

The Role of Individual Reform in the Revival of the Ummah

Before setting the context of this article, two terminologies need to be defined, namely, "Individual Reform" and "Revival of the Ummah". "Individual Reform" refers to the change in the Individual components related to Individual Ibadaat (worships) like Salah (prayer), Sawm (fasting), etc. It also includes other individualistic actions like Mu'amalat (relations/transactions), Akhlaq (ethics) and actions related to food and clothing. "Revival of the Ummah" refers to the revolutionary change in the Ummah with respect to it reverting back to the civilizational and ideological aspects of Islam in all aspects of life especially related to the systemic and institutional levels like Economics, Judiciary, Politics and Foreign Policy.

The role of individual reform in the process of the revival of the Ummah has many contentions with respect to the importance to be given to the task of individual reform in the Ummah. Various questions are raised in this regard by many Muslims and especially Da'wah carriers involved in the process of reviving the Ummah. Some of these claims are:

- Muslims only focusing on the individualistic Ahkam like Ibadaat and Akhlaq do not contribute anything to the revival of the Ummah
- Muslims only focusing on their individualistic Ahkam stand as obstacles to the revival of the Ummah
- Focusing on individualistic Ahkam is the only way to revive the Ummah and all other practical means like involving in politics, accounting the rulers are absolutely unnecessary.
- Individual reform is only necessary for those involved in political work and accounting the rulers as a high degree of Individual Taqwa is a necessary for the great task of reviving the Ummah. Therefore, the scope of individual reform only applies to the group working to revive the Ummah.
- Individual reform of the Muslims is only possible after the revival of the Ummah is complete as a result of which Islam would be implemented at all systemic and structural levels. The subsequent effect of which would be the individual reform of the Muslims in general including those who worked to revive the Ummah.

Keeping in mind the above context and looking into the various perspectives helps us analyze and understand the claims and arrive at conclusive statements based on the correct understanding.

The Perspectives of Capability

The intended meaning of capability here is with respect to the context of actions that fall within the direct capability of the individual. Many of the individual actions like Salah and Sawm fall within the direct individual capability. This means that an individual is free within his capability to act upon these commands with no overwhelming force stopping him from doing so. It may be argued that such individual actions are affected by the systemic environment surrounding him, like the Capitalist Economic policies that drive him to exhaust oneself in fulfilling his basic needs. Such realities do not negate the reality of direct capability that exists within the individual because distractions, whether systemic or otherwise always exist, and it is up to the individual to set his priorities. It is no surprise that there are Muslims who neglect Salah but are able to accommodate time for other trivial activities which they see as important in spite of them being oppressed by the Capitalist Economic system that might endanger one's survival.

Actions that come under direct capability should be distinguished from actions that do not fall under direct capability. For example, implementing the penal code does not come under the direct capability of individuals or groups rather it falls under the direct capability of

those who possess the authority. Regarding indirect capability, general Muslims can be divided into two types. One type that has contacts with those in authority, whose family members or friends are present in positions of authority. The other type includes individuals who gain influence in society or those belonging to various groups or political parties that resort to exhortation using various means like organizing meetings, public rallies, news media, etc. The actions related to individual reform fall within the direct capability of every individual irrespective of whether one possesses authority or not, whereas laws and rules related to systemic and institutional aspects fall within the direct capability of those in authority like the rulers and the military and not under the direct capability of the general masses.

The meaning of one of the components of society are Individuals

Society consists of individuals, common thoughts, common emotions and the system that is applied.

The question that comes to mind regarding individuals as one of the components of society is that what is the understanding implied by the statement that "Individuals are one of the components of society". Do individuals have any role at all to play in society or do they affect society in any way?

Individuals in society are at different levels of influence. Some of them are influential personalities who have the capability to influence the public opinion and thereby altering the common thoughts and emotions in society. Some of these individuals do become rulers or become soldiers or generals in the military. These type of individuals have the capability of implementing the societal aspects of Islam. If these type of individuals possess a high degree of Taqwa then they would definitely play a crucial role in implementing Islam as a whole. So it is about these people that Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an: **﴿الَّذِينَ إِنْ مَنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَعَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ﴾** ***"They are those who, if established in the land by Us, would perform prayer, pay alms-tax, encourage what is good, and forbid what is evil. And with Allah rests the outcome of all affairs."*** [22:41].

Other than these types of individuals, there are laymen who do not aim to enter into positions of ruling or military or scholarship. They simply take care of their individual Ibadat, Mu'amalaat and Akhlaq. Are these individuals of any use in affecting change in society? Do these individuals affect the common thoughts and emotions or in changing the system? The answer to this is that these individuals can be divided into two categories.

