

Ibn Abī Ḥātim. *Tafsīr*.  
 Ibn ‘Ajība. *Baḥr*.  
 Ibn Abī Shayba. *Muṣannaf*.  
 Ibn ‘Ashūr. *Tafsīr*.  
 Ibn ‘Aṭīyya. *Muḥarrar*.  
 Ibn al-Jawzī. *Zād*.  
 Ibn Kathīr. *Tafsīr*.  
 Ibn Mājah. *Sunan*.  
 Ibn Manzūr. *Lisān*.  
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 Māwardī. *Nukat*.  
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**See also:** BEAUTY; BELIEVERS; CALF OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRĀ’ĪL; CANONICAL READINGS; CONTEMPLATION;

COVENANT; CREATION; DISBELIEVERS; IBRĀHĪM, UPON HIM PEACE; INNATE NATURE; KA‘BA; AL-KHADĪR; MOUNTAINS; MERCY; NIGHT AND DAY; OBEDIENCE; PARADISE; PLANTS AND VEGETATION; RESURRECTION; REWARD AND PUNISHMENT; TREE; YA‘QŪB, UPON HIM PEACE; YŪSUF, UPON HIM PEACE.

MUZAFFAR IQBAL

## COMMANDING GOOD

### AND FORBIDDING WRONG

AL-AMR BIL-MA‘RŪF WAL-NAHY ‘AN AL-MUNKAR

This article comprises the following sections: (i) Definitions and usage; (ii) The many ethical categories of *ma‘rūf* and *munkar*; (iii) Context determines specific meaning; (iv) *Amr* and *nahy* as enjoined by Allah Most High, the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, and the Believers; (v) The inverted *amr* and *nahy* of Satan, Pharaoh, and the hypocrites; (vi) Primacy of *amr* and *nahy* and centrality of the *Umma*; (vii) *Amr* and *nahy* as jihad; (viii) Basic method and significance of performing *amr* and *nahy*; (ix) Legal status, qualifications and levels; (x) A collective rather than an individual obligation; (xi) *Ḥisba*: institutional *amr* and *nahy*, its integrals and proprieties; (xii) Monographs; (xiii) Bibliography.

### Definitions and usage

“Sacred law from its first word to its last consists in commanding good and forbidding wrong” (Imām al-Ḥaramayn, *Ghiyāth*, p. 365). “It is the over-arching reference-point (*al-quṭb al-a‘zam*) in the Religion, the foremost concern for which Allah sent forth all of the Prophets” (Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, 4:537, al-Amr bil-ma‘rūf wal-nahy ‘an al-munkar, Preamble). “It is the fundamental principle of the Religion and the caliphate of the Muslims” (Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Aḥkām*, 2:226).

The topic of commanding good and forbidding wrong is formed of four distinct aspects that lexically go back to four stems: *a-m-r* (to command), *n-h-y* (prohibit), *‘-r-f* (know), and *n-k-r* (disavow, disacknowledge).

The stem *a-m-r* points to five principal meanings: any given matter; command as opposed to prohibition; growth and blessing; road sign; and surprise (*al-‘ajab*) (Ibn Fāris, 1:137, *sub a-m-r*). The sense of command occurs 60 times in verbal forms (*amara* and its cognates) and 130 times in nominal forms (*amr* and its cognates) in the Qur‘ān, including *āmirūn* (those who command) (Q 9:112).

The stem *n-h-y* points to the end point of something (Ibn Fāris, 5:359, *sub n-h-y*) while the verb *nahā* (forbid) and its infinitive noun *nahy* (prohibition) are the diametrical opposites of *amara* and *amr* (Farāhīdī, 4:93; Ibn Manzūr, *sub n-h-y*). When the subject of *nahā* is Allah Most High or His Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, the verb is synonymous with *ḥarrama* (to declare unlawful and categorically prohibited in the law) (Saraqūṣī, *Afʿāl*, 3:172, Nūn, al-muʿtall bil-yāʿ fī lām al-fīʿl). The VIII-Form verb *intahā* can thus have either or both of the meanings of “finishing” and “complying with prohibition,” as in the verse, ...*And whatever the Messenger brings you, take it; and whatever he forbids you (nahākum ‘anh), desist from it (intahū)...* (Q 59:7). *N-h-y* and its cognates occur a total of 53 times in all of the above senses, including the expressions *al-nāḥūn*, “those who forbid” (Q 9:112) and *ulī al-nuhā* (sing. *nuhya*) “possessors of virtuous minds” (Q 20:54, 20:128), thus called because “the *nuhya* is the mind that forbids [its possessor] ugly acts” (Rāghib).

