

Directions to Giving Naseehah

Kâmil Mufti

"The religion is naseehah." The people asked, "To whom?" The Prophet (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) replied, "To Allaah and to His Book and to His Messenger and to the leaders of the Muslims and the common folk." [Collected by Bukhari, Muslim]

It lurks in the deepest, darkest parts of ourselves and waits expectantly for opportunities to strike. It attacks our defences of eeman, strategically tears down our walls of taqwa and ruthlessly diminishes our ihsan, or perfection of worship. Struggling against the evil that is inherent in all of us, is a battle that is fought on a daily, even hourly basis, and like most wars it is seldom won alone. Allaah, through His eternal mercy, has given the believers the most powerful weapon available to assure victory in this constant struggle between good and evil - each other.

How many of us have looked to our brothers and sisters in Islam and have seen them straying from the path of Allaah, and have turned our faces away? How many of us have seen our brothers erring and said to ourselves, it is none of my business? Well, it is our business for the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) has made it our business. In the hadeeth related by Tamim ad-Dari, the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said, "The religion is naseehah." The people asked, "To whom?" The Prophet (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) replied, "To Allaah and to His Book and to His Messenger and to the leaders of the Muslims and the common folk." [Collected by Bukhari, Muslim]

The Prophet (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) has equated the entire religion to giving naseehah, but what exactly is naseehah? Naseehah is an Arabic word that is usually translated to mean "sincerity" or "sincere advice", but actually embodies every type of virtue. As believers, this statement of the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) must be taken to heart. By learning what naseehah is, we can then act on it and bring about positive changes in ourselves and each other. Naseehah is a wonderful weapon, but like most weapons, if the user does not know how to use it properly, it can cause more harm than good.

How is Naseehah Given to Allaah?

By establishing His worship by offering the obligatory deeds with perfection.

By believing in Him; negating partners from Him; not denying any of His qualities; describing Him with all the qualities of beauty and perfection; and declaring Him to be far removed from faults and qualities of imperfection.

By establishing His obedience and turning away from His disobedience.

By loving and hating for His sake; befriending and making allegiance to those who obey Him and taking as enemies those who disobey Him; and turning toward what He loves and distancing oneself from displeasing Him.

By appreciating His blessings, bounties and thanking Him for them by obeying Him out of love and drawing closer to Him through the heart.

By calling to all of the above, teaching it and being sincere in it for His sake.

By firmly believing in the heart that it is the Speech of Allaah and His revelation; it is not like the words of the creation; and none of His creation is capable of producing something similar to it. By respecting it.

By learning and teaching it; reading, reciting, and writing it properly; understanding its meaning; staying within its bounds; acting upon what is contained in it.

How is Naseehah to the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) Given?

By affirming his prophethood.

By firmly believing in the heart in everything he came with; obeying him in what he commanded and what he forbade.

By aiding him while he was alive and after his death; taking his enemies as one's enemies, and befriending those who take him as a friend.

By realising the greatness of his right upon us, honouring him, and reviving his Sunnah.

By practising his Sunnah by spreading and affirming it; refuting those who cast doubts upon it; spreading its knowledge and its understanding; not arguing about it without knowledge; calling others toward it; teaching it with gentleness;

showing its greatness and the greatness of those who adhere to it by attaching oneself to them; and showing it its due respect when studying it.

By loving the Ahl-ul-Bait (his family) and his companions; turning away from those who belittle his family or revile his companions.

Naseehah to the leaders of the Muslims

It is wajib (obligatory) to give naseehah to the leaders of the Muslims, since they have faults and are not protected from committing errors, but who are the leaders of the Muslims?

They are the Caliphs and others responsible for the affairs of the Muslims

They are religious scholars

As for Giving Naseehah to the Rulers of the Muslims, it includes:
Assisting and obeying them in the right.

Reminding them if they err or forget.

Making Jihad with them.

Giving Naseehah to the Scholars includes:
Spreading their knowledge.

Spreading their virtues.

Having good opinion about them.

Accepting their rulings if they give sound proofs for their decisions.

Giving them the benefit of the doubt, or making excuses for them if they make mistakes.

Honouring and respecting them.