One category of people who enjoin the good and forbid the evil, and the other who do not involve themselves in the action of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. The latter do not have any influence in society except in changing themselves. However, they do contribute to the building of a general positive environment based on Taqwa through their individualistic actions like performing Salah, Akhlaq, etc. This is contrary to the person who involves himself in sins like bad character, abandoning Salah, etc. having a bad and negative influence on the people around him thereby corrupting the environment in the society in general within his individual scope of influence.

The second category of people enjoin the good and forbid the evil in addition to their individualistic commitment to the Islamic obligations. Commanding the good and forbidding the evil has its effect upon the society influencing the dominant common thoughts and emotions that would lead to the revival of the Ummah. These category of individuals in general also try to change the tangible vices in society like preventing crimes, fights among people, disputes within family, etc.

Reflections from the Seerah

On a careful look at the Makkan phase of the Seerah, it clearly indicates that the commitment to the commands of Islam was based upon the acceptance of Iman in general. Even before the banning of the killing of the girl child in Madina, Muslims in Makkah were

commanded to adhere to the prohibition of killing the girl child. The first Pledge of Aqabah involved adherence to the following command:

1. Not to worship anyone besides Allah (swt)
2. Not to steal
3. Not to commit Zina
4. Prohibition of burying the daughters alive
5. Prohibition of Slander
6. Not to disobey the Prophet (saw)

Even before these commands became laws in Madina, Muslims were asked to adhere to these commands when Zina, slander, killing daughters and other crimes were prevalent in the Makkan society. It is not right to say that these commands were specific only to those group of Muslims who were involved in the process of implementing Islam and taking the rule, rather these commands were general and applied to all people who believed in the Prophet (saw) and accepted Iman.

Understanding from party culture

Shaykh Taqiuddin an-Nabhani (rah) mentions in his book, *The System of Islam*, in the chapter, "The Intellectual Leadership of Islam"

"Islam considers that the system is implemented by the individual's consciousness of Allah # (taqwa). It is also implemented by the state through the feeling of the community of its justice, by the co-operation of the nation (Ummah) with the ruler through al-amr bil maruf wa nahiy anil munkar (enjoining the good and forbidding the evil) and the authority of the state"

Shaykh Taqi (rah) acknowledges the reality that one of the Tareeqa (method) of implementation of Islam is the individual's Taqwa of Allah (swt). One of the causes of the destruction of the Khilafah (Caliphate) is because of some of influential personalities who lacked in their Taqwa of Allah. These individuals violated some of the clear prohibitions of Islam like the allying with the Kuffaar and seeking their help. The traitor Mustafa Kemal not only allied with the Kuffaar to destroy the Khilafah, but he also had a general distaste for the commands of Islam. He banned the Azan in Arabic, banned the Hijab and promoted Liberal values. This means that the fitna (strife) for such people were not merely emanating from the ignorance of the contradiction of the Secular and Liberal values with Islam, rather it emanated from the combination of the lack of Iman, losing confidence in Islam and seeing the Western civilization as superior.

The rejection of Secular and Liberal values is natural in the person who has a high level of Taqwa. Though it may be argued many in the Ummah including scholars hold onto these Western values and promote them, it is not mostly done in way that clearly contradicts Islam, rather the attempt is to project the permissible components of these Liberal values that do not contradict Islam and to show that Islam applies to all times and places irrespective of the dominant ideology. This methodology is perceived as moderate and balanced by many Ulema, but in reality this methodology has resulted in laymen adopting even those aspects of Secular Liberalism that definitively contradict with Islam. This has resulted in a class of Muslims who have a high degree of Taqwa in terms of establishing Salah, giving Zakah, having a great Akhlaq but still believing in the separation of the religion from the state and taking pride in national identity. It must be understood that the individual reform is not complete without having the correct and accurate beliefs regarding the dominant Secular Liberal status quo as these are not mere theoretical beliefs, rather these are beliefs that have grave political implications for the Ummah. Concepts like freedom of religion and freedom of expression that emanate from Liberal values need to be accurately understood and should not mixed with the pure concepts of Islam. These Western values should not be explained to the Ummah in a manner that would dilute the core concepts of Islam. For example, the concept of freedom of religion should not be assumed as compatible with Islam just because

some aspects of Islam agree with the broad definition of freedom of religion. Rather, it should be understood that using such Western concepts as principles (Qa'ida) of Fiqh is problematic and confuses and misleads the Ummah to adopt these concepts and principles in a way that contradicts Islam.

Nature of Individual Taqwa

1. Individual Taqwa in a general manner promotes the fulfilment of the commands of Allah(swt) and this also applies to capable individuals who reach positions of authority to seek to implement the Shari'ah of Allah(swt).

2. Helps to build Nafsiyyah (disposition) and removes Wahn (weakness) which is a great obstacle when involved in activism and creating a revolutionary change that demands great sacrifices.

