



NIZAMIYE MOSQUE COMPLEX

“Where heart and mind meet”

FRIDAY SERMON – 10 : MASHWARAH (CONSULTATION) - 2

The consultation must not be the place of asserting our own ideas

An important principle for evaluating issues with criteria of the conscience is the following fact that the Qur’an states: “... *whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it; and whoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it*” (Az-Zilzal 99:7–8).

Namely, concerning the opinions stated on a certain issue, a view whose evil side has a grain’s weight of dominance over its good side should be put aside, and a view whose good side has dominance—be it of a grain’s weight—over its evil side should be taken as basis. That is, given that goodness has superiority over evil at the weighing of deeds and that Allah Almighty judges His servants accordingly, then this principle must be prevalent at our consultations as well. If goodness has an atom’s weight of dominance in one of the opinions stated, neither seniority, nor title, nor status, nor being a personage of esteem can be a factor for making another person’s opinion more credible. On the contrary, when the truth has become manifest, giving weight to these others factors and using them for pressure means destroying the spirit of consultation.

There must absolutely be no impositions at consultation. **According to Islam, the most ideal person in this respect is the one who says to the other one—perhaps as much as ten times a half an hour during consultation—“You are very right on this subject. I agree with every word you are saying. Besides this, however, such and such thought came to my mind. What do you think about it?”** This is the person who protects the honor of consultation, who is a monument of honor. Otherwise, the person who does not show the respect to listen to the other side, but continuously sees his own opinions as right, is a poor one who has made his own carnal soul into an idol. Even if such a poor person who prostates himself before his carnal soul thinks he is speaking for the sake of religion and serving Allah, in reality he speaks in the name of his carnal soul. Therefore, the thoughts he reveals will always receive a negative reaction. It is for this reason that during the consultation a person must give up firmness at one’s manner, acts, and thoughts, file away the sharp sides of one’s ideas, and thus make them easier to welcome. A consultation where firmness of matters is not broken, thoughts are not voiced in a soft manner and harshness exists will give way to cracks and breakings.

Not seniority or superior status but where the right lies

Sometimes flawed people try to take advantage of their seniority or credit and make impositions. This way, even though unaware, they openly abuse the services they carry out in the name of faith for the sake of their seniority and status. However, no one has the right to eliminate the fruitfulness of the consultation with egotistic and selfish attitudes. I would like to relate an example about this subject.



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Once, the great saint and scholar Hasan al-Basri was among the people who were listening to some Companions of the Prophet. People who attended the gathering were asking the Companions their questions and consulting with them as they were supposed to do, since the Companions had been in the presence of the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, and were imbued with the hue of that presence. I think being in the Prophet’s presence, even once, yields abundant blessings as if one read the entire Qur’an ten times from the beginning to end, for the noble Prophet’s every attitude reflected the Truth. In his looking, giving ear to something, opening his mouth, or moving his tongue or lips, the truths of sound belief in God would be seen all the time. A poet expressed this state by saying that every time he prostrated himself, it was a Divine manifestation. That is to say, a person who looked at him fully felt as if he were in the presence of God by recognizing how his person virtually vanished from sight. This has nothing to do with attempting to imagine the Divine Essence.

On the contrary, this is an emphasis of how our beloved Messenger (saw) reminded of Allah in all of his attitudes and behaviors. Thus, the Companions who were honored with being in the presence of such a blessed Prophet (saw) undoubtedly had a very different experience of imbuing. Particularly, considering the fact that those people who were wholeheartedly attached to the noble Prophet (saw) tried not to neglect being in his presence a few times every day, surely they were people to be listened to and consulted with.

In addition, the economic, administrative, and social lives in those times were completely oriented to religion and were run according to religious principles. Therefore, in order to solve real-life problems people implemented the unshakeable and stable guidelines of religion.

