

## ANSWER

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجِدِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۖ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

*Invite (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good counsel. And argue with them in the best of manners. Surely, your Lord knows best the one who strays from His way, and He knows best the ones who are on the right path*  
[16:125]

## BRIEF COMMENTARY

### Da'wah: Principles and Etiquette

To sum up, three things have been mentioned in verse 125 as necessary for Da'wah:

1. Al-Hikmah (Wisdom)
2. Al-Maw'izah al-Hasanah (Good Counsel)
3. Al-Mujādalāh – 'billati hiya ahsan' (Debate in the Best of Manners)

Some commentators have said that these things are there because of three kinds of addressees. Inviting with wisdom is for people of knowledge and understanding. Inviting with good counsel is for common people. Argument and debate are for those who nurse doubts in their hearts, or simply refuse to accept anything said to them because of hostility and obstinacy.

My mentor and master, Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī has said in his Tafsīr Bayān al-Qur'ān that it is far out to deduce from the context of the verse that the addressees of these three things are groups of three different kinds, separate from each other.

In the light of the above what seems to be obvious here is that these rules of etiquette in Da'wah are to be used for everyone. The first thing to do in Da'wah is to wisely assess conditions surrounding the addressee and pick out the most appropriate thing to say in those terms. Then, what has to be said will certainly be said as a well-wisher, however, this empathy has to be strengthened by such evidences and proof as would satisfy the addressee. And the subject matter and the manner of presentation has to be kept soft and affectionate so that the addressee becomes certain about whatever is being said and starts feeling that this person is saying it in his interest and for his benefit, and that the speaker's purpose is not to embarrass him or belittle his status.

However, the author of Rūh al-Ma'ānī has made a subtle point at this place. According to him, the arrangement of the verse shows that there are really no more than two things in Da'wah: (1) Al-Hikmah (Wisdom) and (2) Al-Maw'izah (Good Counsel). The third thing: Al-Mujādalāh (Argument, Debate) is just not included under the Principles of Da'wah. But, it can be conceded that it does come out handy once in a while in the path of Da'wah.

The author of Rūh al-Ma'ānī proves his point by saying: If these three things were to be the Principles of Da'wah, the exigency of the situation required that all three should have been enumerated with the help of conjunctions as: bi al-hikmah wa al-maw'izah al-hasanah wa al-jidāl al-ahsan, the Holy Qur'ān has elected to say al-Hikmah (Wisdom) and al-Maw'izah (Good Counsel) with conjunctive words in one single arrangement while, for al-Mujādalah, it has chosen to have a separate sentence: **(And argue with them in the best of manners)**. This tells us that argument in matters of knowledge is not a basic element or condition of the Call to Allah (*da'wah ilal-lāh*). Instead, it is an instruction concerning matters that come up in the path of Da'wah - an example of which appears in the next verse where patience has been enjoined because it is inevitable to observe patience over pains inflicted by people while in the path of Da'wah.

In short, there are two principles of Da'wah - (1) Al-Hikmah (Wisdom) and (2) Al-Maw'izah (Good Counsel). No Da'wah - whether to the learned and the classes or to the masses of people - should remain with - out these two factors. However, one has to face the kind of people who are neck-deep into doubts and superstitions and more than ready to start a debate with the Dā'ī (the man of Da'wah), it is to meet such situations that a go ahead signal to engage in the exercise of Al-Mujādalah (argument, debate) has been given. But, by imposing the restriction of: **(in the best of manners)** along with it, it was made very clear that the Mujādalah devoid of this condition has no place and status in the Sharī'ah.

## FURTHER COMMENTARY

### Da'wah and Tabligh: Principles and Curriculum

Embedded in this verse (125) there lies a whole curriculum of Da'wah and Tabligh, its principles and rules of etiquette, within the frame of a few words. As in Tafsīr al-Qurtubī, when Haram ibn Hayyān's *rahimahullāh* time of death came near, his relatives asked him for some wasīyyah (order, parting advice, will). In reply, he said, *"Wasīyyah? That people make for māl (wealth, property, inheritance), which I do not have. But, I would still make a wasīyyah, that of the āyāt of Allah, particularly that of the last verses of Sūrah an-Nahl - and I order you to stand firm on them."* The verses mentioned here are the same as appear above (125-128).

Literally: *da'wah*, means to call. The first duty of the blessed prophets is to call people towards Allah. After that, what they teach as prophets and messengers are explanations of this Da'wah. The Qur'ān mentioning a special attribute of the Holy Prophet has called him: *ad-dā'ī* (one who invites people towards Allah) – see 33:46 and 3:104 and 41:33.

