



25. Being Outstanding

Delivered by His Eminence
ash-Shaykh Su'ood ash-Shuraym
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All praise is due to Allaah, the Most Great, the Most Exalted, the Most Majestic, and the One whose retribution is severe. To Him alone belong complete perfection, complete beauty, and the right to be worshipped. He does what He wills with His creation, and everything throughout the heavens and the earth continually proclaims His perfection. I bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped except Allaah alone without any partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is Allaah's worshipping servant and Messenger. That Messenger had the finest qualities, was granted concise articulate speech, overlooked wrong done to himself, and prohibited harm and disputing. May Allaah grant an abundance of commendation and protection to His Messenger, as well as to the Messenger's Companions, family, and all who continue following their path and guidance until the Day of Resurrection.

My dear audience, you must observe taqwaa of your Lord as He rightfully deserves (i.e. by fulfilling all His commands and avoiding all His prohibitions), you must grasp onto Islaam firmly, and you must implore Allaah to keep you steadfast in adhering to His religion and the Sunnah of His Prophet. You must do those things in order to be among the people who will attain the success of being allowed to see Allaah in Jannah, the abode of His obedient servants in the hereafter. **((Mankind, you must worship your Lord who created you and created those before you, so that you would become people who observe taqwaa of Allaah))** [2:21].

Servants of Allaah, there is no individual who is free of faults, and that is the way Allaah decreed things to be for all individuals throughout His creation. Among people's faults, there is none more detrimental than an individual remaining too negligent to achieve completion and be outstanding even though he is fully able to achieve that for himself.

Servants of Allaah, being an outstanding is an objective sought by every community whose level of awareness is high, and by every diligent individual. It is one of the aims established and emphasized by Islaam. The teachings of Islaam make it clear that what really makes something outstanding is its quality, not merely its quantity. Allaah, the Most Majestic, said that He created death and life **((in order to examine you and make known which of you performs the best deeds))** [67:2], and He did not say "the most deeds." This is because what truly matters is reality, not just appearance. There is also an old adage to the effect that the real milk lies beneath the foam on the surface.

Servants of Allaah, being an outstanding individual does not involve exaggeration or overburdening oneself. Rather, it lies in having firm resolve and putting in necessary effort, since every soul possesses the elements required to be outstanding, and each individual has the potential willpower to achieve that objective. There is no person who lacks the potential to be outstanding. However, people vary in how effectively they uncover that potential, how much or little they remain heedless about it, how well they seize opportunities to nurture it, and how aware they are about the rewards that Allaah grants those who are outstanding. Just as punitive measures inhibit a person from the blameworthy, rewards provide the best encouragement for him to make the firm resolve to be outstanding. Allaah has only granted people sound intellects and healthy bodies in order for those to assist people in harnessing their potential to be outstanding individuals. People are at different levels in their minds, physical abilities, and standards of living. However, every single person among them is still able to be an outstanding individual with what Allaah has made available to him. A farmer is not the same as a doctor,



but each one is capable of being outstanding at what he does. A scholar of fiqh is not the same as a scribe, but each one is able to be outstanding in his respective field.

In reality, being outstanding is not a value that is absolute, that is applicable in only one way to every single person. On the contrary, each person has a way of being outstanding that applies to him. Furthermore, it does not entail being absolutely perfect. Just because one cannot attain perfection does not mean he is to do nothing at all. It is better to be late in reaching an outstanding level than to never reach that level at all. If a person is unable to be at the forefront, he should make an effort to not be at the end. The way a person might end up being outstanding would be to not fail at a time when those who fail are many, and the way he would not be outstanding is to fail at a time when those who succeed are many. Failure is not equivalent with making mistakes, since mistakes are inescapable steps along the path to being outstanding. It is not blameworthy to merely make a mistake. What is truly blameworthy is repeatedly making the same mistake the same way. The Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) said, “A person of eemaan is not to be stung from the same hole twice.” This was collected by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim.

Additionally, a person is to keep his aim high and not place a ceiling on how outstanding he can be. When high aspirations take on the challenges that allow people to rise, they would not be pleased to stop short of reaching the stars.

Servants of Allaah, the true meaning of being outstanding is to make optimal use of what one has. It does not involve going beyond one’s abilities to accomplish anything impossible. Each individual is best aware about the areas in which he can be outstanding, as well as those to which he does not belong. The Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) himself alluded to this meaning when he sensed certain strengths in some of his Companions.

There was an instance when one of them came and said, “Messenger of Allaah, the supererogatory directives of Islaam have become many for me. Therefore, I request that you inform me about something comprehensive to which I can continuously adhere.” He replied, “Ensure that your tongue remains moist with thikr of Allaah.” [saheeh] This was collected by at-Tirmitheeh.

Aboo Tharr (may Allaah be pleased with him) said, “I had once asked, Messenger of Allaah, will you not make use of me in a position of leadership?” He then patted my shoulder and said, ‘Aboo Tharr, you are a weak individual. What you asked for is a major trust, and it will be a source of disgrace and regret for people on the Day of Resurrection except for those who give it its due and fulfil all that is entrusted to them.’” This was collected by Muslim.

