

Al-Istiqamah: Being Straight and Steadfast

By Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ
عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي
كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ نَحْنُ أَوْلِيَآؤُكُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ
وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا تَشْتَهَى أَنْفُسُكُمْ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا تَدْعُونَ ﴿٣١﴾ نَزَّلْنَا
مِنْ غَفُورٍ رَحِيمٍ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِمَّن دَعَا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَعَمِلَ
صَالِحًا وَقَالَ إِنِّي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

Indeed those who say, "Our Lord is Allah," and, further, stand straight and steadfast, the angels descend on them (from time to time): "Fear you not!" (They suggest), "Nor grieve! But receive the Glad Tidings of the Garden (of paradise), that which you were promised! "We are your protectors in this life and in the Hereafter: therein shall you have all that your souls shall desire; therein shall you have all that you ask for!" A hospitable gift from One Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful!" (Surah Hamim al-Sajdah 41:30-32)

Sufiyan al-Thaqafi reported, "I said, 'O Messenger of Allah, tell me about Islam in one word that I would not ask anyone other than you (according to Abu Mu'awiyah he said, "anyone after you").' The Prophet -peace be upon him- said, 'Say I believe in Allah and then stand steadfast. (Musnad Ahmad 14869)

Istiqamah is an important concept of Islam. It has several meanings. It means to be straight, to follow the straight path, to remain firm on one's principles and not to give up under difficulties or challenges. Some scholars say that it also means to be sincere and do good things in public as well in private life. Some others say that it means to be straight in words as well in deeds. Living Islam anywhere at anytime requires istiqamah. Those who live with istiqamah Allah has promised them great reward and blessings in this world and in the hereafter.

Different Challenges in different times and places: Living Islam in different parts of the world has different challenges. Living Islam in Pakistan, in Egypt, in Saudi Arabia or in any Muslim country has some challenges. Living Islam in India, in Africa, in China, in Bosnia and Albania has some challenges. In a similar way, living Islam in America has special challenges. Living Islam in the 7th century in Arabia had some challenges. It had different challenges in 12th century and now it has some other challenges. When Muslims understand the challenges and meet them with wisdom and courage they become successful and bring blessings upon themselves and others.

Istiqamah in Faith: First, we must emphasize deep and sincere faith in Allah. Let us build that relationship with our Creator with more Ibadah and more devotion. Have full trust in Allah. Allah has power over all things. He controls all affairs and if we remain with Allah, Allah will be with us, help us, and support us. We must entertain no doubt about Allah, His Prophet, His Book and His religion. Allah is the Truth and Islam is the right way. No matter what is the propaganda and no matter who misrepresents Islam, non-Muslims or Muslims, we must keep be sure that we are on the right path and nothing should shake our confidence in Allah and the Islam that He gave us. We should practice Islâm fully, in all details and as much as possible.

Istiqamah in the Family and Community: We should be closer to our families. Forget your petty differences and disagreements. Be more loving and caring to our families and our communities. Pay special attends to our youth and children. Let them not feel neglected and frightened. It is scary to sit in front of the TV, watch all those talk shows, and hear the angry words against Islam and Muslims. We have to pay special attention to our children so they do not become alienated, frightened, split personalities or angry. We should develop friendly relationship with youth, sit with them and talk to them about issues. Teach them about our history, it will create confidence and sense of proud and belonging.

We should also become more caring and more united within our community. We need each other all the time, but at the time of crisis, we need each other more. Many people may have lost jobs and go through hardships. There might be discriminations and harassments. We must take care of each other without supporting or harboring any wrongdoers. In the climate of

suspicion, people become very frightened and uncaring. We should discuss how we could help each other in the right way without breaking any laws of the land.

Local authorities are also willing to meet and talk to us. They are willing to discuss any fears and concerns. After this horrific crime on September 11, there were some shocking incidents of hate crimes, but we must acknowledge with thanks that there were more people who showed compassion and empathy. A great effort was made by many neighbors and civic authorities to affirm and display kindness, tolerance and generosity. We must counter this and do even more to show our gratitude and our Islamic behavior. Muslims have always been good to their neighbors, but now we should be even better and more conscious of our duties towards them.

Istiqamah in Da'wah: Da'wah is not to convert people but to convey the message with wisdom and good words. We should give the noble and positive message of Islam. We should try to emphasize more commonalities and explain the difference without getting into theological arguments and without claiming the superiority of one position over the other. There is a great interest among the people to know about Islam and we should do our best to give the right message.

Misconceptions and misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims are on the rise. We should speak in clear terms about issues such as Jihad, infidel, relations with non-Muslims, status of women, status of minorities in Islam, Islam and religious freedom, Islam and democracy, the separation of church and state. We should educate ourselves first then others about Palestine issue, Kashmir issue, Chechnya, Bosnia and any place where Muslim are suffering. People are presenting some verses from the Qur'an and quoting them out of context. We have to explain their correct meanings without becoming apologetic. We must reject and condemn terrorism without any reservation, but this does not mean that we give up the struggle for justice and human rights in Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya or any other land. We should not accept the suffering of any innocent people, neither here nor in Afghanistan or Iraq or any other land.

May Allah keep us straight and strong on the right path. Ameen.