Naseehah to the common Muslims

The following includes giving naseehah to ALL Muslims, be they black, white, Arab or Pakistani; be they sinful, ignorant or heedless. It also includes giving naseehah to Muslims, no matter which organisation or group they belong to or if one likes them or dislikes them.

How is Naseehah given to the Common Muslims?

By guiding them to what will bring them benefit in this life and in the Hereafter.

By removing harm from them and bringing them benefit.

By teaching them what one loves for oneself and hating for them what one hates for oneself.

By teaching them what will benefit them.

By commanding them what is right and forbidding them what is wrong with gentleness and sincerity.

By being soft with them, honouring the elderly, loving and being merciful towards the youths.

By not being deceptive and jealous toward them.

Protecting their honour and wealth.

Manners Of Giving Naseehah

Seeking the Pleasure of Allaah by giving Naseehah It is necessary that a person has the intention of seeking the pleasure of Allaah when giving naseehah. Only such an intention deserves reward from Allaah and acceptance from His slaves.

If the intention is other than that, then that person deserves the anger and wrath of Allaah as well as the hatred and rejection of the people - including the one being advised.

Not Slandering the One Being Advised

This is an affliction that has befallen many Muslims. Many times, after taking a closer look, we find that the person giving naseehah actually wants to slander the person he is advising because of personal hatred. This does not befit the one being advised and may lead to a worse situation with no benefit resulting from the naseehah.

Naseehah is to be Given in Secret

Naseehah is most likely to bear its fruit when given to a person when he is by himself, for in such a situation the person is less likely to be affected by the thoughts of others. The sincere advisor should not aid the Devil over his brother by publicly rebuking him and letting Shaitaan beguile his brother into not taking the naseehah. This closes the doors of goodness and acceptance, and reduces the chances of the naseehah from being accepted.

This is why our pious predecessors used to give naseehah in secret. Hafidh Ibn Rajab writes, "When the righteous predecessors intended to give naseehah to someone, they admonished him privately, to the point that some of them said, "The one who exhorts his brother between him and himself, then it is naseehah. The one who exhorts him in front of people, then it is merely scolding!"

Fudail Ibn Ayyadh, one of the pious scholars from our predecessors, said, "A believer covers up and gives naseehah, whereas an evildoer exposes and humiliates." Ibn Rajab commented on Fudail's saying, "It is naseehah if it is with a cover, while humiliating is with broadcasting".

Naseehah is to be Given with Kindness, Gentleness and Softness

A sincere advisor must be kind, soft and well-mannered in giving naseehah to others, as this might get the desired response from the one he is advising. One must understand that accepting naseehah is like opening a door, and that the door will not open without the proper key. The one who is given naseehah has a heart that has a lock in some matter - for he has abandoned something that Allaah has demanded from him, or has committed something that Allaah had forbidden him from. There is no better key to unlock the heart than kindness in giving advice, gentleness in exhortation and softness in speech as the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) has said, "Kindness is not to be found in anything but that it adds to its beauty, and it is not withdrawn from anything but it makes it defective." [Muslim]

Do Not Compel Others to Follow One's Naseehah

It is wajib (obligatory) on the advisor to render sincere advice to others, but it is not his right to compel others to follow his advice as well. That is the right of the Muslim ruler upon his subjects or a Muslim Qadhi (Judge) in his jurisdiction. A sincere advisor is one who guides toward goodness, but he is not to command others to act upon it.

Ibn Hazm writes that one should not give naseehah on the condition that it must be accepted, otherwise if one goes beyond this, he will be oppressing not advising, and seeking obedience and control. In another passage, Ibn Hazm writes that if a person is mistaken in his advice, he would be expecting people to follow him in his mistake.

Choosing the Proper Time to Give Naseehah

The one giving naseehah must choose the right time to give his advice, since a person is not always ready to receive naseehah. A person may be angry about something, upset about not getting what he wanted, grieved for something he may have lost, or there may be some other reason that might prevent him from responding to the naseehah.

Abdul Hamid Bilali writes, "Choosing proper time and place is one of the greatest causes for the acceptance of naseehah and eradicating evil", and as Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud said, "Hearts (sometimes) yearn and are attentive, but (sometimes) they go through lapses and feed repulsion. So take from them when they are (in a state of) yearning and are attentive, and leave them alone when they go through lapses and are feeling repulsion".

