

UNITY OF THE PATH OF TRUTH

A Friday Sermon by Dr Mahmud Abul-Huda Al Husaini

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At a time, similar to this time, in the honored Sha'ban in the year nine after the migration of the Prophet (PBUH), a significant Divine lesson was produced when a great incident took place. It was the last expedition that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) attended when he set out for Tabuk. The Messenger of Allah went out in Rajab and came back to Medina in Ramadan. He spent the whole month of Sha'ban in Tabuk. The lesson of Tabuk should be an unforgettable lesson. When we devote a certain time to understand the lessons of the Nocturnal Journey and Ascension of the Prophet (PBUH), the lesson of Badr and the lesson of the opening of Mecca, we had better exert a great attention to the connotations of the lesson of Tabuk as it summarizes most of the above mentioned lessons.

The expedition of Tabuk took place a little before the Beloved, Al Mustafa (PBUH) passed away to the High Companion. It was the last great assembly the Prophet (PBUH) attended when he went out spreading truth and guidance. It was not only one of the lessons of the Enlightened Medina; it was also a setting out and movement where about thirty thousand fighters gathered. The Holy Qur'an refers to this incident in many verses. Let us have a little stance on this lesson to explore its occasion and its circumstances that most Muslims are unaware of.

The Prophet (PBUH) did not use to tell his companions about the destination of his expedition, especially, the military ones. But at this time (Tabuk expedition), he identified the destination. It was Tabuk, the gate of Al Sham country. The journey would be long and the enemy soldiers would be numerous. The purpose of the Prophet (PBUH) was to retrain the Rum and the Arab Christians from attacking the Muslims. But he wanted the Muslims to know that they would encounter an enemy army with too many soldiers. He (PBUH) called his army, 'the army of adversity '*Usrah*'.

Provisions for his army (about thirty thousand fighters traveling from Medina to Tabuk), were not enough in that blessed expedition, so was the case with the riding animals. The believers passed through a severe difficulty so that they alternated the chewing of the same date one after another to satiate their hunger. Their thirst was so great that they looked for wetness even in the dung of the animals.

According to the lunar system, they went out in Rajab, stayed there all Sha'ban, and came back in Ramadan. As for the solar system, it was the end of summer when fruits were ripe, and shadows were so beautiful that they attracted the inhabitants of Medina to rest in them. Moreover, the season of selling the fruits was about to begin or it actually began to present great benefit to the inhabitants of Medina.

Thus, temptations that attracted man to the earth were plenty, and the long way to their destination was difficult and hard. The Exalted Allah revealed some verses on that

occasion after the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers came back from their expedition. He said:

"Allah turned with favour to the prophet, the Muhajirs, and the Ansar, who followed him in a time of distress, after that the hearts of a part of them had nearly swerved (for duty); but he turned to them (also): for he is unto them most kind, Most Merciful. He turned in mercy also) to the three who were left behind; (they left guilty) to such a degree that the earth seemed constrained to them, for all its spaciousness, and their (very) souls seemed straitened to them, and they perceived that there is no fleeing from Allah (and no refuge) but to Himself. Then He turned to them, that they might repent: for Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. O ye who believe! Fear Allah and be with those who are true (in word and deed). It was not fitting for the people of Medina and the Bedouin Arabs of the neighborhood, to refuse to follow Allah's Messenger, nor to prefer their own lives to his; because nothing could they suffer or do, but was reckoned to their credit as a deed of righteousness, whether they suffered thirst, or fatigue, or hunger, in the Cause of Allah, or trod paths to raise the ire of the Unbelievers, or received any injury whatever from an enemy: for Allah suffers not the reward to be lost of those who do good. Nor could they spend anything (for the cause) small or great nor cut across a valley, but the deed is inscribed to their credit; that Allah may requite their deed with the best (possible reward). (Al Tawbah, vs. 117-121).

The address in this speech is comprehensive.

The Exalted Allah's statement: "**Allah turned with favour to the prophet, the Muhajirs, and the Ansar**", refers to the intensity of admonition to those who lagged behind. The Messenger of Allah turned away from some of them, and accepted the excuses of some others leaving their secrets to the Exalted Allah to settle their account.

In this verse, the Exalted Allah seemed to reveal the great mercy of the Prophet (PBUH) who in spite of the fact that he (PBUH) knew quite well the lying of those who lagged behind this great incident and presented frail excuses, he accepted their pretension. Thus this verse is an indication of admonition, for although the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) accepted their excuses, the Exalted Allah uncovered the inner reality of those who apologized saying to them:

"Allah gives thee Grace why didst thou grant them exemption until those who told the truth were seen by thee in a clear light, and thou had proved the liars" (Al Tawbah, v. 43).

This is concerned with the favor the Exalted Allah bestowed upon His Prophet (PBUH). As for the that given to the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH), Muhajirin (immigrants) and Ansar (supporters), the Exalted Allah forgave those who inwardly thought to lag behind, some of which went out with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), and others did not. The Exalted Allah forgave the believers who had self chatter to lag behind but they struggled with themselves and went out. He also forgave the those who did not resist themselves and stayed behind, but after they had a hard lesson of many types of punishment during the

fifty days before being forgiven (they are the three Companions who are known to lag behind).

Then the Exalted Allah said: "**who followed him in a time of distress**". The word 'followed' may be understood to refer to two meanings. It may be restricted to those who agreed with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) to go out with him to Tabuk, and they actually did, or it may expand to include the three Companions who prepared themselves for going out with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) but they did not, and they obeyed the self chatter preferring self comfort to the difficulty they were about to encounter.

The Exalted Allah called the month and a half 'a hard hour' to refer to the fact that however hard and difficult the circumstances one bears, they are a mere hour in one's life, so one should not hesitate to stand by the Exalted Allah and His Messenger (PBUH).

The Exalted Allah called the time of this expedition 'the hour of hardship' from its beginning till its end, for the Companions of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) had not faced such difficulty formerly as they did in that expedition.

-"**after that the hearts of a part of them had nearly swerved (for duty)**", i.e., after some of them intended to stay behind and disobey the order of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH).

-"**But he turned to them (also): for he is unto them most kind, Most Merciful**" i.e., he guided them to repent after they had inclined to disobedience, so they went out with the Messenger of Allah.

-"**He turned in mercy also) to the three who were left behind**". They were the three companions who got

themselves ready for the expedition then they tarried at the last moment. They were good believers, but their self-desires defeated them. They were Ka'b Ibn Malek, Murarah Ibn Rabi'a Al 'Amiri, and Hilal Ibn Umayya Al Waqifi. They were three elder companions of the Messenger of Allah, but their punishment was by the inspiration of the Exalted Allah.

They confessed their guilt to the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) after the latter returned from his expedition, and said: "Oh, Messenger of Allah, we have no excuse."

On the other hand, more than eighty hypocrites went to the Prophet (PBUH) apologizing for their lagging behind, and the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) accepted their apology though he knew quite well their lying. But he described the three who did not lie to him and confessed that they had no excuse for lagging behind, saying "**As for those, they are honest**".

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) announced the great boycott of the three honest men. Nobody would talk to them nor look at them or deal with them. When they attended the prayer in the mosque of the Prophet (PBUH) and greeted the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) he did not return their greetings. When they met a relative or cousin and greeted him, he did not return their greetings. When they entered the market, people turned away from them...

After forty days of a severe boycott (a boycott intended to diagnose the malady before treatment), the Messenger of Allah ordered the wives of the three men to dissociate themselves from them. So boycotting reached the stage of separating the wives from the husbands till fifty days were

completed before the verse of repentance was revealed from the Exalted Allah to His Messenger (PBUH).

This was the case described by the Exalted Allah in the Holy Qur'an:

"They felt guilty to such a degree that the earth seemed constrained to them, for all its spaciousness, and their (very) souls seemed straitened to them, and they perceived that there is no fleeing from Allah (and no refuge) but to Himself".

They used to spend their time prostrate before their Lord weeping and penitent. They spent fifty days in this state. Ka'b Ibn Malek passed by a greater trial when the king of the Arab Christians sent him a letter saying: "Your companion has abandoned you. Come to us to console you".

One of the kings of the Arabs sent him a letter telling him not to stay with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) after the latter became unfriendly with him, but Ka'b tore the letter and threw it into the fire. He was fixed in his faith and waited for the order of the Exalted Allah to be issued concerning his state.

After fifty days, the verse of good news was revealed to announce their forgiveness: **"Then He turned to them, that they might repent"** (i.e., before their repentance for the Exalted Allah guided them to repent); **"for Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful"**. After they received the good news, they distributed most of their wealth in thanks to the Exalted Allah.

Then the Exalted Allah moved from the exclusive lesson on individuals (the Prophet, PBUH, the Muhajirin, Al Ansar and the three honest men) into the summary of the lesson that the Ummah should benefit from manifested clearly in His saying:

"O ye who believe! Fear Allah and be with those who are true (in word and deed)

This is the summary of the lesson:

Oh the Ummah of Muhammad (PBUH) adhere to the unity of the path of truth; be disciplined in consolidated rows; do not be dispersed, do not be tardy or be backward, and do not prefer self comfort to the Message of the Exalted Allah.

Let the assembly of faith stand together, and let individuals join this true assembly.

The true assembly is the one that is sincere in its purpose. The believers in this assembly do not aim at worldly benefit, worldly fame, praise of the people, or gaining immediate profit... They rather aim at the satisfaction of the Exalted Allah.

This is the true assembly. When you find such an assembly, adhere to it and do not turn away from it, for if you turn away from it, you belong to either of the three classes:

- the one who presents false excuses;
- the one who says 'I have no excuse', so he deserves punishment;
- or the one who suffers from self strife.

If you defeat yourself, you belong to the third class. But if you dispense with your self frivolity and are a true believer, if you agree with the command of the Exalted Allah and His Messenger, you belong to the chosen class that follow the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) and belong to him.

After the station in which there is a summary of a useful lesson, the Exalted Allah presented a detailed address on solidification and stability to be applied by the believers in the future:

"It was not fitting for the people of Medina and the Bedouin Arabs of the neighborhood, to refuse to follow Allah's Messenger, nor to prefer their own lives to his".

Why wouldn't they prefer their self comfort to the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) who was present before them keen on their benefit?

It was "because nothing could they suffer or do, but was reckoned to their credit as a deed of righteousness, whether they suffered thirst, or fatigue, or hunger, in the Cause of Allah, or trod paths to raise the ire of the Unbelievers, or received any injury whatever from an enemy: for Allah suffers not the reward to be lost of those who do good".

When the believers suffer from thirst, hunger or any type of hardship, or when they fight for the cause of Allah, their deeds will be recorded for them to be rewarded therewith. This is the state of the people of good deeds, otherwise

the case will be mere pretension for whoever is unlike them.

How many the pretenders are...!

Benevolence is not a mere state, nor is it expressions full of kindness and tenderness. It is rather a behavior that should prove the truthfulness of this state.

In Hilyet Al Awliya', by Al Asfahani, Abu Na'im, (MBUH) an interesting anecdote is related about Ibrahim Ibn Adham and Shaqiq Al Balkhi, the two knowledgeable Gnostics, who met at pilgrimage time in the courtyard of Ka'bah. While circumambulating around the Ka'bah, they discussed one type of knowledge in worship, for rituals at the honored Ka'ba are not restricted to circumambulation around Ka'bah or praying only. Seeking knowledge is one of the greatest closeness to the Exalted Allah. Ibrahim said to Shaqiq:

"What is the basis of your method? (i.e., what is the balance by which the sincerity of the traveler to Allah in your path can be measured according to your method?).

Shaqiq said:

"When we are given provision by the Exalted Allah, we eat, and when we are prevented from provision, we become patient".

Ibrahim said:

"This is what the dogs do. What distinguishes you from them?"

Shaqiq said:

"Our teacher, on which method did you base your course and your way?"

Ibrahim said:

"When we are given provision, we prefer the others to ourselves (i.e., we give them what is provided for us because of altruism), and when we are prevented from provision, we are thankful and grateful."

Shaqiq stood up and said:

"My lord, you are our teacher."

'Nor could they spend anything (for the cause) small or great'. The Exalted Allah appreciates your spending for the sake of the Exalted Allah, however small the amount is.

"nor cut across a valley" (i.e., even if they do their best to walk across a valley for the cause of Allah, and how easy it is to cross a valley, and how little time it takes...!

The Exalted Allah sums up two kinds of effort, the first is financial and the second is physical. He wants to refer to a rule that the people of truth should not neglect either of which (the financial and the physical), however small they are.

"but the deed is inscribed to their credit; that Allah may requite their deed with the best (possible reward)".

Too many hours are not enough to explain the lesson of Tabuk, i.e., the lesson of Sha'ban, but it is a time occasion from which we can benefit from before we listen to the lesson of the month of Ramadan so that we might

be true in our purpose and intentions of the heart to be closer to the Exalted Allah.

Allāhum..., guide us to You favorably, and make us from those who listen to wisdom and follow the best of it.

I say my words and ask Allah's forgiveness.