

BIRR: Everything Good with no Limitation

Imam A. M. Khattab

Do you know the meaning of *birr*? It is an Arabic word mentioned twice in the verse [2:177] I recited today. I would like to have some fun, so let us test ourselves, especially the Arabic-speaking people, to see how much we know about our language. [After some interchange between the audience and Imam:] one explanation for the word “birr” in Arabic is *ji-ma‘al-khair* meaning “everything good with no limitation”. Let me proceed a little bit further with the Arabic. The word *birr* is made up of two letters: B and R. From these two letters we have a number of different words. There is *birr*, *burr*, and *barr*. The vowels in Arabic language are marks placed in relation to the alphabetical letters: *fatha* sounds like an “a” and is represented by a dash over the letter; *kasra* sounds like an “e/i” and is represented by a dash under the letter, while a *damma* sounds like an “o/u” and is represented by a little comma over the letter, which result in the words *barr*, *birr*, and *burr* respectively. All we changed are the vowels on the first of the two letters, and that completely changed their meaning. The problem of our children in the school is that when they come to read a word in Arabic, they read it without any attention to these vowels. But the vowels, if read wrong, will completely change the meanings of words.

So, *birr* means *ji-ma‘al khair* – everything good. *Burr* is wheat. See, by placing a *damma*, we went to the kitchen now,

to an item of food! *Barr* is the seashore/land. Let us change the vowels again and get another three words from the same two letters. *Baar*, *beer*, *boor* (extended a, e and o). Every one of them has a different meaning. *Baar* means “kind” – a kind person. *Maseeh*¹ said “He made me kind (*baar*) to my mother.” *Beer* is “a well”. *Boor* means “barren”; when we relate it to the land we say *arb-boor* or “barren land” where no plant will grow. The Qur’an says, “. . . a successful business which will never go bankrupt (*boor*).”²

This gives us a feel for the richness of the Arabic language. This richness caused some ulama³ to specialize in explaining the Qur’an linguistically. As seen above, by modifying the letters B and R, we obtain six words, each one having a different meaning. In some tafseers,⁴ you find explanations of what is known as *i‘raab* (the grammatical cases) showing the grammar in the Qur’an, and sometimes, you find that one word, or one sentence, will be explained in two, or three, or four different ways; and, here, we are not limited: you cannot say this person is right and this one is wrong, or

¹ Jesus

² 35:29

³ Scholars

⁴ Qur’anic exegeses

that explanation is wrong and this is right, because this is the challenge – the challenge for which the Qur'an was revealed.

The Arabs, at the time of Muhammad, were engaged in serious competition with each other to excel in the Arabic language: *Khitabah*,⁵ *qasaa'id*,⁶ and *shi'r*,⁷ that was what they concerned themselves with and that was their business and their careers. They were competing in writing poems, and in delivering speeches, and, for that purpose, they had clubs. These clubs were very, very famous in Arab history. Some of the more renowned among them were the *Sooq 'Ukadh*, the *Sooq Dhu-l-Majannah* and the *Sooq Dhu-l-Majaaz*. In present day Saudi Arabia, these three areas are known to have been the clubs where people met and competed in giving speeches and reciting poetry. Amidst that situation, Muhammad, *'alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*,⁸ came to preach to those people. So what type of miracle will be most to the point in this respect? The Qur'an! The lofty language and style of the Qur'an challenged those Arabs, showing them the impossibility of the Qur'an being the word of a human being.

