

Manifesting Love for the Prophet (S)

*A Khutbah delivered by
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As Muslims, we all claim a deep and unwavering love for our beloved Prophet, Mohammad (S); indeed we are not worthy of calling ourselves Muslims, neither legally nor morally, unless we profess this love to be above anyone or anything else in creation. Such is the implicit and explicit conclusion of the second half of our *shahadah*.

An inescapable facet of this love is our adherence to his *sunnah*. While our daily lives may achieve this adherence to varying degrees depending on our *iman*, every Muslim must believe without a trace of doubt in his heart, that the highest state of existence we can hope to achieve is synonymous with living the Sunnah in its entirety. Such was the living example of the *Sahaabah*, and never more so than in the period during which they cherished the presence of the Prophet (S) among them.

While the love that each *Sahaabah* had for the Prophet (S) was immeasurably greater than we might hope to achieve, there are examples which escape the comprehension of even the most devout of us. Perhaps the most famous of these examples is that of Umar (R); a man who at one time harbored such intense hatred for the Prophet (S), that he resolved to kill him with a stroke from his own sword. The zeal with which he, and the other *Sahaabah*, guarded the Prophet's (S) honor is beyond our imagination.

While we may become frustrated at what we see as a new phenomenon of disbelievers insulting the Prophet (S), it should be noted that the *Sahaabah* were no strangers to vulgarities being leveled against the Prophet (S) both in his presence and in private circles. This was the situation both from the direction of the *Quraish* in Mecca and from the Jews and the hypocrites in Medina. It would be bold indeed to suggest that the *Sahaabah* were not painfully inflamed by the insults. Yet, when their zeal to defend his honor exceeded the bounds of permissible behavior, the Prophet (S) was not slow to stop them. And they in return were just as swift in obeying him. They understood the true test of love for the Prophet (S): placing his command above any personal opinion, rationalization or emotional urge. The notion of disobeying the Prophet (S) in order to create a self-styled display of love for him is nothing less than the manifestation of the *nafs*.

Of course, the Prophet (S) is not here to forbid us in person from committing any excess. As with any other aspect of life, we must rely on what he has left behind: his *Sunnah* as manifested by the understanding and actions of the *Sahaabah*. Since few of us possess the education or faculties to directly discern the *Sunnah*, we resort to its interpretation by the reliable and meticulous scholars of our tradition – the the *Shariah*. It is foolish to view the *Shariah* as lacking in matters of emotion such as our love for the Prophet (S); what other barrier is there to contain the excesses to which our emotions lead us?

So, what does the *Shariah* tell us regarding defending the honor of the Prophet (S)? For one thing, the rule of law is a principle which must be firmly adhered to. As a general rule, initiation of violence (as opposed to physical self defense of person or property) is only permitted under the direction of the state: corporal or capital punishment in the case of criminal prosecution, or the declaration of war in case of international infringements. Taking the law into one's own hands is not permitted, and can carry moral implications in addition to being a civil crime. We see this clearly in the example of the Prophet(S) and the *Sahaabah*, who sanctioned violence only under the authority of the established Muslim state.

In a Muslim country, a crime of blasphemy within its borders must be prosecuted by the state and any punishment determined by the state authorities. A similar act outside of its borders, if the state deems it appropriate to respond, must be dealt with through diplomatic channels, and failing this, by military means. The population of the country has no right to contradict the determination of the state in these matters. Violent demonstration in the street which leads to others being harmed (Muslims, no less) will be a burden we rue on The Day when it matters most. Acts of violence against emissaries of a foreign country are not even permitted to a Muslim state, let alone the general population. In fact, the Prophet(S) himself declared such an act forbidden to him.

On the opposite side, Muslims living in a non-Muslim country must abide by the established laws of that state even where those laws defend others' rights to commit blasphemy. We are not accountable for, nor are we permitted to enforce *Shariah* in a non-Muslim country counter to the local laws. This, again, is the sole preserve of a Muslim state.

Given that individuals are not permitted to take up violence in response to such acts, what should be done? In order to answer this question, we need to determine the purpose of the response. Is it to demonstrate that we are offended? Or perhaps to intimidate? Or maybe to persuade against further harm?

If we are expressing our hurt, the original act has conclusively achieved its purpose, guaranteeing further and more repulsive insults. If the purpose is to intimidate, and we have already recognized that violence is not an option, the intimidation must carry some other means of compulsion, such as the prospect of economic losses. Without such teeth, the warning will be as empty to the target as it is to the ones issuing it. While economic pressure has proved effective in the past, we must bear in mind that it needs to be collective to be credible, and at the same time it must be clearly voluntary on an individual basis.

Love for the Prophet(S) directs that our goal in this situation is to make the attempt to prevent repetition without exceeding our bounds. If we choose to demonstrate, it must be with a view to persuade; without the force of power. Persuasion must appeal to the rational and humane, necessitating that the nature of the protest is also rational and humane, in keeping with our tradition of *nasihah*. This may not assuage our anger and hurt. But as we have established, that is not the purpose, and to force this dimension into the act is to make it subject to our *nafs*.

While we are deeply hurt, and indeed angered, by insults to the Prophet(S), we must hold to the principle of acting with civility as proof of our love to the one whose honor we claim to defend. Furthermore, we must recognize the environment in which we have been thrust, however unwillingly we got there, and be prepared ahead of time. The first step is to recognize the limits which the *Shariah* places on our rights and the responsibilities it places upon us. Once we understand this, we need to be ready with an **effective** response to future such events, as dictated by this recognition.

The Prophet(S) himself taught us to be prepared for an adversity which can be anticipated.

Synopsis by Saif Ghouse, October 2nd 2012