

Types of Responsibilities

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In the speech that I had given in this same venue under the topic of ***"Amr bil Maruf wa Nahi Anil Munkar"*** (commanding to that which is right and forbidding from that which is evil), I alluded to a point which I will repeat here and that is: our religious responsibilities are of two types - some responsibilities are related to our performance of a task which takes shape in one particular form and shape. All of the particular aspects of the specified task and its individual facets have been explained by the religion of Islam and we have been told that we must perform a particular act in its specified form adhering to the specific conditions. Of course, that particular action has been ordered to be performed (by Allah (s.w.t.)) and there is a reason for it, however we are not responsible for the outcome or the result of the action. These sorts of actions are referred to as Taabudiyat (issues that have been legislated which we must follow as acts of worship). It is these sorts of actions which we can also refer to as those which are the "Responsibility of the Form and Shape of the Actions". For example, the Salat is an act which has a specified introductory act related to it (Wudhu, Tayammum, Ghusl) and conditions (relating to it); it has certain particular provisions and parts to it; there are also specified things which must not be performed and certain things which invalidate the prayers. We have been commanded to perform the Salat regardless of the circumstances, and in its particular shape and form it is the purest form of obeying the orders of Allah (s.w.t.). Of course though, this act of the Salat in its' particular form has been ordered :for a result or outcome - there is a direct corollary in the performance of this act

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ

Surely the Salat keeps a person away from evil and wickedness. **[1]**

We are simply accountable for carrying out this act and are not responsible for the outcome that this act will produce. If we perform the act in the correct and complete way as it has been shown to us and how we have been ordered to perform it, then naturally the outcome (distancing ourselves from evil and wickedness) will follow.

The second type of responsibility which we have within the faith of Islam is referred to as the "Responsibility of the Outcome." By this we mean that the outcome or end result of the act is

also the responsibility of the person. Just like a person sometimes says, 'I want such and such of an outcome for this act of mine.' However as for how that outcome will come about - through what channels and preliminary steps, by what conditions and how these will all be carried out - we must state that they should be carried out in the best possible way, however there is not one single, firm and describable way that it must be done. Rather, the ways, methods and through what channels this outcome can come about changes with time and place.

Let me give you an example. Let us suppose that you have a difficulty - for example, one of your friends is in prison. There is a time where you expect a specific task to be completed from a specific person in relation to this trouble that you and your friend are in. For example, your friend gives another person a letter and tells him to make sure that he gives this letter to a particular person - and that too at a certain time.

Obviously we can say that this letter was written for a purpose and goal, however the other party is only responsible to deliver the letter to the person whom you specified. Another time, you want to reach the outcome by yourself directly and thus, have no need for the preliminary steps. You tell your friend that you want him to help you get out of prison - however through what ways and means should be used - these are not specified by you. The person himself must go and see what the best way is to carry out this task.

Usually, these sorts of responsibilities take form where the means to carry out the task is not of one type - meaning that the mode varies. In one instance, the person must make use of a particular way and method, and at another time, he must make use of another method - the specialties of the time and place that he is in and in addition, the other particulars, may differ. In these sorts of instances, the person must sit down, ponder, think and come up with the best possible means to reach an outcome.

Within the religion of Islam, we have both types of responsibilities. The Salat (prayers) and S.awm (fasting) and all other acts of worship make up the first form of responsibility; and things such as Jiha-d (the sacred defense of Muslims and the Muslim territory) form the second type of responsibility. In relation to Jiha-d, the Muslims have an obligation to defend the nucleus of Islam and to protect the freedom of the Muslims - however through what means? Do they defend the cause with a sword, gun or something else? These things have not been specified and in principle, these sorts of things are not able to be specified and generalized! In each and every age, the Muslims are obligated to choose the best ways and : (methods to carry out this task (of defence

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَ مِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَآخَرِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَظْلَمُونَ

Make ready your strength against them to the utmost of your power including steeds of war to“ strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of Allah and your enemies and others besides whom you may not know but whom Allah does know. Whatever you shall spend in the cause of Allah will be repaid back to you and you shall not be treated unjustly”[2]

Thus we must see - what is the best form or method of guidance in each and every time and era?

The issue of guidance and leadership is related to the second form of responsibility mentioned. The Muslims are responsible for the guidance of one another. Each generation is responsible for the guidance of the next generation - especially those people who are officially recognized as the leaders of the society - they have a much greater duty.

In any case, this outcome - meaning that of finding the mode and way of guidance - must be realized. However as for the ways and methods which should be used to reach to this goal, these have not been specified or earmarked for specific times and or for eternity. The noble :verse of the Quran states

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ

O’ you who possess true faith! Save yourselves and your families from the fire of hell whose“ fuel is that of mankind and stones!”[3] This verse means that we must protect ourselves and our families from the fire of hell whose fuel is men and stones. Thus, we see that there is an outcome that we must reach which is to save ourselves and our families, however the way to reach this outcome has not been specified.

In Islam, there is no complete, 100% correct method of guidance and leadership that has been specified in which all of the parts - including the introductory steps, forms, conditions and things which must be performed have been mentioned. In principle these things cannot be specified and brought forth since they differ (according to the time and place that one is living in).

