The 6 CALLS OF AL-ANFĀL

There are six calls throughout Şūrah al-Anfāl. After the battle of Badr, which was the first major confrontation between the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and the disbelievers of Quraysh, this Şūrah was revealed. For that reason, this Şūrah is also called the Şūrah of Badr. In this Şūrah, Allāh ﷻ directs six calls to the believers using the phrase: “O you who have believed.”

In the first call Allāh ﷻ says: (O you who have believed, when you meet those who disbelieve advancing [in battle], do not turn to them your backs [in fight]) [al-Anfāl: 15].

The Muslim should be firm in battle and not retreat. This verse was later explained by another verse that commands the Muslims, if in a state of strength, to not retreat if one Muslim is facing ten of the enemy and in the state of weakness one Muslim should not retreat in the face of two from the enemy.

The second call: (O you who have believed, obey Allāh and His Messenger and do not turn from Him while you hear [His order]. And do not be like those who say, “We have heard,” while they do not hear. Indeed, the worst of living creatures in the sight of Allāh are the deaf and dumb who do not use reason) [al-Anfāl: 20-22].

Obedience to Allāh ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ is the key to all success. This is a general command for all Muslims but since this Şūrah is one that covers the topic of fighting in Allāh’s cause, the command of Allāh to fight takes special significance in this context. Allāh ﷻ describes those who do not listen and obey His commands as being deaf and dumb. He describes them as being the worst of creation.

The third call: (O you who have believed, respond to Allāh and to the Messenger when He
calls you to that which gives you life. And know that Allāh intervenes between a man and his heart and that to Him you will be gathered) [al-Anfāl: 24].

This is a command from Allāh صلی الله عليه وسلم to respond to His call and the call of His Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم. Allāh says that this call is to give us life. He would not invite us to do what would harm us. All the commands of Allāh are for our good. The classical commentators on this verse say that the meaning of this āyah is that by following Allāh’s commands and the sunnah of His Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم grants us a good and proper life. Some of the commentators however such as the scholar from the Tabi`īn, `Urwah bin al-Zubair, and one of the interpretations mentioned by Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurtubī and al Shawkānī is that this āyah is specifically calling us to respond to the call of jihād because through jihād we attain life. This may seem ironic. How can life be attained through fighting, which puts the Muslim at risk of losing his life? How can war that brings death be a path towards granting life?

The explanation may lie in the words of these early commentators of the verse:

In Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Adhīm, `Urwah says, “it means war through which Allāh gave you honor after you were dishonorable, gave you strength after which you were weak, and gave you victory over your enemies after you were defeated by them.”

Imām al-Qurtubī says in al-Jāmi` fī aĥkām al Qur'ān: [regarding the verse] (respond to Allāh and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life) “Jihād is life since it is the cause of life. This is because if you do not attack the enemy, the enemy would attack you, and that would lead to your demise and death. Additionally, death in jihād leads to the eternal life.”

The fourth call: (O you who have believed, do not betray Allāh and the Messenger or betray your trusts while you know [the consequence]) [al-Anfāl:27]

This is a warning from Allāh جل جلاله not to betray the Muslims by conveying information to the disbelievers. It is a warning for Muslims not to spy against Muslims. Giving intelligence to the disbelievers is a betrayal of Allāh and His Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم.

The fifth call: (O you who have believed, if you fear Allāh, He will grant you a criterion and will remove from you your misdeeds and forgive you. And Allāh is the possessor of great bounty) [al-Anfāl:29]
The outcome of fearing Allāh is forgiveness from Him. He also grants those who fear him a criterion with which they can separate between good and evil. This is a light from Allāh in the heart of the believer that helps him see right from wrong, good from evil.

The sixth call: *(O you who have believed, when you encounter a company [from the enemy forces], stand firm and remember Allāh much that you may be successful. And obey Allāh and His Messenger, and do not dispute and [thus] lose courage and [then] your strength would depart; and be patient. Indeed, Allāh is with the patient)* [al-Anfāl: 45-46]

This final call lists five qualities:

1. Standing firm,
2. remembering Allāh,
3. obedience of Allāh and His Messenger,
4. avoiding dispute,
5. patience.

These are the five ingredients of victory that we should all keep in mind.

These are the six calls of Allāh towards the believers in Şūrah al-Anfāl. We ask Allāh to make us of those who follow His commands.

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