

Answer to those who say "I am still young. I will become religious when I am old."

Indifference and apathy, two features that mark today's lifestyle, influence both the domain of religion and all other aspects of life. According to a prevalent understanding based upon people's observations of daily life, Islam is the religion of elderly people who come together every now and then to pray. Therefore, they consider religion to be a means of relief and tranquility when faced with grief and trouble, or when close to death. According to this distorted outlook, adhering to religion while still young and when one can make the most of life is somewhat like being buried before one dies. Under the influence of such thinking, those who still hold religious beliefs and respect religion should postpone living by it until they are old.

But, as with other issues, there is a problem here, one that arises from the fact that information about Islam is gathered not from the Qur'an but from unreliable resources, ignorant people, random relatives, or media outlets. First of all, the true Islam described in the Qur'an is not a religion only for elderly people; on the contrary, it holds everyone responsible for their deeds from the time they are able to distinguish right from wrong. Furthermore, elderly people may find it more difficult to observe many acts of worship due to physical weakness and sicknesses.

Indeed, youth is one of Allah's greatest blessings. It would be a great display of disrespect to turn away from Him at a time when people are at their mental and physical peaks. If people do not undertake their responsibilities of enjoining good and forbidding evil, communicating Allah's message, and glorifying Him when they are young, strong, and healthy, how can they accomplish such duties when they are old and weak?

In fact, Allah praises the young people of faith who submit to Him wholeheartedly, as the verses below indicate:

When the youths took refuge in the cave and said: "Our Lord, give us mercy directly from You and open the way for us to right guidance in our situation." So We sealed their ears with sleep in the cave for a number of years. Then We woke them up again so that we might see which of the two groups would better calculate the time they had stayed there. We will relate their story to you with truth. They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance. We fortified their hearts when they stood up and said: "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and Earth, and We will not call upon any deity apart from Him. We would, in that case, have uttered an abomination." (Qur'an, 18:10-14)

During the time of Prophet Musa (Moses) (pbuh), only a small group of young people followed him:

No one believed in Musa, except [some] offspring [i.e., youths] among his people, out of fear that Pharaoh and the elders would persecute them. Pharaoh was high and mighty in the land. He was one of the profligate. (Qur'an, 10:83)

Many of the Prophets undertook this important duty when they were young. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) (pbuh), one of these noble men who struggled against his idolatrous people, earned a reputation among them. Indeed, the prominent people of his tribe said: **"We heard a young man mentioning them (our deities). They call him Ibrahim."** (Qur'an, 21:60)

The Qur'an does not specify a certain age for assuming one's religious responsibilities. However, people are held liable after they gain consciousness and attain mental maturity. As nothing can guarantee another five minutes

of life to a person, how can someone decide to be irreligious while young and then fulfill his or her religious obligations when old? Noone has guaranteed that he or she will live so long. As stated in the Qur'an:

Truly Allah has knowledge of the Hour, sends down abundant rain, and knows what is in the womb. And no self knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no self knows in what land it will die. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (Qur'an, 31:34)

Do the people of the cities feel secure against Our violent force coming down on them in the night, while they are asleep? Or do the people of the cities feel secure against Our violent force coming down on them in the day, while they are playing games? Do they feel secure against Allah's devising? No one feels secure against Allah's devising except those who are lost. (Qur'an, 7:97-99)

The Qur'an describes the grievous end of those who turn a blind ear to Allah's call when they are young, strong, and healthy in the following verses:

On the Day when legs are bared and they are called upon to prostrate, they will not be able to do so. Their eyes will be downcast, darkened by debasement, for they were called upon to prostrate when they were in full possession of their faculties. (Qur'an, 68:42-43)

Some people hold a superstitious belief that they can make the most of life when young and then repent before death. Clearly, this mistaken idea stems from a lack of knowledge and a lifestyle that is far from religion, for it is sheer insincerity toward Allah. Actually, this is the same as saying: "I can commit all forms of sins, engage in any evil, or transgress Allah's limits and then, toward the end of my life, repent and attain the afterlife." But Allah, Who knows what is concealed in hearts, informs us that such an insincere mentality can never succeed and that He will never accept the repentance of such people, for:

There is no repentance for people who persist in doing evil until death comes to them and who then say: "Now I repent," nor for people who die as unbelievers. We have prepared for them a painful punishment. (Qur'an, 4:18)

Those who are devoid of such wisdom and thus fail to appreciate the extent of Allah's knowledge take it for granted that once they repent, Allah will forgive them and let them enter Paradise. They assume that they can deceive Allah, just as they deceive people in this life. Yet such people only deceive themselves and eventually fall into a desperate situation. At an unexpected time, death will seize them and start them on a journey that has no end. Meanwhile, they still maintain that stealthy mentality. This impudent yet desperate struggle is related in the Qur'an, as follows:

If only you could see the evildoers hanging their heads in shame before their Lord: "Our Lord, we have seen and we have heard, so send us back again and we will act rightly. Truly we now have certainty." [Allah replies:] "Had We so willed, We could have given guidance to everyone, but now My Words are shown to be true: that I shall fill up Hell entirely with jinn and human beings. So taste it. Because you forgot the meeting of this Day, We have forgotten you. Taste the punishment of eternal timelessness for what you did." (Qur'an, 32:12-14)

When death comes to one of them, he says: "My Lord, send me back again so that perhaps I may act rightly regarding the things I failed to do!" No indeed! It is just words he utters. Before them there is a barrier until the Day they are raised up. (Qur'an, 23:99-100)

In the Qur'an, Allah provides guidance to believers so that they can avoid such an irreversible and irrecoverable end:

Give from what We have provided for you before death comes to one of you and he says: "My Lord, if only you would give me a little more time so that I can give alms and be one of the righteous!" Allah will not give anyone more time, once their time has come. Allah is aware of what you do. (Qur'an, 63:10-11)

O you who believe, heed Allah the way He should be heeded and do not die except as Muslims. (Qur'an, 3:102)

O you who believe, heed Allah and let each self look to what it has sent forward for tomorrow. Heed Allah. Allah is aware of what you do. (Qur'an, 59:18)

A close look at these verses reveal that the attitude that we have been discussing is not based upon the utter denial of Allah, but upon the failure to appreciate Him with the appreciation due to Him. In other words, those who employ this attitude fail to heed Allah and observe the limits that He has set as one should. People may accept Allah's being; however, being aware of His infinite power, wisdom, knowledge, as well as acknowledging that He controls all affairs at every moment, that no one is guaranteed security against His punishment, is wholly a different thing. Satan has firm faith in Allah's being, yet rebels against Him. The Qur'an refers to those who accept Allah's being and yet fail to appreciate Him with the appreciation due to Him and become rebellious, as follows:

Say: "Who provides for you out of heaven and Earth? Who controls hearing and sight? Who brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living? Who directs the whole affair?" They will say: "Allah." Say: "So will you not then do your duty?" That is Allah, your Lord, the Truth, and what is there after truth except misguidance? So how have you been distracted? In that way the Word of your Lord is realized against those who are deviators, in that they do not believe. (Qur'an, 10:31-33)

If you asked them who created them, they would say: "Allah!" So how have they been perverted? (Qur'an, 43:87)