THE RELIGION IS NASIHA (GOOD ADVICE)
By Safaa Alshiraida

The word "nasiha" is derived from the root "nasaha" which has several meanings; among these meanings are: to give sincere advice; to be sincere in one's intention; to rid something of its defects. Thus "nasiha" could mean: advice, sincerity, integrity, or doing justice to a person or situation.

The Apostle of Allah (PBUH) said "Religion is nasiha". The companions said "To whom?". He said "To Allah and His Book and His Messenger, and to the leaders of the Muslims and their common folk". (Muslim)

Imam Al Nawawi, may Allah have mercy on him, explaining this Hadith, said: "This Hadith is of utmost importance; it is one of the cornerstones of Islam".

He continues

"Nasiha to Allah (SWT) means believing in Him and not associating partners with Him; believing in all the Names and Attributes of Allah, and not uttering any form of impious speech against His Names; obeying Him and keeping away From whatever displeases Him; loving His loyal servants and hating those who are disobedient to Him; striving in His cause; thanking Him for all His bounties; and summoning others to His path.

"Nasiha to the Book of Allah is to believe that it is the Word of Allah and a revelation from Him which is not similar to the speech of any of His creatures; glorify it and recite it as it should be recited; ponder over its meanings; follow its guidance in every aspect of life; and calling others to follow it.

"Nasiha to the Messenger of Allah is to believe all what he was sent with; obey all his commands; give him his due respect; love those who love him and oppose those who disobey him; spread his da'wah; read with contemplation his Sunnah and Seerah and follow his tradition in all aspects of life.

"Nasiha to the leaders of Muslims is helping them and obeying them in whatever pleases Allah and giving them sincere advice when they act in a way that is contradictory with shari'a.

"Finally, nasiha to common Muslims includes guiding them to what is good for them in this life and in the Hereafter; protecting them against any harm; and enjoining them to do right and forbidding them from doing wrong."
The above explanation of the Hadith gives us an idea about how this simple word, nasiha, includes almost everything that is needed for the establishment of the Muslim society; no wonder then that the Prophet (PBUH) sums the whole religion of Islam in this comprehensive word. In our following discussion, however, we will concentrate on one meaning of nasiha, which is advice.

**Importance of Advice:**

The best way to appreciate the importance of advice is by referring to Surat-ul-Asr, which could be translated as:

"By the time, verily man is in loss, except those who believe, and do good deeds, and recommend one another to truth, and recommend one another to patience"

Two of the four requirements for humanity not to be in loss involve the mutual advice of the members of the society and their encouraging one another to follow the right path and hold fast to it.

Furthermore, advice is the mission of all Messengers of Allah, peace be upon them all; all of them gave their people sincere advice to forsake the falsehood and follow the way of Allah. Nuh (PBUH) said to his people

"I convey unto you the messages of my Lord and give sincere advice to you" (7:62)

And Hud (PBUH)

"I convey to you the messages of my Lord and I am a trustworthy adviser to you" (7:68)

And Prophet Saleh (PBUH), when his people rejected his call and were destroyed

"Then he turned from them and said: O my people! I have indeed conveyed to you the message of my Lord and have given you good advice but you like not good advisers" (7:79)

So did Prophet Shu'aib (PBUH)
"Then he turned from them and said: O my people! I have conveyed to you the messages of my Lord and have given you good advice. Then how can I sorrow for the disbelieving people's (destruction)" (7:93)

Jareer, may Allah be pleased with him said "I gave Allah's Apostle my pledge that I will obey him, as much as I can, and give advice to all Muslims". From this Hadith we see that advice is so important that the Prophet (PBUH) considered it as part of the pledge that should be taken from those who embrace Islam.

Advice - A Requisite for Brotherhood:

One of the most helpful means of keeping a Muslim on the right path in this life is the advice he receives from a sincere Muslim. Many are those who mistakenly think that true brotherhood dictates that you not face your brother with his faults. The truth is, however, that the one who abstains from advising his brother of his defects is iniquitous. Some do not give advice in order not to disturb their relationship with others. This is a serious misconception since the aim of giving advice should exclusively be to attain the pleasure of Allah; and whoever is seeking Allah's pleasure is not intimidated by people's displeasure. Imam Al Muhasabi said "Know that he who advises you is the one that loves you; and he who fawns you deceives you; and he who does not accept your advice is not your brother".

It is evident from the above discussion that advice is an obligation on every Muslim, and if he does not perform this obligation properly, he will not be able to fulfill the four requirements that save him from being in loss. The early Muslims were very keen to advise one another and never forgot that it was part of the pledge they gave to the Prophet (PBUH) to do so.

The following story clearly illustrates how Jareer truly kept the pledge he had given to the Prophet (PBUH): Jareer sent his servant to the market to buy him a horse; the boy came back with the owner of the horse in order that Jareer give him the price which was three hundred Dirhams. After examining the horse, Jareer said to the man "But your horse is worth more, would you sell it for four hundred?". The man agreed. Jareer then said "But your horse is worth more, would you sell it for five hundred?", and he kept on increasing the price until it reached eight hundred Dirhams and then bought the horse. Later when he was asked to explain his behavior, he said "I gave my pledge to the Prophet (PBUH) that I would give advice to all Muslims". Even though it would have saved him some money, Jareer felt that it was his duty toward that man, according to his pledge to the Prophet (PBUH), to tell him that he was asking too little for his horse.
Asking for Advice:

Umar ibn Abdel Aziz, may Allah have mercy on him, said to his servant, Muzahem, "The rulers appoint spies to bring them news about their subjects, but I will appoint you as my scout over myself; if you ever hear me say a word I should not say or see me do what I should not do, stop me immediately and give me your advice".