When Muhammad came with the Qur'an, they did not believe in it. They said that some Persian was teaching him. So a Qur'anic verse was revealed saying: "And indeed full well do we know that they say, 'It is but a human being that imparts all this to him!' – notwithstanding that the tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is wholly outlandish, whereas this is Arabic speech, clear in itself and clearly showing the truth of its source."⁹ Then they said Muhammad authored that book. In response, another Qur'anic verse came to say that they should write such a Qur'an if, as they say, Muhammad is able to write this, since they are men like him and much more fluent in the language. They could not. They were then challenged to write just ten chapters – even like the smallest ones. When they failed even at that, the bar was lowered to write *one sura, one chapter*. When they could not meet the challenge, the final Qur'anic verse came to Muhammad: "Say: 'If all mankind and the jinnkind would come together with a view to producing the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce its like even though they were to exert all their

strength in aiding one another."¹⁰ That is the challenge! The Arabic language is very profound and very rich because of that Qur'an. And we think that when our children come to the mosque for one hour a week to study Arabic, they will be professors of the language. No, don't think that; don't even consider it, because people study Arabic language all their lives and they die without finishing its study. [The English translation of verse 2:177 recited by Imam at the start of the lecture, containing the word *birr* twice, and referred to above, is:]

"True piety does not consist in turning your faces towards the east or the west – but truly pious is he who believes in God, and the Last Day, and the angels (*Malaa'ikah*), and the revelation (*Al Kitab*), and the prophets (*Nabiyeen*); and spends his substance (*a'ataa al-maala*) – however much he himself may cherish it (*'alaa hubbihi*) – upon his near of kin (*qubaa*), and the orphans (*yataamaa*) and the needy (*masaakeen*), and the wayfarer (*wa-bni-s-sabeel*), and the beggars (*as-saa'leena* – those who ask), and for the freeing of human beings from bondage (*fi-r-riqaabi* – or the ransom of slaves); and is constant in prayer, and renders the purifying dues (*zakah*); and truly pious are they who keep their promises whenever they promise, and are patient (*as-saabireen*) in misfortune and hardship and in time of peril: it is they that have proved themselves true, and it is they, they who are conscious of God" [2:177].

Why was that verse revealed, and what was the occasion of its revelation? Previously, in this chapter (*Al Baqarah*) we are informed that the Prophet, peace be upon him, directed his face in prayer to the mosque of Jerusalem. That is why Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque are referred to as *Uulaa al-qiblahthaim* – the first *qiblah* of Muslims. At the start of Islam, the Prophet prayed in the direction of Jerusalem for 16 months. So the Jews started to make fun of the Muslims: how come the Muslims are using our *qiblah*?¹¹ And the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not like that. So he started to pray: "O God, if you can change that..." The Qur'anic verse came to him saying, We have seen you turning your face to the sky, and praying for the change of the *qiblah*. As of now direct your face towards the Sacred Mosque in Makkah; wherever you are, direct your face to it. So, as of that day, Muhammad directed

⁵ Oration

⁶ Odes

⁷ Poetry

⁸ Upon him be prayers and peace

⁹ 16:103

¹⁰ 17:88

¹¹ 2:144. Direction in which one faces when performing formal prayer (*salah*)

his face to Makkah. Again the Jews started to make fun: how come Muhammad changed his *qiblah*? *Yā-‘nī*,¹² if he was facing “their” *qiblah* they were criticizing; if he was not, they were criticizing! Then the Qur’anic verse came to say that directing your face towards east or west, in prayer, is not *birr*; that is not the goal of Islam, and it is not what Allah is looking for, but, the true *birr* – true goodness – is the belief in God, the Last Day, the angels, the books, the prophets, and giving of one’s wealth, though he loves it, to the following people: *qurbaa, yataamaa, masaakeen, ibn-is-sabeel, as-saa’leen, fi-r-riqaabi*.

There are three categories of piety. *Birr* is the highest category and that is why it is described in Arabic as *ji-ma’al-khair* – the total good. The category below *birr* is *īman*, and the lowest category is Islam. Islam is the lowest category. According to the hadith, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was sitting among his companions when a man came to him, attired in white clothes. He looked very strong; he sat in front of the Prophet and placed both of his open hands on the thighs of the Prophet and asked him in a stern tone: “Muhammad, what is Islam?” He replied: “Islam is to proclaim that God is one and that I am His messenger – *Ashhadu Allah ilaha Illallah Wa Ashhadu anna Muhammad ar-Rasoolullah*.” The man then tapped his palms on the thighs of the Prophet, and asked: “And what is *īman*?” The Prophet said: “To believe in God, His Angels, His Books, the Day of Judgment and to believe in the Destiny – *wal qadr wa khayri-hi wa sharri-hi*.”¹³ He then tapped his hands on the thighs of the Prophet for the third time and asked: “And what is *ihsān*?” The Prophet replied: “To worship God as if you see Him; if you don’t see Him, to be conscious that He is seeing you.” So *ihsān* is the highest type of God-

