



Charting the Path Forward: Imam Hassan al-Banna's (رحمة الله) Call to Action for Humanity

Introduction: “To What Do We Invite Humanity?”

This article reflects on Imam Hassan al-Banna's (رحمة الله) influential letter, “To What Do We Invite Humanity?”, which offers timeless insights into the spiritual and social dimensions of Islam. Imam Al-Banna's (رحمة الله) writings underscore the importance of grounding our lives in the principles of the Qur'an, advocating for a purposeful, devoted life, and a sense of communal responsibility. His teachings inspire Muslims to live up to these principles, embracing their responsibility as stewards of Allah's ﷻ creation and entrusted with the duty to uphold justice, compassion, and unity.

Imam al-Banna (رحمة الله) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding Islam as a holistic way of life, integrating personal righteousness with societal obligations. His work calls for the revival of Islamic values in the face of modern challenges, urging believers to contribute positively to humanity in the manner that Allah ﷻ has ordained. This article seeks to reflect on these profound teachings, offering practical ways to implement them in the context of the lived global realities of the twenty-first century.

The Role of the Quran

The Qur'an serves as the foundational guide for Muslims, providing a path towards clarity and purpose in life. It articulates the ultimate objective of human existence – to worship Allah ﷻ in a manner befitting His ﷻ glory, rather than crafting our own interpretations of what that worship should entail.

As stated in the Qur'an,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ



“O believers! Be mindful of Allah in the way He deserves, and do not die except in a state of full submission to Him” (Qur'an, 3:102).

This emphasizes the importance of understanding and fulfilling our divine obligations from a perspective that transcends material gains. In a world where secularism often promotes a materialistic understanding of humanity, it becomes vital to redefine our identity as creations of Allah ﷻ who belong to Him and will ultimately return to Him in due time. Unlike beings that are merely a product of dust, as materialists might argue, the Qur'an portrays humans as possessing a divine essence and purpose.

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ، وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ، سَاجِدِينَ



“So when I have fashioned him and had a spirit of My Own 'creation' breathed into him, fall down in prostration to him.” (Qur'an, 15:29)

This fundamental difference significantly impacts our worldview, enabling us to see ourselves not just as consumers of earthly pleasures but as stewards of Allah's ﷻ creation with a higher purpose.

Imam Hassan al-Banna (رحمة الله) stresses the importance of having a clear reference point: the Qur'an. He advocates for a leadership style that communicates profound truths as founded in the Qur'an, the words of Allah ﷻ, ensuring that knowledge is accessible to all. The Qur'an encompasses the fundamentals of belief and social laws, providing a comprehensive blueprint for life. The understanding that the universe exists not independently of its Creator but in continuous dependence on His ﷻ command underscores the essence of existence itself.

Recognizing that elements like fire do not burn by themselves, but only by Allah's ﷻ decree and its inherent quality to burn can change by His ﷻ decree as well, just like we know the story of Ibrahim(as), who was thrown into the fire, but felt it to be cool.

قُلْنَا يَنَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ



[But] We said: O fire! Be thou cool, and [a source of] inner peace for Abraham!” (Qur'an, 21:69)

A Qur'anic reference point is one that reflects a holistic worldview that appreciates and lives by a consciousness of the constant presence and power of the Divine.

The Purpose of a Muslim

When engaging with the Qur'an, it is crucial to approach it as a personal communication directed at each of us. This means recognizing that its lessons and admonitions are not merely historical footnotes or lessons for others but are intended for our individual introspection and self-assessment. We must resist the temptation to externalize its messages, but rather strive to introspectively examine our actions and intentions to avoid the pitfall of hypocrisy. In doing this, we realize that understanding and living the Qur'an, and calling to worship Allah ﷻ are the central points of purpose for a Muslim.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ارْكَعُوا وَاسْجُدُوا وَاعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمْ وَأَفْعَلُوا الْخَيْرَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ



“For believers, bow down, prostrate yourselves, and worship your Lord, and do good that you may succeed” (Qur'an, 22:77).

The essence of this call reminds us that our existence should revolve around striving for Allah's ﷻ pleasure and conveying His ﷻ message to humanity.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ



‘Remember’ when your Lord said to the angels, “I am going to place a successive ‘human’ authority on earth.” (Qur'an, 2:30)

The title of "شهادة" that Allah ﷻ attributes to Muslims (in the above-mentioned verse) is not simply an entitlement; it is a divine commandment, and therefore one must strive to live and become one who is worthy of carrying this responsibility. Allah ﷻ describes Muslims as the “best nation brought forth for mankind” (Qur'an, 3:110).

