

Part 17 Surah 22 Al-Haj Verses 38-41

Permission to Fight 38-41

It is imperative that such worship rituals be conducted safely away from those who turn people from God's path. No aggression against the freedom of belief and worship or the sanctity of mosques and places of worship can be tolerated. Believers should have the freedom to implement the divine code of living, based on faith, and aiming to achieve every benefit for man. Therefore, when the early Muslims settled in Madinah after enduring persecution in Makkah for years, God permitted them to fight the idolaters so as to repel any aggression against themselves and their faith.

Given at a time when such aggression had reached its peak, the permission to fight also aimed to ensure freedom of belief and worship for themselves and for all other people. God promised the believers that they would achieve victory and establish their authority, provided that they fulfilled their duties, required by their faith, as detailed in the following verses:

God will certainly defend those who believe. For certain, God does not love anyone who betrays his trust and is bereft of gratitude. (38) Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is waged, because they have been wronged. Most certainly, God has the power to grant them victory. (39) These are the ones who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, 'Our Lord is God!' Were it not that God repels some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques – in all of which God's name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed. God will most certainly succour him who succours God's cause. God is certainly Most Powerful, Almighty. (40) They are those who, if We firmly establish them on earth, attend regularly to their prayers, give in charity, enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong. With God rests the final outcome of all events. (41)

Forces of evil are active in this world. The fight between goodness, divine guidance and forces of faith on the one hand and evil, falsehood and tyrannical forces on the other has raged since man's creation. What is more is that evil and falsehood command great firepower. They have no hesitation in using their arsenal and weaponry to achieve their aims. With such power and false temptation, they strive hard to turn people away from the true faith. Hence, it is imperative that faith, goodness and truth should have enough power to repel aggression and to make all wicked schemes futile.

It has not been God's will to leave unarmed the advocates of faith, truth and goodness so that they face the forces of evil and falsehood relying only on the power of their faith, or on the depth of goodness in their hearts. The material power of evil can be very strong, able to shake people and blind their eyes. Besides, people can only endure hardships and trials up to a certain point. God

aggression. Indeed, falsehood and evil will not stop their aggression unless they realize that the truth has enough power to counter their own. Truth may be valued by people, but such value is not enough to provide it with protection against aggression in man's world. It requires the appropriate means of self defence.

In Defence of the Believers

We need to reflect a little on these short statements that provide profound insight into human nature. The first thing to note is that the permission to fight back is granted by God to those against whom the idolaters had waged a wrongful aggression. This permission starts with a statement that God defends the believers and dislikes aggressors: *"God will certainly defend those who believe. For certain, God does not love anyone who betrays his trust and is bereft of gratitude."* (38)

This is a guarantee given by God to the believers that He is the one to defend them, and whoever is defended by God will certainly come to no harm at the hands of his enemies. He will certainly be victorious. Why do they, then, need permission to fight? Why are they required to go to war, suffer casualties, endure hardship and make sacrifices of themselves, when the result is a forgone conclusion and God is able to ensure it without any effort on their part?

The answer is that God's wisdom is absolutely perfect. We as human beings may discern certain aspects of it. Thus, on the basis of our experience and perception we may say that part of God's wisdom may be that He does not want the advocates of His cause to be a group of idle and lazy people who sit relaxing, waiting for victory to be granted them without effort. They do not deserve victory merely because they attend to their prayers, recite the Qur'an and appeal to God for help and support whenever they suffer hardship or aggression.

It is true that believers should always attend to their prayers, read the Qur'an and turn to God for help in situations of ease and hardship alike. However, such worship, on its own, does not qualify them as advocates and defenders of God's cause. This worship is merely part of the equipment they need in their fight against the forces of evil. It is their unflinching ammunition in their hard battle. They must face evil with weapons like the ones it uses against them, but they need to add the most effective weaponry of faith, a God-fearing sense, and a solid bond with God.

God has willed that His defence of the believers be through them, so that as they go through battle, they achieve maturity. Nothing brings about latent human resources better than danger. It is only when people realize that they are being

knows all this and the limits of people's ability. Hence, He wanted the believers to endure the hardship only for a short period during which they would acquire the means to resist and to defend themselves. When they achieved this, they were given permission to fight aggression.