consciousness. The man asked: “When will the Day of Judgment come?” The Prophet answered: “The one who is asked is no more knowledgeable than the one who is asking” The man continued to ask a few more questions and then he left. The Prophet said to the people surrounding him: “That was Jibreel;¹⁴ he came to teach you the details of your religion.” Jibreel came to ask Muhammad questions so the people around him would hear and learn from his answers.

The first question was “What is Islam?” Islam is the lowest category. It is the easiest thing to be a Muslim: just say *La ilaha Illallah Muhammad ur-Rasoolullah* and that is it; you are Muslim – a Muslim on your identification card. But what is *īman* and what is *ihsān*? *Ihsān* is referred to in that Qur’anic verse as *al-Birr – ji-maa’al-khair* or “the total good”. The verse especially mentions that the pious people are those who believe in God, the Last Day, the Angels, the Books, and the Prophets. Why does it mention each one specifically? That is because each of these items belongs in the category of *īman*. *īman* is something in the heart. No one knows about it except Allah. Inseparable from *īman* is the next step which is that of action. But, first, let us see what the difference is between *īman* and Islam. This distinction is necessary because Islam is one thing and *īman* is an entirely different thing.

Islam, as the ulama define it, consists of uttering certain words: as soon as someone says *La ilaha Illallah Muhammad ur-Rasoolullah* we categorize him as Muslim; we say he is Muslim. But we cannot say he is *mo’min*. *Mo’min* is the one “who believes in God, the Last Day, the Angels, the Books, and the Prophets” – all those items that belong in the category of *īman*. Since *īman* is something inside the heart, and because we cannot enter inside somebody’s heart to know what is in there, we cannot call a person a *mo’min*. A *mo’min*, therefore, is one who believes in his/her heart all those items that belong in the category of *īman* and acts upon those beliefs.

When a group of Arab Bedouins from the desert came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and said: “*aamanna*” (we believe) – the Qur’anic verse was revealed to Muhammad saying: “Tell them not to say “*aamanna*”, but, rather, to say “*aslamna*” (we have outwardly surrendered) because *īman* has not yet entered into their hearts.”¹⁵

So, as human beings, we can judge a person as Muslim, but we cannot describe him as *mo’min* because we

¹² An Arabic expression which has no equivalent in English and means, loosely, “I mean” or, “you know” or, “in other words” depending on the context.

¹³ This is a hadith in which the Prophet has quoted a verse of the Qur’an: “To believe in God, His Angels, His Books, the Day of Judgment” then added “and to believe in the Destiny – *wal qadr wa khayri-hi wa sharri-hi*.” *Qadr* may be translated into English as “Destiny”. *Wal qadr wa khayri-hi wa sharri-hi* means to believe in the vicissitudes of life: everything that we, as human beings, perceive to be “good” or “bad”. *Qadr* is the power of God that brings about everything “good” or “bad” as we perceive it. For the believers the “good” is a blessing and a trial, while the “bad” is a trial and “a blessing in disguise”; it could, also, be a punishment. For the unbeliever the “good” is a blessing and the “bad” could be a punishment although he does not perceive it that way since he does not believe in God at all.

¹⁴ Gabriel – the angel

¹⁵ 49:14

don't know what is in his heart. He may be praying, fasting, performing the pilgrimage, but he may be doing these things for other motives and you don't know exactly what is in his heart. As a result, the verse came to say that īman (belief in God, the Last Day, the angels, the revelations, and the prophets) is a part of *birr*.

