

The Sacredness of Honor

We have noted that the Islamic teachings safeguard human dignity and honor, regarding them, in fact, as inviolable and sacred. Once, while looking at the Ka'aba, 'Abdullah bin Umar remarked, "How great and sacred you are! But the sanctity of the Believer is greater than yours"—and the sanctity of the Muslim includes the sanctity of his life, his honor, and his property.

During the Farewell Pilgrimage the Prophet (peace be on him) addressed the assembly of Muslims, saying, **Your lives, your honor, and your property are as sacred to each other as the sacredness of this your day, in this your month, and in this your city.** (Reported by Muslim.)

Islam safeguards the sanctity of a person's honor against backbiting even if what is said about him is true. How much more abhorrent it is, then, if what is said is false and baseless; this is a sheer wrong and a great sin. The Prophet (peace be on him) said, **If anyone says something about a person which is not true in order to defame him, Allah will confine him in the fire of Hell until it extinguishes his utterance.** (Reported by al-Tabarani)

'Aishah reported that the Prophet (peace be on him) said to his Companions, **'Do you know what the worst form of usury is in the sight of Allah?' They said, 'Allah and His Messenger know best' The Prophet (peace be on him) replied, 'The worst form of usury is the violation of the personal honor of a Muslim.'** He then recited, **'Those who harm believing men and believing women undeservedly have laid upon themselves a calumny and a manifest sin.'** (33:58) (Reported by Ibn Abu Hatim, Ibn Murdawai and al-Bayhaqi.)

The vilest kind of attack on personal honor is that of accusing a virtuous believing woman of immorality. Such an accusation not only ruins her reputation and that of her family, destroying her future, but also broadcasts scandals within the Muslim society. This is why the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) listed it among the seven most heinous sins and the Qur'an threatened its perpetrators with dire punishments: **Those who accuse chaste but careless (or indiscreet) believing women shall be accursed in this world and in the Hereafter, and theirs will be a grievous punishment on the Day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet will bear witness against them concerning what they did. On that Day Allah will pay them in full their just due, and they will show that Allah is indeed the manifest Truth.** (24:23-25) **Indeed, these who love that a scandal should be spread concerning those who believe will have a painful punishment in this world and in the Hereafter, and Allah knows and you do not know.** (24:19)

The Sacredness of Life

Islam has made human life sacred and has safeguarded its preservation. According to its teachings, aggression against human life is the second greatest sin in the sight of Allah, second only to denial of Him. The Qur'an declares, **.. If anyone kills a person for any reason other than for (the killing of) a person or for sowing corruption in the land, it will be as if he had killed the whole of mankind....(5:35 (32))**

Because the human race constitutes a single family, an offense against one of its members is in fact an offense against the whole of humanity. The crime is more serious if the slain is a believer in Allah. **And for the one who kills a Believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, to abide therein; and the wrath of Allah is upon him and His curse, and a tremendous punishment has been prepared for him. (4:93)**

The Prophet (peace be on him) said, **"The passing away of the world would mean less to Allah than the murder of a Muslim man."** (Reported by Muslim, al-Nisai, and al-Tirmidhi.)

He also said, **"A Believer remains within the scope of his religion as long as he does not kill anyone unlawfully."** (Reported by al-Bukhari.)

And again, **Allah may forgive every sin except in the case of one who dies a mushrik or one who kills a Believer intentionally.** (Reported by Abu Daoud, Ibn Hibban, and al-Hakim.)

On the basis of these verses and ahadith, Ibn 'Abbas deduced that the repentance of the murder will not be accepted by Allah. For, he argued, since in the case of an offense against another individual, the wrongdoer's repentance is not accepted unless the wrong done to others is righted or their satisfaction secured, the question is how, in the case of murder, one can restore the murdered person to life or secure his satisfaction. Others say that sincere repentance is accepted by Allah; if it erases even the greatest sin, that of shirk or ascribing partners to Allah, why not lesser sins? Allah Ta'ala says: **...Those who do not invoke, together with Allah, any other deity, nor take the life which Allah has made sacred except in (the course of) justice, nor commit zina. And whoever does that shall pay the price (of his sin). The punishment shall be doubled for him on the Day of Resurrection and he will abide in it in disgrace, except for him who repents and believes and does righteous deeds. As for them, Allah will change their evil deeds to good deeds, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (25:68-70)**

"The Murderer and the Murdered Will Be in Hell"

The Prophet (peace be on him) considered a Muslim's fighting another Muslim to be a door to unbelief and a deed pertaining to pre-Islamic jahiliyyah, during which people used to wage wars and shed blood over a camel or a horse. He said, **"Insulting the Muslim is wickedness and fighting him is unbelief."** (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.) **"Do not become unbelievers after I pass away, killing one another."** (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.)

He further said, **'When two Muslims draw weapons against each other, they are at the brink of Hell. If one of them kills the other, they both enter it together.'** Someone asked, **'O Messenger of Allah, this one wthe murderer, but what was the fault of the murdered?'** He replied, **'He was eager to kill the oth.'** (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.)

Because of this the Prophet (peace be on him) forbade any act which might lead to murder or to a fight, even pointing a weapon, saying, **None of you should point a weapon at his brother. Perhaps Satan may make his hand slip and then he will fall into the pit of Fire.** (Reported by al-Bukhari.)

He also said, **If anyone points a piece of iron at his brother, the angels curse him until he stops doing it, even if he is his real brother.** (Reported by Muslim.)

