

AKHLAQ **(Ethics)**

Lesson 1

Imān & Yaqín vs. Shak

Imān (Faith)

Imān (الإيمان) is loosely defined as ‘faith’. Some people define it as ‘belief’ but that is incorrect. Belief is what you believe with the mind. Faith is what you carry in your heart. Atheists do not *believe* humans have souls or have the ability to realize anything with the heart. They believe everything is just a mental, rational process. Muslims believe the mind is useful in making day-to-day decisions and even comparing things to determine good from bad or right from wrong. But knowing Allāh or understanding spiritual concepts deeply is only possible with the heart or soul because it is a matter of *having faith* and not just believing in words or with the mind and thoughts.

And from the word *imān* we have *mu’min* (المؤمن) and (female) *mu’mina* (المؤمنة), which some translate as ‘believer’. But more accurately it is ‘faithful’.

Imān is a higher level of faith than Islām. A person who says he believes ‘There is no god by Allāh and Muhammad is His Messenger’ may be a Muslim but he can only be a faithful (*mu’min* or *mu’mina*) after his or her actions also show faith in Allāh and submission to Him. When a person becomes a *mu’min* or *mu’mina*, they surrender to Allāh. They don’t challenge the laws of Islam and ask ‘why can’t I do this’ and ‘why is that not allowed’. That is because they don’t think they are doing Allāh a favour by believing (i.e. being a Muslim) or having faith (i.e. being a *Mu’min*). Rather they realize that it is Allāh who has done them a favour by guiding them to the right path.

Reflect on the following āyāt of the Qur’ān:

﴿قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا قُلْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ... إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ. يَمُنُّونَ عَلَيْكَ أَنْ أَسْلَمُوا قُلْ لَا تَمُنُّوا عَلَيَّ إِسْلَامَكُم بَلِ اللَّهُ يَمُنُّ عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْ هَدَاكُمْ لِلْإِيمَانِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ﴾

The Bedouins say, ‘We have faith (*imān*).’ Say, ‘You do not yet have faith (*imān*); rather, say, “We have embraced Islam,” because faith has not yet entered into your hearts...

The faithful (mu'minin) are only those who have attained faith in Allāh and His Apostle and then have never doubted, and who struggle (do jihād) with their possessions □ and their selves in the way of Allāh. It is they who are the truthful.

They count it as a favour to you (O Muhammad) that they have embraced Islam! Say, 'Do not do me any favours with your Islam. Rather, it is Allāh who has done you a favour in that He has guided you to faith, should you be truthful.

- Surah al-Hujurāt, 49:14-15,17

Yaqin (Conviction)

Above the level of imān is the level of *yaqin* (اليقين) (conviction). A *mu'qin* (or *mu'qina*) is one who has total conviction and trust in Allāh. Nothing can shake their faith or trust in Allāh. Even in the bleakest of situations and greatest dangers, their faith (*imān*) does not shake.

Examples of this *yaqin* is seen repeatedly in the lives of Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) like when Rasulullāh (s) is almost killed in the cave on the day of Hijrah or when Imām Ali ('a) sleeps under the shadow of the swords of assassins on night of Hijrah; or Imām Husayn ('a) when he stands alone against 30,000 soldiers in the army of Yazid.

In Surah Al-I Imrān, Allāh describes the people with absolute trust and conviction in these words:

﴿الَّذِينَ قَالَ لَهُمُ النَّاسُ إِنَّ النَّاسَ قَدْ جَمَعُوا لَكُمْ فَاخْشَوْهُمْ فَزَادَهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَقَالُوا
حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ﴾

Those to whom the people said, 'All the people have gathered against you; so fear them.' That only increased them in faith (imān), and they said, 'Allāh is sufficient for us, and He is the best One to trust.'

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:173

You notice that the greater the danger, the more their faith (*imān*) increases and they place their trust in Allāh.

When Nabi Musa ('a) left Egypt with the Children of Israel, some say they were over 100,000 unarmed men, women and children with him. When he got to the sea, the army of Fir'aun surrounded them and came charging towards them to massacre them.

Everyone there was certain this was the end and they will never survive the attack from Fir'aun.

﴿فَلَمَّا تَرَأَى الْجَمْعَانَ قَالَ أَصْحَابُ مُوسَى إِنَّا لَمُدْرَكُونَ﴾

When the two armies sighted each other, the companions of Musa said, 'Indeed we have been caught up.'

- Surah ash-Shu'ara, 26:61

But Nabi Musa ('a) even at that moment did not shake in his faith and conviction. He replied:

﴿قَالَ كَلَّا إِنَّ مَعِيَ رَبِّي سَيَهْدِينِي﴾

He said, 'Certainly not! Indeed my Lord is with me. He will guide me.'

- Surah ash-Shu'ara, 26:62

And it was then that Allāh commanded him to strike the sea and it separated:

﴿فَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى مُوسَى أَنْ اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْبَحْرَ فَانْفَلَقَ فَكَانَ كُلُّ فِرْقٍ كَالطَّوْدِ

الْعَظِيمِ﴾

Thereupon We revealed to Musa: 'Strike the sea with your staff!' So it parted, and each part was as if it were a great mountain.

- Surah ash-Shu'ara, 26:63

When your *yaqin* is so great, Allāh will never let you down. He will even split the sea open to help you achieve your goal. In the case of Imām Husayn ('a), obviously it was his martyrdom (*shahādah*) and blood that would save Islam forever. So he wasn't looking to be saved from physical death. He was looking for his message and sacrifices not to be lost in the desert of Karbala. We are witnesses to the miracle of Karbala even today and how Allāh has kept Imām Husayn ('a)'s message alive and how Imām Husayn ('a) is larger than life itself.