The stem *ʿ-r-f* denotes the primary meaning of knowledge (Ibn Sīda), but also visible prominence (Abū ʿUbayda; Ibn Qutayba, *sub Q 7:46*) as well as “continuity (as in *ʿurf*, custom) and tranquility (because the mind is at peace with what is known)” (Ibn Fāris, 4:281, *sub ʿ-r-f*). It appears 70 times in the Qurʾān in seven different forms (*ʿarafa*, *ʿarafa*, *taʿārafa*, *iʿtarafa*, *aʿraf*, *ʿurf* and *maʿrūf*), of which only one, *aʿraf* (sing. *ʿurf*), “heights” (Q 7:46, 48) falls in the category of prominence while everything else falls in that of knowledge. The most frequent term to that effect, the passive participle noun *maʿrūf*, literally “known” and translatable as “universally-shared values,” occurs 38 times in various contexts, such as rights to be respected (Q 2:233; 4:5-7, 25; 33:6), especially in connection with parents (*q.v.*; Q 31:15), the wealth of orphans (*q.v.*; Q 4:6), marriage and divorce (*q.v.*; Q 2:231-241; 65:2, 6), marital cohabitation (Q 4:19), divorcees (Q 2:229, 231; 65:6), blood money (*q.v.*; Q 2:178), deeds (*q.v.*) (2:233-234, 240; 4:25; 31:15; 33:6), language (*q.v.*; Q 2:235, 263; 4:5; 33:32; 47:21), and the proscription of funeral wailing (Q 60:12, *cf.* Mujāhid; Ṭabarī).

The stem *n-k-r* primarily denotes disquieting ignorance (Ibn Fāris, 5:476; Rāghib, *sub n-k-r*) and appears in eleven forms a total of 37 times, of which 20 are in the sense defined as the diametrical opposite of *maʿrūf* (Ibn Sīda; Rāghib; Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, *sub n-k-r*), sixteen of them as *munkar*, “reprehensible matter,” and four times as *nukr/nukur* “spectacular enormity” (Q 18:74, 78; 54:6; 65:8; Farāhīdī, 5:355, *sub n-k-r*; Ibn Qutayba in Samarqandī, *sub Q 18:71*).

All other instances denote change and lack or refusal of recognition (i.e. of truth), whether genuine or affected (see DISBELIEF; REWARD AND PUNISHMENT).

These four stems and their relevant cognates cover an all-encompassing activity closely related to, and in several respects synonymous with, *daʿwa* (see CALLING UNTO ALLAH),

### The many ethical categories of *maʿrūf* and *munkar*

*Maʿrūf* is defined as “any deed that is deemed good” (Zajjāj, *sub Q 31:15*), “every righteousness, justice, and goodness” (Dhahabī, *Juzʿ*, p. 44), as defined by human intellect or, in religious terms, sacred law (*q.v.*) (Rāghib, *sub ʿ-r-f*) alone (Ibn Ḥajar, 10:448, *qawluhu bāb ṭayyib al-kalām*). Insofar as the legal obligation to command and prohibit, *maʿrūf* and *munkar* are exclusively defined in the latter, religious sense, as “the matters sacred law makes obligatory and prohibits respectively” (Haytamī, *Zawājir*, *jihād*, *kabīra* 393-395: *tark al-amr bil-maʿrūf wal-nahy ʿan al-munkar*).

*Munkar* is defined as “every deed sound minds deem ugly or refrain from deeming either ugly or fair, but which sacred law stipulates is ugly” (Rāghib, *sub n-k-r*), “every corruption, rebellion, injustice and indecency” (Dhahabī, *Juzʿ*, p. 44). Thus the wide range of meanings covered by the two terms branch off into a number of other key terms of the Qurʾān. *Maʿrūf* includes *ʿadl* (justice, *q.v.*), *ʿafw* (see FORGIVENESS AND FORBEARANCE), keeping *amānāt* (see TRUSTS), *birr* and *ṣalāh* (see RIGHTEOUSNESS AND VIRTUE), law abidance (*ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*, see LAWFUL AND UNLAWFUL) *iḥsān* (excellence, *q.v.*), *īmān* (see BELIEF), *istiqāma* (uprightness, see GUIDANCE AND MISGUIDANCE), *ṣabr* (see PERSEVERANCE, PATIENCE AND FORTITUDE), *taqwā* (*q.v.*, wariness), *tauba* (see REPENTANCE), *tawḥīd* (*q.v.*, monotheism absolute), and *zuhd* (abstinence), all of which can be subsumed under ethics (*q.v.*).

*Munkar* includes all sins (*q.v.*), not only polytheism (*q.v.*), adultery and fornication (*q.v.*), murder (see KILLING), theft (*q.v.*), drinking wine (see INTOXICANTS) and the rest of the fire-bound enormities (*q.v.*) and indecencies (*fawāḥish*) that all constitute transgressions of the Boundaries of Allah (*q.v.*), but also the non-boundary “minor sins” (*ṣaghāʾir*, sing. *ṣaghīra*, *cf.* Q 18:49) also called “broodings,” *al-lamam* (Q 53:32), in such fledgling acts as craving and wishing, gazing, and talking:

Ibn ʿAbbās said: “I saw nothing resembling *lamam* more than what Abū Hurayra related from the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace: ‘Allah has decreed (*kataba*) for human