

Fairness and Grace

Al-Fatir (The Originator) - Chapter 35: Verse 45

"If God were to punish people [at once] for the wrongs they do, He would not leave a single living creature on the surface of the earth. However, He grants them respite for a term set [by Him]. When their term comes to an end, [they realize that] God has all His servants in His sight."



This verse speaks of God's forbearance and compassion, juxtaposing these with His power and knowledge. It emphasizes that **people are given a chance, not punished immediately**, but that this does not affect the eventual accurate reckoning of their deeds or the fairness of the results at the end. All this is an aspect of His grace. People commit all sorts of bad actions, showing ingratitude for God's favours, spreading evil and corruption on earth, committing all manner of injustices and excesses. Were God to mete out fair punishment to people for their actions, His punishment would have gone beyond them to include every living thing on the face of the earth. The whole planet would then be unsuitable for any type of life, not merely human life.

This highlights the terrible nature of what people perpetrate as a destructive force that could end life in its entirety. However, God does not take people to task straightaway; He forbears and gives them chances. He grants respite to individuals until the end of their lives on earth, and gives communities respite to fulfil their responsibility in performing the task He has assigned mankind to build human life on earth, until they hand over to the next generation. He also grants respite to the human race until the end of human life in this world when the Last Hour arrives. **He provides us with all these chances so that we mend our ways and improve our actions.**

When the time for work and earning reward is over; when it is time for reckoning and administering reward; God will not begrudge them anything of their reward. On the contrary, He will be fair to all. The fact that He has them all in His sight ensures that they will be fairly requited for whatever they have done in their lives. Nothing serious or trivial will be discounted for or against them.

Clean Slate

Allah is the Owner of mercy, and there is no time when that mercy is showered more upon us than in the blessed month of Ramadan. The Prophet has said regarding Ramadan: **"Its beginning is mercy, its middle is forgiveness, and its ending is liberation from the Hellfire."** (Ibn Khuzaymah, al- Sahih) Every moment of Ramadan is a chance to come back to Allah. Whatever we are now going through in our lives is often a direct result of our own actions. If we are humiliated, or feel low, it is our own sins which have lowered us. It is only by Allah that we can ever hope to be elevated. If we are consistently unable to wake up for Fajr, or if we find it increasingly difficult to stay away from haram (the forbidden), we must examine our relationship with Allah. Most of all, we must never be deceived. We must never allow ourselves to think that anything in this world succeeds, fails, is given, taken, done, or undone without Allah. **It is only by our connection to our Creator that we rise or fall in life, in our relationship with our world— and with all of humanity.**

Principle of Charity

Language is based on trust. We have to assume, at least initially, that our interlocutor is speaking the truth and telling us something of value.

Logicians have argued that **the truth of an individual sentence can be assessed only by considering the whole context.** It cannot be seen in isolation but is part of a "conceptual scheme," a fabric of interwoven sentences. We cannot understand the ideas expressed unless we are familiar with this conceptual scheme in its entirety.

Thus the sentence "the law is an ass" is explicable only in a particular framework. Linguists point out that in day-to-day communication, when we hear a statement that at first seems odd or false, we automatically try to find a context in which it makes sense, because we want to understand what is being said to us. The same mechanism is at work when we try to translate a text written in a foreign language.

Linguists have called this epistemological law the "principle of charity"; it requires that **when we are confronted with discourse that is strange to us, we seek an "interpretation which, in light of what it knows of the facts, will maximise truth among the sentences of the corpus."**

In other words, when making an effort to understand something strange and alien to you, it is important to assume that the speaker shares the same human nature as yourself and that, even though your belief systems may differ, you both have the same idea of what constitutes truth.

Financial Assistance

Begging or soliciting financial assistance is disapproved in the Shariah and should only be resorted to in the case of necessity. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said to Qabeesa:

"O Qabeesa, **begging is not permissible but for one of three (classes) of persons: one who has incurred debt**, for him begging is permissible until he pays that off, after which he must stop; **a man whose property has been destroyed by a calamity** which has smitten him, for him begging is permissible till he gets what will support life or will provide him reasonable subsistence; and **a person who has been smitten by poverty**, the genuineness of which is confirmed by three intelligent members of his people, for him begging is permissible until he gets what will support him, or will provide him subsistence. O Qabeesa, **besides these three, [every other reason] for begging is forbidden, and one who engages in such consumes that which is forbidden.**" [Muslim]

Instead of asking from others and relying upon others, a Muslim should much rather prefer to work for his own wealth, even if his work is of a very menial nature. In another hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) stated:

"It is better for one of you to bring a load of firewood on his back and sell it, than to ask of another who might give him or refuse to give him." [Muslim]