

Islam Keeps the Concept of the Scales of Justice in the Forefront

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As humans, we should always be aware of the scales of justice. If you ask a dictator why he is oppressing people or doing a certain "evil" action, he will always give you a reason or justification. He will say that he is not doing anything wrong. However, everyone else may clearly claim that he is definitely committing atrocities and wrong doings. How do we know what is right or wrong?

This is very difficult, and we must keep the concept of the scales of justice in the forefront. Islam identifies rules to assist us. For example, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said that you wish for that person what you wish for yourself. In other words, put yourself in the other person's shoes. This forces you to know your limits. Everything has limitations, and one should never exceed the limit. For example, as a parent, when you see your child misbehaving, you want to admonish him or correct his behavior.

Sometimes a parent may get very emotional and start using excessive language or force (e.g., uncontrolled beatings or very harsh yelling). Now, if the parent, at that moment, stopped and asked himself or herself, what if the roles were reversed and I was this child? Would I like to be hit this many times or be yelled at in such a manner for this minor misconduct? No, of course the parent would not want to receive this reaction. If the parent really ponders, he or she will understand that the limit has been exceeded and that this is not justice.

In another example, let us say person A did something wrong to person B or caused him harm. Then later on, person A felt really bad and went to ask person B for forgiveness and tried to compensate for the wrongdoing. What if person B is stubborn and does not forgive person A? Person A would feel horrible, and he would carry such a tremendous pain. That is why one should put himself in the other's shoes. Yes, person A did something wrong to person B or violated his right. However, person B would want to be forgiven if he was in the shoes of person A. Right? It is only natural and just. In all cases, the scales of justice must be in front of us. The Qur'an (49:13) states: O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware.

Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (peace be upon him and his family) was the personification (or reverse

personification) of the scales of justice. Imam Ali said that it is not enough that you call me the commander of the faithful and I do not know how the people are living. He used to worry about whether the people in the remote desert were hungry because he was in charge. How many of our current leaders are like this? Leaders of great nations will hold lavish dinners for other leaders but not lose sleep over the poor and hungry of their own nation. In regards to the scales of justice, there are three points to keep in mind: 1) do the right thing without any tiredness (meaning, if you see something right, go after it. You must have a clear vision on what is right.

From a legal point of view, doing taqlid (emulation) to a mujtahid (jurist) (if you are not a mujtahid yourself) assists oneself in understanding the right path.), 2) do not grab on people (meaning, do not put pressure on people. For example, if you want to raise money, ask the people. But if you put people in a difficult situation and do not give them options, the pressure you are exerting may get you some money, but that person will probably not want to see you or talk to you anymore.), and 3) do not show off (your alleged good deeds will be void if you do). (Jalali, page 460).

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said that the best aql (intellect or reasoning) is to do a good thing whether it is for a person that is good or bad. Listen, we are not the police. Many times we will say that this person is good or this person is bad without even knowing any details. If a person is sick (whether you think he is bad or not), help him. You would want him to help you if you were sick.[18] In regards to doing something good, the Prophet and Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (peace be upon them and their family) said do it immediately.

In regards to giving money, Imam Ali (peace be upon him and his family) said do not say what is my small amount of money going to do. Meaning, do not say let the rich pay because your amount will not really have an impact. No, you must do your part. It does not matter if your amount is small or large. Remember, piety is found in quality, not mere quantity. There is another hadith (tradition) that says that you have to be very gentle in communicating with others. Also, Imam Ali (peace be upon him and his family) said that if you take revenge, the best revenge is to forgive. This is very hard to do, but this, like the other traditions, points out basic concepts that embody the scales of justice.

The wise Qur'an (53:39) states, "And nothing belongs to man except what he strives for." Also, the Qur'an (91:7-10) states, "By the soul and Him who fashioned it, and inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and vices: one who purifies it is felicitous, and one who betrays it fails."

Imam Ali (peace be upon him and his family) said that all of you are from Adam (peace be upon him), and Adam was from dirt. (Jalali, page 464). Meaning, we are all going to die one day, and the only thing that will remain are our deeds. We must be just in our actions, because that justice will allow us to succeed.

