

Seerah is the answer: Attitude – Me First to They First

Darkness has no existence of its own; it can subsist only in absence of light. It is the nature of light to spread and the nature of darkness to disappear as soon as light appears. Islam spread the light of guidance and dispelled the darkness of superstition, ignorance and idolatry by showing the principles of goodness as they were lived by the Sahaba.

A Sahabi came to Rasoolullah ﷺ and complained of hunger and distress. Rasoolullah ﷺ had nothing in hand or in his home to feed him. He asked the other Sahabah:

"Would anybody entertain him as a guest tonight on my behalf?"

One of the Ansaar said: "Ya Rasoolullah ﷺ, I will do that."

When he told his wife, she said to him, "We have nothing to eat today except what little I kept for our children." The Sahabi said to her, "Put the children to sleep and bring the food. When we come into the room put out the lamp as if by accident and we will let our guest eat while pretending to eat with him."

The guest left after eating his fill. The Ansari Sahabi and his wife and children went to bed hungry. That is when Allah ﷻ revealed this Ayah:

وَالَّذِينَ تَبَوَّؤُوا الدَّارَ وَالْإِيمَانَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ يُحِبُّونَ مَنْ هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ
وَلَا يَجِدُونَ فِي صُدُورِهِمْ حَاجَةً مِّمَّا أُوتُوا وَيُؤْثِرُونَ عَلَى
أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ وَمَنْ يُوقِ شُحَّ نَفْسِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ
هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

Hashr 59: 9. *And those who, before them, had homes (in Al-Madinah) and had adopted the Faith, love those who emigrate to them, and have no jealousy in their breasts for that which they have been given (from the booty of Bani An-Nadir), and give them (emigrants) preference over themselves, even though they were in need of*

that. And whosoever is saved from his own covetousness, such are they who will be the successful.

Ubay bin Kaab (RA) said: "Rasoolullah ﷺ once deputed me to collect Zakat from a locality. I went to a person there and asked about the details of his possessions. It turned out that a one-year-old baby camel was due from him in Zakat. When he heard this, he exclaimed, 'Of what use is a one-year-old baby camel? You can neither milk it nor ride it. Here is a fine grown-up she-camel. So, you take this instead.'

I replied, 'My commission does not permit me to take more than what is actually due from you. I, therefore, cannot accept what you offer. However, Rasoolullah ﷺ is visiting this locality and tonight he will camp at a place not very far from here. If you like, you can go and place your offer before him. If he does not object, I will gladly accept your offer, otherwise you can only give me exactly what is due from you.'

The Sahabi took the female camel to Rasoolullah ﷺ that evening and said, 'Ya Rasoolullah ﷺ, your deputy came to receive Zakat from me. By Allah! before this time, I have never had the honor of paying anything to the Prophet of Allah ﷻ or his deputy. I therefore placed everything that I possessed before him. He decided that a one-year-old baby camel was due from me. But Ya Rasoolullah ﷺ ! This baby camel is of no use. It can neither yield milk nor carry a load. I, therefore, requested your deputy to accept a fine grown-up she-camel instead, but he refused to accept without your permission. I have now come to you with the she-camel.'

Rasoolullah ﷺ said, 'No doubt only that much is due from you which he worked out, but if you are willing to give more than that of your own accord, it would be accepted.' He then presented the she-camel to Rasoolullah ﷺ which he accordingly accepted and made dua for the donor.

My final story is about a Sahabi who had a shop in the market of Madina. One late afternoon a Jewish man came to him to buy something. The item was available in the shop and the customer was happy at the price and asked to buy it. To his great surprise, the Sahabi said to him, "Please do me a favor." He pointed to a shop at the far end of the market and said, "Please go to that shop and buy this thing from that

man instead." The customer was very surprised. He asked the Sahabi, "What a strange man you are! Why are you sending me to your competitor?" The Sahabi replied, "I have been watching him all day but for some reason, he has not done any business today. Now it is almost sunset, and the market is about to shut for the night. If you don't buy from him, he will go home with nothing. That is why I am requesting you to buy from him. He has the same product at the same price, so you lose nothing, and he will have something to take home."

The customer was pleased at this altruism and headed for the other shop. When he reached there, he discovered that the shopkeeper was from his own tribe and was, like himself, a Jew. He completed his deal and returned to the Muslim's shop. There he discovered that there were some other customers and the Sahabi was dealing with them. He saw the Jewish man but couldn't attend to him until his customers had gone. When he became free, he asked him with surprise, "What happened? Didn't you get what you wanted? Did the man not have it in his shop?"

The Jewish man replied, "I got what I wanted from him. I discovered to my great surprise that you sent me to someone who is from my tribe and is not a Muslim, but like you said, he had what I wanted, and I got it."

"I am happy," said the Sahabi, "but why did you return to me?"

The Jewish man said, "I returned to ask you for something else that you have."

"What is that?" asked the Sahabi, surprised.

