

Embracing Self-Improvement in Islam

As Muslims, we have a personal responsibility to continuously strive for self-improvement in both our spiritual and worldly lives. Allah encourages us to grow and develop, while our beloved Prophet (Sallallahu Alayhi Wasallam - peace be upon him) advised us to be the best versions of ourselves. In a world that faces numerous challenges and where the need for change is paramount, it becomes even more crucial for us to take ownership of our personal growth.

To help us navigate the challenges of this life and fulfill our Islamic obligations, we need to improve ourselves in various aspects, such as adopting better Islamic practices or enhancing secular aspects of our lives. This is because embracing personal change not only benefits us but also contributes positively to the world around us.

The ability to transform provides hope for a brighter future. Fortunately, abundant advice is available through the teachings of the Quran, Sunnah, and the many Islamic scholars. **However, the real challenge lies in applying this knowledge to bring about lasting change in our lives.**

However, making lasting personal change can be tough, and it's common for people to lose motivation along the way. Nevertheless, we must persevere in our efforts to overcome barriers to change, as it is our responsibility as Muslims to constantly improve ourselves.

Why is it then many of us fail to change? Understanding this can help us address and overcome these obstacles. One of the biggest hurdles to change is procrastination, which involves replacing high-priority tasks with those of lower importance. Let's remember though that both worldly and spiritual matters suffer when we fall into the trap of assuming that time will always be available. The Quran provides numerous examples of nations given time to

change but faced consequences when they failed to do so. Allah says in the Quran:

فَلَمَّا نَسُوا مَا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ فَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ أَبْوَابَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فَرِحُوا بِمَا أُوتُوا
أَخَذْنَاهُمْ بِغُتَّةٍ فَأِذَا هُم مُّبْلِسُونَ

“So, when they forgot (the warning) with which they had been reminded, We opened for them the gates of every (pleasant) thing, until in the midst of their enjoyment in that which they were given, all of a sudden, We took them (in punishment), and lo! They were plunged into destruction with deep regrets and sorrows.” while they will bear their burdens on their backs; and evil indeed are the burdens that they will bear! -- Quran, Surah Al-Anaam (verse 44)

The message above couldn't be clearer. Allah gives us the time to reform ourselves. When we postpone indefinitely, we shouldn't be surprised if our conditions worsen. Allah says in the Quran,

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمَمٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَضَرَّعُونَ

“Verily, We sent (Messengers) to many nations before you (O Muhammad). And We seized them with extreme poverty (or loss in wealth) and loss in health (with calamities) so that they might humble themselves (believe with humility).” (Quran, Surah Al-Anaam, Verse #42)

We must, therefore, urgently address our spiritual and worldly imperfections, connecting them to our undesirable circumstances. Remember, delaying change can lead to challenging times and future regrets. Don't wait for tomorrow, as it may bring additional burdens.

Another reason that leads to failure in change is becoming desensitized to falsehoods and imperfections. To initiate change, we must first identify and acknowledge negative behaviors, habits, thoughts, or beliefs. However, when we become desensitized to such imperfections, the need for change fades. For instance, many Muslims overlook the importance of praying Fajr on time and no longer view it as a sin or feel compelled to correct their behavior.

Today, people often prioritize their personal interests when setting guidelines, rather than relying on Allah's commandments and the Prophet's teachings. This can blur the lines between what is true and false, making it harder to discern right from wrong. This can lead to increased acceptance of wrong behaviors, with disastrous consequences. Losing the ability to distinguish between falsehood and truth allows Shaytan to infiltrate our lives and impede our progress. Allah tells us in the Quran,

وَمَنْ يَعْشُ عَنْ ذِكْرِ الرَّحْمَنِ نُقَيِّضْ لَهُ شَيْطَانًا فَهُوَ لَهُ قَرِينٌ

وَإِنَّهُمْ لَيَصُدُّونَهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ وَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُّهْتَدُونَ

“And whosoever turns away blindly from the remembrance of the Most Gracious (Alláh) (i.e., this Qurán and worship of Alláh), We appoint for him a Shaitán (Satan/devil) to be a Qarin (a companion) to him. And verily, they (Satans/devils) hinder them from the path (of Alláh), but they think that they are guided aright!” (Quran, Surah Az-Zukhruf - 36-37).

In conclusion, to fulfill our responsibility as Muslims, we must continually strive for improvement. The journey from hardship to fulfillment, from good to great, and from Allah's displeasure to seeking His pleasure begins with embracing the process of change. As mentioned in the Quran,

لَهُ مُعَقَّبَاتٌ مِّنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِّنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَالٍ

"Verily, Allah will not change the condition of a people as long as they do not change their state themselves" [Surah al-Raa'd 13:11].

May Allah grant us the wisdom and strength to navigate these challenges and help us get on a path of constant improvement and transformation.