While expressing the general sense, this word may take several forms, such as: (*da'wah ilal-lāh*: Calling towards Allah), (*da'wah ilā al-khair*: Calling toward the good) and (*da'wah ilā sabīlillāh*: Calling towards the way of Allah). However, the outcome is the same because calling towards Allah is actually calling towards His din and the Straight Path.

The next phrase: (*ilā sabīli rabbik*: to the way of your Lord) carries two nuances of expression. Here, by

mentioning the special attribute of the Most Exalted Allah - 'Rabb' - and then by annexing it to the Holy Prophet ﷺ, a hint has been given that the work of Da'wah is connected with the attribute of nurture, raising, training and education. Here, it is being suggested to the Holy Prophet ﷺ that the way Allah Ta'ālā has nurtured him, he too should invite people using the mores of nurture and education. It should be a Da'wah in which due consideration is given to the nature and attending circumstances of the addressee and the ultimate approach has to be such as would not weigh heavy on the recipient, rather, should be as effective as is possible. The word: (*da'wah*) itself imparts this sense in that the mission of a prophet is not simply limited to conveying the injunctions of Allah and making people hear them. Instead, his mission is to invite people to implement these in their lives. And it is obvious that no one inviting someone to Allah would present his submission in a manner which causes distraction and aversion or in which the addressee has been maligned or mocked at.

The expression: (*bil-hikmah*: with wisdom) which follows immediately has been used in the Holy Qur'ān for several meanings. At this place, some Tafsīr authorities have taken: (*al-hikmah*) to mean the Holy Qur'ān, some others explain it as the Qur'ān and Sunnah, still others call it the binding argument while Rūh al-Ma'ānī has given the following Tafsīr of 'al-hikmah' with reference to al-Bahr al-Muhīt: *It is sound speech which goes into one's heart.* (Rūh al-Ma'ānī)

This Tafsīr assimilates all above views. The author of Rūh al-Bayān has also carried almost the same sense in the following words: *"Al-Hikmah means the insight through which one finds out the dictates of circumstances and talks as appropriate relatively, chooses such time and occasion as would not put a burden on the addressee, employs lenience where lenience is called for and firmness where firmness is in order. And where he thinks the addressee would be embarrassed by saying something frankly, there he should use hints to communicate, or employ a change of subject and approach in a way that neither embarrasses the addressee nor feeds him with the thought of sticking by his prejudice."*

The next word: (*al-maw'izah*) or: (*wa'z*) literally means to say something in the spirit of wishing well in a manner that would make the heart of the addressee softened and arable, all tuned to accept it. Once this is done, it will be useful to talk about the reward and benefit of such acceptance, as well as, about the punishment and ill-effects of not accepting it. (Al-Qāmūs and al-Mufradāt of Rāghib al-Isfahānī)

Later, by saying: (*al-hasanah*: good), the sense conveyed is that the subject and treatment of this counsel should be such as would satisfy the heart of the addressee, removing doubts and apprehensions whereby the addressee comes to realize that you have no personal motive behind your approach and that you are addressing him only in the interest of the addressee and for his or her good.

We may stay with the word: (*al-maw'izah*: counsel) for a while and say that it had already made it clear that this wishing well has to be in an effective manner. But, experience bears out that sometimes while wishing well for someone, the approach could become hurtful or insulting for the addressee. (Rūh al-Ma'ānī). In order that people would leave this kind of approach, the word: (*al-hasanah*: good) was

added.

The word: (*jādik*: argue) in the subsequent sentence: (**And argue with them in the best of manners**) has been derived from: (*mujādala*). At this place, it means argumentation and debate and: (And argue with them in the best of manners) means that should there be, in the process of Da‘wah, the need to engage in debate or exchange of arguments, then, that discussion should also be in the best of manners. It appears in Rūh al-Ma‘ānī that good manners require a gentle and soft approach in mutual submissions, arguments have to be such as would be easily understood by the addressee, arguments have to be supported by known premises so that they help remove the doubts of the addressee and shields him against falling into dogmatism. And there are other verses of the Qur’ān which bear witness to the fact that this approach of showing good manners in debate (*al-ih̥sān fī al-mujādalah*) is not restricted to Muslims alone. About the people of the Book (Jews and Christians), the Qur’ān particularly says: And do not argue with the People of the Book except in a manner which is the best. (**al-‘Ankabūt, 29:46**). And in another verse, by giving the instruction of: (**speak to him in gentle words - Tā-Hā, 20:44**) to Sayyidnā Mūsā and Hārūn, it was also stressed that this was how they have to deal even with as rebellious an infidel as the Pharaoh.

**End.**

