

# The Hisbah Principle in Islam

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The Hisbah principle is a historical conceptual framework that encapsulates the command of Allah (SWT) as instructed in the Qur'an and Sunnah. In a world where corruption, oppression and immorality are constantly on the rise, we are faced with the question of what constitutes our humanity? To what extent have we contributed to the societal detriment that we are currently facing? The purpose of this paper is to encourage introspection, identifying human purpose and in retrospect, highlighting the Hisbah principle of ethical conduct. Through understanding and implementation of the Hisbah principle we can create discipline in every aspect that governs the Muslim Ummah for the benefit of humanity at large. This paper serves as a reminder of our origin and purpose, which is based on religious teachings that support good character while simultaneously forbidding that which is evil. Contrary to this, the current ideologies, as inculcated by Western norms, promotes secularism, greed, selfish behaviour, materialism, and immorality, which has infiltrated all aspects of our society and is the driving force behind the many forms of corruption seen in politics, education, healthcare, and social justice around the world. It seems we have forgotten the essence of life on earth and the duties we collectively share. Therefore, in order to achieve the betterment of our purpose in this life and in the Hereafter, it is imperative to implement the practice of the Hisbah principle, as stated in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

**Key words:** *Qur'an, Sunnah, Hisbah Principle*

## Introduction

Amongst the important ideologies which has served a pivotal role in maintaining the Islamic ethos through the ages, is the hisbah principle. This paper expands upon this principle and examines its roots back to Prophet (SAW), the Khulafa-ur-Rashidun, and how it was institutionalized during the Golden Islamic Age which was dominant until the thirteenth century. It also makes an impassionate call that the Muslim Ummah should seriously look at reimplementing this important principle.

## 1. THE HISBAH PRINCIPLE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE QUR'AN AND SUNNAH

The hisbah principle can be interpreted as being “rewarded by Allah (SWT), for enjoining good and forbidding evil” (al-amar bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy an al-munkar), to ensure that Allah (SWT) injunctions in keeping with the Qur'an and Sunnah are established.

Whilst the words “al-amar bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy an al-munkar” - inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong, has been included in various verses of the Qur'an, the injunction specific to the hisbah principle is highlighted in Surah Al-Imran-verse 104:

*“Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity”.*

In addition to the above verse and within the context of the Hisbah principle verse 110 from Surah Al-Imran mentions:

*“Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah (SWT). If only the People of the Book (Torah and Injeel) had faith, it was best for them; among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors”.*

The above verse emphasizes the requirement for Muslims to stay on the right path and not to go astray.

Elaborating on the words “*Let there arise out of you a group of people*”, highlights that although all Muslims are instructed to “*enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong*”, the implementation of the hisbah principle is not necessarily incumbent on every Muslim, but specific to “a group of people”, dependent on their authority and influence.

Referring to the hisbah principle within the context of the Sunnah, the two ahadith below mentions:

*“If anyone of you has seen any wrongful acts have taken place, then you must stop it with your hands, if you are not able to do so, and then use your tongue, and if you still not able, then use your heart to hate it. It is the weakest faith of you”.* (Sahih Muslim 49)

*“The Messenger of Allah (SWT) said: ‘There is no people among whom sins are committed in their presence whilst they are stronger and of a higher status (i.e., they have the power and ability to stop the sinners) and they do not change them, but Allah will send His punishment upon them all.’* (Musnad Ahmad 19253/Sunan Ibn Majah 4009)

Whilst the first hadith above reaffirms that every Muslim should be committed to “*enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong*”, the second hadith elaborates that those individuals who “have the power to stop it” will be held accountable.

The above two ahadiths confirms that whilst every Muslim should be “*enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong*”, the responsibility of the hisbah principle is limited to those in authority and influence.

## 2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HISBAH PRINCIPLE IN ISLAM

The development of the hisbah principle can be traced to the period of the Prophet (SAW) as well as the Khulafa-ur-Rashidun.

Abu Hurayrah (RA) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (SWT) passed by a pile of food. He put his fingers in it and felt wetness. He (SAW) said: “*O, owner of the food! What is this? The owner replied: 'It was rained upon O Messenger of Allah.'* He (SAW) said: *'Why not put it on top of the food so the people can see it?'* Then He (SAW) said: *'Whoever cheats, is not one of us.'* (Jami` at-Tirmidhi 1315). To ensure honesty and integrity of trade in markets, Prophet (SAW) appointed Sa`id ibn Sa`id ibn Al-`Aas after the conquest in Makkah to oversee a Makkan market ([www.islamstory.com](http://www.islamstory.com)).

‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab, during his period as Khalifa in the city of Madinah, not only implemented the hisbah principle by drawing people to the straight path, prevent fraud and warn against it, and touring the market carrying a stick to warn those who sold goods at exorbitant prices, but also implemented changes in the administration of the economic, agricultural, military, political, and educational system. In addition, he appointed several officers, based on their respective expertise and scope of duty to ensure that the Hisbah principle was applied effectively. He appointed al-Saib bin Yazid, together with Abdullah bin Utbah bin Masud to supervise the business activities in Madinah. Female officers including Syedah Al-Syifa and Al-Syedah Samra binti Nahik were also appointed ([www.islamstory.com](http://www.islamstory.com); Hamarneh & Anees, 1983; Ibrahim, 2019; Shah, et al., 2013).

It has also been reported that al-Harith bin al-Hakam was appointed by Uthman bin 'Affan as an enforcement officer in Madinah, where he supervised business activities (Shah, et al., 2013).

The Hisbah principle was also contributed to by Ali bin Abi Talib, when Malik b. Ashtar was appointed as ruler of Egypt, as mentioned below.

*“When Malik b. Ashtar was appointed by the ruler of Egypt, Sayidina Ali ordered that zakat was collected, and prosperity and wellbeing taken care of. He ordered that everyone feared Allah (SWT) through the practice of punishing accordingly, and having good, noble traditions,*



*emulating examples set by the Prophet Rasulullah (SAW) and abiding to the al-Qur'an"* (Ibrahim, 2019).

This formalisation of the Hisbah principle became an obligation on Muslim rulers, to promote high moral and ethical values in all scopes of life by means of admonition against acts of omission and commission, in keeping with “*enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong*” ([www.islamstory.com](http://www.islamstory.com); Hamarneh & Anees, 1983; Ibrahim, 2019; Shah, et al., 2013).

The Hisbah principle that was initiated during the period of Prophet (SAW) and implemented by the Al-Khulafa-ur-Rashidun, expanded during the Umayyad period, followed by the Abbasid and the Ottoman periods.

### **3. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HISBAH PRINCIPLE**

Whilst the development of the Hisbah principle continued throughout the eras of the four caliphs, (Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Alī (RA), the formalised title of the person responsible to enforce the Hisbah principle – Al-Muhtasib was officially introduced during the Abbasid Dynasty. The Al-Muhtasib operated from an office which became known as the Al-Muhtasib Office. This person was responsible for supervising and maintaining all the administrative activities of a place/city/state, including Islamic rulings, health authority, urbanization, and others. Indeed, such duties were imposed upon the Al- Muhtasib with the authority to ensure that all kinds of activities take place within his area must be in accordance with Shariah teachings. He was also responsible for penalizing wrongdoers who acted against the prescribed rules ([www.islamstory.com](http://www.islamstory.com); Hamarneh & Anees, 1983; Ibrahim, 2019; Shah, et al., 2013).

As a whole, hisbah as a system actually connotes four salient essentials namely Al-Muhtasib (the officer in charge), Al-Muhtasib ‘Alaihi (the offender), Al-Muhtasib Fih (subject-matter of the case) and also Al-Ihtisab (actions taken by Al-Muhtasib). These four salient features, needed to be carried out according to the rules and regulations stipulated in Islamic law (fiqh) (Shah, et al., 2013).

The Muhtasib's jurisdiction expanded to that of having the right to test and select the peoples of professions and trades to determine their proficiency and professionalism in their crafts ([www.islamstory.com](http://www.islamstory.com)).

To facilitate the running of the Al-Muhtasib office, manuals and guidebooks were developed, that defined the scope of responsibilities, and emphasized the unimpeachable moral qualities, and excellent intellectual abilities worthy of meeting the high requirements. The Al-Muhtasib had to be well acquainted with Muslim law, be a man of integrity, impartial in his judgements, ready to exhort the transgressors of the law in truthfulness and execute justice and should also have a wide experience with markets and traders, knowledge of the types of frauds and

adulterations, practiced in various crafts. He stood to defend the person who was wronged or injured and to guide the welfare of the citizens. For his aid, *Al-Muhtasib* selected helpers who were assigned special duties and reported to him. This explains how Muslims applied the doctrines of their religion to improve social conditions and to encourage means for better living and for steady progress (Hamarneh & Anees, 1983).

The above clearly denotes the importance of the Hisbah office, and its involvement in all phases of commercial, social, and moral affairs within a Muslim society.