Shak (Doubt)

The opposite of *yaqin* is *shak* (الشك) (doubt). *Shak* is a sign of weak *imān* at best or hypocrisy (*nifāq*) at worst. A Muslim or Mu'min without *yaqin* may sometimes doubt in Allāh or His mercy briefly but soon realizes his or her mistake and repents. A hypocrite never recovers from his or her doubt. The more signs they see, the more they doubt. Nothing convinces them.

Imān, *Yaqin* and *Shak* can vary depending on how much importance we give to our souls and how hard we struggle against our *nafs* (egos). Everything we do physically affects us spiritually. What we eat, wear, say, do, watch, the friends we keep, our thoughts, our career and livelihood, all this and more (i.e. everything we do physically) affects our intention (*niyyah*) and our souls and therefore determines the level of *imān* and *yaqin* vs. *shak* we have.

The best way to understand *imān*, *yaqīn* and *shak* is through the Qur'ān and the words of the ma'sumeen ('a) i.e. from hadith.

Your teacher will only discuss a few of the āyāt of Qur'ān and *ahādith* given below. Thereafter you are encouraged to read and reflect on the rest yourself. You may even want to take one of the hadith and write an essay on it so that you think about it deeply.

Imān (Faith) in Hadith

What is Imān?

1. Rasullāh (s), '*Imān* is to know with the heart, to speak with the tongue and to act with the limbs.'
2. Rasullāh (s), 'The best *imān* is for you to know that Allāh is with you wherever you are.'
3. Imām Ali ('a), '*Imān* is a tree. Its root is conviction (*yaqīn*). Its branches are being Godwary (*taqwa*). Its light (*nur*) is modesty (*hayā*) and its fruit is generosity (*sakhā*).'
4. Imām Ali ('a), '*Imān* is to be patient during afflictions and to be thankful during ease.'
5. Imām al-Bāqir ('a), 'Islam is to accept (the truth) without action. *Imān* is to accept with action.'
6. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'Cursed is the person who claims *imān* is just words without action.'
7. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'The reality of *imān* is that you prefer truth over falsehood even if the truth is harmful to you and the falsehood is beneficial to you (materially).'

Note: This hadith means *imān* is to love and hate everyone and everything for the sake of Allāh only. For example loving someone whom Allāh loves even if he is a stranger and not related to you; and to dislike someone whom Allāh dislikes because of his actions, even if he is a close relative.

What Removes Imān

1. Rasullāh (s), 'When a person's constant and greatest concern is to get more pleasure and engage in more lusts, the sweetness of *imān* is removed from his heart.'

Who is a Mu'min / Mu'mina?

﴿إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ حَقًّا لَهُمْ دَرَجَاتٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ﴾

The faithful are only those whose hearts tremble [with awe] when Allāh is mentioned, and when His signs are recited to them, they increase their faith, and who put their trust in their Lord, maintain the prayer and spend out of what We have provided them. It is they who are truly the faithful. They shall have ranks near their Lord, forgiveness and a noble provision.

- Surah al-Anfāl, 8:2-4

See also the opening āyāt of Surah al-Mu'minun (Surah 23).

1. Rasulullāh (s), 'Whoever has three qualities will taste the sweetness of *Imān*: one who loves nothing more than Allāh and His Messenger; one who would rather be burnt with fire than to turn away from his religion (of Islam); and one who loves and hates others only for the sake of Allāh (i.e. those whom Allāh loves and hates).'
2. Imām Ali ('a), 'A *mu'min* is constantly remembering Allāh and frequently reflecting (on nature and the signs of Allāh). On blessings he gives thanks (to Allāh) and on suffering he bears patience.'
3. Imām Zayn al-Abideen ('a), 'A *mu'min* is pious and obedient to Allāh even when alone and no one is watching; and he gives charity even when he has little. He is patient in suffering and forbearing when angry and he speaks the truth even when afraid.'
4. Imām al-Bāqir ('a), 'A *mu'min* is stronger than a mountain. A mountain can be demolished and moved from its place. But nothing can move a *mu'min* from his religion.'
5. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'A *mu'min* is not overcome by his lust and his stomach does not disgrace him.'

Note: 'stomach' in this hadith means 'greed for food'.

6. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'A *mu'min* is stronger than solid iron. Because iron, when it is put in fire, it changes in shape. But a *mu'min*, if he is killed, brought back to life, then killed again, his heart will still not change.'

Yaqin (Conviction) in Hadith

﴿كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ﴾

No indeed! If you were to know with certain knowledge ('ilm al-yaqin), you would surely see hell. Again, you will surely see it with the eye of certainty ('ayn al-yaqin).

- Surah at-Takāthur, 102:5-7

1. Rasulullāh (s), 'People have not been given anything in this world better than *yaqin* and well-being (*āfiyah*), therefore ask Allāh for these two.'
2. Rasulullāh (s), '*Sabr* (patience) is half of *imān* and *yaqin* is complete *imān*.'
3. Rasulullāh (s), 'The best thing to ever enter a heart is conviction (*yaqin*).'
4. Rasulullāh (s), 'Nabi Isa ('a) used to walk on water. If his *yaqin* was even more, he would have walked in the air and prayed on water.'
5. Imām Ali ('a), 'How great is the achievement of one whose heart is blessed with the glad-tidings of *yaqin*!'
6. Imām Ali ('a), 'To sleep with *yaqin* is better than to pray (*mustahab*) with doubt (*shak*).'
7. Imām Ali ('a), 'Yaqin is the pillar of *imān* (faith).'
8. Imām Ali ('a), 'Sincerity (*ikhlas*) in action comes from having *yaqin*.'
9. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), '*Imān* is better than Islam. And *yaqin* is better than *imān*. There is nothing more precious than *yaqin*.'