He even went so far as to say, **"It is not permissible for the Muslim to frighten his brother."** (Reported by Abu Daoud as well as by al-Tabarani on reliable authority.)

The sin of murder is not limited to the murderer alone. Each individual who participated in this crime, by deed, or by word, will be the recipient of Allah's punishment in proportion to his share in it; even a person who happened to be at the scene of the murder will receive a share of the sin. A hadith states, **None of you should remain in a place where a man is being killed unjustly, for the curse (of Allah) descends on anyone who was present and did not defend him.** (Reported by al-Tabarani and by al-Bayhaqi on good authority.)

The Sanctity of the Lives of Allies and Non-Muslim Residents

Thus far we have quoted those texts which warn Muslims against killing or fighting fellow Muslims. But let no one get the impression that the life of a non-Muslim is not safe in a Muslim society, for Allah has declared the life of every human being to be sacred, and He has safeguarded it.

This applies as long as the non-Muslim does not fight against the Muslims; if he does so, shedding blood is permissible. However, if the non-Muslim is of a people with whom there is a treaty or if he is a dhimmi (a non-Muslim resident of an Islamic state), his life is sacred, and it is unlawful for the Muslim to attack him. In this regard the Prophet (peace be on him) has said, **Anyone who kills a person from among the people with whom there is a treaty will not smell the fragrance of the Garden, although its fragrance reaches to a walking distance of forty years.** (Reported by al-Bukhari and others.) **"Anyone who kills a dhimmi will not smell the fragrance of the Garden."** (Reported by al-Nisai.)

Capital Punishment

Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala says, **...Do not take the life which Allah has made sacred except in (the course of) justice....(6:151)**

Allah has mentioned three crimes for which the death penalty is justified:

1. Unjust murder. Murder which has been proved demands retaliation by taking the life of the murderer—a life for a life, a like return for an evil committed, as the initiator of the killing is the initiator of the wrongdoing. As the Qur'an states, **In the law of qisas (retaliation) there is life for you, O people of understanding....(2:179)**
2. Publicly committing zina with a person who is not one's spouse if at least four upright people have actually witnessed intercourse taking place and testified before the court that they saw it. The death penalty applies to either of the two who is married. Confession, repeated four times before the court by the adulterer or adulteress, is equivalent to the testimony of four witnesses.
3. Apostasy from Islam after willingly accepting it and subsequently declaring an open revolt against it in such a manner which threatens the solidarity of the Muslim community is a crime punishable by death. No one is compelled to accept Islam, but

at the same time no one is permitted to play tricks with it, as some Jews did during the Prophet's time: A party of the People of the Book say, '**Believe in what has been revealed to the Believers' at the beginning of the day and reject it at the end of it, in order that they may turn back** (from Islam). (3:72)

The Prophet (peace be on him) limited capital punishment to these three crimes only, saying, **The shedding of the blood of a Muslim is not lawful except for one of three reasons: a life for a life, a married person who commits zina, and one who turns aside from his religion and abandons the community.** (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

In any of these instances, the death penalty can be implemented only by the proper authority after due process of law prescribed by the Shari'ah; individuals cannot take the law into their own hands, becoming judges and executioners, since this would result in absolute chaos and disorder. However, the judge may turn the murderer over to the victim's next-of-kin to be executed in his presence so that their hearts may be eased and the desire for revenge extinguished. This is in obedience to the saying of Allah Ta'ala, **...And whoever is killed wrongfully, We have given authority to the heir; but let him not go to excess in killing (by way of retaliation), for indeed he will be helped.** (17:33)

Suicide

Whatever applies to the crime of murder likewise applies to committing suicide. Whoever takes his life by any means whatsoever has unjustly taken a life which Allah has made sacred. For since he did not create himself, nor even so much as a single cell of his body, the life of an individual does not belong to him; it is a trust given to him by Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala. He is not allowed to diminish it, let alone to harm or destroy it. Allah Ta'ala says: **...Do not kill yourselves; indeed, Allah is merciful to you.** (4:29)

The Islamic teachings require the Muslim to be resolute in facing hardships; he is not permitted to give up and to run away from the vicissitudes of life when a tragedy befalls or some of his hopes are dashed. Indeed, the believer is created for striving, not for sitting idle; for combat, not for escape. His faith and character do not permit him to run away from the battlefield of life, and he possesses a weapon which never fails and ammunition which is never exhausted: the weapon of his unshakable faith and the ammunition of his moral steadfastness.

The Prophet (peace be on him) warned that anyone who commits the crime of suicide will be deprived of the mercy of Allah and will not enter the Garden; he will deserve Allah's wrath and be cast into the Fire. The Prophet (peace be on him) said, **'In the time before you, a man was wounded. His wounds troubled him so much that he took a knife and cut his wrist and bled himself to death. Thereupon Allah said, 'My slave hurried in the matter of his life.' therefore, he is deprived of the Garden.'** (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.)

If a person is deprived of the Garden because he cannot bear the pain of his wounds and so kills himself, what about the one who takes his life because he has suffered a loss, whether great or small in his business, has failed an examination, or has been rejected by a woman. Let those people who are weak of will pay careful attention to the following hadith. **He who throws himself down from a rock and commits suicide will be throwing himself into the fire of Hell; he who drinks poison and kills himself will have the poison in his hand, drinking it forever in**

the fire of Hell and he who kills himself with a weapon will have that weapon in his hand, stabbing himself forever in the fire of Hell. (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.)