**Helping One Another in Righteousness**
 *(Imam Mohamed Baianonie at the Islamic Center of Raleigh, NC, delivered this Friday speech on September 11, 1987)*

Allah created man and honored him over all of His other creations. He trusted man with the responsibility of carrying on Allah's commands. This is a great honor, yet it is also a hard responsibility that cannot be fulfilled completely without the full cooperation among human beings. Succeeding in fulfilling this great trust from Allah, depends on how well humans cooperate with each other. And because of this, Allah orders his servants what can be translated as, “Help one another in righteousness and piety, but do not help one another in sin and transgression.” surat Al-Ma'idah, (verse 2).

After reading this verse, you will find that Allah (S.W.T.) has clearly defined the areas in which we must cooperate with one another and the areas where we should not help each other. However, Allah (S.W.T.) does not specify who we must or must not cooperate with because He (S.W.T.) meant for us to cooperate with all people regardless of their race, faith, or gender. We should not use race, faith, or gender to be an obstacle in cooperating with one another in righteousness and piety. And likewise, if we are of the same race, faith, or gender then it is not permitted for us to cooperate with one another in sin and transgression. This is the great foundation that Allah (S.W.T.) wanted the Muslim Ummah to build on in their relationships.

Imam Ibn-Kathir explains this verse saying, “Allah (S.W.T.) ordered His believing servants to help each other to do good and this is called al-ber . Avoiding sins is called attaqwah and Allah (S.W.T.) forbids them to help each other in wrongdoing, sins, and prohibited things. Imam At-Tabari said, “ Ithim , means to leave what Allah (S.W.T.) has ordered one to do. And Al-Udwan , means transgressing against what Allah (S.W.T.) has limited you in your deen , and transgressing against what Allah (S.W.T.) has obligated upon you, in yourself and with others.”

Imam Ash-Shawkani said in explaining this verse, “The order from Allah (S.W.T.) in this verse includes everything that is considered ber and taqwah . Also Allah (S.W.T.) has forbid us from helping each other in ithim , and udwan . Al-Ithmu includes every action or saying that brings a sin to the one whom does it. Al-Udwan includes treating others unjustly. Based on this, there are all kinds of things that make a person sinful, which include the acts that are unjust against others and oneself. ”

Here we see this verse as a great foundation of this deen , which many rulings are built upon. The Muslims should control all of their relationships with Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The Muslim scholars used this verse as evidence to reach the Islamic verdict on many issues, especially in cases where there is no clear-cut evidence.

And there are many Ahadith of the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) that came to clarify and build on this verse . Many Ahadith clarify that Muslims should help one another in acts that are righteous and pious, and they should avoid helping others to commit sins. Here are some of these Ahadith :

The prophet (S.A.W.) said, “…He who is helping in the need of his brother, Allah is helping in his need. And He who helps a Muslim to solve a hardship, Allah (S.W.T.) will solve a hardship for him on the Day of Judgment.” [Reported by Imams Bukhari and Muslim]

The prophet (S.A.W.) said, “…Allah will be in the helping of a person to the extent that the person helps his brother.” [Reported by Imam Muslim]

The prophet (S.A.W.) said, “…Bring a fair reconciliation between two opposing parties (and it) is charity, helping somebody to mount his animal, or to load his baggage on the animal, is also a charity…” [Reported by Imams Bukhari and Muslim]

Encouraging others to do good things is one of the ways that Muslims can cooperate with each other in righteousness. The prophet (S.A.W.) promises those who encourage goodness to receive the same reward of those who do the good deed. So the prophet (S.A.W.) said: “Whoever guides someone to virtue will be rewarded equivalent to him who practices that good action.” [Reported by Imam Muslim] In another Hadith , the prophet (S.A.W.) said, “If anyone calls others to follow right guidance, his reward will be equivalent to those who follow him (in righteousness) without their reward being diminished in any respect on that account.” [Reported by Imam Muslim]

When people encourage others to do sinful things, then they will receive the same penalty of those who have sinned. The prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said, “And if anyone invites others to follow error, the sin, of which he is guilty, will be equivalent to those of the people who follow him (in sinfulness) without their sins being diminished in any respect on that account.” [Reported by Imam Muslim]

Not only does Islam find importance in building the Muslim individual, but also it takes interest in building the Muslim community. This is not surprising, for Islam is the religion of the individual and of the community. For this reason we find many verses and Ahadith that lay down the foundation for the Muslim community. Allah (S.W.T.) desires the Muslim Ummah be the model for all of humanity by fulfilling the responsibility that Allah has trusted us with.