Servants of Allaah, we understand from the preceding that a weak individual cannot be outstanding when it comes to managing things because that requires strength to face challenges, and wisdom in overcoming obstacles. Being outstanding in management does not come about merely by wishing or making nice-sounding suggestions. It comes about by having ideas that are realistic and which one is strong enough to accomplish. A person who lacks a certain thing cannot give that thing to anyone else. A discerning individual does not overdo things in order to contradict his own nature and do things other than the ones that he does well; otherwise, he would fall short in them more often than get them right, particularly at times that require proficiency. There is a narration which states that “Allaah indeed loves that when anyone among you performs an action, he does it proficiently.” [saheeh. See as-Saheehah (1113)]. That proficiency is part of being outstanding which, in turn, leads to progress. A fact accepted by all is that civilization does not come about without being outstanding. Furthermore, being outstanding is a key quality that drives invention. The foremost generations of Islaam only scaled great heights due to being outstanding individuals who furthered the various branches of knowledge in their era such that others became dependent upon them. They attained prominence in areas of law,



governance, administration, medicine, physics, and other realms of knowledge and industry which humanity has benefitted from greatly.

During the time of the foremost generations of Islaam, one of the key features of being outstanding was giving due consideration to respective fields of specialization, and this is because overstepping one's area of expertise leads to errors. In that regard, ibn Hajar (may Allaah have mercy upon him) commented that "when a person speaks outside his area of expertise, he will say many strange things." [Fath al-Baaree 3/584]. There is no doubt that specialization fosters the expertise which leads to proficiency, discovery, and creativity. It also limits the chaos that results from conflicting with other specializations, especially in the event that there is incompatibility between them. Circumstances among the Salaf (foremost generations) of our Ummah show that individuals were outstanding in various areas that complemented each other based on what Allaah blessed them with. Zayd ibn Thaabit was outstanding in learning languages, and he acquired mastery of the Syriac language in fifteen days. Aboo Hurayrah was outstanding in memorizing the ahaadeeth of the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection), and he narrated more than four thousand of them. Khaalid ibn al-Waleed was outstanding in leading armies due to his military expertise, and Allaah's Messenger (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) had even called him "the unsheathed sword of Allaah." It was narrated that the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) said, "Zayd has the most knowledge among you about inheritance." It was also authentically narrated that the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) had said Hassaan ibn Thaabit was the most proficient of the Companions in poetry, that 'Alee was most knowledgeable in judicial matters, that Mu'aath had the most knowledge of the permissible and impermissible, and that Aboo 'Ubaydah was the most trustworthy individual of this Ummah...



All praise is due to Allaah, the Lord of all creation, and I implore Him to grant commendation and protection to the most noble of His Prophets and Messengers. The best speech is the Book of Allaah and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection). The worst of things are those which are invented and then claimed to be part of Islaam. Every such invention is considered bid'ah, and every bid'ah is misguidance. You must also remain with the jamaa'ah (collective of Muslims who adheres to what is correct) because the hand of Allaah is over the jamaa'ah.¹ If anyone breaks away from it, doing so will take him to the hellfire.

May Allaah grant all of you His protection. You must also realize that no matter how proficient and outstanding a person becomes, complete perfection belongs to Allaah alone and no individual is infallible except for His Messenger (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection). The objective of being outstanding is to come as close as possible to doing all that is correct, reaping fruits while they are ripe and have not withered, and to be honoured with uplifting our Ummah in front of all others. The individuals of our Ummah are the ones who make up its collective, and the potential for being outstanding that each one of them has should not be squandered. It must also always be borne in mind that being outstanding does not involve pretentiousness. Sound thinking dictates that an individual know his true ability, be the way that Allaah made him, and let others see him as they know him to be without pretending to be something else. There are people who have sought to be outstanding by pursuing incorrect channels and they eventually failed to achieve their objective. There are many who try to overdo attempting to copy the strides of others but did not become outstanding by doing so, and they also lost their own stride which Allaah created them with.

¹ See Jaami' at-Tirmithee (2166), Sunan an-Nasaa'ee (4020). Graded saheeh by al-Albaanee.



In addition, if Allaah blesses someone to be outstanding, that person must beware of becoming conceited and arrogant. Being truly outstanding comes from an individual performing his own tasks with resolve and without depending on others. It does not come from climbing on top of others by stealing their distinctions and claiming them as his own. It also does not come from seeking to monopolize prominence in the event that anyone else shares with him in being outstanding. Such negative attitudes are, in fact, tantamount to falsifying realities and pretending to be what one is not. We seek refuge with Allaah from such things, especially in light of the fact that the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) said, “Pretending to have what one lacks is like draping oneself in two robes of falsehood.” This was collected by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim. Therefore, a Muslim who is content and aware is someone who, if unable to be outstanding himself, does not let that make him refrain from being a stepping stone for others to become outstanding. In an authentic hadeeth, the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) stated, “It may well be the case that a person may convey words to someone else who understands them even better than himself.”