This discussion of justice reminds me of a childhood event. When I was in middle school (I was about thirteen years-old), I remember a day when the teacher was handing back our graded exams. One student reviewed his exam and discovered that the teacher made a mistake in counting the points. Actually, the teacher gave the student too many points. Now, this student had to decide whether to keep quiet and keep the high score or to tell the teacher about the mistake. If he told the teacher, the teacher would probably lower the score. This student decided to tell the teacher the truth. The teacher was so surprised and happy with the student's honesty, the teacher did not reduce the score and told the student that he deserved the extra points. This student, at that moment, embodied or used the scales of justice. He knew what was right and acted upon it (even though he might "harm" himself in regards to his class grade), and his act of justice was rewarded. Being just is not only the right thing to do, it is advantageous for us. We enter this world and leave this world within a relatively short period of time. If we are just during this time, it will benefit us beyond our comprehension

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Law and rules are part of all communities and societies. The many countries and nations of this world all have their own laws. There are even tribal laws and laws amongst thieves (e.g., do not steal from each other). Shari'ah (Islamic law) and other laws are the same in concept. The only difference is the source. For example, secular law stems from the people's opinion (such as via Congress or a founding body), but shari'ah stems from revelation of God (the All-Wise) and ahadith (traditions).

Islam gives people freedom, but this freedom has limitations. One aspect of shari'ah is to help people identify these limitations. In the United States, people say that there is freedom of speech. Ok, there is a certain "freedom" of speech, but there are also limitations. The case law provides a plethora of examples where public good or other reasons are stated to limit speech in certain situations and places.

The U.S. laws also give other freedoms but not without limitations. Look, there is a reason jails and penalties exist. You cannot just do anything you want. You have to follow the rules of the country, state, city, etc. In Islam, the same concept applies. Islam gives the basic freedoms of 1) life, 2) will, and 3) work.[19]

However, these freedoms have limitations. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said that the dunya (world) has to be a prison for you. What does this mean? Should we live in a jail cell? No, but we have to know our limitations. We surely are being tested in this world, and the Lord (the All-Merciful) has sent us guidance.

Within this guidance, we find the guidelines of shari'ah. A lot of the limitations of shari'ah must be self-imposed by Muslims. For example, once I met some engineers for work. One of these engineers was born and grew up in Iran, but now he works and lives in the United States. In a relaxed tone, he told me that he drinks alcohol. He was not worried about getting caught and harbored no fear. Should one avoid sin because of the fear of government or the fear of God (the All-Beneficent)? Whom do we worship? We should always be cognizant of the fact that Allah (the All-Knowing) is always watching.

We must not exceed the limits and we must restrain ourselves to be just to our own souls and for the love of God (the All-Praiseworthy). The following are verses from the Qur'an that beautifully convey truths that are relevant to this discussion: (2:256), inter alia, "There is no compulsion in religion: rectitude has become distinct from error." (76:3), "Indeed We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful." (10:99), inter alia, "Would you then force people until they become faithful?" (49:13), "O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware." (30:30), "So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind (There is no altering Allah's creation; that is the upright religion, but most people do not know.)" (See Jalali, pages 464-465).

Accordingly, we should willingly embrace shari'ah and do our utmost to follow the laws daily. However, when it comes to application and following the rules, there are seven conditions one should keep in mind: 1) maturity (everyone is responsible when he or she becomes mature), 2) aql (intellect or reasoning; an insane person is not responsible), 3) not being feeble in a particular situation or subject, 4) willingness (one must not be forced), 5) intention, 6) should not bring harm (e.g., the act should not bring harm to someone else), and 7) the act should be possible (meaning, being able to materialize). (Jalali, page 466).

Generally, these are basic conditions that apply to Islamic worship, ethics, and transactions. Allah (the All-Wise) sent us the last Prophet, Prophet Muhammad and the Imams (peace be upon them all and their family) as guidance.

"Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and

I have approved Islam as your religion.” (Qur’an (5:3)).

All in all, we have been given Islam, including its regulations, as help or assistance. If we choose to follow the laws, then it will benefit ourselves in this world and the hereafter. And if we can help ourselves, then we can help our families (such as our children) and others.

.(“O you who have faith! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire.” (Qur’an (66:6