**WMWT-3**

**VOLUNTEER DISCIPLINE**

**Bismillahirrahmanarraheem**



The believers are only those who believe in Allah and His Messenger and, when they are [meeting] with him for a matter of common interest, do not depart until they have asked his permission. Indeed, those who ask your permission, [O Muhammad] - those are the ones who believe in Allah and His Messenger. So when they ask your permission for something of their affairs, then give permission to whom you will among them and ask forgiveness for them of Allah. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (Sura Nur:62)



Those who believe in Allah and the Last Day would not ask permission of you to be excused from striving with their wealth and their lives. And Allah is Knowing of those who fear Him. (Sura Taubah:44)



Only those would ask permission of you who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day and whose hearts have doubted, and they, in their doubt, are hesitating. (Sura Taubah:45)



And if they had intended to go forth, they would have prepared for it [some] preparation. But Allah disliked their being sent, so He kept them back, and they were told, "Remain [behind] with those who remain."

Recitation of above verses and praises to Allah.

In order to introduce this session I am going to share with you two passages which at first seem to contradict each other. I am going to read a part of the translation of an ayat from Sura Nur verse 62, then I am going to read something from sura Taubah ayats nos 44 to 45 and and it will seem as if they are saying the exact opposite of each other. So let’s start with, Sura Nur. It says, ‘***Those who are asking you permission are in fact the ones who believe in Allah and his messenger.’*** Surah Taubah says, ***‘Those who believe in Allah and the last day, don’t ask your permission,’*** and it goes further, ***‘those who are asking your permission they don’t believe in Allah and the last day.’***

Surah Nur says, ***‘Those who ask your permission those are the ones who have imaan***.’ Surah Taubah says, ***‘Those who ask you permission are the ones who have no imaan!’*** Then there is another contradiction, ‘***If they ask you (to be excused) for whatever issue they have, don’t give them permission!’***

Surah Nur says, ***‘If they ask for permission, it’s a sign of imaan and if they are asking (to be excused) for an important matter, give them permission.’***

Surah Taubah says, ***‘May Allah forgive you, why did you give them permission?’*** Surah Nur says, ***‘Give them permission.’*** Sura Taubah says, ***‘Why did you do it?’*** Surah Nur says, ***‘If they ask permission that’s Imaan.’*** Surah Taubah says, ***‘They have no imaan.***’ All these seem like contradictions. Opposite commands.

How do we make sense of them and how are they related to Islamic work?

Both passages are to do with seeking permission or an excuse from Islamic work. We are discussing them because they represent some of the most beautiful examples of Quranic wisdom on the issue of seeking permission from Muslim leadership.

Now this first one in Sura Nur is awesome. The first part says, ***‘The believers are only those kinds of people who have faith in Allah his Rasul (s). Whenever they are with him on some collective mission,*** (some task or some project and it’s talking about the companions of the prophet (s) may Allah be pleased with them) that is when they go with him on some mission or he assigns them to some mission or he assigns them to go scout some area or speak to some tribe or whatever and he sends five, six or ten or whatever number of them and he gave them a task it could be any task it doesn’t have to be military in nature. It could be any task. ***‘They would not abandon (or leave) that task until they asked permission of the Prophet(s).*** As can be seen, this passage has great benefit particularly for us because it refers to any collective task.

Let’s push that in to contemporary times and imagine we are in a meeting and it is decided that by the end of this week you three X,Y and Z will get three tasks done. Each one of those three people thinks the other two will do it. So X thinks Y will do it, Y will thinks Z will do it and Z thinks Y or X will do it, I don’t have to do it. All thee turn up empty handed the next week. This in psychology is called diffusion of responsibility. Nobody takes responsibility, everybody thinks somebody else will do it and when you come back next week you each look at each other and X says, ‘You didn’t do it, but you were nodding you head.’ Y replies, Yeah but you were nodding it more than I was.’ But at the end of the week nobody gets it done.

But the guidance of Quran is that whenever they are on a collective task, there is no diffusion of responsibility. They don’t abandon that task unless they explicitly tell the team leader, ‘I am sorry I can’t do it. I got a situation at home, my mother in law is here or something.’ So they let you know clearly, ‘I can’t do it.’ They don’t assume that somebody else will take care of it.

This is very powerful guidance folks. This diffusion of responsibility is the kind of thing that destroys voluntary work. As a result of it the leadership complain that volunteers don’t do anything and the volunteers say the leadership is not getting anything done, and nothing is being done because everybody thinks someone else will do it. And the whole effort or project is stagnant. But the Quranic advice keeps the machinery from breaking. What it means is that if you are not going to be able to do it come out and say it. ‘Listen I have a meeting, I have an emergency, I have a doctor’s appointment, I have this, that, I can’t do it.’ Be open about what you can and cannot do.