It was for this reason that the people who lived at the time of Hasan al-Basri sought out the then living Companions, who had learned religion from its source. At such a gathering Hasan al-Basri also attended, they asked a question to a Companion and he answered it. After the Companion finished speaking, Hasan al-Basri, who was about 30 years old at the time and was sitting somewhere at the back, was consulted. As he spoke, the Companion admired him. As he was so fair and righteous thanks to the virtuous qualities he had acquired from the beloved Prophet, the Companion asked the people around him, “Why are you asking your questions to me while you have this man here?” As it is also seen in this example, the Companion of the Prophet did not even use his honorable status and credit as a means of imposition. Before a young man whom he thought to be endowed with more effective speech and stronger judgment, he directed the attention to that young man and believed that letting him speak would be better. I think such an approach is very significant at the issue of grasping the spirit of consultation.

Unfortunately, such a degree of righteousness is not shown in our time. A person who has certain seniority wants to be the one who talks all the time and expects others to listen to him in complete silence. In addition, instead of listening to the person speaking, the individuals who make up the consultation group are preparing certain answers in their mind as counterarguments. And sometimes people show unnecessary obstinacy and feel obliged to say something for the sake of objecting to what another person says. And sometimes they even begin to



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scheme in a devilish fashion for the sake of refuting the other person’s opinion. For this reason, even if the words spoken at the consultation are truthful, they yield no benefit.

What speaks should only be the truth

A person should not be disturbed when the truth surfaces by means of somebody else. If there is another person to voice a sensible and acceptable consideration, cherishing thoughts as, “Let me be the one who speaks and receives appreciation by expressing these good ideas,” is an improper attitude for a believer. However, if others have nothing to say about a matter that must be settled, and if keeping silent is likely to cause certain people to suffer loss, then one must speak for the sake of righteousness. In such a situation, it is necessary also to consider whether the collective is likely to accept the words to be spoken, so that no negative reaction is evoked. It is more sensible to be silent in a place where opinions are not respected and is a necessity of respecting the thought one wants to state. Because, even if the words spoken are truthful, it becomes very difficult to accept them later on if the people addressed react against them initially. People who leave that place in the face of such a situation can even devise new pretexts later in order not to let that idea be practiced.

In this respect, one must speak at a moment when the general mood of the collective seems likely to show respect for the truth, so that everybody benefits from it. At the same time, everybody who joins the consultation must be very righteous. Particularly, figures of esteem whose words are listened to must act very carefully in this respect, for whatever such people say their words will be respected. However, there can also be faults and mistakes in the words those people say.

At this point, esteemed ones should, as soon as they realize that what they said was mistaken, be able to step back from their mistake immediately and be very comfortable doing so. In addition, allowing others who do not deserve to speak, instead of a person who deserves to speak, will result in ignoring beneficial ideas and unnecessary gossiping.

It is necessary to avoid backbiting at all costs

Another one of the most important points that needs to be considered is acting scrupulously to avoid backbiting during consultation and not condemning others unnecessarily. Otherwise, we might become a loser in a zone of winning. At the moment we think we are serving on the path of truth, we contaminate our tongue, which gains priority over our heart, and thus extinguish our spiritual life. In this respect, it is necessary to show utmost care to avoid backbiting. **If backbiting is committed by mistake, it is then necessary to go the person who has been backbitten and ask forgiveness for having violated his or her rights. The boundaries must be very clear while talking over certain matters, so that people will not be misled and no doors will be opened for thinking negatively about certain individuals.** In order to prevent such situations from arising, even the people who speak truthfully must remain silent. They must remain silent and first ask themselves, “I wonder how I can express this truth without offending anyone?” Only then should they reveal their thoughts after thinking more deeply. **Concerning a believer, silence should be reflection and speaking should be wisdom.**



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That is, it is necessary to speak if there is some wisdom in the words to be spoken, or one must keep silent. As a Sufi poet expressed, "Either tell about the Beloved, or hush!" If there is a likeliness of chattering about subjects that will not take people to ways leading to Allah, nor pave the ways leading to his Prophet (saw) for them, or do not convey anything in the name of religious truths, that useless tongue, which is given priority over the heart, must be bitten and the person should keep silent. If the person does not bite one's tongue when necessary, he or she will bite others. It must never be forgotten that wounds caused by bayonets can be treated and cured, but it is very difficult to mend hearts wounded by words