Before stating this permission for self defence, God also tells them that it is He who will defend them: *"God will certainly defend those who believe..."* (38) He also tells them that He dislikes their enemies because of their treachery and ingratitude. *"For certain, God does not love anyone who betrays his trust and is bereft of gratitude."* (38) He has judged their position to be fully justified, because they are the ones who have endured injustice and persecution. They do not resort to aggression against others: *"Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is waged, because they have been wronged..."* (39) Because they are the ones at the receiving end of wrongful aggression, they are reassured that God will grant them His support and protection: *"Most certainly, God has the power to grant them victory."* (39)

Furthermore, they have all the justification for going to war. They have been chosen to undertake a great humanitarian task, the benefits of which will not be theirs alone. Indeed these benefits will accrue to all believers. Their fight will ensure that people shall enjoy the freedom of belief and worship. Besides, they are the ones who have been wronged, the ones driven out of their homes without valid justification: *"These are the ones who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, 'Our Lord is God...' (40)*

It is the most truthful word any person can say, and the word everyone should say. Yet, it is because of their saying this that they have been driven out of their homes. Hence why such injustice does not carry any semblance of right action. The Qur'anic statement makes it clear that these victims of aggression have no personal objective to fight for; instead, they fight only for their faith. They seek no worldly gain. Personal and national interests that give rise to conflicts, alliances and wars are of no appeal to them.

Beyond that, we have the general rule that makes it clear that faith needs to be defended: *"Were it not that God repels some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques – in all of which God's name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed..."* (40)

We note here that the verse mentions monasteries where priests devote all their time to worship, as well as places of public worship for Christians, Jews and Muslims. They are all vulnerable and can be destroyed, despite their sanctity and dedication for worship. Evil will not respect the fact that these places are made for extolling God's name. They are protected only through people's efforts, with the advocates of faith standing up to repel falsehood's

attacked that they muster all their resources. Thus, every cell comes forward to play its role, joining ranks with all other cells, each doing its utmost to attain the highest level it can achieve in this life. A community entrusted with God's cause needs to have all its cells ready, its resources brought to the fore, and all its forces mobilized so that it attains its full maturity and is able to discharge its great trust.

A speedy victory gratuitously given to people who make little effort will not tap such latent resources and abilities. There is simply no incentive for them to bring such resources into play. Furthermore, victory achieved easily is lost easily. To start with, it comes cheap, requiring no real sacrifice. Moreover, those who achieve it do not have the necessary training to maintain it. Since they did not have to mobilize their resources to win it, they are not mobilized to defend it.

Moreover, when the Muslim community has to go to war and utilize its resources in attack and defence, feeling its weakness at times and strength at others, retreating one day and moving forward the next, it gains valuable experience. It will experience contrasting feelings such as hope and pain, joy and sorrow, anxiety and reassurance, weakness and strength. It will also experience unity in faith, a readiness to sacrifice all, as well as the bringing together of all elements before, during and after the battle. It will learn what points of strength it has so as to enhance them, and what areas of weakness it has and how to redress them. All these are needed for a community entrusted with the divine faith and its advocacy.

For all this and other reasons known to God, He does not make of victory a free gift granted to believers in a package that falls to them from the sky. Indeed, God accomplishes His defence of the believers through their own efforts.⁸

⁸ We need to add here that Islam does not consider fighting an end or an objective in itself. It permits fighting for a goal that is greater than achieving a state of *modus vivendi*. As stated in many other Qur'anic verses, peace is the goal Islam wants to achieve. But peace must be free of aggression, injustice and oppression. When oppression or injustice is perpetrated against any aspect of human dignity, such as the freedom of belief and worship, justice, fair distribution of benefits, responsibilities, rights and duties, and conscientious observance of divine rules by individuals and the community alike, then Islam adopts a different attitude. Whether such aggression and injustice are perpetrated by an individual, a group or a state, and the victim of such aggression is similarly an individual, a group or a state, Islam will not countenance any peace that sanctions such aggression. Peace, according to

Islam, does not mean the absence of war; it means complete justice, according to the code God has chosen for human life.

Assured Victory

Yet victory may be slow in coming to those who are driven out of their homes against all right and for no reason other than their declaration of their belief in God as the only Lord in the universe. If it is slow in coming, then there must be a reason for this.

Victory may be slow in coming because the Muslim community has not as yet attained full maturity. It may not have mobilized all its resources or tapped its potentials. Should victory be given to it then, it would not be able to protect it for long, and so would soon lose it. Victory may also be delayed until the community of believers has given its all, sacrificing every cherished thing, demonstrating that it holds nothing too dear.