Asking for advice is a sign of a true believer. When a person asks for advice, this indicates that he accepts the fact that he must have some defects and that those defects should be corrected; that he is concerned with finding out about his own defects rather than keeping busy searching for other people's defects and mistakes. Al Saqati said "When Allah is planning to seize His servant gradually with punishment, He makes him become unaware of his own blemishes and magnifies other people's defects in his sight".

In order to obtain sincere advice, one should, in the first place, exercise great care in choosing his friends, and should always remind them to inform him of any vice he might have.

Accepting Advice:

Accepting advice is not less important than asking for it. A true believer treats an advice like an invaluable gift that was given to him by someone who loves him. A hypocrite or an unbeliever, on the other hand, dislikes being advised. Imam Al Shafi'i, may Allah have mercy on him said: "When I give someone an advice and he accepts it, I respect him and love him; but if he rejects it, I despise him and dislike him". This is because the one who rejects an advice does not deserve it in the first place; an advice is like a precious gift that should only be given to those who appreciate it. Some people take you as their enemy if you advise them; you had better not advise this kind of person.

A person only refuses a truthful advice out of pride; and this brings to them a great loss. An arrogant person regards himself as superior to others in wealth, knowledge, position, etc, and that prevents him from detecting, and hence correcting, the various defects he has. The Prophet (PBUH) defines pride as "disregarding the truth and belittling other people". And Allah (SWT) says, describing such an arrogant person,

"And when it is said to him, 'Fear Allah', he is led by arrogance to (more) crime. So enough for him is Hell, an evil bed indeed" (2:206)

Such an erroneous feeling of superiority hinders those people from attaining what is good for them. On the other hand, those pious people who have attained victory over their own desires are the ones who possess the true honor and dignity.
"But honor belongs to Allah, His Apostle, and to the believers, but the hypocrites know not" (63:8)

Etiquette of Giving Advice:

The following are some manners that the adviser should follow; otherwise his advice will be rejected and will not be accepted by Allah.

1. Modesty:

A sincere Muslim should never show a didactic attitude when advising others; trying to teach people what to do frequently make them turn away from you. Furthermore, follow an indirect way in conveying your advice whenever possible. Al Hassan and Al Hussein, may Allah be pleased with them, once saw an old man making Wudu incorrectly. They approached him and said "O uncle!, my brother and I, are arguing about the right way of making Wudu, would you watch us and see who does it better?". After watching them, the man said "Both of you do it right, it is I who do it wrong". With this politeness, the two boys were able to convey their advice to a man who is much older than they were without hurting his dignity.

2. Advising in Private:

All the eminent scholars of Islam agree that secrecy is a requisite for an advice to be accepted. Abu Hatim Al Basti said "Giving advice is an obligation on everybody, but it should be given in private. Whoever advises his brother in private does him a favor; and who ever advises his brother in public hurts him". Al Fudail said "A believer keeps secrets, while an unbeliever reveals them and reproaches people in public". Sufian was asked "Do you like that someone inform you of your defects?". He answered "If he comes advising me in private, yes; but if he comes slandering me in public, no".

In order for his advice to be accepted by Allah, an adviser should be sincere, seeking only the reward from Allah. Giving advice in public contradicts sincerity since it indicates that the adviser is only trying to be seen of others (i.e., Riya').

3. Verification:

Before giving an advice, one should first make sure that it was not his misunderstanding of the other person's behavior and that the latter really did something wrong.

4. Gentleness:

Describing the manners of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and warning us against harshness, Allah (SWT) says:
And the Prophet (PBUH) said "Allah is gentle and He likes gentleness in everything". Harshness and rudeness make people reject the advice, and bring about failure to a da'iah. Sayyed Qutb urges us to be kind to people, by saying "When you touch the good side in the souls of people, you find a great deal of good nature the eye cannot perceive on first glance. All it needs is some affection toward their mistakes and foolishness, true amity for them, and a little unstilted care about their grief and concerns, only then will you uncover the good side in their souls".

Our leader, the Apostle of Allah (PBUH), gives us the best example in gentleness. It was narrated by Muslim that Mu'awiya ibn Al Hakam said "While I was offering Salah behind the Prophet (PBUH), a man sneezed, then I said 'May Allah have mercy on you'. Then people started gazing at me, I said 'Woe to me, what is wrong with you? Why are you looking at me like this?' But none of them answered. Instead, they started clapping their hands on their thighs. I understood that they wanted me to stop talking, so I stopped. After he finished praying, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who is the best teacher I have ever seen, neither hit me nor reproached me, he turned to me and gently said 'During Salah, one should not utter any kind of ordinary speech; only praise Allah, magnify Him, and recite the Qur'an'.

5. Avoiding searching for mistakes:

Some people, while thinking they are doing right, commit great iniquities by searching for the mistakes and defects of others. Whoever keeps himself busy looking for the defects of others, will surely be subject to punishment from Allah in this life by uncovering his defects in front of others. A true Muslim should hope that others do not commit iniquities, while an envious person hopes that they do wrong and is happy when they do; and the advice of the latter cannot be accepted by Allah. A Muslim should never look for defects or mistakes, but if he sees them, then he gives the appropriate advice.

Finally, the following are a few words of advice to all Muslims regarding giving and accepting advice:

* Be sincere in your advice; seeking only the reward from Allah.
* Accept advice, even from someone who is younger or less knowledgeable than you.
* Ask your brothers frequently for advice.
* Do not look for your brothers' mistakes or defects.
* Always follow the proper manners when offering advice.

And it is Allah whom we ask to guide us to the right path.