Many people, even among Muslims, doubt the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter, exactly like the people of the olden times who used to say, "When we die and turn into dust, are we going to be given life again?" To believe in the Last Day means, essentially, that you believe in justice. If there were no Last Day, there would be no justice, because the people who did good in their lifetime would be equal to those who did evil. Every action we do, as human beings, has an end: the end is either reward or punishment. If you obey the laws of the land you are a good citizen; if you disobey the law you are not a citizen in good standing. If you work hard in school you succeed, if you don't, you fail. If you farm your land in the right way, you will harvest a good crop, if you don't, you will starve to death that year. Everything in our life comes either with a reward or a punishment. So what about this life as a whole? There must be some sort of punishment and some sort of reward, too. And that is what the Last Day is all about. The Qur'an refers to this Last Day in a number of verses. Sometimes we understand these verses literally; sometimes we don't know what they mean, and everyone interprets them, or visualizes them the way they like. But, the main essence of these verses is that there is a reward and there is a punishment, and there is a life after death. For example: [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The translation is:]

"And as for him whose record shall be placed in his right hand, he will in time be called to account with an easy accounting, and will turn joyfully to those of his own kind. But as for him whose record shall be given to him behind his back, he will in time pray for utter destruction: but he will enter the blazing flame" [84:7-12].

That's how the Qur'an states it. And we, as human beings, visualize the meaning in our own way though we don't know what the language means; the Qur'an is talking to us in the language which we understand. In the final analysis, we know that there is a life after death, there will be justice, and everyone is going to be receiving reward or punishment according to what he had offered during this life. So that is what belief in Allah and the last Day is all about.

Malaa'ikah (angels). What are the angels? The angels

are a creation of God about which we don't know much. What we hear and read in books is that they don't get married and they don't have children like human beings. But what the Qur'an states clearly about them is that they are *always* obedient to God; they don't have free choice; they don't think. Some angels are mentioned in the Qur'an by name – *Jibreel*, *Mikaa'eel*, and *Israa'feel* – while others are mentioned in the hadith. Every one of them has a job to do. Say, for example, *Jibreel*: his job is that of a messenger between God and His human messengers on earth. He is referred to in the Qur'an as *Ar-Ruh* – The Spirit. He came to Maryam¹⁶ to tell her that she was going to conceive a fatherless son. The Qur'an states, We sent to her "*Ruhu-naa*" – Our Spirit – referring to the Angel *Jibreel*; he appeared before her like a young man in full strength. In regard to the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an said: "الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ" The trustworthy, the honest *Ruh* came with the Qur'an directly to your heart. . ."

Do we see the angels? We don't! So why do we believe in them? The very beginning of chapter *Al-Baqarah*¹⁷ mentions the first attribute of the pious people – *al-muttaqeen* – that they believe in *Al Ghayb* or "That which is beyond the reach of human perception" (or the Unseen). The belief in the angels means belief in the Unseen.

Al-Kitab. *Al-Kitab* are five. We, as Muslims, are required to believe in all of them. *Al-Qur'an*, which was revealed to Muhammad, the Torah, which was revealed to Musa, *Az-Zaboor*, which was revealed to Dāwūd or David, *Al-Injeel*, which was revealed to *al-Maseeh*,¹⁸ and The Scrolls of Ibrahīm, which the Qur'an referred to in Chapter *Al-A'la*.¹⁹ These are the five books which the Muslims are required to believe in. Of these books, the one that remains intact is the Qur'an, and, as such, it is our Criterion. The Bible as it exists today is not the word of God, but it is the word of Matthew, St Luke, St. John – the word of somebody else. It is the same with the Torah and with the Psalms. When we read any sacred book and it matches the Qur'an, we say that is correct, if it does not match what the Quran says, we say it is wrong.

