



# ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL

## 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

SENIOR LEVEL

## Lesson 1- Introduction

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. In the next lesson, we will discuss the conditions of these obligations and how best to meet them.

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. Some examples include:

- A parent teaching and showing their child how to pray
- A school curriculum including religious education, teaching children the rules of Islam
- Television advertising encouraging people to give charity

Forbidding evil means that we should discourage and prohibit others from doing evil deeds. This includes creating a social environment where people are discouraged from transgressing against the laws of Islam or doing evil deeds. Some examples include:

- A friend discouraging a fellow friend from using foul language

- A government making all websites with explicit material prohibited and shutting them down

Enjoining good and forbidding evil are alternative obligations (Wājib Kifā'i). This means that the obligation stands as long as it is not met. However, once someone meets the obligation, then it no longer applies to anyone. For example, if someone is swearing in public, then it is an obligation on all to stop him. However, once one person stops him, then the obligation drops from the others.

## 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)

"O my son! Establish prayer, enjoin good and forbid evil, and bear with patience whatever befalls you. Verily! These are some of the important commandments ordered by Allah with no exemption." (31:17)

As can be seen from the āyāt of the Holy Qur'an:

- One of the characteristics of the best communities is that they enjoin good and forbid evil
- The command to enjoin good comes directly after the command for daily prayer, emphasising its importance

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".<sup>i</sup>

"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"<sup>ii</sup>

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, buy their prayers will not be answered."<sup>iii</sup>

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.

## ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL: ON A GLOBAL SCALE

These obligations can come about in many different contexts. On an individual level, a friend may advise their friend to avoid listening to ḥarām music. On a community level, a person may encourage their neighbour to attend the mosque. However, it is also important to realise that these obligations have a wider scale as well.

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 is to be aware of this and to try to protect ourselves from such advertising. It is also our duty to do what we can to produce positive advertising, whether it is through social media or other small media projects.

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.

Our duty as young Muslims living in today's world is to keep a sharp eye on what is happening around the world. We cannot ignore these things and say that they are not our business. Muslims around the world are like one body, and if one part is hurting, the whole body hurts. We must also try to gain insight in order to know what is actually the truth of what is happening around the world.

Once we know the truth, we must do whatever we can to enjoin good and forbid evil. We must speak out against injustice and do what we can to stop it. We must make others aware of the truth and encourage them to stand up to oppression as well. We must remember that enjoining good and forbidding evil are not just obligations on an individual or family level, but they are obligations on a global scale as well.

#### Review Questions

1. Enjoining good and forbidding evil are:
  - a. Recommended acts
  - b. Individual Obligations
  - c. Alternative Obligations
2. Enjoining good and forbidding evil are:
  - a. Only obligatory on an individual level

- b. Are obligatory on all levels
- c. Are only obligatory on a community level

## Lesson 2

In this lesson, we will discuss the conditions of these two obligations.

The first important point to understand is that these obligations can be met in several ways:

- By thoughts
- By words
- By actions

How do we know which method to use? Whichever method is sufficient to make an impact and get results is sufficient. For example, if advising someone through words is enough, then that is all when we need to do. If words are not enough, and action must be taken, then action becomes obligatory.

On the other hand, if action is needed, but one is not able to do this because of fear of harm or death, then they should use words. If one is not able to even use words, then they can at least enjoin good by hating evil actions in their minds, and loving good things in their minds.

### THE CONDITIONS

Mas'adah ibn Sadaqah narrates: "Imam al-Şādiq (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.'"<sup>iv</sup>

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. For example, before a person corrects what they think is a mistake in someone else's prayer, they must be sure that they are speaking with knowledge and know the correct rules of prayer

- 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.
- 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. For example, if a person misses their Fajr prayer just once, when they are usually very timely about it, we do not have to advise them because they are unlikely to do this again frequently.
- 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. Our intention must be purely to enjoin good for the sake of Allah (SWT) and to meet our Islamic obligation
- Give advice politely. We should not berate someone, scream at them, or advise them in a rude way. Instead, we should use pleasant words, remain calm and not embarrass the other person.
- Give advice privately. We should do our best to not make the issue public. Instead, we must give

the advice in the most private of settings, when we are alone with the other person.

## 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.'"<sup>v</sup>

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.

## Review Questions

1. The conditions of these two obligations include:
  - a. Sufficient knowledge of the rules in the situation
  - b. The probability that the person being advised will take some heed
  - c. The person giving advice must be a scholar or a leader
2. When giving advice to one who has is doing something wrong, we should:
  - a. Do it publicly
  - b. Do it privately
  - c. Be harsh so the person understands

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<sup>i</sup> Mishkatul Anwar, chapter on Enjoining Good and Forbidding

Evil

<sup>ii</sup> Mishkatul Anwar, chapter on Enjoining Good and Forbidding

Evil

<sup>iii</sup> Wasailul Shia, Chapter 1 on Enjoining Good, Narration 4

<sup>iv</sup> Mishkatul Anwar, chapter on Enjoining Good and Forbidding

Evil

<sup>v</sup> Mishkatul Anwar, chapter on Enjoining Good and Forbidding

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