"I want what is in your heart that made you think about your competitor's welfare when that man is not even from your tribe or religion and made you give up your profit so that he would not go home empty handed." And the man accepted Islam.

The point I am making is that it was Applied Islam, Islam in practice that won hearts.

Islam is not a philosophy or a theory. Islam is the name of a practice, like Judo. If you read all the books on Judo and know all about its genesis and all about the principles of leverage that are behind each throw and why the fulcrum in each throw is applied where it is, you would be called a great scholar of Judo. But if you get into a street fight, you would still hit the floor very hard. That is because you know a lot about Judo, but you don't know Judo. To know Judo, you must join a Dojo and practice, fall ten thousand times, throw ten thousand times and only then will you know Judo. Then in a street fight you will win every time even if you are not able to deliver a lecture on the origin and development of Judo as a martial art. This is exactly the case with Islam. If you want to see the benefits of Islam, you must practice it. Rasoolullah ﷺ was sent to show us how. His life is the blueprint, the live demo, the pilot project, proof of concept to show that Islam works, and how! That is the reason the Seerah is so important to study and live by.

Allah ﷻ sent His Messenger ﷺ with a message. And with the instruction to inform the people about the message, to prepare them to receive it, to teach it to them and to demonstrate to them how to apply it in their lives. This was the task of Muhammad ﷺ.

Allah ﷻ called His Messenger ﷺ a Neyma (Blessing) for the Believers. He said:

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ
يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن
كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

A'al Imraan 3: 164. *Indeed Allah conferred a great favor on the Believers when He sent among them a Messenger (Muhammad ﷺ) from among themselves, reciting unto them His Ayaat (Qur'an), and purifying them (internal and external, Tazkiyya wa Tarbiyya), and instructing them (in) the Book (Qur'an) and Al-Hikmah (the wisdom and the Sunnah of the Prophet), while before that they had been in manifest error.*

Think of this like a Master Trainer training a group of Trainers to teach the rest of the world. This was the situation and role of Rasoolullah ﷺ and his Sahaba.

By extension, this is also our role as Muslims, to take the message of goodness called Islam to the rest of the world.

The Hadith of Abu Sa'eed al-Khudree (RA) applies here also as it is an exhortation to action. On the authority of Abu Sa'eed al-Khudree (RA) who said: I heard Rasoolullah ﷺ say, *"Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith."* [Muslim]

If you reflect on this Hadith two things are clear. Firstly, Rasoolullah ﷺ made a general statement and said, 'Whoever sees an evil'. He didn't specify that this evil relates to religious matters. Any evil, anywhere, if it comes to the notice of a Muslim, it is his job to stop it. And that is the second matter. Rasoolullah ﷺ made three categories; those who do something to stop that evil by acting; those who are unable to do that but at least raise their voice against it. The third category is of those who are not able either to act or to raise a voice, but they hate it in their hearts and (implication) don't participate in it and move or stay away from it. Rasoolullah ﷺ called this last category a sign of a weak faith, meaning that the individual must do something to strengthen his faith. There is no mention of what we do today i.e. join in the action and participate in the evil knowing full well that it is prohibited. The Sahaba didn't do this. That is because the one who does that has rebelled against Allah ﷻ. The Hadith addresses the Faithful, the Believers. Not the faithless and rebels who worship their desires instead of Allah ﷻ.

This is the principle of Amr bil Ma'arouf and Nahi anil Munkar (Enjoining good and forbidding evil). We seem to have restricted this simply to issues of Halaal and Haraam but that is not what is meant by enjoining good and forbidding evil. It means, first and foremost, to live by that code and then to propagate it for everything that is beneficial and harmful for society. Let me ask you, how many times have you seen Muslims, collectively stand up against the exploitation of women by objectifying them as sex objects in advertising? Why not? After all that should concern us because a huge part of the population is being exploited for the benefit of the sellers of those products. How many times have Muslims stood up against the use of plastics, carbon emissions, air and water pollution, global warming, the need to use solar power

instead of burning coal or other hydro carbons? How many times have Muslims stood up against the atrocities visited upon Dalits in this country for centuries? The same Dalits who we try to slide up to today and include with us as 'Minorities'. How can 70% of the population be a minority? Instead of establishing the equality and dignity of Islam, our leaders, both temporal and religious, helpfully created a caste system in Islam, which Allah ﷻ didn't authorize them to do. One day everyone will answer for taking over the authority of Allah ﷻ. If we had upheld Islamic principles, what might have been the effect on our public image as contributing members of society? We need to live Islam.

