

Oppress

By Ahmed H. Sheriff

(6)

SIDE WITH THE OPPRESSED
AND NOT WITH THE OPPRESSORS

Modern sophisticated weapons have made large scale killing of innocent people a much easier task. Frequently ~~we~~ we read the heart-rending stories ^{of} tragic destructions caused by air bombardments or launching of missiles. It would appear that mass production of all sorts of weapons has become so much commercialized that the profit motive ^{could} ~~is~~ be behind the conflicts and wars between Muslim states.

Whatever ideological differences between one Muslim nation or the other or the gravity of their dispute, how humanly does it justify to undertake such attacks ~~to~~ ^{which} destroy innocent lives particularly of women and children? Why is the world silent over the ~~constant~~ destructions in Southern Lebanon and Iran by persistent bombardments from Israel and Iraq?

The point I wish to discuss herewith is what our moral and Islamic duty is under such circumstances. Do we adopt an attitude of 'why bother' and show no concern whatsoever since we are not directly affected? Should we not raise our voice of protest lest we offend someone somewhere?

Let it not be forgotten that Islam is not merely a doctrinaire religion but a complete code of conduct which also includes the upholding of human rights and welfare of oppressed people of the world. To those involved in committing oppression and injustice in this world, Almighty Allah has declared His stringent wrath and retribution. The holy Qura'n has condemned the oppressors in strongest terms. Not only that, Allah has forbidden to cooperate or associate or even be inclined towards them. Says the holy Qura'n: "And incline you not to those who act unjustly lest the fire (of hell) touches you" (Sura Hud v 113)

The holy Qura'n goes further by enjoining Muslims to involve themselves in the struggle and fight for the cause of the oppressed:

"And what reason have you that you should not fight in the way of Allah and of the weak (the oppressed and deprived) among the men and the women and the children of those who say Our Lord! Cause us to go forth from this town whose people are oppressors and give us from Thee a guardian and give us Thee a helper." (Sura Nisa v 75)

And Hazrat Ali a.s. has guided us in these words:

"Be unfriendly towards the oppressors but ^{be} supporters of the oppressed" In the eyes of Ali a.s., inequity and injustice is so horrible that he expresses his strong feelings on the subject in these words:

" I swear by Allah that if all the continents of the earth and all that is under the sun were offered to me in exchange for sinning towards Allah even by stealing a grain of barley from an ant, truly I should never do such a thing"

Ali a.s. could not wrong even an ant even though all the lands of the earth were offered to him, so hateful is an unjust action in his eyes.

Undoubtedly the greatest misfortunes that beset Islam and the Muslims is their lack of firmness in dealing with the evils of oppressors and their connivance with them not^{to} mention their cooperating with them. The holy Imams always endeavoured to prevent their companions and relatives from cooperating or helping oppressors. A number of traditions have been related, one of which is from Imam Zainul Abedeen a.s. Writing to Mohamed ibne Muslim Az-Zuhariy warning him not to engage in oppression and unfair dealings, the Imam adds:

" The reason they (the Omayyads) ask for you is only to use you as a grinding stone, a bridge whereby they can progress to their evil aims, a ladder to their deviations, so that you may be an agent and a propagandist for their crimes. Through you, they can hide their affairs from wise men, and attract the ignorant to themselves. Neither their own ministers nor their followers can disguise their faults as you can; what little will they give to you compared with what they take away. Take care of yourself, examine yourself and reckon with your actions as a responsible person.

The last sentence is full of meaning. It should lead us to develop in ourselves the sense of responsibility. The responsibility not only of committing sins and oppressive crimes but also of abating and siding with the criminals and oppressors.

More forceful than the above is the following conversation on the subject. It is narrated by Al-Kashani that Safwan Al-Jammal went to see Imam Musa Kazim a.s.

' O Safwan ! All of your actions are good, except one !

' And what is that ? '

' Your hiring of camels to that man Harun' (Harun Rashid the Abbasid

' I swear by Allah that I did not do this so that he might ^{caliph} hunt, or amuse himself, but only that he might make the pilgrimage to Mecca. I have not taken charge of the camels myself, but have entrusted them to a servant'

' Does he have to pay for them ? '

' Yes '

' Do you wish him to live until he pays '

' Yes '

' Whosoever wishes them (i.e. the oppressors) to stay alive is in fact one of them, and he ~~is-in-fact~~ shall enter Hell'

Safwan relates that he immediately went and sold all his camels.

If such is the future for one who only wishes the unjust and oppressor to live, then how bad it must be for one who helps them or associates with them, obeys them or do their work.

The Prophet of Islam had said that people who see injustice being perpetrated and remain silent, shall suffer the wrath of God. He also said that the one who collaborates with or assists a tyrant, knowing him to be so, will go out of the fold of Islam.

Such being the forceful teachings of Islam, let us ask ourselves how far are we concerned and what do we do in protest against the heinous crimes presently committed against our Muslim brothers ? After all for what sins are those innocent women and children not to speak of men being deliberately annihilated by intermittent air bombardment or overhead missiles ?

We have an Islamic and moral duty to raise our voice in protest and do what we can in support of those who are made to suffer.

(quotations from Message of Peace
Oct 21- 1979)