

MIFTAAH SEMINAR

BETWEEN ANTS AND MEN



Shaykh Mohammad Elshinawy

Lessons From the Ant: Speaking Up

- The story of Sulaiman AS and the ant is mentioned in Surah Al-Naml:

وَحَثِيرَ لِسُلَيْمَانَ جُنُودَهُ مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ وَالطَّيْرِ فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ ﴿١٧﴾ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَتَوْا عَلَىٰ وَادِ النَّمْلِ قَالَتْ نَمْلَةٌ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّمْلُ ادْخُلُوا مَسَاكِنَكُمْ لَا يَحْطِمَنَّكُمْ سُلَيْمَانُ وَجُنُودُهُ وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١٨﴾ فَتَبَسَّمَ ضَاحِكًا مِّن قَوْلِهَا وَقَالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ وَأَدْخِلْنِي بِرَحْمَتِكَ فِي عِبَادِكَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

And gathered for Solomon were his soldiers of the jinn and men and birds, and they were [marching] in rows. (17) Until, when they came upon the valley of the ants, an ant said, "O ants, enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive not." (18) So [Solomon] smiled, amused at her speech, and said, "My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to do righteousness of which You approve. And admit me by Your mercy into [the ranks of] Your righteous servants." (19)

- There are multiple reasons why Sulaiman AS smiled when he heard the ant. One of those reasons might have been that he was impressed with the compassion of the ant. Instead of saving itself, it tried to save as many others as it could.

- This is a quality of the prophets and of every believer
- The Prophet SAW lived his life trying to save people from destruction and left no stone unturned in trying to extend Allah's mercy to humanity.
- Anas RA narrated that a young Jewish became sick, so the Prophet SAW went to visit him. He sat near his head and asked him to embrace Islam. The boy looked at his father, who was sitting there and he told him to obey Abu-l-Qasim and the boy embraced Islam. The Prophet SAW came out saying: "Praises be to Allah Who saved the boy from the Hell-fire."
 - The Prophet SAW could not get any worldly value from this boy accepting Islam because he was about to die. It shows the Prophet's SAW pure concern for the salvation of humanity.
- Let not the ants be more compassionate than you
- The verse says نَمَلَةٌ, which means a random ant, not the queen ant or some other important ant amongst them.
 - Being insignificant is a decision. You decide if you are going to be a bystander who will watch the events of the community go by or if you are going to do something about it.
 - Decide to be important and relevant
 - Allah says in Surah Al-Maidah:

قَالُوا يَا مُوسَىٰ إِنَّ فِيهَا قَوْمًا جَبَّارِينَ وَإِنَّا لَن نَّدْخُلَهَا حَتَّىٰ يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا فَإِن يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا فَإِنَّا دَاخِلُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾ قَالَ رَجُلَانِ مِنَ الَّذِينَ يَخَافُونَ اللَّهَ عَلَيْهِمَا ادْخُلُوا عَلَيْهِمُ الْبَابَ فَإِذَا دَخَلْتُمُوهُ فَإِنَّكُمْ غَالِبُونَ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَتَوَكَّلُوا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

They said, "O Moses, indeed within it is a people of tyrannical strength, and indeed, we will never enter it until they leave it; but if they leave it, then we will enter." (22) Said two men from those who feared [to disobey] upon whom Allah had bestowed favor, "Enter upon them through the gate, for when you have entered it, you will be predominant.

And upon Allah rely, if you should be believers." (23)

- These were two random man who feared Allah and that caused them to encourage the other people to listen to Musa AS.
- Even in the presence of a prophet, let alone a shaykh, you still have a job.
- Shaytan might come to a person and say, "What are you? You are not going to change the world." You might not change the world, but you might be able to change one person and that is important. He might say to you, "You are just a drop in the ocean. So, what is the point in trying?" Tell yourself, "This is the only drop Allah will ask me about, so I am responsible for this drop." If we do this, then we will see a lot more improvement in the ummah a lot faster than we expected.
- The Prophet SAW said:

إِنْ قَامَتْ عَلَى أَحَدِكُمُ الْقِيَامَةُ وَفِي يَدِهِ فَسَلَةٌ فَلْيَغْرِسْهَا

Even if the Resurrection were established upon one of you while he has in his hand a sapling, let him plant it.

