can overcome you today, and I will stand firm by you.'* But when the two hosts came within sight of each other, he turned on his heels and said: 'I am done with you, for I can see what you cannot. I fear God, for God is severe in retribution.'" (48)

We have several reports that refer to this verse and to what it relates. However, none of these is attributed to the Prophet himself, with the exception of one that is graded as poor in authenticity. This report attributes the following statement to the Prophet: "Iblis is never seen to be more insignificant, humiliated or depressed as he normally is on the day of attendance at 'Arafat, as he witnesses God's forgiveness, mercy and grace being bestowed on people; except for what he saw on the day of Badr." People asked the Prophet: "What did he see on the day of Badr?" He answered: "He saw Gabriel marshalling the angels."

The other reports quote 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, Qatadah, al-Hasan and Muhammad ibn Ka'b. Here are some examples of these, related by al-Ṭabari: "Ibn 'Abbas reports: Iblis came on the day of Badr with a company of satans raising a banner in the form of a man from the Mudlij clan, while Satan himself took the form of Suraqah ibn Malik. He said to the unbelievers, 'No human host can overcome you today, and I will stand firm by you.' When the two armies were marshalled, the Prophet took a handful of dust and threw it at the unbelievers. They started to flee. Jubayr came to Iblis only to find him

and assured them of his protection, nor how he turned on his heels and said what is reported in the Qur'an of his statements.

We cannot say anything about 'how' all these matters took place and in what form they were done. Everything that concerns Satan belongs to the realm that lies beyond the reach of our human perception. We have no way of knowing exactly 'how' such matters occur, except in as much as the Qur'anic statement relates. The statement we have here confirms the event but does not mention how it happened. We prefer not to go any further than that.

We do not support the line of thinking advocated by the school of Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh which tries to find an interpretation that denies any physical presence or effect for anything that belongs to the world beyond. In connection with this particular verse, Shaikh Rashid Rida says:

"*Satan made their deeds seem fair to them, and said: 'No one can overcome you today, and I will stand firm by you...'* (48)" The verse implies an order to the Prophet to tell the believers how Satan made the deeds of the unbelievers seem fair to them by his whispering to them and giving them the impression that no force could overcome them, whether it be the weak band of Muhammad's followers or any other tribe, because they could command a larger and more courageous force. He further impressed on them that he was going to give them firm support. Al-Baydawi says in his commentary: "Satan misguided them into believing that by following him in such actions as they might have thought to earn God's pleasure would be sufficient to protect them. They were so deceived that they prayed to God to give victory to the group which followed the better of the two religions."

"*When the two hosts came within sight of each other, he turned on his heels...'* (48)" When the two armies drew close to each other and each could have a clear idea of what situation the other was in, and before the actual battle started, he drew back and turned away. Commentators who say that 'coming within sight of each other' means drawing close to each other are rather mistaken. What is meant here is that at this juncture he stopped his whisperings to them and his attempts to delude them. The statement is figurative in the sense that Satan's whispering is depicted in terms of a movement similar to that of a person coming towards something he wants, and the stopping of these whispers as leaving that thing alone and turning away from it. The Qur'anic account goes further to indicate that Satan abandons them and disassociates himself from them altogether: "(He) said: 'I am done with you, for I can see what you cannot. I fear God, for God is severe in retribution.'" (48) This means that as he declared he had nothing to do with them, he feared that they were doomed, particularly since he saw that God had sent the angels to support the Muslims. The phrase ending this

holding a man from the unbelievers by the hand. Iblis withdrew his hand quickly and retreated with his assistants. The man said: 'Suraqah, have you not pledged to stand firm by us?' He said: 'I see what you cannot see. I fear God, for God is severe in retribution.'

'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr reports: "When the Quraysh made up their minds to go out in defence of the caravan, they remembered the conflict between them and the Bakr tribe. They were so worried that they began to have second thoughts. Iblis appeared to them in the shape of Suraqah ibn Malik of the Mudlij clan, who was a highly respected chief of the Kinanah tribe. He said to them: 'I shall stand firm by you and make sure that the Kinanah will not try to attack you from behind while you are away.' They continued with their preparations and moved fast."

Qatadah reports on the subject of the verse mentioning how Satan persuaded the unbelievers to take up arms against the Muslims: "We have been told that he (meaning Satan) saw Gabriel with the angels coming down to support the believers and he claimed that he had no power to counter that of the angels. He said as he saw them: "*I am done with you, for I can see what you cannot. I fear God...'* (48)" He was certainly lying for he, a sworn enemy of God, had no fear of God in his heart. He realized that he had no power and could extend no protection to anyone. It is in his nature to let down those who believe in him and do his bidding. Once the truth comes face to face with falsehood, he turns away, unscrupulously letting them down and declaring that he has nothing to do with them."

Following our chosen approach in this commentary, we prefer not to discuss matters which relate to the world that lies beyond our human perception in any degree of detail, when we do not have a Qur'anic statement or a highly authentic *hadith* to explain them. Such matters require a statement of this type to formulate a conceptual belief. However, we do not adopt a negative attitude either. In this particular case, we have a Qur'anic statement that tells us that Satan did make their deeds seem fair to the unbelievers and encouraged them to raise an army and march to fight the Muslims, promising them support and protection. Later when the two hosts were within sight of each other, "he turned on his heels and said: 'I am done with you, for I can see what you cannot. I fear God, for God is severe in retribution.'" (48) Thus he let them down, keeping no promise he had given them, and leaving them to suffer the outcome of their actions on their own. We have no idea how he made their actions seem fair to them, nor how he said to them that they could not be overcome by any human power on that particular day. Neither do we have any idea how Satan promised them support

verse, "*God is severe in retribution,*" may be part of Satan's own statement and it may be a new statement commenting on the event itself...

