



ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL

JURISPRUDENCE

JUNIOR LEVEL

Introduction

“Let there arise from you a group of people inviting what is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong; these are the ones who will be successful.”
(3:104)

In order for religion to progress and for society to be successful, people must guide each other toward piety, by encouraging each other to do good, and discouraging each other from doing evil. This action is compulsory for those who believe in God and the Day of Judgment. Giving sincere advice is not, as some may argue, interfering in someone else's business; rather it is a valuable favour and one of the best forms of charity.

ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL

To be able to encourage good deeds and discourage and forbid evil deeds, it is important to know what the meaning of this is. We live in a world where wrong actions are considered normal and are commonly done by so many people – does this mean that the action is good? No!

Good and evil is defined by what Allah (SWT) has ordered us through the Holy Qur'an and the authentic narrations. It is not what we or the people in our community or family decide. It is what Allah (SWT) decides.

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand the meaning of enjoining good and forbidding evil
- Understand the importance of this obligation by referring to the Qur'an and narrations in relation to this topic
- Understand the different ways of meeting these obligations
- Review the importance of listening to advice when it is given to us



Let us take a look at some examples from the Qur'an and Ḥadith about the meaning and importance of enjoining good and forbidding evil.

“The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise.” (9:71)

The Prophet (saw) said, ‘Whoever enjoins good and prohibits wrong is the deputy of Allah and the deputy of His Prophet on the earth.’ⁱ

Imam Ali (as) said, ‘The basis of Islamic law is the enjoinement of good and the prohibition of wrong.’ⁱⁱ

Imam al-Ḥusayn (as) said, ‘It is not permissible for a believing eye to watch Allah being disobeyed and close without first changing the situation.’ⁱⁱⁱ

THE CONDITIONS OF THE OBLIGATION

Imam al-Sadiq (as) said, ‘Verily the one who enjoins good and prohibits wrong should possess three qualities: he should act upon that which he enjoins and abstain from that which he prohibits; he must be just with regards to what he enjoins and just with regards to what he prohibits; and he must be gentle in what he enjoins and gentle in what he prohibits.’^{iv}



From this ḥadith, we can see that not everyone can enjoin good and forbid evil – because no one will listen to someone who does not at least try to practice what they preach. Therefore, the conditions for meeting this obligation are:

1. Practice what you preach
2. Be just in what you enjoin
3. Be gentle in your approach (to guide another person) – Do not blame, abuse or insult someone who is doing something wrong. Also, do not force someone to do something good. Encourage them and educate them – do not impose on them.
4. You must have knowledge of what you are preaching or teaching – you cannot guide someone if you do not have correct knowledge
5. You must have the physical and mental ability to guide another person. If performing the obligation would cause significant harm to your life, wealth or health, then it is not obligatory on you.



THE LEVELS OF ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL

We may come across many different situations where we see something wrong happening or where we feel we want to do something good.

Sometimes, we attend a program at the centre and there is a fund raiser auction to support needy orphans

in another country. There are so many people donating money, but unfortunately, we might not have enough money to give. In such a situation, even the desire itself or the intention is enough for us to attain the reward, because that intention is all we can give to encourage the good that is happening.

In the same way, when we see something wrong happening in school, for example we see another boy being bullied, but we are not strong enough to say or do anything to stop it, but in our heart we hate the bully's actions – this is also enough to give us the reward of hating what is evil.



However, we must remember the key in this situation is that we must act according to our capacity. If we have the money to give to charity, but we only 'wish' it – it will not be sufficient. Also, if we are strong enough to speak against or do something to stop another boy being bullied, we must take that action. In the case of forbidding evil, it is important to remember that to remain silent and wish it not to happen, when we can do something more is not only wrong, but it can also be punishable especially if we don't do something to stop evil or wrong doing.