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ



“You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allāh”. (Qur'an 3:110)

This is not merely a title but a call to embody the virtues of guardianship and leadership in righteousness. This guardianship is predicated on adherence to divine guidance that brings about justice, compassion, and support for one another. Justice, a critical virtue within this framework, must be established in society according to the principles laid out in the Qur'an. As Imam al-Banna (رحمة الله) highlights, our starting and ending points in discussions of justice and purpose should align with the teachings of the Quran.

Imam al-Banna (رحمة الله) highlights that if we begin our journey with differing beliefs or values, we will end up with different goals and outcomes, which can take us away from our true purpose in life. Our invitation to humanity is anchored in the understanding that we are called to a life of worship, responsibility, and justice.

Imam al-Banna (رحمة الله) highlights the significance of the Shahada (testimony of faith) not just as a declaration but as a commitment to action; a true believer must be ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of Allah ﷻ. As we reflect on Imam al-Banna's insights, we are prompted to ask ourselves how we live our lives today. Are we sincerely pursuing Allah's ﷻ causes, or are we succumbed to the distractions and whims of this worldly life? Our destination is profound, shaping our actions and motivations, and urging us to remain vigilant. It is essential that our deeds align with our intentions, ensuring our efforts are indeed for the sake of Allah ﷻ, seeking His pleasure in all that we do.

Connection with Faith

In today's world, the challenge for Muslims is to return to core Islamic values amidst the distractions of materialism and fleeting pleasures. This journey towards Mujahdatul Nafs (مُجَاهِدَةُ النَّفْسِ), or the struggle against the lower desires of the self—calls for a profound reflection on our relationship with the divine, and simultaneously inspires us to strive to attain a higher state of self that is deeply entrenched in a higher and divine purpose. Imam al-Banna (رحمة الله) asks the question: Have Muslims truly comprehended the teachings of the Qur'an to the point that their souls are uplifted? Have they freed themselves from the constraints of material desires, thereby raising their spirits above worldly distractions and directing their attention sincerely towards Allah ﷻ?

The Qur'an emphasizes the interconnectedness between individual responsibility, which includes practices such as prayer and fasting, and our obligations toward the wider community. Allah ﷻ illustrates that fulfilling individual duties is essential for enhancing communal responsibility. This dual responsibility highlights the importance of a balanced approach to faith; one cannot neglect personal rituals in the name of communal obligations, nor can one forsake communal duties while being consumed by personal worship. Each facet complements the other, unveiling the wisdom of the divine message.

The Qur'an poses an important reminder of our purpose and the importance of living with intention,

أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ



"Then did you think that We created you uselessly and that to Us you would not be returned?" (Quran, 23:115).

In drawing from the examples of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم, we see a profound embodiment of devotion and balance in their lives. Described as “monks by night and knights by day,” they exemplified a beautiful harmony between spiritual devotion and worldly responsibility. By night, they were deeply immersed in prayer, humility, and reflection, renouncing worldly allure with sincerity, pledging their hearts to Allah ﷻ. When dawn broke, they transformed into fierce warriors, prepared to defend their faith with courage and conviction. This dichotomy illustrates the essence of an Islamic life, a seamless integration of spiritual commitment and active engagement in the world. It is an invitation to straddle both realms successfully, allowing one's inner spirituality to energize their external endeavors.

This connection fosters not only individual growth but also strengthens the fabric of society, illustrating the profound teachings of our faith. It reflects a dedication to embracing the totality of our responsibilities in striving for Allah's ﷻ pleasure and engaging meaningfully in the service of humanity.

Collective Responsibility

Islam profoundly emphasizes the importance of community and brotherhood. The Qur'an implores believers to “Cling fast to the rope of Allah, all of you, and do not become divided” (3:103).

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ۚ وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءَ فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوًا وَكُنْتُمْ



“And hold firmly to the rope of Allāh all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allāh upon you - when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favor, brothers” (Qur'an, 3:103)

It is a reminder of the grace that Allah ﷻ has bestowed upon us when He united our hearts. In promoting this sense of brotherhood, the Qur'an further states, “The believers are but brothers” (Qur'an, 49:10).

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ



“The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allāh that you may receive mercy”. (Quran, 49:10)

This reinforces the idea that our mutual support is integral to our faith. Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم accentuated the importance of benefiting from the unity of believers, asserting that Islam mandates its followers to create a single brotherhood that cultivates harmony.