The meaning of these statements, then, is that the disciples of the evil one were active among the unbelievers, working on their evil souls, whispering to them to delude them and to give them a false sense of power. At the same time the angels were working on the noble souls of the believers to give them support and to increase their confidence that God's promise of victory would certainly come true.¹

There is a clear tendency here to interpret the actions of the angels as merely making an impression on the souls of the believers. This commentator also states firmly that the angels did not take part in the fighting, despite the fact that God says to the angels: "*Strike, then, their necks and strike off their every fingertip.*" (12) He further describes Satan's actions as working on the unbelievers' souls. Such interpretation is typical of the line this school follows. It is similar to the interpretation given by Shaikh Muhammad 'Abduh when he comments on *Surah* 105 which describes how God destroyed the Abyssinians who came with a large army to destroy the Ka'bah and at the head of the army marched an elephant. The *surah* states: "*Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the people of the elephant? Did He not cause their treacherous plan to be futile, and send against them flights of birds, which pelted them with stones of sand and clay? Thus He made them like devoured dry leaves.*" (105: 1-5) In his commentary Shaikh Muhammad 'Abduh says that those 'stones of sand and clay' could be only the smallpox virus. Such an approach carries matters too far. It unnecessarily seeks to interpret matters that belong to the world beyond in terms of what is familiar to us in our world, when there is nothing to prevent these statements from meaning exactly what they say. All that is needed is not to try to go further than the clear meaning of every such statement. This is our chosen approach.²

49 Deception Compounded by Short-Sightedness

While Satan was working hard, trying to delude the unbelievers and encouraging them to go out in force to fight the believers then abandoning them at their time of need, the hypocrites and those who were sick at heart thought the worst of what fate the Muslims would be facing. They looked at the small band of believers facing up to a much superior force. Thinking only in material

¹ M. Rashid Rida, *Tafsir al-Manar*. Dar al-Ma'rifa, Beirut, Vol. X, pp. 27-28

² The author comments on this *surah* in detail and discusses Shaikh 'Abduh's view in Vol. XVIII pp. 252-257. — Editor's note.

terms, they felt that the believers brought upon themselves a woeful doom, deluded by their faith, thinking that faith would bring them victory or at least give them protection: *"The hypocrites and those in whose hearts there was disease said: 'Their faith has deluded these people...' (49)"*. Some scholars say about this group that they were Makkans who looked favourably upon Islam but who stopped short of accepting it. They went out with the Quraysh army, uncertain of their own attitude. When they realized how superior the forces of the unbelievers were they said this about the Muslims.

The hypocrites and those who are sick at heart are unable to understand the true causes of defeat or victory. They only look at appearances and have no means of understanding the true nature of anything that is not physically apparent. They cannot appreciate the power of faith and what effect trusting God and relying on Him bring about. They cannot see how believers cannot be overawed by forces that do not rely on a firm belief in God. Hence it is understandable that they should think the believers to be deluded by their faith, bringing themselves to ruin as they faced a far superior force.

Any situation may have the same physical appearance in the eyes of believers and those whose hearts are devoid of faith. What is different, however, is how they look at any situation and how they evaluate it. Unbelievers do not see anything beyond the physical appearance, while those who have faith see the reality that lies beyond it. They are able to see all the forces that have an influence on it and balance between them accurately. The fact that believers understand and from which they derive reassurance is that to which the conclusion of this verse alludes: *"But he who puts his trust in God knows that God is Almighty, Wise." (49)* But this fact is withheld from those hearts that have no faith. Yet it is the one that tilts the balance and determines the outcome of the conflict between the two groups every time and everywhere.

On the day of Badr the hypocrites and those who were sick at heart said about the Muslim group, *"their faith has deluded these people..." (49)* This is the same thing that such people say whenever they see the advocates of Islam confronting the mightier forces of tyranny, when their main equipment is basically this religion, their unshakeable faith in its truth, their burning desire to defend what God has made sacred and their reliance on God and trust in Him.

The hypocrites and those who are sick at heart stand idle, watching the advocates of Islam as they firmly stand up to the forces of falsehood, deriding their attitude that makes little of the dangers to which they expose themselves when they take on such mightier forces. At the same time, they are full of admiration for such people who are willing to take such great risks for their

cause. They cannot understand why anyone should be willing to be exposed to such great dangers. They view everything in life, including faith and religion, as little more than a business deal. If they feel they can profit by it then they will take it up without question, but if it involves risk taking, then they do not want to have anything to do with it. They are unable to see matters from the point of view of a believer, and they cannot evaluate matters using the perspective of faith. From a believer's point of view, the deal is a highly profitable one in all circumstances. It leads to one of the two best eventualities: victory which brings about the implementation of faith in practical life or martyrdom which ensures admittance into heaven. Besides, the balance of power is viewed differently by the believer. God Himself is involved, but the hypocrites and those who are sick at heart do not take God's power into account.

The advocates of Islam, wherever they may be and in whichever period in history they live, are called upon to use the standard of faith when they evaluate matters. They must look at everything in the light of God's guidance. They must not be overawed by the mighty forces of evil, thinking that they have little power of their own. How could they think themselves to be weak when they have God on their side? They must always pay heed to the instructions God gives to the believers: *"He who puts his trust in God knows that God is Almighty, Wise." (49)*