

What Does Allah Want from Us First?

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On hearing the word "first" what should immediately spring to mind is the obvious: basic, primary, obligatory. But why should we think basic when we consider ourselves advanced?

The reason is that nothing grows and flowers unless it was planted well and nourished with the right conditions. Right? If not it would just droop, sway or even be uprooted. "Basic" means fundamental, the foundation. Preparation of the soil before we plant the seed.

Why do we assume "I know" or "I am doing" or "I am fine" or "I don't need to be a scholar?" These are some of the erroneous ways of thinking we normally come across. But is this the attitude we should be adopting for a purpose so important? For the purification of our souls? For the acceptance of Allah? For encountering the life of eternity?

Another bad attitude we know is one of arrogance, pride, self-sufficiency, degrading and looking down on others. This is sinful and detrimental to its bearer.

So the first thing to do is to change the attitude.

In Islam, "deeds" mean actions and spoken words but includes attitudes. Passing thoughts are not accountable. But an established attitude needs to be examined as it is defined in the dictionary to be: a settled way of thinking or feeling, and it influences a person's choices and actions when taking up challenges, recognizing truths, seeking rewards, etc.

So how can we change negative attitudes?

The first important step is to understand what Allah has said:

The second ayah of the Qur'an speaks volumes.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

[All] praise is [due] to Allah, Lord of the worlds. (1:2)

Al-hamdulillah – Believers are directed to praise Allah. All praise and gratitude is due to Allah from His servants at every moment of the day. Our acute awareness of His favours known and unknown.

And then *Rabb al-'aalameen* – the owner, controller, provider, caretaker of all He creates. He is the *Rabb*, so why worry and distress ourselves? This concept cannot be properly realised except by bringing about a change in attitude. We need to live our lives aware of His care under His *ruboobiyyah*.

Worship is due to the Creator alone with ikhlaas:

قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصاً لَهُ الدِّينَ

Say, "Indeed, I have been commanded to worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion.

Learn the conditions for acceptance of a deed, which are: 1) Sincerity, i.e., it must be done only for Allah, and 2) Correctness, i.e., it must be done according to the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Abū Hurayrah narrated that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said: *"The one who marries with the intent of not paying the dowry, is in fact a fornicator. And the one who takes a loan with the intent of not paying it back is in fact a thief."* (Narrated by Ibn Hibbān and Imām Aḥmad)

Ibn Taymiyyah said, "Without doubt, *ikhlaas* removes the cause for entering the Hellfire. So anyone who enters the Fire from those who said, '*Lā ilāha ill-Allah*' proves that he had not implemented the sincerity of *lā ilāha ill-Allah*, which would have protected him from the Fire." (*Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 10/261).

On the authority of Abu Hurayrah: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Allah the Exalted, has said, 'My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more loved by Me than what [religious obligations] I have imposed on him.'" (Narrated by Al Bukhari)

Some of these obligations are: Salah, Saum, Zakah, Hajj (if one is able), and abstention from everything forbidden. Imam an-Nawawi went on to explain that it is unfortunate to observe habitual fasting and praying by night, along with careless disregard of such basic obligations as justice, truthfulness, kindness to parents and giving rights.

If voluntary acts take one closer to Allah, it means we first have to get close, don't we?

The next step is to understand ourselves.

As humans we are a higher species than animals; beings that can think, feel and make choices.

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ

We have certainly created man in the best of stature. (95:4)

Allah created man in the best of forms, pleasing in appearance, endowed with abilities, qualities, intellect; in every way fully capable to accomplish things. It essentially implies that these favours have been given for a reason. From them stems responsibility and accountability. The adjective form of human is "humane," which means kind, gentle, compassionate, understanding, tolerant and good natured. So Allah wants us to be humane first. It is of such huge importance that we need to be reminded. But are we? If not a re-haul of our attitude is necessary.

We need to keep the body fit.

We must eat from halaal food and not from food that was earned in an unlawful way, for it harms the very foundation required to purify the soul. We need to eat, dress, clothe and behave while keeping in mind our purpose in life and the limits as outlined for us by our Creator.

وَإِنْ تَعَدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

And if you should count the favours of Allah, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (18:16)

Ibn Jareer said: "This means that Allah is Forgiving when you fail to thank Him properly, on the condition that you repent and turn to Him in obedience, and strive to do that which pleases Him. He is Merciful to you and does not punish you when you turn to Him and repent."

Then we must build character.