Shak (Doubt) in Hadith

1. Imām Ali ('a), 'Doubt (*shak*) is the result of ignorance.'
2. Imām Ali ('a), 'I have never doubted in the Truth ever since it was shown to me.'
3. Imām Ali ('a), 'Doubt (*shak*) extinguishes the light (*nur*) of the heart.'
4. Imām Ali ('a), 'A person does not go astray until his doubt (*shak*) overcomes his conviction (*yaqin*).'
5. *Shak* is form of filth (*rijs*) in the heart. Imām as-Sādiq ('a) has said, the *rijs* (impurity) mentioned in the ayah of tathir (33:33)¹¹ is *shak*. Then said, 'By Allāh, we (the Ahl al-Bayt) never doubt in our Lord, ever!'

¹¹ The translation of the āyah at-tathir is: "Indeed Allāh desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification." (33:33)

Lesson 2

Despair vs. False Hope

Muslims are required to live a balanced life in which they neither fool themselves that they can take wrong advantage of Allāh’s mercy (doing as they please), nor do they lose so much hope in Allāh’s mercy that they give up trying to go to Jannah.

Losing hoping in Allāh’s mercy is called *al-Ya’as* (اليأس) or *al-Qunoot* (القنوط)¹². It literally means ‘To Despair’. And the opposite – false hope or feeling safe from Allāh’s wrath - is called *al-Amn min makrillah* (الأمن من مكر الله). Both these extremes are major sins in Islam. According to some scholars these two are the greatest sins after *shirk* (associating a partner to Allāh).

Despair in Allāh’s Mercy

Shaytān does not really care whether we commit sins or not. What he is really after is that we should no longer have a relationship with Allāh through du’as and istighfār. So he tempts us to sins in the hope that after sinning many times, we finally won’t bother asking Allāh for forgiveness. When we reach a point in life where we feel it is useless to do istighfār and Allāh will never forgive us, that is when Shaytān has truly won our souls and hearts.

A Muslim must believe firmly that no matter how much they have sinned, the mercy, kindness and love of Allāh is still limitless and Allāh is still willing to forgive someone if they turn back to Him – even until the last breathe of their lives. To despair in Allāh’s mercy is a sign of disbelief.

Allāh tells us in the Qur’ān:

﴿وَلَا تَيْسُّوْا مِنْ رَوْحِ اللّٰهِ اِنَّهٗ لَا يَيْسُّ مِنْ رَوْحِ اللّٰهِ اِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُوْنَ﴾

And do not despair of Allāh’s Mercy; indeed no one despairs of Allāh’s Mercy except the unbelieving people.

- Surah Yusuf, 12:87

Despair in Allāh’s mercy brings a state of utter hopelessness. A person imagines himself or herself as definitely going to Hell and therefore they see no benefit in praying or doing any good or keeping away from any sin or evil.

¹² Don’t confuse this with *al-qunoot* in salāh that is القنوت.

Thereafter they start thinking that they might as well enjoy as much worldly pleasure as possible since they are definitely not going to make it to Jannah and Allāh won't ever forgive them. It is for this reason that in hadith we are told, even if your sins are as many as the drops of water in the ocean or the grains of sand in the desert, Allāh can and *will* forgive all of them, as long as you repent sincerely. It doesn't matter how many times in life you already made a promise to Allāh not to sin and fell into sin again. Never lose hope that Allāh will still forgive you. The only condition is that when you do istighfār, always be as sincere as possible.

﴿قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ
الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

Say: 'O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allāh. Indeed Allāh will forgive all sins. He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.'

- Surah az-Zumar 39:53

Despair in Allāh is not just when we sin. Sometimes people despair when they are in trouble and their prayers are not answered. By their nature, when things are going well in life, people feel Allāh is on their side but when Allāh tests them, they lose hope and think Allāh has abandoned them and no longer cares about them. This is also a form of *ya'as* and *qunoot* that is *harām*.

History shows us that Allāh always rescues the faithful at the last minute after they pass their test of showing they never despair of Allāh's help.

For example, Nabi Ibrāhim ('a) was actually thrown into a fire but he didn't despair even as he was flying in the air towards the fire. So Allāh changed the fire and made it cool for him (Qur'ān, 21:69). Nabi Ibrāhim ('a) also put a knife on the throat of his only son (Nabi Ismā'il ('a)) in obedience to Allāh – never losing hope in Allāh's mercy – and Allāh saved his son.

The example of Nabi Musa ('a) was given in the previous lesson; how he never despaired even when he was trapped on the shores of a sea with hundreds of thousands of men, women and children of Israel against the army of Fira'un.

Nabi Ayyub suffered terrible diseases and tests. All his children and wives died. He lost all his wealth and farms. But he never stopped asking Allāh for help:

﴿وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ فَكَشَفْنَا
مَا بِهِ مِنْ ضُرٍّ وَآتَيْنَاهُ أَهْلَهُ وَمِثْلَهُمْ مَعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِنَّا وَعِندَنَا وَذَكَرَىٰ لِلْعَابِدِينَ﴾

And Ayyub, when he called out to his Lord, 'Indeed distress has befallen me, and You are the most merciful of the merciful.' So We answered his prayer and removed his

distress, and We gave him [back] his family along with others like them, as a mercy from Us, and a reminder for the pious.

- Surah al-Anbiyā, 21:83-84

Similarly you can think of lots of other examples: Nabi Yunus (‘a) saved from the belly of a fish, Nabi Ibrāhim (‘a) and Nabi Zakariya (‘a) have children at a very old age, the Ka’bah is saved from the attack of Abraha and his elephants, Rasulullāh (s) narrowly escapes assassination on the night of hijrah, Imām Husayn (‘a)’s sacrifices for Islam survive against all odds for 1400 years and to this day, and so on. All these People of Allāh had one thing in common – trust in Allāh’s kindness and never despairing or losing hope in Him; that in the end they will succeed.