The Prophet (saw) said: 'He who sees wrong being done should redress the situation with his own hand, and if he cannot do so then with his tongue, and if he cannot do so then with his heart [disapproving the act], and that is the weakest level of faith.'^v

Therefore, in the case of enjoining good and forbidding evil, there are different levels:

1. To take action to stop the wrong or forbidden action
2. To speak against the evil
3. To hate it and disapprove it in your heart and mind

SOME EXAMPLES OF ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL

Enjoining or encouraging good:

1. Getting a group of friends together and working on a project to help orphans.
2. Taking part in a fundraiser to help collect money to buy new furniture for the classrooms at an Islamic school
3. Inviting your friend to attend the Islamic centre for a lecture on a special occasion.
4. Encouraging a friend in school to pray on time and to pray every day.

Forbidding Evil:

1. Telling your friends not to do bad things like smoking or lying or skipping class
2. Stopping another person from bullying someone who is weaker or speaking against it or reporting it to an authority.
3. Reporting a crime or a wrong action to an authority if you are unable to stop it from happening.
4. Stopping a fight from happening at school

ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

As the common phrase goes 'Charity begins at home', and the same goes for these obligations. It starts at home with us and our families.

However, it does not stop there. As Muslims, we must practice enjoining good and forbidding evil at every level of our environment. This means, with ourselves, our

family, our community, our country and even the world. You might ask - how can we enjoin good and forbid evil on a large scale like at a national or international level?

The answer to this is creating awareness of good moral behaviour and speaking out against immorality and bad conduct which is unhealthy for the society. Some common examples are:

Enjoining Good Examples:

1. Writing to a fast food chain store or supermarket to introduce the selling of ḥalāl food or meat
2. Writing to your minister to ask the government to allow building of a mosque
3. Helping orphans in poorer countries by collecting money and fundraising in the community, school and other places and sending the money to the orphans

Forbidding Evil Examples:

1. Writing to the Prime Minister encouraging them not to support unjust wars and invasions
2. Taking part in a protest that is organized to create awareness and show disagreement against waging an unjust war against another country
3. Writing or speaking out against anything wrong that is happening in the world today



Remember, enjoining good and forbidding evil affects the whole society. Imagine if you were in a boat and the person in the seat next to you starts making a hole under his seat. Will you just remain silent and say 'he is making a hole under his seat so it is none of my business?' Instead, you will stop him from doing it because his action will affect the whole boat and everyone can drown because of one person's action. In the same way, the human society is like a boat, if someone does something wrong, he must be advised to stop and at the same time we must encourage each other to do good, so we all remain safe, happy and successful.

Review Questions

Q1. How do we know what is good and what is bad:

- a. Our feelings tell us what is good and bad
- b. The newspapers tell us what is good and bad
- c. Whatever Allah (SWT) tells us through the Holy Qur'an and Ahlul Bayt (as)

Q2. What is the lowest level of discouraging or forbidding evil?

- a. To act with whatever means we have to stop the wrong
- b. To hate it in our hearts and reject it in our minds
- c. To write and speak against it

Q3. How do we practice guiding people to do what is right and avoid what is wrong?

- a. By being rude and impolite
- b. By being wise and gentle
- c. By forcing someone

Lesson 2: How to Enjoin Good and Forbid Evil

In the previous lesson we learnt about the importance of enjoining good and forbidding evil and the effects this has on the individual, the family, community and even on a national and global scale. Even though anyone can do the act of enjoining good and forbidding evil – they have to know what obligations they have by doing this.

This lesson will discuss the qualities, obligations and limitations of the person doing the act of enjoining good and forbidding evil and the situations in which we should do it or in some case should not do it.

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’”.

THE QUALITIES OF THE ONE WHO ENJOINS GOOD AND FORBIDS EVIL

1. Ability
2. One who is obeyed
3. Knowledge
4. Application to oneself

Mas’adah ibn Ṣadaqah 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.’

Ability - means that the person who wants to enjoin good has the skills and facilities to be able to guide the person who is doing wrong. An example of ability could be that the person who wants to enjoin good and forbid evil shares a close relationship with the person who is doing wrong, for instance a close friend, or husband and wife.