 Another related issue concerns the word Inshallah. We have to change the culture of corrupting the meaning of Inshallah. We have to stop that. That’s a sacred phrase. It’s a beautiful thing to say, Inshallah, but we have turned it to something ugly. Inshallah can mean so many things; It means yes, Inshallah means never, Inshallah means may be if l’am in the mood. It could mean anything. Hey you coming?’ ‘Inshallah.’ it could mean, ‘yes’, it could mean, ‘no’ it could mean, ‘I don’t like you.’ It could be any of those meanings, so be clear in what you can and cannot do. Be clear in your commitments and especially in committee tasks and team tasks.

In order to understand the issue better we can use the example of work. Let us suppose that at your job you have a team and your team is given a task and your manager says, ‘You three have this task.’ What do you three do? You talk each other and say you do this part, you do A, you do B, I do C, immediately. So you won’t have a situation at the end of the deadline in which one of the guys says, ‘I thought you were going to do everything that’s why I was on vacation this week. None of the employees will do that because they know what’s going to happen if they do that; they will get fired. They will lose their job.

But in Islamic work the difference is that it’s voluntary. You may get the response, ‘What are you going to do?, Fire me? I don’t get a pay check anyway,’ or, ‘Go ahead what are you going to do? I won’t come anymore,’ or ‘Fine, it was boring anyway.’ So you start thinking because it’s voluntary you can make it trivial. You can make light of it because you think you don’t have to take it seriously. You don’t have to meet the deadline like you have to do at work. What happens when you have not met a deadline at work? You stay late, you sweat it out. You stay late in the office and you finish the work because you have to finish the task because you need the job. There’s a serious attitude when we are at work but not when we do Islamic work. But we must remember that Islamic work is more important than any other task and to recap the Quranic instruction, if you can’t do it just say no.

Manipulative Leadership

Now on the flip side you let’s imagine that you have an ameer, somebody who’s in charge of a project, a team leader and he gives you a task and you say you can’t do it .He responds by saying, ‘Struggle like it deserves to be struggled for and stop making excuses.’ You say, ‘Brother, my son is sick, my wife is sick, I got to take care of them first.’ He quotes another ayat and says, ‘Your money and children are a fitnah (trial) for you, Allah has the ultimate reward.’ Let her be sick, Allah will take care of her. You think you will take care of her? Have some imaan? Do my work.’

Leadership (about which we’ll talk in more detail in one of the following sessions) should not be emotionally manipulative. You can’t give your volunteers a religious guilt trip. The Prophet (s) never did it. He never made people feel that way when they came and asked to be excused. So if you are in a situation and the leadership makes you feel guilty when you come to say, ‘Sorry I can’t do this,’ try not be affected by their emotional blackmailing. First of all you coming and saying, ‘Sorry, I can’t do it’, was a choice, you didn’t have to come. You could have just skipped on the whole thing and when they asked you could have said, ‘Oh I forgot.’ but the fact that you made an effort to come and say, ‘Look I know this is important, but I can’t do it please assign to someone else’, is a show of how much you believe in the project and is a show that you take it seriously. So that should not be turned into a guilt trip by the leadership. That’s bad leadership. That’s emotionally manipulative leadership and that’s the kind of leadership everybody runs away from and such leaders often complain, ‘I don’t have any volunteers, nobody works with me.’ Obviously when you act like that, who wants to work with you? I mean the fact that you are at the masjid all the time is probably because of the fact that you wife doesn’t want to hang out with you either because maybe you are that kind of a personality. Maybe you need to go home a little. So this is also a very important area on the issue of seeking and giving permission.

Taking permission when you are the volunteer is a sign of your commitment but in the verses under discussion the leadership is also given advice at the same time. One quality is, ***‘If they come to ask you permission for some of their important matters then give it.’*** But it should not be a weak or a lame excuse for trivial things. For example, ‘Hey by way I just bought some new furniture and I need to fix it in my house, or by the way the new movie just come out or we are going to by our suits for the wedding party that’s why I can’t make to the program, sorry.’ All these are examples of flimsy excuses but if they come to you with an excuse that is legitimate or serious (Shaan in Arabic) in that case the rule is, ***‘Give permission to whomever among then you want.’***

Remember it’s a leader’s discretion to give or not to give permission. At the end of day the leader is told that you have the choice you can give and not give permission.

Let us now try to understand the contradiction by an example. Suppose there’s a store with a number of employees and the manager’s got a guy that’s really hard working. Basically that guy is running the store single-handedly and he’s got another guy; the nephew or some relative who got the job through connections so doesn’t do any work.It’s as if he’s on vacation even when he’s at work. So now the good employee comes and asks for a day off and the lousy employee comes and asks for a day off too. Who is the manger going to give a day off to? What makes sense? He is going to give it to the lousy employee! You know why? Because the lousy employee whether he was there or not it’s the same for the manager. Work wasn’t going to get done anyway, so he says, ‘Chuti maro, go.’ And the guy who works hard, he’s not going to give him a day off. But they both walk off and the lazy one says to himself, ‘You know what? I don’t do any work and I get a day off.’ And the other one’s thinking, ‘Man I am working so hard I deserve a day off and he does not give me day off.He gives this guy a day off. That’s not fair.’ But what he doesn’t realize is that he didn’t give him a day off not because he doesn’t like him or is being unfair but because he is more valuable to the manager. It’s a proof of how valuable he is.