And it is not only for Prophets and Messengers and Imāms. Even ordinary people can attain Jannah if they don’t despair. For example, the magicians of Fir’aun. They were the worst of people. But in one moment, when they showed courage and faith, they became Muslims. Thereafter even though Fir’aun threatened to chop their hands and legs and to crucify them (and he did that), they never lost hope or despair. You can read about what they said when Fir’aun threatened them in Surah ash-Shu’ara, 26:49-51.

Other examples of people who placed their trust in Allāh even though they were surrounded by evil are Asiya, the wife of Fir’aun, the People of the Cave (*ashāb al-kahf*), Hurr bin al-Yazid al-Riyāhi (at Karbala), and so on. You can research and read about these individuals and their stories on your own.

Not only should we not despair in Allāh’s mercy for ourselves, but also we should never lose hope about others. Even if we know a person who commits harām or does not practice a wājib act, don’t assume ‘they are definitely going to end up in Hell’. What counts most are the last moments of our lives. A person may realize the truth and repent sincerely at the very last moment of their lives.

When we despair in Allāh’s mercy, we are saying, ‘We no longer believe Allāh has more love to give’ or ‘He is not great enough or kind enough to accept us.’ Even if we don’t deserve to be forgiven, it doesn’t mean Allāh is not kind enough to forgive the undeserving who sincerely repents.

Consider for example, is there any wrong you can do that your mother would not forgive? Allāh loves you far, far more than your mother can ever love you. In fact even the love in your mother’s heart is a gift from Allāh that He gives all mothers.

When you have a great need and you pray to Allāh desperately but your prayers are not answered immediately, you must trust that there is a reason for it that you may realize one day.

﴿وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

It may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, maybe that you love a thing while it is evil for you. Allāh knows and you don't know.

- Surah al-Baqarah 2:216

Finally, remember that duas and repentance (*tawbah*) are cords that connect us to Allāh. When we despair, we cut this cord. It is for this reason that despair is such a major sin. Allāh tells Rasulullāh (s) in the Qur'ān:

﴿وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِي إِذَا دَعَانِي﴾

And when My servants ask you about Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the one who calls out, when he calls on Me.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:186

﴿وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ﴾

And your Lord says: 'Call out to Me, I will answer you.' Those who are too proud to worship Me, will enter the fire of Hell.

- Surah Ghāfir, 40:60

Lesson 3

Despair vs. False Hope (Cont'd)

Feeling safe from Allāh's Punishment

The opposite of despair in Allāh's mercy (*al-ya'as*) is *al-amn min makrillah* - to feel safe from His wrath. In other words, instead of the other extreme where a person is so frightened of Allāh that he or she loses hope in His mercy, in this extreme, a person feels so confident that he or she does not fear sinning against Allāh.

This is also a major sin and there are two main groups of people who commit this sin. The first group are usually disbelievers in Allāh. They don't care about Allāh's punishment and mock the idea that Allāh can or would ever punish them. The second group are usually believers but they mistake Allāh's infinite mercy for weakness and think because Allāh is so merciful, they can get away with anything even without trying to obey or repenting sincerely for their sins.

The first group of people might laugh and say, 'I am ready. Allāh can even punish me now. I don't care!' The second group of people might say, 'My Lord is too merciful. Even if I don't pray and fast, He will forgive me.' Or 'I really love Imām Husayn ('a) so as long as I cry for him, he will intercede for me on the Day of Judgement even if I don't do what is wājib or keep away from harām.'

The people in both cases are wrong. They are delusional and are fooling themselves.

In the case of the first group, who mock at Allāh's warnings, Allāh says:

﴿أَفَأَمِنَ أَهْلُ الْقُرَىٰ أَن يَأْتِيَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا بَيَاتًا وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ أَوْ أَمِنَ أَهْلُ الْقُرَىٰ أَن يَأْتِيَهُمْ
بَأْسُنَا ضُحًى وَهُمْ يُلْعَبُونَ أَفَأَمِنُوا مَكْرَ اللَّهِ فَلَا يَأْمَنُ مَكْرَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ﴾

What! do the people of the towns then feel secure from Our punishment coming to them by night while they are asleep? What! do the people of the towns feel secure from Our punishment coming to them in the morning while they fool around? What! do they feel secure from Allāh's plan? No one feels secure from Allāh's plan except the people in loss.

- Surah al-'Arāf, 7:99

In the case of the second group, we should never forget that the Prophets and Imāms are obedient servants of Allāh. They don't do as they please but only do what is the will of Allāh. Even when they intercede (do *shafā'ah*) on the Day of Judgement, it will only be for those whom Allāh wishes to forgive. It won't be against Allāh's wishes. The example of Prophets and Imāms is that like that of angels whom Allāh describes as follows:

﴿بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُّكْرَمُونَ لَا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

They are (Allāh's) honoured servants. They do not speak ahead of Him, and they act (only) by His command.

- Surah al-Anbiyā, 21:27

To be careless of Allāh's warnings of His punishment means to be disrespectful to Allāh. It means a person does not take Allāh's warning seriously or thinks he or she can get away from Allāh's punishment.

It is sufficient to read history to realize how no one escapes or gets away from Allāh's punishment when they disobey. Thousands of nations have come and gone. Great empires and 'superpowers' that no one thought would ever disappear have gone without a trace.

Allāh says:

﴿قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ انظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكْذِبِينَ﴾

Travel over the land and then observe what was the fate of the deniers.

- Surah al-An'ām, 6:11

Sometimes Allāh allows a person to do wrong for a while (i.e. He gives them respite or 'more time'). Then punishment descends on them suddenly. And a more painful punishment awaits them in the hereafter.