The principle of Amr bil Ma'arouf and Nahi anil Munkar (Enjoining good and forbidding evil) is about making the switch from **Me** first to **They** first. This is not about altruism. It is about Positive Self-interest. Muslims must recognize that when we put others first in terms of fulfilling their rights, we are really ensuring that our own needs and rights are fulfilled without having to fight for them. In a marriage if both spouses are focused on fulfilling each other's rights, then they need not worry about their own rights being fulfilled. In other words, if we take care of our duty to fulfill the rights of others, our rights will automatically be fulfilled. It is also good to remember that we will be questioned about our duties, not about our rights. Islam encourages us to make this switch and move from being an inward looking, selfish, the-world-can-go-to-hell kind of person to someone who understands that if the world does go to hell, then I go with it. Imagine a society where people are concerned about others, where they go out of their way to ensure that people's rights are fulfilled, needs taken care of and justice is done. I am not talking utopia. I am talking about Madina at the time of Rasoolullah ﷺ and for a while thereafter. It was when these principles were compromised that conflict arose and as they say, the rest is history.

Another great example of making the switch from Me first to They first is the story of Abu Bakr as-Siddique (RA). When he passed away and Omar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) became the Khalifa, someone told him that there was a camp of someone on one end of Madina where Abu Bakr (RA) would go every morning before Fajr and stay for a while and return. Omar ibn Al-Khattab (RA), who was always looking to exceed Abu Bakr as-Siddique (RA) in deeds, went to the camp and saw that there was an old

Commented [SS1]: Could not understand this sentence.

Commented [SS2]: Are you referring to Muslims or Dalits—it is unclear.

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Commented [SS4R2]: I understand that question you asked above. However, I'm not able to follow this:

The same Dalits who we try to slide up to today and include with us as 'Minorities'. How can 70% of the population be a minority?

Who is the 70% you are referring to. If it's Dalits, I'm not being able to follow. Doesn't Dalits' status as minorities or 'backward class' predate Muslims' status as minorities?

Commented [MYB5R2]: Dalits are what used to be called Scheduled Castes and so on and are according to the Hindu caste system, Untouchable – their touch defiles the Upper castes. This prejudice and racist caste barrier predates Islam itself as it is over 3000 years old

woman there who was blind. She had very meagre possessions and a milch goat. She was weak, unable to take care of herself. Omar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) realized what she needed so he swept her tent, fed the goat and milked it. Then he cooked some bread for the lady and gave her the bread and milk to eat. The lady took the food and said, 'Who are you? You are not the man who comes every day to do this for me.' Omar (RA) was astonished that the blind woman knew that he was someone else. He asked her, 'O! Mother, how do you know it is someone else?' She said, 'He knows that I have no teeth, so he would chew the bread to make it soft and then put it in the milk before giving it to me.' Omar (RA) said to her, 'That man has passed away and I have come to take his place. I will come and serve you every day.' Then he asked her, 'Do you know who that man was?' She said, 'No. Who was he?' Omar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) said, 'He was Khaleefatur Rasoolullahﷺ, Abu Bakr as-Siddique (RA).'

When the ruler personally looks after the weakest in society, you have a society that today looks unreal to us. That is why we need to study the Seerah to do a reality check and convince ourselves that the kind of life that we have cursed ourselves with, where Prozac is the top selling drug and suicide is the answer to our stress, is not necessary. We can choose to have a life where we live happily, healthy, free from stress and in a compassionate and caring environment.

The character of a person is seen by how he treats those who can do nothing for him. So also, the character of a nation. It is judged by how it treats the powerless and the weak. Anyone can beat up those who can't fight back. But it takes character to defend them, stand up for their rights and to fight for them, knowing that they can do you no favor in return.

That too is a choice which is in our power to make.

Now that we have completed this chapter, let us reflect on our activities, habits, preferences, likes and dislikes and see what we look like. Me first oriented or They first oriented. Remember that a lot of this has to do with our upbringing. We raise selfish children who then become the curse of our lives with their infighting. The fights that destroy generations of work, break up families, divide property and inheritance and earn the anger of Allahﷻ, all start in the nursery at age two. If you raise children

to compete, reward competition instead of sharing, teach them to accumulate possessions instead of giving them to others, teach them to lie and cheat and support lying and cheating (telling the school the child is sick when he doesn't want to go to school), encourage sloth and an undisciplined life because you or your servants are willing to pick up after your little "Baba", then believe me, one day he/she will grow up to make you regret your actions in this world itself. And what happens after you leave the world is another story.

Now go to the Action Plan page and write what you need to start doing, stop doing and continue to do. Try to be as specific as possible because that will help you to monitor your success after you start applying the new ways. Then list the Inhibitors and Enablers for each one. What are the things, habits, conditions, people and situations, which are likely to inhibit you from Starting, Stopping or Continuing that activity? And what are the things, habits, conditions, people and situations which are likely to help and enable you to succeed? The more specific you are, the better.

Action Plan

Start: What are the attitudes, behaviors, habits that I need to **start** in order to make the switch in attitude from 'Me First to They First'?

Stop: What are the attitudes, behaviors, habits that I do now but need to **stop** in order to make the switch in attitude from 'Me First to They First'?

Continue: What are the attitudes, behaviors, habits that I do at present, which I need to **consciously continue** in order to make the switch in attitude from 'Me First to They First'?