#### **4. THE HISBAH PRINCIPLE DURING THE GOLDEN ISLAMIC AGE**

The Hisbah office, played an important role in the spread of Islam extending from the Indus in the East to the Atlantic in the West. It continued with the rapid rise of cities with large populations together with the expansion of commerce, industry, and communications, for several centuries in many parts of the Islamic world. During the tenth century, the Hisbah system was established in Egypt, and from there it spread to North Africa. Thereafter, it was introduced in Christian Spain, in the thirteenth century (Hamarneh & Anees, 1983). During this Golden Islamic Age which began in the seventh century and effectively continued until the fifteenth century, the Hisbah principle was the foundation that ensured not only the highest level of morality, social justice, and fairness but also made a significant scientific contribution to humanity (Ahmed, Habib & Richard, 2016).

Although the office of *Al-Muhtasib* continued in Egypt until the reign of Muhammad ‘Ali (1805-1849), the founder of the Khedive dynasty and in the Republic of Syria until 1925 (Hamareneh & Anees, 1983), negative influences from other sources took gradual control over the past few centuries leading to the corruption, oppression and immorality that we are currently facing in this 21st century.

#### **5. THE REVIVAL OF THE HISBAH PRINCIPLE IN THIS CENTURY**

The Western lifestyle, based on a predominantly secular, materialistic system, which began over the past few centuries, and more particularly from the 20th century onwards, through the total control of media, telecommunications as well as the technological development of the computer age, has gradually but completely dominated most nations of the world.

Whilst the technological advancements have benefited the world as we know it, including communications, essential services (both public and private), commercial accessibility and to a certain extent in healthcare, unfortunately, the promotion of materialism, anti-religious and more specifically anti-Islamic values, have been accepted as a way of life by most people. Sadly, this extends to the Muslim Ummah as well.



The current status inevitably emphasizes on individuality and focuses on a selfish approach of each person wanting the best for himself/herself, irrespective of how it will and can harm the next person, nor the consequences on the self in this world and the Hereafter. This is totally opposite to *“enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong”*.

In addition to the above, the Western system is, financially based on Riba (interest), promotes Darwin’s theory of evolution, which negates that Allah (SWT) has created everything in perfection. Another concern is the influence of the Western system in education, which remains devoutly secular, promoting schools of unbelief and values that are the very antithesis of the belief system of Deen-ul Islam (Association of Muslim Professionals of South Africa, 2021).

Moreover, over the past few decades, the depth of immorality, and the promotion of lifestyle and social norms that are completely against the Qur’an and Sunnah is of major concern. In keeping with the Hisbah principle, these elements of the Western system need to be challenged and exposed as being sinful, and even satanic.

Whilst members of the Ummah have gone astray, there is, and always has been, good actions and high moral values from many Muslims, individually and organizations, with respect to charity, Allah (SWT) consciousness and retaining the teachings of the Qur’an and Sunnah. Also, there is an increase in Islamic education that has created awareness amongst many young Muslims, which remains largely at an individual level, with failings on higher levels, especially those who have authority and influence. More concerning is that whilst the Hisbah principle is intended for people of authority to guide, protect, and support the Ummah, many organizations are unable to realize and see the truth. An even greater tragedy is that many of the Muslim organizations, states and countries are now actually colluding with this Western system.

On a personal note, I was also a victim of Western domination. Only after the age of 40 did I become aware of the Muslim contribution, in all fields, including medicine, during the Golden Islam Age. More significantly, the limitation of Western medicine became apparent to me only in 1990, when my youngest daughter was diagnosed with fibrosing alveolitis, the cause/s of which I was told were unknown. This made me realize that Western medicine, based on the Germ theory and the Doctrine of Specific Aetiology, as well as the side effects of chemical medication is contrary to the holistic approach of the founders of medicine Hippocrates, Galen, and Ibn Sina. Sadly, the practice of Western medicine is completely opposite to the Hippocratic principles in medicine. My daughter’s illness and further research into the philosophical principles of Tibb led to my journey to Tibb al-Nabawi.

Finally, and to highlight that there is so much information that we as Muslims are not aware of, I only became aware of the Hisbah principle a few months ago, from a research paper in the book “Health Sciences in Early Islam”.



## **6. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

What is required by Muslims at all levels is to embrace and implement the Hisbah principle. At an individual level, being constantly aware of “enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong” should be embraced by all of us, and reminding our family and friends of the Hisbah principle. This will raise our Iman (faith) to a higher level for which Allah (SWT) will most certainly reward us.

For those individuals or groups with authority and influence, the Hisbah principle should be taken seriously so that the well-being of Islam can be felt by the society at large and the Muslim Ummah in particular.

May Allah (SWT) have mercy on us and Insha-Allah by implementing the Hisbah principle at all levels Allah (SWT) will bless us with a peaceful life.



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