It may happen that victory is not granted until the community of believers has tried all its efforts and realized that such efforts, on their own, cannot guarantee victory unless they are supported by God.

Victory is granted by God only when believers have done their best, placing all their trust in Him alone. Likewise, victory may be delayed so that the community of believers strengthens its bonds with God. It will suffer and render sacrifices, realizing that it cannot turn for support to anyone other than God. It is such a bond with God that guarantees that it will continue to follow the right path after victory. This is a crucial objective. The Muslim community must never swerve from the path of truth and justice through which its victory is achieved.

Victory may also be slow in coming if the community of believers does not dedicate all its struggle and sacrifices to God alone. It may be fighting for something it wants to gain, or for national interests, or to demonstrate its bravery. But God wants its struggle to be purely for Him, untinged by any other feeling or objective. The Prophet was once asked about a person fighting to support his community, one fighting out of bravery, and one fighting to be seen in battle: "Which of them is for God's sake?" He replied: "Only he who fights so that God's word becomes supreme fights for God's cause." [Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Victory may be delayed because the evil the believers are fighting may still be mingled with a residue of goodness. God may determine that such a residue should be finally separated so that the evil becomes pure, without any trace of goodness, when it is finally defeated.

Furthermore, victory may be delayed because the falsehood that the believers fight is not seen in its true reality by all people. If it is defeated at such a juncture, it could still find support by those who continue to be deceived by it, unconvinced that it is absolutely false. In this situation, God may determine that falsehood remains until its reality is seen by all, so that no one feels sorry for it when it ultimately collapses.

Victory may also be slow in coming because the general environment is not yet ready to receive the truth and justice that the community of believers represents. If the believers are granted victory in such circumstances, they will have to face resistance by the environment they work in. Therefore, the struggle continues until such time as the whole area is ready to receive the truth triumphant.

For all these reasons, and others known to God alone, victory may be slow in coming. This means in effect more sacrifices and more suffering by the believers. Nevertheless, God will continue to defend them and grant them victory in the end.

When Victory is Granted 41

When granted by God, victory brings about new duties and responsibilities:

God will most certainly succour him who succours God's cause. God is certainly Most Powerful, Almighty. (40) They are those who, if We firmly establish them on earth, attend regularly to their prayers, give in charity, enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong. With God rests the final outcome of all events. (41)

God's true promise which will never fail is that He supports those who support Him. The question that arises here is who are these people that support God and thus deserve His support which means certain victory? Their qualities are outlined in this verse. They are those who, when given victory by God and are established in a position of authority, "attend regularly to their prayers..." (41) They worship God alone, submitting themselves to Him willingly and strengthening their bonds with Him. They "give in charity..." (41), thus they meet the liability imposed on their property. By so doing, they demonstrate their ability to overcome greed and self interest, and they help their community to provide help to the poor and needy. They thus demonstrate a practical example of the Prophet's description of the Muslim community: "In their mutual love, sympathy and compassion, the believers are like one body: when any organ is in complaint, the rest of the body shares its complaint with symptoms of sleeplessness and fever." The third quality is that they "enjoin the doing of what is right..." (41) They advocate every good thing and encourage people to practise

it. By contrast, they also "forbid the doing of what is wrong..." (41) They resist evil and corruption. In this way, they demonstrate a very important characteristic of the Muslim community which does not tolerate any wrong if it can change it, and does not hesitate to do any right thing if it is within its ability.

These are the people who give succour to God, as they implement the way of life He has chosen for mankind. They rely on God alone, to the exclusion of any other power. It is such people that God promises victory, and His promise is most assured. It will never fail.

Here we see again that the victory granted to the Muslim community relies on the fulfilment of its conditions and the discharge of certain responsibilities. All matters rest with God who determines what course events should take. He may change a defeat into victory or a victory into defeat when the foundation is not solid or responsibilities are ignored: "With God rests the final outcome of all events." (41)

The victory granted by God is one that leads to the establishment of His code in human life. It is a code that ensures that truth, justice and freedom are fulfilled so that they can bring goodness into human life. No individual self-aggrandizement is allowed; no personal greed or desire tolerated. Such a victory has well-defined conditions, duties and a price. It is not granted as a personal favour to anyone. Nor does it continue when its objectives and duties are not fulfilled.