- The ant did not act as an alarmist and panic. It restrained its sense of panic.
 - When you feed the panic of any moment, it paralyzes people's ability to think for themselves.
 - Our circulation of bad news on social media or in our gatherings is very debilitating for other people.
 - Staying calm in intense moments gives you a better chance of helping people.
 - Abu Dharr narrated:

قُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَيُّ الْأَعْمَالِ أَفْضَلُ قَالَ " الْإِيمَانُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْجِهَادُ فِي سَبِيلِهِ " . قَالَ قُلْتُ أَيُّ الرِّقَابِ أَفْضَلُ قَالَ " أَنْفُسُهَا عِنْدَ أَهْلِهَا وَأَكْثَرُهَا ثَمَنًا " . قَالَ قُلْتُ فَإِنْ لَمْ أَفْعَلْ قَالَ " تُعِينُ صَانِعًا أَوْ تَصْنَعُ لِأَخْرَقَ " . قَالَ قُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ ضَعُفْتُ عَنْ بَعْضِ الْعَمَلِ قَالَ " تَكْفُفْ شَرِّكَ عَنِ النَّاسِ فَإِنَّهَا صَدَقَةٌ مِنْكَ عَلَى نَفْسِكَ "

I said: Messenger of Allah, which of the deeds is the best? He (the Holy Prophet) replied: Belief in Allah and Jihad in His cause. I again asked: Who is the slave whose emancipation is the best? He (the Holy Prophet) replied: One who is valuable for his master and whose price is high. I said: If I can't afford to do it? He (the Holy Prophet) replied: Help an artisan or make anything for the unskilled (labourer). I (Abu Dharr) said: Messenger of Allah, you see that I am helpless in doing some of these deeds. He (the Holy Prophet) replied: Desist from doing mischief to the people. That is the charity of your person on your behalf.

- Part of the harm that you should restrain from people is your own pessimism and negativity
- The ant gave very useful instruction
 - The ant said, "Enter your homes," instead of telling them to run
 - The ant did not tell them to just get underground. Ants are very territorial, so if they end up going into another ant's home, then they will be dead.
 - We should be better at giving better and clearer instructions
- The ant gave them the reasoning behind the instructions.
 - The ant said, "So that Sulaiman and his army do not crush you."
 - We often skip giving people justifications
 - This was a prophetic method. The Prophet SAW would help people and ease them into instructions by explaining to them why and explaining things that may not be clear in ways that would help them in their battle against Shaytan.
 - One of the ways that a person helps Shaytan against their brother is by advising them in a way that is less likely to be accepted. This might be because you are too impolite or too unclear. So, we should not assume that a person knows something.

- The Prophet SAW would go out of his way to explain to people that he follows his own advice.
 - He was once walking with his wife Safiyya at night and some of the sahaba saw him. The Prophet SAW stopped and told them that she was his wife. They said they would never assume anything bad of the Prophet SAW, but the Prophet SAW said he did not want Shaytan to slip something inside them. He did not want them to think that he was preaching something different than what he was practicing.
 - Abu Umamah narrated that a young man came to the Prophet SAW and said, "O Messenger of Allah! Give me permission to commit Zina." The Prophet SAW helped him think it through and consider what the world would look like if these exceptions were given. He asked him if he would like it if it were his mother, sister, or daughter. Just as you would not like it for them, other people would not like it for their own mothers and sisters.
 - The Prophet SAW helped him rationalize the rule.
- Help people by respecting their intelligence and giving them explanations and justifications.
- Despite the dangerous situation, the ant gave Sulaiman and his army an excuse.
 - The ant said, "They will crush you without realizing it."
 - Before the crime even happened, the ant already gave them an excuse by saying that if they were to crush you, it would be by accident.
 - The ant shows a purer heart than most people
 - People once came to Abdullah ibn Masud and said, "We smell the alcohol that is dripping from this man's beard." Ibn Masud said to them, "We were forbidden in Islam from spying."

- Ibn Masud was trying to tell them that there is no way to conclude that without spying and we are not allowed to do that, so the default is that this man is innocent.
 - He gave this man an excuse and did not judge him right away because a Muslim's honor is sacred.
- A man once came to Imam al-Shafi'i and said, "قَوِّىَ اللهُ ضَعْفَكَ", meaning, "May Allah strengthen your weakness." Imam al-Shafi'i said, "If Allah strengthened my weakness, He would have killed me," meaning if He amplified his weaknesses, then it would harm him. Imam al-Shafi'i was teaching the man that the more appropriate way to say it is, "قَوِّىَ اللهُ قَوَّتَكَ وَأَضْعَفَ اللهُ ضَعْفَكَ", meaning, "May Allah strengthen your strength and weaken your weakness." The man was worried because he did want Imam al-Shafi'i to assume that he was trying to harm him. So, Imam al-Shafi'i said, "By Allah, I only meant well by what I said. I know that even if you were to openly curse me out, you would have only meant well."
 - The excuse was presented before anything bad could have happened
- The believer should always give people excuses preemptively. It is for your peace of mind and so that there is less tension in society.
- Umar RA said, "It is impermissible for a Muslim to hear his brother say something and interpret it in a negative light while he can still interpret it in a better way."
- The Prophet SAW said, "Allah has forbidden for the fire to touch every person that is non-overbearing, soft, easy-going, and close to people."

Staying Quiet

- The Prophet SAW left us with a golden principle in regard to speech regulation. He said, "Whoever of you believes in Allah and the Last Day must speak good or keep silent."
 - Imam al-Nawawi said that this hadith means the default must be silence until it is clear to you that there is greater benefit in you speaking. If it is unclear whether there is more benefit or harm, then you are supposed to keep silent.
- Ibn Taymiyyah says it is impermissible for you to invite someone to do the right thing if what will arise from that is greater harm. In that scenario, it would be haram to promote good. The point of promoting good is to lessen the evil. If you are going to do it in a way that increases the evil, then it defeats the entire purpose and objective of enjoining good and forbidding evil.
- If you are not versed in a subject, then you are not allowed to speak. Ibn Abdul Barr says, "The scholars all agree that the layman cannot have an opinion."
 - If everyone who did not know stayed quiet, then so many disputes would end.
 - Unless you know why you believe in the opinion you have, then it is just your word against another person's word.
- In relationships, when you over-advise and share your opinions, it can cause more harm than good.
 - The Prophet SAW was praised in Surah al-Tahrim when his wives did something they should not have done and he pointed some of it out and ignored some of it.
 - It is a praiseworthy quality to let some things go
 - Abu Bakr once came to the Prophet's SAW house and heard his daughter, Aisha RA, raising her voice to the Prophet SAW. He entered the room and started yelling at her and reached for her.

- The Prophet SAW jumped in the middle and broke it up. When Abu Bakr RA left, the Prophet SAW said to Aisha jokingly, "Did you see me when I came between you and that man?" He diffused the air and turned the situation into a joke.
- During the end of the Prophet's SAW life, Jibril told him to seek forgiveness to the people of Baqī' again. Aisha got suspicious and followed him. The Prophet SAW noticed a silhouette in the dark and sped up on the way home. When he got home, he saw Aisha RA in bed but her chest was breathing heavily. The Prophet SAW asked her what happened and she said she thought he was going to speak to one of his other wives. The Prophet SAW was upset and told her what he was doing. Aisha RA realized that she made a mistake and she asked, "What should we say when we go to the graveyards?" The Prophet SAW knew that she was changing the subject, but he responded and told her the dua to say.
 - The Prophet SAW knew when he did not have to say things
- The root of this issue is spiritual refinement. Do you want to shame people or give them excuses? It is a translation of the state of a person's heart.
- The Prophet SAW said, "Whoever says, 'Everyone is doomed,' he is the most doomed of them." In another narration, he said, "Whoever says, 'Everyone is doomed,' then he is the one that doomed them."
 - As a result of speaking like that, it becomes a norm in society and destroys them
- Ibn Mubarak used to say, "The believer is the one who is looking for excuses for others. The hypocrite is the one who looks for faults of others."
- Imam al-Ghazali says when people speak in this negative way, it stems only from hatred or envy.