This means no lying, no cheating, using polite language, humility, respect for elders, sensitivity to humans, animals, plants – i.e., all living beings. It requires a value system based

on Islam, not self-aggrandisement and pride in terms of lineage or the power, position, wealth, status, etc. that the world offers on a platter. Allah has told us:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقُّكُمْ

Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. (49:13)

Abu Dharr al-Ghifari reported that the Prophet said that his Lord said,

يَا عِبَادِي: إِنِّي حَرَّمْتُ الظُّلْمَ عَلَى نَفْسِي، وَجَعَلْتُهُ بَيْنَكُمْ مُحَرَّمًا؛ فَلَا تَظَالَمُوا

"O My servants! I have forbidden thulm (oppression) to Myself, and I have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another..." (Narrated by Muslim)

It was related on the authority of Abu Sa'id, Sa'd bin Malik bin Sinan al-Khudri that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

لَا ضَرَرَ وَلَا ضِرَارَ

"Let there be no harm [to anyone] and no harming [in reciprocation]." (Narrated by Ibn Majah)

This hadith is the basis of every fatwa. Harm is prohibited in every form, both to the self and to others, and avoidance of all that is harmful. To take someone's right unlawfully is major harm and not to be ignored, as is damage to reputations and injury to feelings.

Break through the difficult pass.

Allah has said:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ

We have certainly created man into hardship. (90:4)

This world is not a place of comfort and ease for man. He strives to survive, get his needs, achieve his goals. His life is a process of continued exerting of oneself that never ends until he meets his Lord.

فَلَا اقْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ - وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ - فَكُّ رَقَبَةٍ - أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ - يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ - أَوْ مِسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ - ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ - أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ

But he has not broken through the difficult pass. And what can make you know what is [breaking through] the difficult pass? It is the freeing of a slave. Or feeding on a day of severe hunger an orphan of near relationship or a needy person in misery. And then being among those who believed and advised one another to patience and advised one another to compassion. Those are the companions of the right. (90:11-20)

Keep worry and fear under control.

لَهُ مُعَقِّبَتٌ مِّنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ

For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah. (13:11)

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُّصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ قَلْبَهُ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. And whoever believes in Allah – He will guide his heart. And Allah is Knowing of all things. (64:11)

It means whoever suffered an affliction and knew that it occurred by Allah's wisdom and decree and then patiently awaits Allah's reward – Allah will guide his heart and will

compensate him for his loss in this life by granting him certainty in faith. Allah will replace whatever he lost for His sake with the same or what is better. Ibn Abbas said this means he will know that what reached him could not have missed him and what has missed him could not have reached him.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"Amazing is the affair of a believer. There is no decree that Allah writes for him, but is better for him. If an affliction strikes him, he is patient and this is better for him. If a favour is granted to him, he is thankful and this is better for him. And this is only for the believer."* (Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Take care of your family:

Teach your family the religion and good behaviour. As Allah said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ

O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones. (66:6)

It is an obligation for the Muslim to teach the family members of his household and his male and female servants what Allah has made obligatory for them and what Allah has forbidden them.

Gain Knowledge.

The first word revealed to man was "Iqra" which means "recite" or "read."

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ - خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ - اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ - الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ - عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ.

Read in the name of your Lord who created – created man from a clinging substance. Read, and your Lord is the most Generous – who taught by the pen – taught man that which he knew not.

The Prophet (ﷺ) is first ordered to recite from the Book of Allah. Then later he, and through him, all mankind, is told to ponder, to reflect on the verses being read or recited and to comprehend its concepts. This leads to faith based on clarity and understanding. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"Seeking knowledge is an obligation on every Muslim"* (Narrated by Ibn Majah)

Proper learning requires dedication, perseverance and purpose. To progress from sharing bits and pieces of unauthentic or a mixed hash of information from the internet to a proper study from authentic books and sources. Qur'an and Sunnah must come first. Just as water sustains the body, so knowledge gives life to the heart.

Grasp the essence.

Abu Bakr is said to be the best of the companions because of his strong imaan. Abu Bakr bin Iyaash said, "Abu Bakr was not better than them because of his many prayers, or because of his fasting, but because of something that firmly took root in his heart." (*Fadaa'il as-Sahaabah*, by Imam Ahmad, 1/173)

Get the connection.

The secret of our striving in this life is to find out what our Rabb wants from us at every moment and stage of our lives and then do it. And we should work towards the same for all people. Anas bin Malik reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: *None of you [truly] believes*

until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself." (Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Only a single minded focus to change the present lethargic, casual, selfish, everything goes type of attitude to an attitude of: "I want to know the Truth, all of it, endeavour to live it, keep it as top priority, and then remain steadfast on it and spread it" will heal the cancer of doubt, uncertainty, biased thinking, lack of basic knowledge and consequently, selective obedience.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ.

Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. (13:11)

This is the only roadmap to change and the recognition of Islam as the true religion sent to bring purpose and show guidance to lives for the betterment of all. By this means hearts will be warmer, tongues softer and behaviours more pleasing, in sha Allah. How can believers be otherwise? The only peace possible in this dunya (world) will be ours. That mental peace of striving on the path outlined by our Creator, the path leading on to everlasting peace in the Hereafter. To those righteous ones it will be said:

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ - ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً - فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي - وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي

"O reassured soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him], And enter among My [righteous] servants and enter My Paradise." (89:29-30)

وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