This brotherhood is not merely a superficial association; it requires deep commitment and a sincere wish for one another's success in attaining Jannah (paradise). It is not enough to just extend kind gestures; we are called to actively engage in encouraging one another toward righteousness. Commanding good and forbidding wrong is a vital part of this responsibility, as genuine advice (نصيحة) should stem from a desire to see our brothers and sisters on the path of Allah ﷻ.

Navigating this balance between intention and action is crucial. The challenge lies in distinguishing personal desires from divine commandments. Good intentions alone do not suffice if they lead to actions contrary to Islamic teachings. We must avoid hypocrisy and ensure that our advice and guidance are aligned with Islamic principles. Personal bias should never dictate our interpretation of Islam; rather, we should strive to adhere to the guidance provided by the Qur'an and Sunnah, establishing them as the standard against which we assess our actions. To cultivate an enduring sense of brotherhood for the sake of Allah ﷻ, we must actively work against greed and selfishness. True success lies in selflessness and the ability to uplift our community. Reflecting upon our experiences, it is essential to act as Ansar (helpers) to one another, especially in times of calamity faced by the Muslim ummah worldwide.

Commitment to Sacrifice

Life is a sacred trust bestowed upon us by Allah ﷻ, and it is our responsibility to utilize this trust in service to Him and our community. This profound obligation emphasizes the importance of prioritizing our faith (Iman) and communal responsibilities over the fleeting allure of material gains. Our lives, along with our resources, are not simply possessions; they are entrusted to us for the purpose of engaging in righteousness and contributing to the welfare of humanity.

Allah ﷻ makes this expectation clear, stating in the Qur'an:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَىٰ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ بِأَنَّ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ



“Surely Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their possessions; the price for them shall be Paradise” (9:111).

This divine assurance underscores the reality that our devotion and sacrifices in this life hold immense value in the eyes of Allah ﷻ. Thus, a believer should strive toward this holy goal, recognizing that the ultimate return for their efforts lies in Allah's ﷻ mercy and forgiveness.

Additionally, Imam al-Banna (رحمة الله) emphasizes that the practice of charity (نَفَقَة) serves as a concrete expression of this trust. By deducting small amounts from our expenditures to support those in need, we not only nurture the spirit of generosity but also cultivate compassion in our hearts. It is through such acts of giving that our souls are enriched, and this generosity helps to fortify the bonds within our community.

Our role is to understand that success, ultimately, stems from Allah ﷻ. We are merely instruments in the fulfillment of His ﷻ plans, and He alone dictates the timing for victory and achievement. It is through sincere contributions made solely for the sake of seeking Allah's ﷻ pleasure that we witness true growth, both spiritually and communally. Each act of charity, regardless of its size, is magnified by Allah ﷻ, serving as a testament to the unwavering commitment of believers and the collective spirit of the Muslim community.

Urgency for Action and Reform

In the pursuit of upholding Islamic values and principles, there exists a critical need for both personal and societal transformation. As Muslims, we must recognize that individual growth cannot be separated from the reform of the wider community. Our faith calls upon us to not only cultivate our personal relationship with Allah ﷻ but also to actively engage in societal issues that hinder the manifestation of Islamic values in our lives.

When we engage in our duties, we do so firstly for the sake of fulfilling what Allah ﷻ has commanded. The primary motivation must stem from a sincere desire to please Allah ﷻ, not merely in anticipation of personal gain or reward in the Hereafter. While the hope for divine approval and rewards is indeed important, it is crucial that our actions are focused on obedience to Allah's ﷻ will above all else. This perspective fosters a sense of humility and purpose in our endeavors. When we prioritize our duties as acts of worship, we form a strong foundation for optimistic intentions. As long as our actions align with Allah's ﷻ commands and fulfill the necessary conditions, we can attain His ﷻ approval. Recognizing that the rewards for our efforts are ultimately in the control of Allah's ﷻ should inspire us to approach our duties with sincerity and commitment, knowing that our true success is defined by our adherence to His ﷻ guidance.

The urgency for action and reform within our personal lives and society at large cannot be overstated. It is a call for each believer to contribute positively to their surroundings while striving for continuous personal improvement. By emphasizing the importance of brotherhood and unity, we reinforce our collective resolve to uphold Islamic values and engage in meaningful reform. As we navigate challenges in contemporary society, it is important to remember that our commitment to Islam requires dedication, solidarity, and a sincere effort to uplift both ourselves and our communities. It is through cooperative action and unwavering faith in Allah ﷻ that we will be able to effect change, foster a strong Islamic identity, and work towards a brighter future for the Ummah. Therefore, let us act with urgency, embracing our responsibilities and fulfilling our roles as servants of Allah ﷻ, united in purpose.

