Calling on Allah and Responding to Him (Part 2)

Today’s khutba is a continuation of last week’s khutba on the topic: ‘Calling on Allah and Responding to Him’. Ayah 186 of Surat al-Baqarah forms the core subject of our discussion. It states, “When My servants ask you about Me, say that I am near. I respond to the call of one who calls, whenever he calls to Me.” Today’s discussion will focus on the second part of the same ayah, “let them, then, respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided”

This ayah tells us that Allah responds to the call of the one who calls Him, but the caller should respond to Him too, and believe in Him. To be able to respond to Allah, one has to know what Allah wants from him. This can only be known through the Qur’an, which mentions all that is to be known. But, this would require a person to read the Book of Allah in its entirety, paying attention to each and every word. This, in present times, is usually difficult for most people because of their busy lifestyles and constraints on time.

This problem, however, can be overcome by benefiting from the advice of Abdullah ibn Mas’ud (RA) who is reported to have said that special attention should be paid to the ayat that begin with “O people” (Ya Ay-yuhannas) or “O you who believe” (Ya Ayyuhallazeena Aamanu) because Allah is addressing us directly in these ayat, and therefore, we better listen. These two styles of addresses appear in the Qur’an 20 and 89 times respectively. By reading these ayat, we can find out what Allah wants from us, and then we can respond to Him accordingly.

A section of the Qur’an comprising of four ayat (102 to 105) from Surat Aal ‘Imran, somewhat summarizes what Allah wants from us. “O you who believe, be conscious of Allah as is His due and die not except as Muslims (ones who have surrendered completely to Allah). And holdfast, all together, to the rope of Allah and be not divided. And Remember Allah's favor on you when you were (once) enemies and He joined your hearts and became brothers by His grace. You were on the brink of the pit of fire and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes His signs clear to you so you may be guided. And let there be a group from among you that calls to goodness, and ordain what is right and forbid what is wrong. And those are the successful ones. Do not be like those who, after they had been given clear evidence, split into factions and differed among themselves: a terrible punishment awaits such people” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:102-105).

At the individual level, Allah wants us to have His taqwa, which means that we become righteous and pious, and remain conscious of Him. This is to prepare us for our ‘real task’ that lies ahead, but to be able to embark upon that task, we are told to collectively hold on fast to the Qur’an, and to not get divided. We are asked to remain united, as we are members of one single Muslim ummah. As a matter of fact, Muslims do remain divided on the basis of their race, nationality, language and cultural backgrounds.
To emphasize the importance of leaving behind all traces of tribalism, nationalism, and racism (‘asabiyyah) and to remain united, the Prophet (SAW) addressing a multitude of believers in his farewell sermon during Hajjat ul Wida’ said, “All mankind is from Adam and Eve; an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety (taqwa). Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood.” Taqwa is something that is hidden. It is a state of the heart known only to Allah.

In another hadith, the Prophet (SAW) said, “He is not one of us who calls for ‘asabiyyah or who fights for ‘asabiyyah, or who dies for ‘asabiyyah.” Unfortunately, this is exactly what we are witnessing in Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and other parts of the Muslim world—Muslims fighting each other and killing each other. There is no problem of being proud of one’s cultural heritage, but the same should not override one’s faith. We are Muslims first, and then we are who we are. After all, differences of race and tribe among people have been made by Allah Himself so that people may recognize each other. This diversity among human beings is something to be celebrated, and not something that should cause enmity among them. “O mankind! We created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you might come to know each other. The noblest among you in Allah’s sight is the one with the most taqwa. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware” (al-Hujurat, 49:13).

The ummah has to remain united under the banner of la ilaha illallah. Then only it is possible to collectively embark upon the real task—the task of calling people towards what is right and good and forbidding them from what is wrong and evil. “Let there be a community among you who call to the good, and enjoin the right, and forbid the wrong”(Aal ‘Imran, 3:104). A community or group has to rise from within the larger ummah to carry out this obligation entrusted upon the Muslim ummah. This would entail calling Muslims back to the Qur’an (da’wah ruju’ ilal Qur’an), and calling non-Muslims to Islam. Most Muslims, even though they may be praying, and fulfilling their other modes of worship, have either strayed away from or are unaware of the Qur’anic injunctions and guidance pertaining to different spheres of life, whether moral, ethical, personal, social, economic, or political.

Before we go out to make da’wah to non-Muslims, the first and foremost people worthy of our da’wah are those who are close to us. This is the Prophetic methodology. The Prophet (SAW) began his da’wah with his own kith and kin and others who were very close to him. The invitation to come back to the Qur’an is invitation to all that is good. “Say: ‘It is the blessing and mercy of Allah; so rejoice in it. It is better than all that you amass’” (Yunus, 10:58). The ‘blessing and mercy of Allah’ mentioned in this ayah refers to the Qur’an, which is indeed better than all the wealth than one can accumulate.

The non-Muslims have to be called to Islam. This has been the call of all the prophets and messengers of Allah. They all invited their people to the worship of One God. “O my people worship God; you have no other god but Him” (al-A’raf, 7:73). As Muslims, we have a responsibility toward all our brothers and sisters in humanity. This is because Allah sent prophets and messengers, specifically for their nations, their tribes, or their people. It was only Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the last and final messenger of Allah who was sent for the entire humankind for all times to come. Since the institution of prophethood has come to an end after his demise, the responsibility of guiding humanity now devolves upon the Muslims. The Prophet’s words said during his last sermon also accentuate the obligatory nature of da’wah work. He said, “All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly.”

