

NY Resolutions

WHY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS DO NOT WORK
(AND THE ISLAMIC ALTERNATIVE THAT DOES)

Any step towards self-improvement must be applauded and encouraged. With this in mind, we see that people often use the new year to make firm promises for the next twelve months. The period is viewed as an opportunity for a 'fresh start'. Viewed in this matter, New Year's Resolutions are not a bad thing.

Having said that, we also know that such resolutions seldom work. In a recent poll, it was found that on average, only 16% of people stick to their resolutions. The remaining 84% give up between one and six weeks. So the solemn promises made in January fizzle out by the middle of February.

Why New Year's Resolutions typically do not work

The experts have provided numerous reasons, and they can be summarised in the following points:

- a. People set unrealistic goals in January.
- b. Once people set up resolutions, they do not have a means to track or review the progress made.
- c. After the initial period of hope in January, people quickly lose motivation and commitment to their goals.
- d. Thanks to their busy schedule, people simply forget.

What is the Islamic alternative?

Like with all areas of life, we find that Islam has a perfect alternative and certainly this is the case with New Year's Resolutions. It can be encapsulated in one beautiful saying of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ:

“Whosoever has two equal days then he is in loss.”

من استوى يوماه فهو مغبون

In simple terms, our Prophet ﷺ asked us to take each day as it comes. He asked us to compare our output and productivity to yesterday. If a Muslim can improve on yesterday - even by the finest of margins - then he is heading in the correct direction. If his work is less than yesterday, then he is heading for loss and needs to take actions to correct this. In short, all we have to do is improve on yesterday.

If a Muslim desires to improve his physical health, then his focus should be on simply improving on the day before. If he did 10,000 steps today, his aim should be at least 10,001 steps tomorrow. If a person desires to cut down his screen-time on the smart phone, he should compare his progress to the previous day alone. If a Muslim promises to recite the Qur'ān more, then he monitors his progress on a daily basis; so long as he recites more than the previous day, he is making progress.

The benefits of this approach

- a. Because a Muslim is now acting upon the saying of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ he is gaining an immense reward for acting upon his Sunnah. This alone is sufficient encouragement for us to adopt this approach to self-development.
- b. The beauty of this approach is that it is memorable. Everyone can remember what they did yesterday, so it is easier to track and review.
- c. Many resolutions are long term ones that cannot be achieved overnight. They require a sustained effort. Success is more likely with Islam's method because it involves fulfilling bigger goals on a day-by-day approach. It is bite-size by nature and Allāh loves

this. In a ḥadīth recorded by Imām al-Bukhārī, the Prophet ﷺ said:

“The most beloved acts to Allāh are the continuous ones, even if they are a small amount.”

أَحَبَّ الْأَعْمَالِ إِلَى اللَّهِ أَدْوَمُهَا وَ
إِنْ قَلَّ

- d. In terms of spiritual development, we often exert great effort at particular times of the Islamic calendar (Ramaḍān, the Day of ‘Arafa, *Layla Niṣf Sha‘bān* and so on), but then become neglectful for large parts of the year. Adopting the Prophet’s approach stops this, as it is sustained *istiqāma* (steadfastness) throughout our lives.

May Allāh enable us all to act upon the flawless teachings of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, *āmin*.

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