The (general) leadership of the people is not like the Salat which is a matter of obedience to Allah (s.w.t.) or for example the recitation of incantations and spells in which the person would

simply memorize that which he wishes to recite to charm and control scorpions or snakes where any time a scorpion or snake would come around the person, he would recite the things which he has memorized to keep away or to tame the predator - meaning that there is no specific method which can be employed in these regards.

Methods of Leadership are Relative and Temporary

At a certain time and place, it may be through one thing that people receive guidance, however it is possible that in another time and place, that same thing may lead to misguidance and being led astray!

If the same logic that causes an old, illiterate woman to become a true believer is used by an intelligent, learned person, then it may actually cause him to being led astray. Furthermore, it is possible that a book that is in agreement with the thoughts of a particular time and which is in conjunction with the opinions of a specific era and at the level of their thinking, and which would lead to the guidance of the people (of that time), may actually be classified as a book of misguidance in another time period!

We have books that, in their own time period, fulfilled the requirements and responsibilities for when they were written and hundreds and thousands of people received guidance through such a book; however those same books - in our time period - would not guide anybody! These books are deemed too simple and could lead to the misguidance and cause doubts and confusion in the minds of the people and thus, would be classified as books of misguidance - such a book whose buying and selling, printing and distributing would not be free of doubt!

It is amazing! A book that had led thousands - rather hundreds of thousands of people to the path of true guidance in the past may now be classified as a book of misguidance? Yes! With the exception of the Heavenly Book (the Noble Quran) and the true words of the Masumin (a.s.), any other book we speak about has a particular message that is aimed at a specific and limited time period. When that era is over, the book is then of no use. This issue that I have just spoken about is a very important, societal issue and even today is still regarded as an unknown, strange and unfamiliar issue that we must overcome, however this issue has never been discussed nor brought up. I do not anticipate that this issue will be made completely clear in this gathering of ours, however it must continuously be stated that we must accept that the ways to guidance are specific for their own time periods.

With this said, it is necessary that we now bring forth proofs from the Islamic texts in relation to this topic so that may be known that what we discuss here is the view expressed in the :Islamic works. I started out my discussion with a verse of the Quran which states

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ

Call others to the path of your Lord through wisdom and good exhortation and argue with them in the best possible manner. [4]

According to the unanimous opinion of the commentators of the Quran, this verse presents us with three different ways to invite people and offers us three distinct ways of guiding the people. Each of these three ways of guidance must be used in their own specific instances.

(رب) This verse tells us that we must call people to the way of our Lord. The word Lord is a special term meaning one who is responsible for upbringing and nurturing. Since this level of guidance is a level of invitation as well as upbringing and nurturing, the word used here is Lord. Therefore, we are told to invite people to the path of our Lord - the path which people must be nurtured and trained upon - but through what means?

Wisdom is in the meaning of persuasive, firm speech which has (الحكمة). We must use wisdom neither marks of alteration in it, nor one in which doubts can occur. In the terminology of the people of logic and the philosophers, this is speech whose preamble is 100% based on pure certainty. By this we mean that the people must be called to the path of the Lord with proof, wisdom and knowledge that is 100% pure and which is completely unadulterated. The commentators of the Quran have mentioned that inviting people through the use of logical, intellectual wisdom, proofs and evidence is limited to one particular group of people who have the ability to make use of this method.

meaning that we must call (والموعظة الحسنة) The second method is through good exhortation the people to their Lord through good words, advice and warnings which their heart and soul will be in agreement with. There are some people who do not possess the ability to express their beliefs through the use of their intelligence and academic proofs, and if an intellectual issue is presented to them, they immediately become confused. Thus, the way to guide them is through good council and warnings.

Such people must be guided through employing stories, narratives and wisdom-based anecdotes and anything that would bring ease and comfort to their hearts. The responsibility of exhortation and good council is to work on the heart of a person, whereas the job of intellectual and logical proofs deal with the brain and thinking ability of a person. A majority of the people are still at a level of basing issues which they believe in on their heart, soul and emotions and are not at a level of using their intellect and thoughts.

(و جادلهم بالتي هي احسن) The third stage is that of arguing with the people in the best possible way. Thus, if a person is put face to face with someone else whose purpose is not to arrive.

at the truth and whose goal is not to understand what the actual facts are – rather he has come and is ready to speak, argue and bring up points of contention – then the other one too must dispute with that person as he is quarreling with. However, we must argue with such a person in the best possible manner such that the argument does not stray from the path of the truth and reality. Therefore, we must not resort to unfairness or injustice in arguments, nor can we resort to lying or other similar things.

This verse gives us many different ways through which we can guide people and each way has been put in place for a particular instance in time. Thus, it is clear that the ways through which we can guide people are not all the same, nor are they equal!

Notes:

[8] Su-ratul `Ankabu-t (29), Verse 45

[9] Su-ratul Anfa-l (8), Verse 60

[10] Su-ratul Tah.ri-m (66), Verse 6

[11] Su-ratul Nahl (16), Verse 125