- The Prophet SAW said, "Beware of suspicion because it is the falsest form of speech, and do not probe or spy."
 - When you suspect something, you are going to find it. This is called confirmation bias. You will interpret everything you see according to the statement in your head.
 - Imam al-Nawawi said this is called internal backbiting. You are not allowed to speak to others about negative qualities of other people that are true. Similarly, you are not allowed to speak negatively to yourself about your brother (سُوءُ الظَّنِّ).
 - You should not let negative thoughts about others settle in your heart. If you allow it to settle, then you will eventually say them out loud.
 - If someone tries to get you to look into the faults of others and expose them, then you should shut it down. We are not trying to incriminate other people.
 - Someone once stole coins tucked into the turban of Ibn Masud. The people around him began making dua against the person who stole it. Ibn Masud raised his hand and said, "O Allah, if need caused him to steal it, then bless him in that money. If he did it out of shamelessness, then make it the last sin he commits."
- The Prophet SAW said, "The religion is نَصِيحَةٌ"
 - نَصِيحَةٌ is about wishing well for others
- There are many instances in which the sahabah remained quiet and it avoided much harm.

- When the Prophet SAW passed away, there was a council held to appoint the next leader. The people wanted to appoint Sa'ad ibn Ubadah to lead the Ummah. Abu Bakr, Umar, and Abu Ubaydah rushed there to stop them from making this decision because they knew the Prophet SAW would not have liked it. After much discussion, Abu Bakr became the Khalifah. Umar made a comment on this saying, "That Saqifah was a fluke," meaning that if Sa'ad ibn Ubadah were to tell everyone to take out their swords, they would have done it. But, Allah protected the people through the restraint of Sa'ad ibn Ubadah.
 - Ali RA was not present at the council because he was preparing the Prophet SAW for burial. He was very insulted that they made this decision without him because he did not know the context. If he vocalized his disagreement, it could have led to the first civil war. But, he restrained himself and later announced to the people that he never held anything against Abu Bakr.
- Khalid ibn Waleed was the undefeated commander of the Muslim army. Umar RA decided to take him out of leadership and put Abu Ubaydah in charge. It was not easy, but Khalid ibn Waleed stayed quiet and did not complain about it.
 - The sahabah used to prioritize the ummah no matter what. They did not live for themselves.
- When Abdullah ibn Masud saw the copy of the Mushaf that was compiled, he believed that Surah al-Falaq and Surah al-Nās were not supposed to be part of the Mushaf. He knew the Surahs, but he believed that they were adhkar that the Prophet SAW would constantly recite. When ibn Masud realized that everyone was saying this, he just thought to himself that maybe he misunderstood something instead of causing a problem out of it.

- In the time of Uthman RA, Islam was prospering. Abu Dharr had a unique opinion that it was not halal to save money. The sahabah disagreed with this. They said that the ayat that threaten those who hoard gold and silver refers to those who do not pay zakah. Abu Dharr believed that it referred to anyone who keeps more than today's meal. When he was in Shaam, Abu Dharr was condemning people for having too much money. The Khawarij started to quote Abu Dharr and claim that he agrees that Muawiya is corrupt and Uthman has too much money too. Muawiya sent a message to Uthman for help and Uthman called Abu Dharr to Medina. When Abu Dharr entered upon Uthman, he said, "You think I am one of them (the rebels), don't you? By Allah, I am not one of them." Uthman asked Abu Dharr to stay with him in Medina, but Abu Dharr did not want to stay because he knew that if he was around all of the people, then he would not be able to stay silent. So, instead of speaking up and creating problems in the ummah, he asked permission to live far away. He left to a distant place and lived there for the rest of his life.
 - The Prophet SAW said about Abu Dharr, "Abu Dharr walks alone, will die alone, and will be resurrected on the Day of Judgement alone."