3. Actions are motivated by strong feelings and emotions. Thoughts alone are not effective in encouraging people to act. It is the thoughts coupled with strong emotions that push people to act. Strong emotions coupled with the correct and pure thoughts synergizes to create a profound effect in activism.

4. If majority or all follow Islam based on fear of the law, then it is problematic, rather true success is when people follow Islam in spirit motivated by the fear of Allah and earning His pleasure. This would be achieved by the Education system under the Khilafah, but even before the establishment of the Khilafah, achievement of higher degree of Taqwa among the Muslims generally through proper Islamic schools and Da'wah activities in Masajids would create a positive effect towards the revival of the Ummah.

5. There is a difference between materialistic and spiritual actions in terms of strengthening of the relationship with Allah. Islam encompasses both purely materialistic and purely spiritual actions. The materialistic actions also have a spiritual component which is the realisation of the relationship with Allah (swt) while undertaking the material action. This concept is called mixing matter with spirit. However, in terms of building and strengthening the relationship with Allah (swt), the role of the purely spiritual actions like Salah, Sawm, Hajj and other Nawafil Ibadat cannot be undermined. *On the authority of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, «مَنْ عَادَى لِي وَلِيًّا فَقَدْ آذَنْتَهُ بِالْحَرْبِ، وَمَا تَقَرَّبَ إِلَيَّ عَبْدِي بِشَيْءٍ أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا افْتَرَضْتُهُ عَلَيْهِ، وَلَا يَزَالُ عَبْدِي يَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ بِالنَّوَافِلِ حَتَّىٰ أَحِبَّهُ، فَإِذَا أَحْبَبْتُهُ كُنْتُ سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ، وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يُبْصِرُ بِهِ، وَيَدَهُ الَّتِي يَبْطِشُ بِهَا، وَرِجْلَهُ الَّتِي يَمْشِي بِهَا، وَلَنْ سَأَلَنِي لِأَعْطِيَنَّهُ، وَلَنْ اسْتَعَاذَنِي لِأُعِيَنَّهُ»* **“Verily Allah Ta’ala has said: ‘Whosoever shows enmity to a wali (friend) of Mine, then I have declared war against him. And My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more loved to Me than the religious duties I have obligated upon him. And My servant continues to draw near to me with nafil (supererogatory) deeds until I Love him. When I Love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask [something] of Me, I would surely give it to him; and were he to seek refuge with Me, I would surely grant him refuge.’”** [Al-Bukhari]

The nature of actions between the servant and the Creator produces an effect of strengthening the relationship of the servant with the Creator that is not found in other material actions even when mixing matter with spirit occurs. A Muslim when conducting business or eating food, or working in an office may take actions according to the commandments of Allah (swt), but this is not the same as the Ibadah like Salah and Fasting because these spiritual actions by its nature help in strengthening the relationship with the Creator. So although mixing matter with spirit is obligatory, spiritual actions are unique with respect to strengthening the relationship with the Creator.

Individualism in Islam vs Capitalism

Unlike Capitalism and Communism, Islam has a prominent individual component. For Capitalists, individual action is nothing but to base it on freedom and one's whims and

desires. Communists have a similar viewpoint of Individuals. Islam has a well-defined individual ahkam that needs to be adhered to. Individuals adhering to the tenets of Islam is actually seen as an embodiment of Islam as a whole. But owing to the birth of the Secular ideology, there has been a new class among Muslims who reduce Islam to merely the individualistic aspects and try to create a novel Secular Nationalistic version of Islam. However, the emergence of this new class of Muslims does not undermine the importance given to the individualistic actions in Islam and these actions being one of the core components of Islam unlike other modern materialistic ideologies.

Political implications of Individual reformation

The commitment to the Ahkam Shari'ah by a Muslim also relates to the clear societal commands in Islam. Muslims who are committed in their individual actions also earn for fulfillment of the commands in Penal code, Marriage, Inheritance, Jihad and Economics. The ideological nature of Islam is clearly perceived and understood by the West and the governments today. This has even resulted in the perception of individualistic commitment to Islam as a threat. Individualistic commitment is seen as a symbol and a potential path towards political Islam as politics is a component that cannot be separated from Islam.

During a period in Egypt, the beard was seen as a symbol of extremism and political Islam. In many countries, those who are regular in their Salah at the masjid. This has been the case in Western countries where the growth of Islam in terms of the number of Muslims and the Muslims individualistic adherence to Islam is seen as a political threat. **This is an indirect political implication of Individual reformation.**

Another direct political implication of individual reformation relates to the beliefs which a Muslim possesses. If people have great akhlaq and nafil, but still believe in nationalism and secularism, then this is problematic and stands as obstacles for revival. These beliefs have political implications in terms of how people generally perceive change in society. People who don't have problems with Secular Liberal and Nationalistic values would not attempt to change it. Moreover, this is quite opposite to the concept of Righteous Deeds (Aa'mal-us-saalihaat) as having correct and pure beliefs comes under actions of the heart. However it should be noted as discussed in previous sections that it is those who stick to individual obligations and nawafil who would be the most receptive to change their incorrect beliefs pertaining to the status quo.