So sometimes when someone comes with a legitimate excuse to the Prophet(s) and says, ‘I cannot do it,’ and the Prophet(s) says, ‘I can’t give you permission I need you.’ That’s a discretion on the Prophet(s) but if he can afford to let him go, he will. So the leader has to be merciful. But he also needs to understand the needs of the work. So press upon your followers but don’t press so much that they break. That’s the balance we need to aim for.

Now let’s go to the other passage. This one is from Sura Nur. Remember Sura Taubah is from beginning to end an emergency situation. It’s a state of emergency for the whole Muslim community. Makkah has just been conquered and we have just pocked at the Roman hornet’s nest. And now there’s a big conflict about to begin between us and the Romans. And so the Messenger (s) starts preparing for an open draft. This was the first time in Islamic history that it was mandatory on any one capable of fighting to come and join the army. Before that it was voluntary. Badr and Uhud were voluntary. Ahzaab was voluntary, but Tabuk was a conscription so if anyone didn’t show up he’d better have a good excuse. We heading towards Tabuk. We are going to meet the Roman army of around 100,000 men. So it’s not a light matter.

The hypocrites (munafiqoon) weren’t up for it so they came to the Prophet(s) with excuses like, ‘Oh Messenger of Allah, give me permission, see I have a weak spot for women. So when we are going to pass through some towns with really beautiful women I won’t be able to control myself. So I am going to put myself in fitnah and therefore please don’t let me go into battle against the Romans.’ Of all the Iame excuses you could have come up with and that to the Messenger(s). And He (despite knowing the insincerity) still heard this and the said, ‘Ok, you can stay.’ And that’s the genius of the Prophet(s). That kind of joker would have been a liability on the battle field, not an asset. Even Allah says, ***‘If they came out with you they would have he caused nothing more than a disruption***.’\* They would have been a problem not a solution.

Because on the battlefield you need the tightest discipline. If one soldier leaves his position there can be chaos. So if you have an unreliable solider you tell him, ‘Why don’t you stay at home and cook? Let the real soldiers go.’ So if he’s coming and asking for an excuse, it’s better you let him stay. But Allah instructs the Prophet(s) that in a state of emergency, ***‘When people come and ask you to give permission don’t give them permission***.’ And you will find that even through you did not give them permission they will still stay behind and they’ll prove their disobedience to you and they’ll prove their hypocrisy. So I did not want you to give them permission this time. So Allah says in a state of emergency, ***‘Why did you give them permission?’*** ***Don’t give permission until you can confirm who is speaking the truth and who is lying.\****

 So in a state of emergency and life and death situations permissions are dropped. During those times, there’s no, ‘Please excuse me I have problem.’ No, that will not be given. And actually the only people excused were the ones Allah himself excused in Sura Taubah.

So what we're learning in Sura Nur is the standard protocol of discipline. If you have an issue, ask permission. Leadership should go out of their way to try to give the permission in most cases. That should be the rule. Let it go and that’s a show of courtesy to the volunteers. Don’t make them feel bad about it. Do not make them feel that they are less of a volunteer. Respect them and honor their request. The fact that they came and asked you permission is a sign that they respect you anyway. By the way under normal circumstances did the hypocrites ever ask permission? No they did not ask for permission . The only reason they came to ask for permission was because it was mandatory this time. So voluntarily they never came to ask for permission. The people who came to ask for permission voluntarily that is a sign of imaan. That’s the difference between Sura Nur and Sura Taubah.

In a state of emergency people will come making lame excuses, obviously that’s proof that they have no imaan. ***Then their hearts one riddled with doubt and they are going to go back and forth in their doubts.***

By the way Allah insulted them very nicely in the Quran. It is as if Allah is saying, ‘Picture a guy coming to the Rasul (s) and saying, ‘I was ready to go but you know at the last minute this thing happened. You know me I was ready.’ Allah says, ‘***Had they really intended to come with you, they would have packed their bags,’*** go check their homes, how many bags did they fill? None. They had not packed. Allah called them out because he knew what was inside their houses. They said, ‘I am ready to go.’ Allah responded that in that case, ‘Lets see how ready you were? Let’s take a look . But Allah was disgusted at the thought of appointing these people with you in battle. Allah did not want them to come . They shouldn’t have the honor of accompanying you. That’s why they stayed behind. He made them lag behind. This is the insult. In battle in the Arabic language, Quaidoon is used for men, women and children that don’t go to battle. As Allah say’s, ***‘Sit back with the women and children who sit back .’*** That’s what he calls them . He insults them with this language. So this was a session on volunteer discipline and specifically permission. The next session is about giving your opinion.