



ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL

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Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand the meaning of enjoining good and forbidding evil
- Understand the importance of this obligation
- Understand the different ways of meeting the obligation
- Discuss some of the conditions of this obligation
- Review the importance of listening to advice

JURISPRUDENCE

LEVEL 5

Lesson 1- Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil

Enjoining good and forbidding evil are two of the most important obligations in Islam. In Arabic these two obligations are termed:

Al-amr bil m'arūf Enjoining Good

Al-nahy 'anil Munkar Forbidding Evil

In this lesson, we will discuss the importance of these obligations and some ways of carrying these obligations out in relation to more global issues.

Enjoining good means that we should encourage and urge others to do good deeds. It also means we should create a social environment where people are encouraged to adhere to the laws of Islam and do good deeds.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE OBLIGATIONS

It is unanimously accepted among Muslims that these are two very important obligations. The Holy Qur'an makes this clear in many instances, including the following:

“You are the best community amongst people, you enjoin to good and forbid evil and believe in Allah.”
(3:110)

The authentic narrations of the Ahlul Bayt (as) also emphasise the importance of this obligation. Below are two of many narrations from Prophet Muḥammad, indicating the importance of this obligation:

“People will be in a good state as long as they enjoin good and forbid evil, and help each other to good. If they do not do this, blessings will be taken away from them and they will be empowered over each other. Then there will be no helper for them neither in the earth nor in the skies”.ⁱ

“I saw a man from among my community surrounded by the flames of fire, then his enjoining good and his forbidding evil rescued him from the flames and placed him with the angels”ⁱⁱ

Furthermore, Imam al-Redha (as) says:

“You should enjoin good and forbid evil. Otherwise, the evil people among you will come to power. At such a time, the good people among you will supplicate, but their prayers will not be answered.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The narrations emphasise that if a community wants to continue to receive blessings from Allah (SWT), and to have their prayers answered, then they cannot ignore these two vital obligations. If a community ignores these obligations, or becomes lazy in fulfilling them, then they risk:

- Losing many of their blessings
- Being excluded from Allah’s Mercy
- Being ruled by ruthless oppressors
- Never having their prayers answered

Thus it is clear from the Holy Qur’an and the authentic narrations that these two obligations are extremely important on an individual and a community level.

THE CONDITIONS

Mas’adah ibn Sadaqah narrates: “Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) was asked about enjoining good and forbidding evil, is it the obligation of the entire community? He (as) said: ‘No’. It was said: ‘why’. He (as) said: ‘it is the obligation of the one who has the ability and who is obeyed, one who knows what is good and what is evil.’”^{iv}

The following are the main conditions for enjoining good and forbidding evil:

- Sufficient knowledge: the person must know what is good and what is evil, and have sufficient knowledge regarding these.
- The probability of affecting the person: if we feel that our advice will have an effect on the person,

then we are obligated to say or do something. If we feel that it will not, or might make them worse, then we do not need to say anything.

- The probability that a person will make the mistake again: if a person is unlikely to make the same mistake again, we do not need to advise them.
- The person performing the obligation should not come to harm. If a person feels their life, health or wealth would significantly be harmed then the obligations no longer apply to that person. However, if it is a particularly important issue, then one must take a stand even if there is a fear of harm (e.g. Imam Ḥusayn at Karbala)

THE ETIQUETTE OF GIVING ADVICE

If the above conditions are met, then it becomes obligatory on us to enjoin good or forbid evil. This will often be done through giving advice to someone. When giving advice, there are some etiquettes we should follow:

- Maintain a pure intention. We must make sure that we are not just picking on people’s mistakes or trying to put them down.
- Give advice politely.
- Give advice privately.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Imam al-Ṣādiq (as): “When the following āyah was revealed: ‘O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the Hell-fire...’ a man from among the Muslims sat and began crying. He said: ‘I have been unable to protect myself, and now I have been made responsible over my family as well’. The Messenger of Allah told him: ‘it is sufficient for you to command them to that which you command yourself and forbid them from that which you forbid yourself.’”^v

There are some special situations where enjoining good and forbidding evil are even more important:

- Within a family. Parents especially have a special obligation to advise their children and guide them. The obligation also applies to siblings advising each other.
- Positions of leadership: people in positions of leadership (e.g. community leaders, government heads) have a particular obligation to enjoin good

and forbid evil. This is especially important in maintaining the community's moral health.