Seven Steps to Reviving Our Ummah

Imam Hassan al-Banna (رحمة الله) invites every Muslim to renew their commitment to fostering a healthy Islamic society through seven essential steps. These characteristics are vital in building a community that reflects Islamic values and promotes mutual support. Let us elaborate on each step.

Pride in Serving Allah ﷻ: First and foremost, take pride in your identity as a servant of Allah ﷻ. Recognize that being part of Allah's ﷻ chosen community is a privilege and a responsibility. This sense of pride is foundational to our faith and should be embraced without hesitation or shame. As believers, we accept and uphold the tenets of Islam, including its rules, without hesitation. It is essential to ground our understanding in the belief that our tasks are divinely ordained, emphasizing that our actions stem from our commitment to Allah's ﷻ commands rather than our personal judgments.

Appreciation of the Task: Appreciate the immense responsibility that comes with being a believer and prepare yourself for it. Each of us must recognize that while we may belong to a collective group, our accountability before Allah ﷻ is individual. On the Day of Judgment, we will stand alone and be questioned about our beliefs and actions. Therefore, it is imperative to engage actively in our individual spiritual journeys, making conscious efforts to fulfill our duties and contribute to the community.

Accept the Consequences: It is crucial to understand the significance of the consequences of our actions in this life and the Hereafter. The focus should not solely be on immediate results but rather on the sincerity and effort we invest in our tasks. Are we making an effort to improve ourselves, abide by Islamic teachings, and contribute to the Ummah? Recognizing that our trials and efforts shape our character and faith is central to our growth.

Self-Reform: The cornerstone of fulfilling our commitments lies in self-reform. Start by aligning your thoughts and actions with the Qur'an and Sunnah. Without a solid foundation of spiritual and ethical principles, no serious work can be accomplished. Each individual must take the initiative to look inward, reforming their character and beliefs to reflect the teachings of Islam. This personal transformation is essential for fostering a thriving community.

True Brotherhood: Believe genuinely that every Muslim is your brother or sister, sharing in both their joys and struggles. Recognize that every land where “La ilaha illallah Muhammad Rasool Allah” – (لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ) is proclaimed should be seen as a sacred space worthy of defense and support. Engage actively in efforts that benefit Muslim communities, understanding that the pursuit of Jannah requires dedication, perseverance, and continuous self-improvement.

- It is important to recognize that trials and mistakes are integral aspects of life. Rather than using these challenges as excuses for inactivity, we should embrace them as opportunities for growth. When mistakes occur, rectify them and move forward with renewed commitment, as those who fail to act often miss significant opportunities for progress.

Islamic Systems as Foundation: Firmly hold the belief that any societal system not grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah will not deliver genuine happiness or success. Imam al-Banna (رحمة الله) emphasized that without a foundational basis in Islamic teachings, systems will fail to address the deeper needs of humanity. It is critical to approach discussions about societal systems with this foundation, ensuring that any proposed changes align with the principles of Islam.

- A significant aspect of this commitment is the continuous reform of laws and practices to be in accordance with the Qur'an. We must recognize the need for justice and equitable treatment as outlined in Islamic teachings, and not be swayed by societal pressures to deviate from these principles.

Hope and Revival: In every effort, maintain a spirit of hope and a commitment to continuous improvement. Recognize that the responsibility to create change starts with the individual. True transformation in society will arise when individuals align their actions with the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. To rise as a community, we must embody four essential traits: unwavering resolve (إرادة), loyalty, the willingness to sacrifice, and a strong and sincere faith in what we know to be true. By internalizing these principles and committing to personal and collective growth, we can contribute to the revival of the Ummah and establish a thriving Islamic society.

Conclusion

Together, by integrating these seven characteristics into our lives, we reaffirm our commitment to serving Allah ﷻ and supporting our communities in reflecting the true teachings of Islam. This reflection on Imam al-Banna (رحمة الله)'s letter *"To what do we call humanity"*, guides the reader through a framework to understand Islam as a balanced and comprehensive way of life which integrates personal righteousness with societal obligations and calls for a revival of Islamic values as a means for contributing to societal development towards Truth.