And sometimes Allāh punishes a person gradually through 'blessings'. This is called *Istidrāj*. For example, a person runs after wealth and forgets Allāh. As a punishment, they get more wealth! The more they get, the further they go away from Allāh. That is why Imām Ali ('a) warned us to be careful when we see that the more we disobey Allāh, the more blessings we get. It means we are being set up!

Of course this doesn't mean that Allāh does not give blessings to good people. But always ask yourself: When I get more blessings, do I forget Allāh or do I remember Him more? If you thank Him and remember Him more, it is a blessing. But if it makes you forget Allāh, then it is a form of punishment for previous sins. What matters most to Allāh is how pure your soul is and how much you remember Him. It doesn't matter as much, how rich or poor or ill or healthy your body is in this world except how these affect your soul and your permanent home in the hereafter.

Allāh says in the Qur'ān:

﴿وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ نِعْمَتَنَا خَيْرٌ لَّانفُسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نَمْلِي لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ﴾

And let not those who disbelieve think that the respite We grant them is good for their souls: We give them respite only that they may increase in sin, and there is a humiliating punishment for them.

- Surah Āli- 'Imrān, 3:178

Respite and *istidrāj* of course only apply to those who when they sin, ignore repentance (*istighfār* and *tawbah*).

The people who are truly learned and who realize the greatness and majesty of Allāh, never take Allāh's warnings lightly. Instead they fear Him and are in awe of their Lord.

The Qur'ān says:

﴿إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ﴾

Only those of His (Allāh's) servants who possess knowledge truly fear Allāh

- Surah al-Fātir, 35:28

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'The root of wisdom is the fear of Allāh.' In other words, a person cannot be called wise if they don't fear Allāh.

Fear of Allāh doesn't mean fearing that Allāh will just punish without reason. Fear of Allāh means fear of committing sins and disobeying Allāh intentionally. We can succeed in the hereafter and live happily forever and ever in the most beautiful place Allāh has ever created (Jannah), but we must work for it whilst hoping in the mercy of Allāh.

Imām Ali ('a) has said, 'Do not be of those who hope for the hereafter without working for it.' And he has also said, 'I have never seen a person who truly wants to go to paradise asleep nor a person who really wants to flee from hellfire asleep.' By saying 'asleep' Imām Ali ('a) means 'being lazy, heedless and not working hard or doing something about one's hereafter.'

Summary of Despair and Hope

The summary of the previous lesson and this lesson then is that the true *mu'min* neither despairs in Allāh's mercy nor feels safe from Allāh' wrath. He or she keeps both in mind based on āyāt of the Qur'ān like:

﴿نَبِّئْ عِبَادِي أَنِّي أَنَا الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ وَأَنَّ عَذَابِي هُوَ الْعَذَابُ الْأَلِيمُ﴾

Inform My servants that I am the All-forgiving, All-merciful, and that My punishment - that is the painful punishment.

- Surah al-Hijr 15:49-50

﴿غَافِرِ الذَّنْبِ وَقَابِلِ التَّوْبِ شَدِيدِ الْعِقَابِ ذِي الطَّوْلِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ إِلَهُ الْمَصِيرِ﴾

*The Forgiver of sins and the Acceptor of repentance, severe to punish, Lord of bounty.
There is no god but He – to Him is the return.*

- Surah Ghāfir, 40:3

In one hadith we are told that the heart of a *mu'min* is like the two pans of a scale in perfect balance. If you put a *mu'min's* fear of Allāh's punishment on one side of the scale and his hope in Allāh's mercy on the other, neither side will tip. It will rest in perfect balance.

We should also be the same when we preach to others. Imām Ali ('a) has said, 'The perfect scholar in Islam is one who does not let people despair and lose hope in the mercy and kindness of Allāh and yet does not make them feel safe from Allāh's wrath.' (Nahj al-Balāgha, saying number 85).

Lesson 4

Taqwa

The word 'taqwa' (تقوى) is very often misunderstood, yet it occurs in the Qur'ān very frequently. Some translate it as 'Fear of Allāh' and others as 'Piety'. The word taqwa comes from the Arabic word *wiqāya* that means 'to safeguard' or 'to abstain from something in order to protect oneself from its harm'. So taqwa is to abstain from sin so as to safeguard oneself from eternal punishment. And this is done by constantly being conscious of Allāh's presence. In other words, taqwa is not to fear Allāh but to fear disobeying Him through sin. Allāh does not want His creatures to be afraid of Him because of His ability to punish them. He wants them to realize that He is warning them for their own good and they should fear sins that can cause them to end in Hellfire.

So even when we say 'Fear Allāh', we don't mean 'be scared of Him'. We mean be ashamed or sad at doing something that would displease Him. We will therefore define taqwa as 'Godwariness' or 'Godconsciousness'.

One who practises taqwa is called a *muttaqi* and the plural is *muttaqun* or *muttaqeen*. So again, instead of defining muttaqi as 'pious' or 'God-fearing', we will define a muttaqi as a 'Godwary' or 'Godconscious' person.

When Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) was asked to explain meaning of the word, 'taqwa' he replied, 'It is to submit to the command of Allāh (s.w.t.) and not to go near the prohibited (*harām*).'

A Muslim who has taqwa is always conscious of Allāh and therefore always concerned about pleasing Him. It is impossible for a Muslim or even *Mu'min* to be a muttaqi and still not practice something that is wājib or still practice anything that is harām. In fact, over and above wājib and harām, you will always find a muttaqi trying to practice everything mustahab and avoiding anything makruh.

Importance of Taqwa

Taqwa is not just important for a person's spiritual growth and to attain closeness to Allāh. It is also an important ingredient in any good work being accepted by Allāh, along with other ingredients like intention (*niyyah*).

Just like Allāh does not accept a good deed that is not done 100% for Him and Him alone, similarly Allāh does not accept good deeds except from the muttaqun, meaning from those who make every effort to do what is wājib and keep away from harām.