Lesson 2-Enjoining Good on a Global Scale

In the last lesson, we spoke about enjoining good and forbidding evil in different situations. In this lesson, we will focus on doing this in relation to issues that have a global impact.

ADVERTISING

These obligations can come about in many different contexts. Advertising is a major issue related to enjoining good and forbidding evil. The general public responds to mass advertising, and through this medium people can be easily influenced. Unfortunately, in most countries around the world, advertising is used to encourage sins and evil deeds, rather than to enjoin good. We see advertisements for alcohol everywhere, and it was only recently that some countries stopped cigarette advertising.

Just as damaging are the indirect messages sent through advertising. One of the main principles of advertising in the West is 'sex sells'. Therefore, we see that whatever is being advertised (cars, alcohol, and clothing) there is often a sexual tone to the advertising. This creates a society which is obsessed with body image and sex. Rather than enjoining good, advertising in the West constantly and persistently enjoins evil.

Our duty in relation to this may include the following:

- Protect and shield ourselves and our families/loved one and community from such advertising. We can do this by minimising television use. Even if there is a suitable TV program we want to watch, we can stream this and watch it on our own terms. We can also set up our internet use settings to protect ourselves and our families from inappropriate advertising.
- Positive advertising: while formal advertising is expensive, we can use social media tools to advertise for positive things. A positive example is the 'Women in Solidarity with Hijabs' (WISH) campaign initiated by one of our community

members in Australia. This was highly successful in raising awareness of Hijab in the community.

'POLITICS'

Another major issue related to enjoining good and forbidding evil is what happens globally in what is called 'politics'. In our generation, it has become common for Western countries to invade other countries using different excuses. These invasions lead to death and destruction, and cripple these countries for a long time. In addition, we see Western powers try to cause divisions between Muslims and foster conflict between them.

We also see politics affect our communities at a local level in Western countries. For example, changes to data security laws, 'terrorism' laws and discrimination laws may unfairly target or affect Muslim.

Our duties in relation to this may include

- Following the news and being aware of what is happening around the world
- Lobbying our local and national governments by sending letters to MPs, attending peaceful protests and making the issues known to our community
- Supporting or participating in social media and mainstream media campaigns which work to denounce oppression. A great example is the 'Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions' campaign which is working to reduce the interaction of the wider world with the illegitimate regime in Occupied Palestine. Another example is the 'Islamophobia Register Australia' which aims to highlight instances of discrimination against Muslims in Australia.

EDUCATION

It is difficult for people to follow the truth if they do not know it. Therefore, education is an essential part of enjoining good. This may include:

- Community education on Islam: setting up after-hours Islamic schools for children and classes for adults is a great way of bringing the community together while teaching important Islamic values

and beliefs. The aim for all our communities should be to eventually have full-time Islamic schools with a holistic Islam-oriented educational model.

- Individual education of the wider community: this is done simply by talking about contemporary issues with our non-Muslim workmates, colleagues, friends, sports teammates etc...This can have a great impact on the way they view Islam and Muslims.
- Mass education of the wider community: a good example of this is the 'Who is Hussain' campaign, which aims to educate the wider Muslim and non-Muslim community about the great personality of our third Imam, the Great Martyr of Islam.

CLASS ACTIVITY

Research some social media or mass media campaigns that have had a positive impact. What elements do you think made them successful? Are there any negative aspects to these campaigns?

Do you have any ideas for future campaigns?

Review Questions

Q1. Enjoining good and forbidding evil are:

- Recommended acts
- Individual Obligations
- Alternative Obligations

Q2. Enjoining good and forbidding evil are:

- Only obligatory on an individual level
- Are obligatory on all levels
- Are only obligatory on a community level

Q3. The conditions of these two obligations include:

- Sufficient knowledge of the rules in the situation
- The probability that the person being advised will take some heed
- The person giving advice must be a scholar or a leader

Q4. When giving advice to one who has is doing something wrong, we should:

- Do it publicly
- Do it privately
- Be harsh so the person understands

ⁱ Mishkatul Anwar, chapter on Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil

ⁱⁱ Mishkatul Anwar, chapter on Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil

ⁱⁱⁱ Wasailul Shia, Chapter 1 on Enjoining Good, Narration 4

^{iv} Mishkatul Anwar, chapter on Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil

^v Mishkatul Anwar, chapter on Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil