

Tāriq ibn Shihāb narrated:

1

The first to start with the speech, i.e., the khuṭbah, before the prayer on an Eid Day was Marwān. A man stood up and said to him: 'The prayer is offered before the speech'. He said: 'This has been left out'.

2

Abu Sa'īd said: 'This one has discharged his duty'.

3

I heard God's Messenger (peace be upon him) say: "Whoever of you sees a wrongful action should change it with his hand.

4

and if he is unable to do so, then with his tongue.

5

and if he is unable to do that, then with his heart. This [last one] is the weakest degree of faith'.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by Muslim, 7.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿You are the best community that has ever been raised for mankind; you enjoy the doing of what is right and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in God.﴾ (3: 110)
- ﴿Those of the Children of Israel who disbelieved were cursed by David and Jesus, son of Mary. That was because they rebelled and persisted in their transgression. (78) They would never restrain one another from wrongdoing. Vile indeed were the things they did.﴾ (5: 78-79)
- ﴿The believers, men, and women are friends to one another: They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong; they attend to their prayers, and pay their zakat, and obey God and His Messenger. It is on these that God will have mercy. Surely, God is almighty, wise.﴾ (9: 71)

The Narrator

Abu Sa'īd Sa'd ibn Mālik ibn Sinān al-Anṣārī belonged to the Khazraj tribe and to Madinah and is known as al-Khudrī. He took part in the Encounter of the Moat and the following military expeditions. He tried to join the army for the Battle of Uḥud, but the Prophet did not allow him as he was then too young. He took part in a total of twelve military expeditions and in the pledge under the tree. He narrated a large number of hadiths and issued fatwas for a period of time. He died in Year 74 AH, 694 CE.

Summary

It is not right for a believer to see something wrongful being committed without changing it. If he is able to accomplish this physically, without causing harm or trouble, he should do so. If not, then verbally, giving admonition and speaking properly to the person concerned. Otherwise, he should denounce the deed privately, making clear that he personally disapproves of it.



Message and Meaning

1

Ṭāriq ibn Shihāb belonged to the tābi‘īn generation. He mentions that Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam was the first to make the deviation of starting the Eid Prayer with the khuṭbah, or the sermon. What is well-known is that on the Day of Eid, the prayer is followed by the khuṭbah, which is the opposite of the Friday Prayer. It appears that Marwān, who was the Governor of Madinah at the time, felt that people might depart after the prayer, and he wanted to deliver the khuṭbah before they left. One person stood up, explaining the sunnah and advising Marwān that the prayer should precede the khuṭbah. Marwān did not accept his advice and told him that this practice was abandoned.

2

On hearing this, Abu Sa‘īd al-Khudrī said that the man had fulfilled his duty of giving the right advice, enjoining what is right and speaking out against what is wrong. Thus, he cleared himself, since God only wants people to do what is within their ability. God says that ‘the Messenger’s duty is but to deliver his message’. (5: 99)

3

Abu Sa‘īd then provides the evidence in support of what was said, citing what he heard the Prophet (peace be upon him) say: ‘Whoever of you sees a wrongful action should change it with his hand’. A wrongful action applies to every action that Islam disapproves of.

To change a wrongful action by hand does not mean that a Muslim should physically destroy people’s property or shed blood. To do so is to cause strife and harm. It is a condition of changing wrong action by hand that the person trying it should be able to do it without causing harm. Thus, it applies to a ruler, or a government, as they can use their power to change things. It also applies to a parent or a husband who can discipline his children or family. A person who is unable to physically change a wrongful action should seek the government’s help. If he cannot, then the duty does not apply to him.

4

When a person is unable to change a wrongful action physically, fearing that it may cause him harm or lead to a situation of strife, his duty is to try to change it with his tongue, which means that he should express disapproval of the sinful action and point it out to the perpetrator, calling on him to abide by the teachings of Islam. He should encourage the perpetrator to turn to God in repentance and stop that wrongful or sinful action. He should use the most suitable address that fits the situation and the addressee, so as to implement the Qur’anic verse that says: ‘Call people to the path of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation’. (16: 125)



If one fears adverse consequences and feels unable to change the wrong deed by word of mouth, he should secretly disapprove of such wrong. He should dislike it and make his feeling of disapproval clear. He should also intend that he will change it if he has the power to do so.

To privately disapprove of what is wrong is the weakest grade of belief. The only feeling behind quiet disapproval is to accept the sinful action, even though one does not do it himself. Hence, a different version of the hadith adds: 'Beyond this there is not the equivalent of a single mustard seed of faith'.⁽¹⁾

Enjoining right and speaking against evil is an essential duty. It is required to ensure the well-being of society and the implementation of Islam. It is a collective duty, which means that it applies to the whole community. Therefore, if some people implement it, the whole community is deemed to have discharged the duty. However, it may be a personal duty for a person who happens to be the only one who knows about a particular wrongful action, or if the action is done by his family or people under his care.