Cooperation is one of the important foundations that the community must be built upon. Before we can begin working on the bigger community level, individuals Muslims must find cooperation among their own families. The family is the building block of society. A husband and wife must find mutual cooperation between each other in order to carry out the roles trusted to them. If they cooperate, then they will raise their children in the correct manner, and those children will then become good citizens in the Muslim community. The prophet (S.A.W.) said, “…A man is a steward to his family members of his house, a woman is a steward to her husband's house and his children…” [Reported by Imams Bukhari and Muslim]. Ayeshah (R.A.) described the prophet's (S.A.W.) life with his family; she said, “He used to remain busy serving and helping his family.” [Reported by Imam Bukhari]

Muslims must also cooperate with their neighbors. A good person will tend to his neighbor's needs, and help them in all good and protect them against harm and evil. The Prophet (S.A.W.) considered harming one's neighbors to be contradictory to fulfilling one's faith, and said, “By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!” They said, “Who, messenger of Allah?” He said, “He whose neighbor is not be safe from his evil.” [Reported by Imam Bukhari] In this hadith, “neighbor” is a general term that includes Muslims and Non-Muslims living close-by, the person working near him, the person next to him on a ship, etc. This Hadith also means that the person who harms his neighbor has weak faith in Islam.

Allah (S.W.T) has linked good treatment of one's parents and relatives with the good treatment of one's neighbors and said what can be translated as, “Submit yourselves to Allah, and do not join any partners with Him; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, and the wayfarer (you meet) .” surat An-Nisaa', (Verse 36)

There are so many ways in which we can show kindness to our neighbors, the lowest type of kindness simply includes not hurting your neighbor. The prophet (S.A.W.) said, “One who believes in Allah and the Last Day must not hurt or harm his neighbor...” [Reported by Imams Bukhari and Muslim] And the highest type of kindness to your neighbor is when you share in good and bad tidings. The prophet (S.A.W.) said , “The best friend in the sight of Allah is he who is the best to his friends, and the best neighbor is the one who behaves best toward his neighbors.” [A good hadith Roprted by Imam At-Tirmithi] And also the prophet (S.A.W.) said, “Gabriel kept advising me to treat the neighbors kindly, so much that I thought that he would order me to make them as my heirs.” [Reported by Imams Bukhari and Muslim]

All neighbors whether they are Muslim, non-Muslim, relative, or non-relative deserve their rights as a neighbor just because they are your neighbors. There should be no difference in the treatment of a Muslim neighbor and a non-Muslim one, or a relative and a non-relative. However, a Muslim has the rights of the neighbor as well as the rights of a Muslim. And a relative has in addition to the rights of a neighbor, the rights of a relative.

And if we look beyond the neighbors whom the neighborhood is made of, we find the larger community, the Muslim community living in the same locality. Cooperation must be the basis for our relationships in our various efforts and endeavors, so that our efforts meet and form a force for good and against evil…and in achieving this, the community will realize itself and become able to reach its great needs and hopes.

For every person is a force in him and every group is also a force in itself. And when these individuals and groups cooperate and unite, it can be a great source for everyone's good. However, if it stays spread out and scattered, it will waste its potential and indifference will increase and spread, until all its good is lost.

The cooperation required of us as Muslims includes physical and moral cooperation. The prophet (S.A.W.) said, “Support your brother whether he is the transgressor or the transgressed. ” They said, “How can we support our brother if he is the transgressor? He said, “By preventing him from transgression.” [Reported by Imam Bukhari]

The prophet (S.A.W.) said, “The example of the believers in their being merciful among themselves and showing love among themselves and being kind among themselves resembles one body, so that, if any part of the body is not well then the whole body shares the sleeplessness (insomnia) and fever with it.” [Reported by Imams Bukhari and Muslim]

The prophet (S.A.W.) said, “The bonds of brotherhood between two believers are like parts of a building, one part strengthens and holds the other, the prophet then clasped his hand with the fingers .” [Reported by Imams Bukhari and Muslim]

The prophet (S.A.W.) has set for us the greatest examples of moral and physical cooperation. This must be achieved in a Muslim community that wishes to establish itself in order to perform its duty of carrying Allah's (S.W.T) word on earth. The prophet showed us an example of physical and moral support when he bonded the Muhajireen (those who migrated with him from Mecca to Madina) and the Ansar (the people of Madina who supported him). That brotherhood was so strong that it was a reason for inheritance in some cases, before the Qur'an laid down the laws of inheritance. Imam Bukhari reported that, “The muhajireen used to inherit from a man from the ansar . Although the ansari may have had relatives, the prophet (S.A.W.) had made them brothers. But when the (inheritance verse) came down that method of inheritance ended.”

And the prophet (S.A.W.) encouraged Muslims to help in all good causes, even if they were cooperating with non-Muslims. When he (S.A.W.) was twenty, before prophet-hood, he attended a meeting of the Quraish (the prophet's tribe) at which the men of Quraish pledged to help the weak overcome the strong, and the person whose rights were taken overcome the person who took his rights. He took part of the pledge and spoke about it after he became prophet and said what was reported by Imam Ahmad and others in an authentic narration, “I attended the home of Abd Allah Ben Jada'an where a treaty was formed and I was very pleased with it. If I had been invited after Islam came down, I would still have attended.”

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