Inviting people towards good is not enough unless it is complemented by forbidding them from evil. This is crucial because of the evil all around us. The shayateen among jinns and ins (humans) are busy corrupting people’s minds, thoughts, attitudes, and behavior. Social evils have spread like wild fire. There is a sharp decline in the standards of morals and universal values such as honesty, truthfulness, and trustworthiness among individuals as well as institutions. At the same time, bigotry, racism, and other malpractices and vices
are on the rise everywhere. Drinking, drugs, gambling, prostitution, and all types of blatantly obscene activities (fawahish) are contributing to breakdown of families. Who are the people behind all this?

Who are the people responsible for dragging our country into senseless wars and failing economies? Who are the people who have made our financial institutions breed on greed and have caused the gap between haves and have-nots to widen? Who are the evil geniuses behind the entertainment industry who under the garb of entertainment have devised provocative and sensational ways and means to make people get addicted to pornography and illicit sex? Who is behind the potent ‘Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender’ (LGBT) movement which now has its own insignia and flag? Even the Catholic Church has caved in to this wicked movement with the Pope publicly declaring, “Who am I to judge them?”

Who are these devils who have declared war with Allah and His messenger and are spreading mischief and corruption on the earth? They are none but the devils among men; the human agents of Shaytan. They leave no stone unturned to ruin people’s lives both in this world, and the next. “We have assigned for every prophet an opponent, Satans from among men and jinn” (al-An’am, 6:112). Allah does not like such mischief makers. “And Allah does not love the evil-doers (mischief makers and corrupters)” (al-Ma‘idah, 5:64). What are we as Muslims supposed to do in this situation? In compliance of the divine command that says, “Let there be a community among you who call to the good, and enjoin the right, and forbid the wrong,”(Aal ‘Imran, 3:104), we have to stand up against this gigantic storm that has come up our way.

Muslims are duty bound to fight evil (munkar). The Prophet (SAW) said, “He who amongst you sees something evil should change it with his hand; and if he does not have enough strength to change it, then he should change it with his tongue, and if he is unable to do it, (even) then he should abhor it from his heart, and that is the least of faith.”

This ummah has been produced to serve humanity, and therefore it is our prime responsibility to command all that is good and forbid all that is evil (‘amr bil ma’ruf wa nahi ‘anil munkar). “You are indeed the best ummah evolved for mankind. You enjoin the right, forbid the wrong, and believe in Allah” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:110).

The Qur’an repeatedly warns us that past nations who did not pay heed to Allah’s prophets and messengers, and kept committing major sins were utterly destroyed. “When We decide to destroy a town, We command those corrupted by wealth [to reform], but they [persist in their] disobedience; Our sentence is passed, and We destroy them utterly” (al-Isra’, 17:16). The humanity as of now is not going to be completely destroyed by divine punishment despite the evil, mischief, corruption, and transgressions of evil-doers, because Allah says, “We never punish until We have sent a Messenger” (al-Isra’, 17:15), and there is no prophet or messenger to come after Muhammad (SAW). The mischief makers, therefore, carry out their evil designs with impunity. They will be dealt with and taken to task on the Day of Judgment.

However, being the last ummah, we have been entrusted to change the condition of the people for the better, and this is not possible if we do not change ourselves from within. There is hardly an evil that is not found in the Muslim community. We have to keep in mind that unless we change ourselves, we cannot change the society at large. The Prophet (SAW) said, “By Him in Whose Hand my life is, you either enjoin good and forbid evil, or Allah will certainly soon send His punishment to you. Then you will make supplication and it will not be answered.”

Basically, it is through fulfilling the obligation of enjoining good and forbidding evil that we respond to Allah (SWT). This is the basic implication of the text “let them, then, respond to Me” (falyastajeebuli).

As for the text that says “and believe in Me” (walyu’minubi), the implication is that we should be calling only on Allah and not turning towards others for help. Unfortunately, there are Muslims who turn to dead saints, angels, palm-readers, fortune-tellers, and their like seeking their advice, help or intercession. To believe
in Him is to truly believe in His attributes such as, al-Razzaq (the Provider), al-Shafi (the Healer), al-Rahman (the Merciful), al-Mujib (One who answers prayers), etc.

Belief in Allah is not just lip-service. It has to be deep rooted in the heart. Then, with conviction (yaqeen) in our hearts, we need to fulfill our duties to Allah and respond to Him. And all this has to be done not only at an individual level, but also at a collective level. This calls for organizing ourselves into a jama’ah. People who strive in this direction are those who will be rightly guided. The call of our predecessors as recorded in the Qur’an used to be, “Lord, we have heard a caller calling to the true faith saying, Believe in your Lord, and we believed. Lord, forgive us our sins and remove from us our bad deeds and make us die with the virtuous. Our Lord! Grant us what You have promised to us through Your messengers, and do not humiliate us on the Day of Resurrection. Surely, You never fail to fulfill Your promise.”(Aal ‘Imran, 3:193-194). Allah responded to them. “Their Lord accepted their prayer, saying, I will deny no man or woman among you the reward of their labors. You are members one of another. I will certainly forgive the sins of those who emigrated and were expelled from their homes, who suffered persecution in My cause, who fought and were killed. I will certainly admit them to Gardens through which rivers flow, as a reward from God: with God is the best reward” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:195). Enjoining good and forbidding evil is not an easy task.

Rather than procrastinate our God-ordained obligations, we should live with a sense of urgency because once that day comes, there is no turning back. “So set your face firmly towards the True Deen, before a Day comes from Allah which cannot be turned back” (al-Rum, 30:43). There will be no refuge and no denial of one’s doings. “Respond to your Lord before a Day comes from Allah which cannot be turned back. On that Day you will have no refuge and no means of denial” (al-Shura, 42:47).

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