In the days of Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a), a man saw someone stealing a loaf of bread. So he followed the thief and further along he saw the thief giving half the loaf to a beggar. The man was surprised. He caught up with the thief and asked him, 'what are doing? First you steal and now you are helping a hungry beggar? Don't you know stealing is harām?'

The man said, 'Leave me alone. I know what I'm doing. Allāh records ten rewards for doing one good deed and only one sin for doing one bad deed. I stole and got one sin. I gave some to the beggar and got ten rewards. So I still have a balance of nine good deeds!'

The man did not know how to answer him and rushed to Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) and told him what he had seen. The Imām smiled and recited the following āyah of the Qur'ān:

﴿...إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

Allāh accepts only from the Godwary.

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:27

In other words, the thief was not getting any reward for giving the beggar because it was done without taqwa. And if you read the start of this āyah (5:27), it talks of the two sons of Nabi Adam ('a) – Hābil and Qābil – and Allāh says in the same āyah, 'When the two of them offered a sacrifice, it was accepted from one of them and not accepted from the other.' This further proves Imām as-Sādiq ('a)'s explanation that Allāh only accepts from the Godwary.

Another man called Sulaymān bin Khalid says, 'I asked Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) regarding the āyah:

﴿يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَا بُشْرَىٰ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُجْرِمِينَ وَيَقُولُونَ حِجْرًا مَّحْجُورًا وَقَدْ مَنَّا إِلَىٰ مَا عَمَلُوا مِنْ عَمَلٍ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ هَبَاءً مَّنْثُورًا﴾

The day when they see the angels, there will be no good news for the guilty that day, and they (the angels) will say, 'Keep off [from paradise]!' Then We shall attend to the works they have done and then turn them into scattered dust.

- Surah al-Furqān 25:22-23

Imām as-Sādiq ('a) replied, 'By Allāh, even if their deeds are as white as Egyptian cotton it will be scattered like dust because when they see sin and shamelessness they do not keep away from it.'

The Imām gave the example of Egyptian cotton because it was considered to be the whitest and purest cloth at the time.

Think of Taqwa as a shield or a protective covering. It is what keeps us from committing sins. When we don't care about sinning or we are oblivious that Allāh is watching us while we sin (i.e. we are not Godconscious) then we don't have our shield to protect us from the Fire of Hell.

In fact, in the following āyah, Allāh uses the word 'qu' to mean 'save' and it comes from the same word as taqwa:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ﴾

*O you who have faith! **Save** yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones...*

- Surah at-Tahrim, 66:6

In one hadith we are told, 'Even if you stand (very long) for prayers like a tent peg planted in the ground and keep fasting till you resemble a dried stick and stoop like a bow, Allāh will not accept any of your deeds till you have *taqwa* to guard against sinful actions.'

Consider now the following āyah of Qur'ān:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ﴾

When those who are Godwary are touched by a visitation of shaytān, they remember [Allāh] and, behold, they perceive.

- Surah al-A'rāf, 7:201

Notice the difference between a muttaqi and any other person. For people without the shield of taqwa, when shaytān tempts them or whispers evil in their ears, they are not even aware of it. So they go along with the thoughts planted in their minds by shaytān and sooner or later they give in to temptation. What the āyah above is saying is that the people with taqwa are always on guard. Their Godconsciousness (taqwa) is like a radar that picks up on signals from shaytān. As soon as they are 'attacked' by a thought from shaytān, their taqwa defence system kicks in. They are conscious and wary of Allāh so they clearly see this is from shaytān and they seek refuge with Allāh for His protection by reciting phrases like *ta'āwudh* (*au'dhu billāhi min ash-shaytānir rajeem*) and *istighfār* (*astaghfirullāha rabbi wa atubu ilayh*).

Then they reinforce themselves with more du'as and more dhikrs and tasbihs until one day they reach a level where shaytān does not even bother to whisper to them because they are totally Godconscious at all times. Make this a habit: Every time a sinful thought comes to your mind, recite the *ta'āwudh* and *istighfār* and sincerely ask Allāh to protect you from shaytān and to increase your taqwa.

If you read the sermons of Rasullāh (s) and the Imāms (like Imām Ali ('a)'s sermons in Nahj al-Balāgha), you will find that very often the first thing they said, was 'I advise

you to adopt the taqwa' (أُصِيكُم بِتَقْوَى اللَّهِ) meaning 'I advise you to first be conscious of Allāh and ensure you do everything wājib and keep away from everything harām, before you start thinking of doing other noble deeds'.

So whether we want to go for ziyārah or do 'azā of Imām Husayn ('a) or whether we want to help the world and build schools and orphanages and dig wells and feed the poor, the first and foremost matter is to get the foundation right. Anything you do in life must be accompanied with taqwa (conscious of Allāh and keeping away from sin).

Remember: As long as we keep sinning, we are not of the muttaqun. So every time we sin without repenting, we erase some of the previous good deeds we did.

We should therefore not measure how good we are just based on how much good we do. We must first look at how much taqwa we have i.e. how God-conscious we are when it comes to keeping away from harām and submitting to Allāh's will and orders. With taqwa even little actions are great in Allāh's eyes but without taqwa our good works and acts of charity carry little weight.

The following are now āyāt of the Qur'ān and the words of the ma'sumeen ('a) (i.e. hadith) on taqwa. Your teacher will only discuss some of them. Thereafter you are encouraged to read and reflect on the rest yourself. You may even want to take one of the hadith and write an essay on it so that you think about it deeply.

Taqwa in Qur'ān and Hadith

﴿وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَٰكِن كَذَّبُوا فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ﴾

If the people of the towns had been faithful and Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth. But they denied; so We seized them because of what they used to earn.

