

على بن أبي طالب أمير المؤمنين (ع) قال:
" مَنْ اسْتَبَدَّ بِرَأْيِهِ هَلَكَ وَ مَنْ شَاوَرَ الرَّجَالَ شَارَكَهَا فِي عُقُولِهَا."

Imam Ali (AS) stated:

"Whosoever is persistent in his own opinion will perish, and whosoever counsels with others becomes a partner with their intellect."

A true Muslim constantly probes into the good and the bad of every matter, and when he is in doubt he will seek the opinion and advice of experts and those whose wisdom he trusts.

رسول الله (صلى الله عليه و اله):

" مَا شَقَى عَبْدٌ قَطُّ بِمَشْوَرَةٍ وَ مَا سَعَدَ بِاسْتِعْنَاءٍ بِرَأْيٍ."

The Holy Prophet (SAW) stated:

"No one has become miserable by consulting, and no one has become prosperous by insisting in his own way."

He (SAW) also said: *"The foundation of intellect, after believing in Allah, is kindness with people, and everyone is in need of consultation."*

Raaghil Isfahani, in his famous "Mufradaat" ("Vocabulary of the Qur'an"), describes مشورة (Mashwarah) as:

"المشورة استخراج الرأي بمراجعة البعض إلى البعض."

"Deriving a (correct) inference by consulting one another." This means that when someone does not have a proper opinion on a subject, he gains necessary information by making an inquiry from an informed person.

Consultation is a norm in the Islamic decision making process, and it is recommended for Muslims to seek advice on every important issue pertinent to their life on earth and in the Hereafter. It is even stated that those who are more enlightened would be apt to ask for others' opinions.

Allah (SWT), in the Holy Qur'an, Surah 3 verse 159, in order to abolish closed-minded autocratic thinking and cultivate an Islamic civility among the early Muslims, commands the Holy Prophet (SAW), in spite of his divinely inspired knowledge, to make consultation with the believers.

".....و شاورهم في الأمر."

"....and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs."

Similarly, in Sura Al-Shura, verse 38, it states:

"وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ."

"And those who respond to their Lord and establish prayer, and (conduct) their affairs with counsel among themselves, and what we have provided them with their sustenance they spend."

An opinionated person who does not counsel with others in order to make a more appropriate choice or an intelligent decision, would, in all likelihood, encounter perplexities and perhaps an endless cycle of complications.

Because the focus of Islam is on man and his behavior, man must be correctly informed of what he is striving for and what the true purpose of life is. An accurate perception of the purpose of life is absolutely crucial in the entire doctrine of resurrection in Islam, since the “weighing of the deeds” presupposes and, to some extent, depends on it.

It is essential for Muslims to remain steadfast in their pursuit of ultimate truth, and, in order to achieve this, a believer must vigorously seek and contemplate other opinions and, ultimately, choose the best. This is why Islam constantly exhorts people to give their unreserved and sincere opinion whenever approached for consultation. For example, it is reported from The Holy Prophet (SAW) stating:

رسول الله (صلى الله عليه و اله):

إِذَا أُسْتَشِرَ أَحَدُكُمْ أَخَاهُ فَلْيُشِرْ عَلَيْهِ

“When your brother seeks the counsel of any one of you, you should give your (honest) opinion.”

It is in this context that Islam’s assertion for a sound education and acquisition of undistorted information, transmitted by immaculate sources and the sharing of it with others, shows its significance.

Also it is imperative for a Muslim to live a righteous and an exemplary life in all different circumstances. One must have utmost certainty and a firm conviction such that every important task in life is performed with a clear perception and accuracy.

It is quite obvious that all people are not at the same mental and intellectual level. Nor do they possess the same knowledge and proficiency on every subject. Therefore, it is reasonable that a Muslim should acquire important information in a sound way to avoid the perils of uncertainties in a changing world.

On the other hand, a spontaneous negative reaction to another opinion is also a sign of arrogance which is contradictory to the humility and down-to-earth nature of a true believer. Equally, giving inadequate or deceptive advice is inconsistent with the spirit of Islamic ethics and thus prohibited. The following prophetic *hadith* further illustrates this point:

رسول الله (صلى الله عليه و اله):

”الْمُسْتَشَارُ مُؤْتَمَنٌ فَإِنْ شَاءَ أَشَارَ وَ إِنْ شَاءَ سَكَتَ ، فَإِنْ أَشَارَ فَلْيُشِرْ بِمَا لَوْ نَزَلَ بِهِ فَعَلَهُ.“

“A consultant is a trustee. If he chooses, he should give advice. If he decides to, he can remain silent. However, if he gives advice it must be that which he would apply to himself.”

Once we determine that the essential purpose of consultation is to gain from the wisdom and intelligence of others, what primarily concerns us is the all-important question: who is the most reliable candidate for this purpose?

Obviously, one should seek the opinion of the experts, whose higher mental and intellectual capacities are in tandem with their knowledge and unwavering faith in Allah (SWT). But this is not to say that Islam regards consultation with ordinary Muslims as inadmissible.

The Holy Prophet (SAW) also stated:

“Whoever decides to perform a task and consults with a Muslim, Allah will make him successful in the most appropriate way.”

It is however, conceivable that to consult with those who suffer from spiritual, ethical, and intellectual deficits may evoke confusion, misrepresentation, and perhaps more uncertainty.

And this belief is further reinforced when we examine the Holy Qur'an and the authentic words of the Holy Prophet (SAW) on "*Mashwarah*" (*consultation*). Shaykh Saduq (RA), in his classic work "Al-Khisaal," reports the following hadith from the Holy Prophet (SAW):

"يَا عَلِيَّ لَا تُشَاوِرَنَّ حَبَانًا فَإِنَّهُ يَضِيقُ عَلَيْكَ الْمَخْرَجَ وَ لَا تُشَاوِرَنَّ الْبَخِيلَ فَإِنَّهُ يَفْصِرُ بِكَ عَنْ غَايَتِكَ وَ لَا تُشَاوِرَنَّ حَرِيصًا فَإِنَّهُ يُزَيِّنُ لَكَ شَرَّهَا."

"O Ali, do not make consultation with the cowardly as he would make the escape route constricted (in your mind), do not consult with a miser as he would make your goal insignificant, and do not counsel with a covetous person as he would add luster to greediness."