If the wrongful action is one which all people know to be forbidden, such as negligence of prayer or fasting, undutifulness to parents, drinking alcohol, adultery, etc. then every Muslim may express disapproval. If the ruling concerning a wrongful action is not readily apparent to all, disapproval is the duty of scholars.



1 Related by Muslim, 50.

Implementation

1

The hadith confirms that whoever invents in religion something that does not belong to it, his action is rejected. Religious deeds are accepted by God only if they follow the Prophet's guidance.

2

The man who stood up advising Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam did not fear his power. He simply offered advice to him. A Muslim should not fear expressing disapproval of wrongful action unless this may bring him much harm.

3

One should not be deterred from speaking out against what is wrong by his knowledge that the perpetrator will not listen to such good advice. A Muslim's duty is to give sincere advice, and it is God who guides all.

4

It is wrong to think that refraining from sin is sufficient to ensure safety. Remaining silent without expressing disapproval may incur punishment. The Prophet said: 'When people see wrongful action and do not change it, they will be close to a general punishment by God'.⁽¹⁾

5

It is not permissible for a Muslim who is able to change a wrongful action he sees to refrain from changing it. God says: 'Those of the Children of Israel who disbelieved were cursed by David and Jesus, son of Mary. That was because they rebelled and persisted in their transgression. (78) They would never restrain one another from wrongdoing. Vile indeed were the things they did'. (5: 78-79)

6

One should make sure that one's attempt to stop a wrongful action does not lead to an even more serious wrong. It is important to adopt a wise approach. If one feels that speaking out against such action is more useful, one should confine oneself to this.

7

The duty to change wrongful action physically is conditional upon being able to accomplish this without causing harm or strife. If such conditions are met, then the change should be accomplished.

8

One aspect of physical prevention of wrongful action is that a Muslim does not approve that his wife, daughter, or sister goes out exposing her charms. In this case verbal advice is not sufficient. Action is necessary.

9

Another example of physical changing of wrongful action is that a Muslim should order members of his family to attend to their prayers and other worship. He should deal with whoever neglects prayers and other duties in the way he thinks most likely to ensure his proper attendance to them.

10

Yet another example of physical change of wrongful action is to remove from one's home aspects of disbelief and sin, such as images, charms, talismans, etc.

11

A person who feels unable to physically change a wrongful action should try to give advice and state the truth wisely, without causing trouble or harm.

1 Related by Ahmad, 1; Ibn Mājah, 4005; Abu Dāwūd, 4338; al-Tirmidhī, 3057.

12

Changing wrongful action with one's tongue does not mean using abusive language or expressions of contempt or backbiting. It is achieved by giving sound advice, urging people wisely to do what is right and refrain from what is wrong.

13

A true Muslim should undertake the duty of enjoining what is right and prohibiting what is wrong. He should not be deterred by a feeling of awe when addressing his advice to someone in high position. God says: 'Were it not that God repels some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques – in all of which God's name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed'. (22: 40)

14

Enjoining what is right and prohibiting what is wrong is not limited to governors and public authorities. It is also incumbent on Muslim individuals. A Muslim should undertake this duty provided that he knows what he is approving or disapproving of.

15

To give advice or discipline to a sinful Muslim is an act of mercy.

16

A true believer does not care only for himself following the right path. He is also concerned about his society and community. He is keen to make clear to them the risks that apply to them concerning their faith and livelihood.

17

One of the worst things that may happen to anyone is to abandon enjoining right and criticizing evil in order to curry favour with a friend or relative, or a loved one, or to appease someone in power. God's curse applied to the Children of Israel when considerations like these stopped them from enjoining what was right and forbidding what was wrong.

18

A Muslim who is unable to speak out against some evil should denounce it in private, within himself, hating what is sinful and dissociating oneself from it. He should also resolve to change it physically or verbally if he becomes able to do so.

19

One aspect of secret disapproval is to dissociate oneself from disbelief and disbelievers. This means that a Muslim should dislike polytheists and disbelievers and should not maintain cordial relations with them as long as they continue to hate God and incur His displeasure.

20

Everyone should test one's heart and faith. A person who sees some evil and disapproves of it physically, verbally, or privately has a degree of faith consistent with his disapproval. The one who does not care about that should know that he stands away from the pleasant areas of the believers.

21

To disapprove of evil in secret when one is able to change it physically or verbally indicates weakness of faith. Everyone should be keen to ensure that one's faith is complete.

22

To attend places of idleness, backbiting, people's abuse, and other sinful practices indicates that one's heart does not disapprove of such matters. Had one disapproved, one would have disliked such a gathering and not participated in it.