- Surah al-'Arāf, 7:96

1. Rasulullāh (s), 'One who is nourished with taqwa is nourished with the best of this world and the next.'
2. Rasulullāh (s), 'Do what is wājib, you will be a muttaqi.'
3. Imām Ali ('a), when he was asked the best of deeds, he said: 'Taqwa'.
4. Imām Ali ('a), 'The cloth of taqwa is the most honourable of robes.'

5. Imām Ali ('a), 'One who plants the tree of taqwa will reap the fruits of guidance.'
6. Imām Ali ('a), 'Fear Allāh and be conscious of Him to some degree, even though it be little. And place between you and Him a curtain (of shame), even though it be thin.'

Note: In other words, even if you cannot be very Godconscious, don't become completely shameless when it comes to sinning and disobeying Allāh.

7. Imām Ali ('a), 'One who controls his lusts will be a muttaki.'
8. Imām Ali ('a), 'Taqwa is to keep away' i.e. from what is harām.
9. Amir al-Mu'minin, Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a) in one of his sermons said, 'Beware that sins are like unruly horses on whom their riders mount, and their reins have been set loose, so they plunge with them into Hell. Indeed piety and Godconsciousness (taqwa) are like trained horses on whom their riders mount with the reins in their hands, so that they make them enter paradise.'

Note: This hadith is beautiful. It is full of imagery and very graphic in description. It is an excellent hadith to write an essay on, explaining in detail what you understand of it and expanding on its meaning and implication.

10. Imām al-Bāqir ('a) narrated that Imām Ali ('a) used to say, 'Any action performed with full Godconsciousness (*taqwa*) is never deemed little, and how can it be deemed little when it is an action that is accepted?'
11. Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a), 'The most difficult act of worship is to refrain from sinning.'
12. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'The (Day of) Resurrection is the wedding day of the muttaqeen.'
13. Mufaddal, the companion of Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a), was once sitting with the Imām when he (Mufaddal) lamented, 'How few are my deeds!' Imām as-Sādiq ('a) told him not to speak like that and to ask Allāh for forgiveness. Then the Imām said, 'Few deeds performed with Godconsciousness (taqwa) are better than many deeds performed without it.' So Mufaddal asked, 'How can deeds be many in number yet be without Godconsciousness?' And Imām as-Sādiq ('a) replied, 'They can. It is just like a man who feeds people, is kind to his neighbours, helps people with their needs when they are going on a journey (and so on), but when the gate to forbidden things (harām) is opened in front of him, he will enter it, because his (good) actions were without Godconsciousness (taqwa) (i.e. so he has no shield to protect him or his

actions from being destroyed by his sins). Whereas another person may not have acquired many deeds, but when the gate to forbidden things (harām) is opened in front of him, he will never enter it.'

14. Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a), 'I advise you to be Godconscious, pious and to strive; and know that striving (to do good) without refraining from sins is useless.'
15. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'A person is not considered one of our (elite) Shi'ah if he lives in a town with a population of a hundred thousand, and there is someone among them who is more pious than him.'
16. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'A person is not considered one of our Shi'ah if he proclaims (our virtues (*fadā'il*)) with his tongue, yet his actions contradict our actions and sayings. Our Shi'ah are those whose tongues are in harmony with their hearts; they listen to our sayings and act according to our actions – those are our Shi'ah.'

Taqwa is to be Conscious of Allāh's Presence at All Times



Lesson 5

Istighfār & Tawba

One of the greatest signs of Allāh’s love and mercy for human beings is that after giving them freewill to do as they please, He also gave them a way out to make up for mistakes. When a person commits a sin out of ignorance or forgetfulness or accidentally, they harm their own soul. This harm can be erased and they can return their soul to its original state of purity by asking Allāh to forgive them and by turning back to Allāh.

Asking Allāh to forgive us for our sins and mistakes is called *istighfār*. Making a firm resolution not to sin again and turning back to Allāh is called *tawbah*. This means when a person commits a sin repeatedly and habitually and then decides to repent, they first do *istighfār* (ask for forgiveness) and then *tawbah* (turn back to Allāh). *Tawbah* is therefore a higher state of repentance than *istighfār*.

A complete and most sincere change of heart and turning back to Allāh is also called *Tawbat an-Nasuha* (Sincere and Complete Repentance) in the Qur’ān.

As we studied in Lesson 2, one of the greatest sins in Islam is to lose hope in Allāh’s mercy and that is what Shaytān really wants for us. This means no matter how many times we fall and sin and no matter how many times we have already asked for forgiveness, we must never stop asking Allāh to forgive us once more. The only condition is that every time we ask, we must be sincere and not say words of *istighfār* knowing very well that we plan to sin again.

﴿قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ
الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

Say [that Allāh declares,] ‘O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allāh. Indeed Allāh will forgive all sins. Indeed He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.

- Surah az-Zumar 39:53

Allāh is too kind and too merciful to allow a person to beg Him and then to turn him or her away and refuse to forgive. If a beggar knocks on our door we feel bad turning them away empty-handed. How can Allāh do that then? If Allāh did not want to forgive us then He wouldn’t even give us the opportunity or thought to ask Him for forgiveness. So whenever we find an opportunity and willingness to repent sincerely, we should also know that Allāh has decided to forgive us once more.

Not asking Allāh for forgiveness is a sign of pride. Allāh loves to see His creatures ask Him for His forgiveness and blessings. To recognize that Allāh is our Master and we are His slaves is a sign of humility and it makes us pure and sincere. To refuse to

accept that Allāh is our Creator and Master is a sign of false pride and defiance to surrendering to Allāh and it is this false pride that stops people from praying salāh or asking Allāh for forgiveness.

Of course for our repentance to be sincere, we must also undo any harm we have done. For example, if we steal something, asking Allāh for forgiveness is not enough. We must also return what we stole. If we backbite, we must ask Allāh for forgiveness but also ask the person we have hurt for forgiveness or do something nice for him or her. If we missed our salāh or sawm, we must pay them back (in addition to asking for *maghfira* (forgiveness)).