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. Unfortunately, some people reach such a stage of stubbornness that when we give them advice about an issue (e.g. ḥijāb) they close up and become hostile, and it may even make them more stubborn. So before we give advice, we should assess how it will be received.



Knowledge means that the person should know the difference between right and wrong first, before they tell others what to do. It is impossible to guide someone when you yourself are lost.

Application to one self – this is the most important factor in achieving an effect of enjoining good and forbidding evil. Simply, it means practice what you preach. Your advice will have a much stronger impact if you practice what you tell another person.



Allah (SWT) says in the Holy Qur’an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ كَبُرَ مَقْتًا
عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ تَقُولُوا مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ

“O you who believe! why do you say that which you do not do? It is most hateful to Allah that you should say that which you do not do.” (61:2-3)

THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS

In addition to the above qualities of the person giving advice and enjoining good, there are certain responsibilities in the manner which this act is performed.

- 1. The first obligation is that the adviser should be polite and courteous and not embarrass the other person.**

There is another beautiful story from the life of Imam Ḥasan (as) and Imam Ḥusayn (as) which shows us how we can advise others without embarrassing them or making them feel humiliated.

One day, the two Imams, who were young boys at the time, went to the mosque to pray. There they noticed an old man who was performing the Wuḍū' in the wrong way. In order to avoid hurting his feelings by just telling him directly, they made a plan between themselves, to show him the right way to perform Wuḍū'.



The Imams asked the man to judge between them as to whose Wuḍū' was more correct. Once the man saw them performing Wuḍū', he realised he was doing it wrong and fixed his Wuḍū'. Furthermore, he did not feel at all offended or embarrassed.

2. We should be fair in giving advice

When we are giving advice, we should make sure that we are doing it fairly and justly, with a pure intention. We should not be doing it simply to pick out others' mistakes or to make ourselves feel superior.

IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING TO ADVICE



As human beings we are always in need of guidance so we can achieve the best from our potential. One of the keys to success is seeking advice from successful and wise people.

We have learnt about many stories in the Qur'an and history of the Prophets where people refused to listen to advice, because they were selfish. They rejected listening to someone else's point of view and in the process they ended up rejecting the truth for which they were punished. Therefore, not listening to advice can lead us far away from the truth and can land us in many problems.



- a. Because it helps us avoid mistakes
- b. It makes us humble
- c. Both of the above

ⁱ [Mustadrak al-Wasail, v. 12, p. 179, no. 13817]

ⁱⁱ [Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 6817]

ⁱⁱⁱ [Tanbih al-Khawatir, v. 2, p. 179]

^{iv} [al-Khisal, p. 109, no. 79]

^v [al-Tarhib wa al-Tarhib, v. 3, p. 223, no. 1]

^{vi} **References:**

- Lecture notes on Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil – Sheikh Mansour
- Hadith Databank – Dar al Hadith - http://www.darolhadith.com/modules.php?name=my_AlfabetMenu
- Discovering Islam, by Imam Sayed Moustafa Al-Qazwini – Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil - <http://www.al-islam.org/discovering-islam/14.htm>
- Holy Quran – Sura Tauba, 9, Verse 71

Let's look at some of the benefits of listening to advice

- It helps us increase our knowledge
- It solves some of our problems by giving us guidance in the right direction
- It protects us from making mistakes
- It builds strong relationships as people consult one another, there is sharing of knowledge and compassion between them which in turn creates unity and wellbeing for the community

^{vi}By listening to advice, the person listening must take into consideration the words of advice and then make a decision themselves. After they have made their decision, they should have trust in Allah (SWT).

Review Questions

1. What is one of the qualities of the person enjoining good and forbidding evil?

- a. He should be male
- b. He must be rich
- c. He must practice what he preaches

2. If you think that a person will not listen to advice, you should:

- a. Force him to listen
- b. Punish him
- c. Ignore him

3. Why should we always be eager to listen to advice?