Nabiyeen – the prophets and messengers of God. How many are they? Some ulama – and I don't know from

¹⁶ Mary

¹⁷ Chapter 2 in the Qur'an

¹⁸ Jesus

¹⁹ 87:18-19

where they got their figure – maintain that God sent 125,000 prophets. Personally, I wonder why not 125,033? Why such an exact number? Anyway, this is written in Muslim books, and it makes one wonder. Therefore, you should not believe every word you read in a book written by a Muslim. Weigh it by thinking about it! All we know is that the Qur'an mentions 25 prophets by name. In Chapter Al-An'aam, eighteen of them are mentioned in one verse. The other seven are mentioned in some other verses. But we know that there were more than 25, because there is another Qur'anic verse saying to the Prophet "And, indeed, O Muhammad, We have sent Messengers before you, of them there are some whose story We have related to you, and some whose story We did not relate to you; everyone of them came by the permission of God."²⁰ This indicates that the number of prophets was more than 25. But why are we required to believe in *all* the prophets? That is the crux of belief: to indicate that the message is one. All these prophets whose names are mentioned, and those whose names are not mentioned, came with the same message which is called Islam. Islam means to "submit oneself to the Will of God" and that is the message with which every prophet came. So, that shows the unity of the messengerhood, the unity of the message, and the unity of the Source which sent that message.

The Qur'an refers to the message of every prophet as Islam. The followers of Jesus said: "Be witness that we are Muslims." Pharaoh, when he was about to drown, said: "Now I believe in the God of Moses and Haroon, and I am a Muslim." Bilqees,²¹ when she went to Solomon said, "O my Lord, I have indeed wronged my soul: I do now submit in Islam, with Solomon, to the Lord of the Worlds." Ibrahim said: "We are Muslims and not from among the idolaters." So, every successive prophet came with a portion of the same message, until the message was completed through Muhammad, *'alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*. The Qur'an says, "Today I have perfected for you your religion and accepted Islam to be your faith."

آتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ (A'taa al- maala 'alaa

hubbihi). The phrase *'alaa hubbihi* is called *jumlah mu'taridah* in the Arabic language. *Jumlah mu'taridah* means that it is not necessary for the understanding of the meaning of a sentence, but it provides further clarification. If the verse were to say

"A'taa al maala qurbah, yataamaa..." the sentence would still have the same meaning as it does with the phrase *'alaa hubbihi* inserted in it. But the phrase *'alaa hubbihi* was inserted to show that wealth is very dear to a human being. Sometimes it is dearer than the children. We hear about people who disown their children, or people who throw out their children from the house, but we have never heard about someone throwing out his money from the house or disowning his money. That is why in a number of Qur'anic verses money is always mentioned before children, e.g. "Your wealth and your children are a *fitnah*." *Fitnah* means an *examination*, or a *test* in this life. So that Qur'anic verse which talks about *birr* is saying that directing your face towards the east or the west, while praying, is not *birr*; it is not what Allah is looking for, but, the true *birr* – true goodness – is

– آتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ –
 "The giving of one's wealth, *though he loves it*, to *qurbah*, *yataamaa*, *masaakeen*, *ibn-is-sabeel*, *as-saa'leen*, *fi-r-riqaabi*. *Fi-r-riqaabi* does not exist nowadays. *Wa-bni-s-sabeel* is very limited nowadays because of the widespread ownership of credit cards. In the olden days, a traveler was in trouble if he ran out of money. But, nowadays, you have a credit card with a \$5,000.00 or \$10,000.00 limit, and if you run out of cash, you can use your credit card. Imagine we are talking and explaining Qur'an and applying the concept of the credit card to explain some verses. I am sure there are some Muslims out there, who, if they heard what we are saying today, will declare that all the people in this mosque are *kuffar!* And all because we are explaining the Qur'an from the point of view of our environment and our time, and that is just commonsense. And commonsense is what we need to utilize, otherwise a tape recorder will be better than a human being – a tape recorder can replay all the Qur'an without making a single mistake. A human being makes mistakes. But the advantage that a human being has is that he is capable of contemplating and analyzing what he is reading, and so he comes out of it with conclusions based upon conditions prevailing in his time, his knowledge, and his circumstances.