Naseehah that is Against Islam is not to be Followed

Giving naseehah is part of Sharia. Therefore, if someone gives advice to leave a deen demanded by the Sharia or to perform a forbidden deed, then it is not called naseehah. The one giving such should quit doing that and the one being advised should not accept it.

For instance, if someone tells you to shave your beard, to expose some part of the body by taking off the hijab, to shake hands with women on job interviews, to date the girl you are interested in, to take a job at a gas station that sells alcohol, or to go see the latest movie, then you should not obey. These matters are not counted as naseehah which the Prophet (sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) made part of the religion.

Factors Affecting the Acceptance of Naseehah

i) Naseehah must be given according to the proper manners which have been described above.

ii) One of the most important factors that contribute in one's rejecting a fellow Muslim's naseehah is arrogance. Arrogance prevents one from accepting naseehah and acting upon it. Whereas, the one who continuously strives to take arrogance out of his heart, finds it easy to accept naseehah. This is because the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said, "Arrogance is to reject the truth and despise the people".

Naseehah is from the truth and the advisor is from the people. The arrogant person, on the other hand, is one who rejects the truth and looks down on the people. As a result, neither the naseehah nor the one giving it suits him. On the contrary, a humble person will accept naseehah from others with an open heart, no matter where the advisor comes from, because he knows that a wajib (obligatory deed) is being conveyed.

Unfortunately, many are tricked by Shaitaan in this matter to accept naseehah only from those who are from the same country, or are of the same race, or hold affiliations with the same Islamic organisation / party as they do. The situation gets very sad when some of our brothers and sisters will not take naseehah because the one giving it has not been a Muslim for very long, or has not lived in America for very long, or is too young to be "telling people what to do." They pay no attention to the naseehah itself, or try to determine whether the naseehah itself is according to the Quraan and Sunnah. Rather they are quick to reject their fellow Muslim's naseehah due to such baseless reasons. We must realise all these subtle forms of looking down on others and rejecting their beneficial naseehah. Remember that the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) has said that anyone with an atom's weight of arrogance in their heart will not enter Paradise.

Benefits of Naseehah

It purifies the one being advised from some weakness. When one sees a fellow Muslim negligent in performing a good deed, or committing some wrong, he should take it upon himself to mend the shortcoming. The shortcoming may pertain to the rights of Allaah or to the rights of His slaves. When a believer gives naseehah to his brother in Islaam, he helps him in a matter in which his brother has erred because the believer loves for his brother what he loves for himself. When a believer gives naseehah to his brother, he is disposing of the right that his brother has upon him. Just as you would not like to see a fault in yourself, and would work to remove it, likewise, you should not like to see that fault in your brother. You must hate to see in him what you hate to see in yourself, hence, you should give him naseehah to remove that fault as you would have liked to receive naseehah to have that fault removed from you. Give your brother naseehah and guide him toward goodness, and take him away from harm.

Giving naseehah is a sign of true brotherhood, a way of bringing the hearts closer, and of closing the doors of hatred and suspicion. This is why Umar ibn Abdul-Aziz said, "The one who grants naseehah to his brother in matters of this his religion and concerns himself with mending affairs of this life; then, he has granted an excellent gift and fulfilled a wajib that was due on him .." If someone were to ask, "How is naseehah a right of brotherhood, when one's faults are mentioned?" the answer is not to feel apprehension when your brother informs you of your faults. He may know something that perhaps you are unaware of, and is compelled to tell you about it out of sheer compassion. It is a way of winning over the hearts of those who are endowed with insight.

Shaitaan has declared war on all of humanity, and Allaah has given the believers the tools necessary to win this war. Informing each other of ugly deeds we perform, or about loathsome characteristics that we may have is like pointing out where the land mines are on a battlefield. By pointing out these hidden dangers, we help to keep each other from destruction. In this war of conquering the self, the help, aid and guidance of our brothers and sisters is needed to assure that ultimate victory, insha'Allaah, of true success in this life and in the Hereafter.