Reflections on Surah Nur: Ayah 55

﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّن بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا ۗ يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا ۗ وَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ﴾
Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good that He will certainly make them successors in the land, as He did with those before them; and will surely establish for them their faith which He has chosen for them; and will indeed change their fear into security—‘provided that’ they worship Me, associating nothing with Me. But whoever disbelieves after this ‘promise’, it is they who will be the rebellious. [24:55]

There are two extreme viewpoints i.e. a group that calls just for perfection of individualistic actions and neglecting practical means, and other group that focus mainly on the practical means for change neglecting the individualistic reform. This ayah seems to sort this issue if understood in the proper context and the nature of the reality of human society. The ayah specifically does not talk about taking the practical means for change, neither does the ayah talk about neglecting the practical means for change. This is because Islam in general does not prohibit one from taking all permissible means possible to achieve permissible objectives. Rather Islam stresses that everything in the Universe follows the “Cause and Effect” principle created by Allah (swt). Allah (swt) says: ﴿وَأَعِدُوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِّن قُوَّةٍ ۗ وَمَن رَّبَّاطِ الْأَخِيلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ ۗ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَعَآخِرِينَ مِّن دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ ۗ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِن شَيْءٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ مِن رَّبَّاطِ الْأَخِيلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ ۗ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَعَآخِرِينَ مِّن دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ ۗ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِن شَيْءٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَظْلَمُونَ﴾
Prepare against them what you ‘believers’ can of ‘military’ power

and cavalry to deter Allah's enemies and your enemies as well as other enemies unknown to you but known to Allah. Whatever you spend in the cause of Allah will be paid to you in full and you will not be wronged." [8:60]

Neither are the miracles that Allah (swt) gave the Prophets and the Awliya, a proof for neglecting the means necessary for accomplishing objectives. Rather these miracles were accompanied along with the practical means undertaken by the Prophets and Messengers in their respective missions.

The ayah speaks about adherence to good deeds based on Iman ordained by Islam. As mentioned before, individual commitment to Islam do has political implications when it is done based purely on Islam and not based on any other world view that dominates us. The individualistic Ahkam of Islam should be represented as that emanating from a comprehensive Deen (ideology) based on Iman and not represented merely as a religion that fits into the Secular Liberal model. Consequently, individual actions when done in the correct perspective has a great effect in initiating political change and can also be considered as a means for political change from this perspective.

Another aspect is the "promise of Allah" mentioned in the Ayah. Islam cannot be exactly compared to materialistic ideologies like Capitalism and Communism in the sense of focusing just on the practical means for change, although Islam generally commands not to neglect the practical means. Islam is based on a spiritual basis i.e. the belief in the existence of the All-Powerful Creator of the Universe. This implies that Muslims are connected to the Creator of the Universe and are supported by His Power and blessings in their practical means to establish Islam and make it dominant. Allah (swt) supported the Believers during Badr through Angels in addition to their taking the practical means to defeat the enemy in the battle. And Allah (swt) based this unseen help from Him on the condition of Iman and performing good deeds.

As mentioned previously, even though there are a subset of deeds that cannot be performed without an authority or power, there are many ahkam that are capable of being adhered to by individuals. Otherwise, there can be no meaning for this ayah if this ayah creates a cyclic dependency i.e. good deeds are necessary for the Khilafah and there cannot be good deeds without the Khilafah.

Summary

Individual reform among the Muslims of the Ummah in general has a positive effect on the Ummah accelerating its revival. Individual reform in its highest standards is also obligatory among the individuals of the Kutlah (cluster) that works to revive the Ummah. It is no wonder that many of the historical personalities that succeeded in defeating the enemies of Islam were people with a high degree of character and Taqwa and involved in valid methodologies of Tasawwuf.

Though individuals belonging to organizations or groups are usually secularized and do not challenge the status quo thereby standing as obstacles in the revival of the Ummah, this however, does not negate the general good that they contribute by building a general environment of Taqwa with respect to the individualistic actions of Islam. This is because the general nurturing of the concept of Taqwa naturally makes it easy to convince these people of the contradictions between Islam and the dominant Kufr status quo prevalent in the world today. The groups that don't focus on countering the beliefs promoted by Secular Liberalism create a vacuum among their individual members that would either be filled with the thoughts and emotions emanating from the status quo or it could be filled with the pure and sincere Islamic thoughts and emotions. Individual reform is not complete without having the correct beliefs in relation to the dominant status quo and its contradictions with Islam.

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