Up to here, this Qur'anic verse is related to belief, giving, sharing, and charity: "True piety does not consist in turning your faces towards the east or the west – but truly pious is he who believes in God, and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Revelation, and the Prophets; and spends his wealth – however much he himself may love it – upon his near of kin, and the orphans and the needy, and the wayfarer, and

²⁰ 40:78

²¹ The Queen of Sheba

those who ask, and for the freeing of slaves.” Then the verse continues: *wa aqama as-salaah* (those who are constant in prayer). So, the one who performs his prayer also belongs in the category of *birr*. But what does “performing his prayer” mean?

A lot of Muslims emphasize prayer nowadays, but they are emphasizing prayer as an end in itself. Prayer is not an end in itself: it is not a matter of performing a prayer and that is it. Prayer is a reminder; prayer is a means of keeping a human being in contact with goodness. The Qur’an describes the function of prayer when it says, [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Convey unto others whatever of this divine writ has been revealed unto thee, and be constant in prayer: for, behold, prayer restrains man from loathsome deeds and from all that runs counter to reason; and remembrance of God is indeed the greatest good. And God knows all that you do” [29:45]. If the prayer does not lead you to restraint, then, you did not pray. Though you made *ruku’at*²² and *sujood*,²³ you did not pray, because it did not fulfill its function. “Performing his prayer” means, performing the prayer in a way that will result in achieving the purpose for which it was legislated. So, those who establish prayer, and, thereby, are included in the category of *birr* are those who performed the prayer as it should be performed.

Zakah is another pillar of Islam, and because money is very dear to human beings, this Qur’anic verse mentions it twice. At the start the verse says, *A’ataa al maala*. . . spends out of his wealth, then, it says, *aqama as-salaata wa-aata az-zakaata* – those who establish prayer and who give *zakah*. This means something. It means that there is *zakah*, and there is something more that is not *zakah*, which is called *sadaqaat*. *Sadaqaat* is being referred to in “giving of one’s wealth, though he loves it, to the following people: *qurbaa, yataamaa, masaakeen, ibn-is-sabeel, as-saa’leen, fi-r-riqaabi*”, to the extent that, in a Muslim state which is governed by the Qur’an as its Constitution, the government is permitted to legislate for payment of *sadaqaat* if the *zakah* is not enough to fulfill the needs of the country or to balance the budget of the country. At the start of the verse, the subject of money is related to giving *sadaqaat* or charity, and after mentioning the prayer, *zakah* is mentioned, which, like the prayer, is a compulsory item.

²² Bowing

²³ Prostration

وَالْمُؤْفُونَ بَعْدَهُمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا : this is a

description of a type of people who are included in the category of *birr*: “They who keep their promises whenever they promise.” This is our problem as Muslims. We don’t do that. We can give 100 promises, followed by *insha’allah*²⁴ and never fulfill them. Then, when you ask me why I didn’t fulfill my promise, I say, *Rabbuna maa shaa’* – God did not will it – I have an excuse. When I used to visit Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and all those areas, and someone would say to me *insha’allah*, I knew that he did not intend to do what he was saying. It has become an unexpressed law for me, because I have tried it once, twice, three times with many people and found that an individual is saying *insha’allah* with the express intention of not honoring his promise; it has become second nature to some people, whereas the Qur’an says that those who fulfill their promise, when they give a promise, belong to the category of people who practice *al-birr* or the *total good*. The people who don’t do that, on the other hand, are given another description in the Qur’an. They are called *al-munafiqin* or the hypocrites. There is a whole chapter in the Qur’an entitled *Al-Munafiqin* because of the prevalence of this characteristic in a human being. In that chapter, the Prophet is told, “When the hypocrites come to you, Muhammad, they say ‘We bear witness that you are indeed the messenger of God’. But, God knows very well that you are His messenger and God bears witness that the hypocrites are false in their declaration of faith.”²⁵

A number of other descriptions for such people are also found in the Qur’an. Imam quotes:²⁶

مُذَبِّبِينَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ لَا إِلَى هَؤُلَاءِ وَلَا إِلَى هَؤُلَاءِ

which means you don’t know where they stand – to the right or to the left; they are distracted in mind, swinging between two attitudes, being sincerely for neither one group, nor the other. And another description is [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“...And when they rise to pray, they rise reluctantly, only to be seen and praised by men, remembering God but

²⁴ “God willing”

²⁵ 63:1

²⁶ 4:143

seldom.”²⁷ They show laziness. The Qur’an talks a lot about the attribute of hypocrisy, and considers the hypocrites as the most dangerous category of people against Islam.²⁸ Because, if there is a *kafir*, you know that he is your enemy. If there is a Muslim you know that he is your brother, but the one who is *al-munāfiq* or a hypocrite, you don’t know where he falls. How can you trust him? And that is why the Prophet was warned against those people.

There is a hadith of the Prophet which corroborates what the Qur’an says: “The signs by which you know the hypocrite are three: When he speaks he tells lies. When he gives a promise, he will not fulfill it. When you trust him with something, he will not rise to the level of that trust.” And in another hadith, he added something else: “And if he is angry, or in conflict with someone, he will be outrageous.”

The Prophet used to pray for the hypocrites, to ask forgiveness for them, and he used to pray at their graves when they died. A Qur’anic verse came to the Prophet saying: “And never shalt thou pray over any of them that has died, and never shalt thou stand by his grave...”²⁹ So the Prophet stopped. But he continued to pray for forgiveness for them. Then, another verse was revealed – and see how the Qur’an treats the Prophet, how harshly it says to him – “And whether thou dost pray unto God that they be forgiven or dost not pray for them – it will be the same: for even if thou wert to pray seventy times that they be forgiven, God will not forgive them, seeing that they are bent on denying God and His Messenger...” From this verse we learn not only the position of the hypocrites, but, also, we learn the position of the Prophet. Sometimes Muslims are overwhelmed by emotions and elevate the Prophet to the place of divinity. The Prophet was a human being, and Divinity belongs to God alone. In the Muslim countries, people read *mawlid* or *mawlood sharif*, in which they recite that the Prophet was created of *noor* (light) and that *noor* was transferred from Adam to Idrees³⁰ to this, to this, until it reached Abdullah.³¹ That is nonsense. And there

are a lot of Muslims sometimes debating these points. Muhammad was the result of a meeting between Amina and Abdullah, exactly like any other human being. The Qur’an said it very clearly: “Say to them Muhammad, I am a man like you. The only difference between me and you is that I received revelation.”³²

“Whether thou dost pray unto God that they be forgiven or dost not pray for them – it will be the same: for even if thou wert to pray seventy times that they be forgiven, God will not forgive them...” This verse is akin to a threat from God, as if to say, “Muhammad, I said don’t do that.” In Chapter ‘Abasa³³ God rebukes the Prophet saying that, when the blind man came to you, Muhammad, you didn’t pay any attention to him because you were with the important and influential people of Quraysh. How do you know, maybe, this blind man will be a good believer? It shows us that the Qur’an and God are blaming Muhammad for certain conduct. And that is the difference between divinity and humanity. The Prophet, when he found some of his companions exalting him, said in his hadith: “Don’t exalt my status, as the Christians did with Jesus, to the extent that they made him the Son of God, because I am nothing but a plain man, and a messenger of God.”

That verse of *al-birr* ends by saying that those who are patient in hardship, in good times and bad times, and in times of peril and war, it is they who have proved themselves true, and it is they who are conscious of God. So those people who practice patience in their lives are counted in the category of *al-birr*.

I think we have few minutes and I would like to entertain one or two questions so no one will say that you are a captive audience and I am a dictator. [Two questions were asked: one was regarding the zakah and membership payments in the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo, and the other was regarding the sighting of the new moon for Ramadan.]

²⁷ 4:142

²⁸ 63:4

²⁹ 9:84

³⁰ The name of an Arabian prophet

³¹ Father of Muhammad

³² 18:110

³³ Chapter 80