Sometimes we forget to ask Allāh for forgiveness or we treat some of the sins we commit as ‘minor’ and therefore we continue on with our lives not realizing how we have harmed our souls. A true faithful (*mu’min*) must therefore always do some self-accounting (*muhāsabah*) before going to bed every night. Muhāsabah means reviewing what we did for the day and if we realize any sin we have committed we should ask Allāh for forgiveness immediately. Shaytān also tries to make us delay istighfār and tawbah by telling us to wait until tomorrow, or Thursday night or the month of Ramadan or when we go for Hajj, and so on. But of course no one knows when they will die and therefore istighfār and tawbah must always be done as soon as possible.

If we can shed tears of remorse when asking Allāh for forgiveness then that is a sign of our sincere repentance and also proof that Allāh has forgiven us.

Istighfār and tawbah can be simply saying ‘*astaghfirullāha wa atubu ilayh*’ (I seek forgiveness from Allāh and turn back to Him’) i.e. turn back to His obedience. But it must come after sincere regret and remorse and after we undo any harm we have done - and we should have a sincere plan never to sin again before asking Allāh to forgive us.

Most Muslims will do their best to keep away from major sins like alcohol, adultery, and so on. The challenge usually is what is ignored as ‘minor’ sins.

Rasulullāh (s) was once travelling with his followers when he stopped at a desert where there was nothing growing. Rasulullāh (s) asked his followers to go and collect wood. They replied that it was a desert – there was only sand around and it was not possible to find any wood in such a deserted place. Rasulullāh (s) however insisted that they try and find some.

So off they went and sure enough, as they brought back what they could find, soon there was a big heap of twigs and wood before Rasulullāh (s)’s feet. Rasulullāh (s) then used this as a practical lesson and told them that sins are like these twigs that we do not notice at first. When we look at our lives it seems as if there are no sins we have committed. But it is only by searching our hearts carefully that we can recollect them all and ask Allāh to forgive them. What Rasulullāh (s) was teaching them was the importance and art of *muhāsabah* – self-accounting.

Is it not better to self-account and find all our 'little' sins now while we can still ask Allāh for forgiveness rather than on the Day of Judgement when it will be too late? Muhāsabah should be done every day at bedtime or after our last salāh ('ishā).

Allāh takes pride in being the most merciful and forgiving and He assures us that if we commit a sin and then ask for forgiveness, He will most definitely forgive us:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَغْفِرِ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ وَكَمْ يُصِرُّوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

and those who, when they commit an indecent act or wrong themselves, remember Allāh, and plead [Allāh's] forgiveness for their sins - and who forgives sins except Allāh? - and [those] who do not persist in what they have committed while they know [He forgives them].

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:135

But forgiveness is only for those who are sincere and who make a mistake. It cannot of course be for those who sin knowingly and don't bother with repenting until the time when they are dying when it is too late:

﴿إِنَّمَا التَّوْبَةُ عَلَى اللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السُّوءَ بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ يَتُوبُونَ مِنْ قَرِيبٍ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا وَكَيْسَتْ التَّوْبَةُ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ إِنِّي تُبْتُ الْآنَ وَلَا الَّذِينَ يَمُوتُونَ وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ أُولَٰئِكَ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا﴾

Acceptance of] repentance by Allāh is only for those who commit evil out of ignorance, then repent promptly. It is such whose repentance Allāh will accept, and Allāh is all-knowing, all-wise. But [acceptance of] repentance is not for those who go on committing misdeeds: when death approaches any of them, he says, 'I repent now.' Nor is it for those who die while they are faithless. For such We have prepared a painful punishment.

- Surah al-Nisā, 4:17-18

By keeping the doors of istighfār and tawbah open until the end of a person's life, Allāh ensures that no one has a valid excuse as to why they could not make it to Jannah. On the Day of Judgement if a person says, 'O Allāh! I was unaware and ignorant; I was chained by passions and desires and I could not resist the temptations from shaytān!' he will be told in reply, 'Was not the door of tawbah always open for you?'

We should of course still avoid sins even though the opportunity for istighfār and tawbah is always there. The reason is that when we try hard to obey Allāh and then

make a mistake once in a while, we will rush to do istighfār out of shame and regret. But if we make a habit of sinning then our hearts will become hard and we will become too proud to ask Allāh for forgiveness and soon we will find that even when we repent we are not sincere and we do it only half-heartedly.

Allāh loves a person who repents sincerely so much that Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) said Allāh is more pleased with the *tawbah* of a *mu'min* than we are when we find something we had lost and had no hope of every finding again.

One of the rewards of sincere tawbah, that also shows how kind and loving Allāh is, is that not only does Allāh erase the evil deeds of a person who repents but He actually changes them into good deeds so that the time that was spent in sin is now counted as time spent in doing good. Hence He says:

﴿إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا﴾

except those who repent, have faith, and act righteously. For such, Allāh will change their vices with good deeds, and Allāh is all-forgiving, all-merciful.

- Surah al-Furqān 25:70

One of the punishments in this world for sinning a lot without repentance is that a person's life is shortened and such a person's du'as are not accepted.

It is reported in a hadith that Allāh told Nabi Dāwūd ('a), 'O Dāwūd! Give good news to the sinners and warn the pious people!' Nabi Dāwūd ('a) was obvious surprised to hear this. He asked, 'My Lord! What should I give as good news to the sinners and how should I warn the pious?' And Allāh replied, 'Give good news to the sinners that I will accept their repentance and warn the pious not to become proud of their piety because there is no one who is not deserving of being punished if I insist on taking his or her account with justice (instead of mercy).'

Istighfār and tawbah is so important that even Rasulullāh (s) and Imāms ('a) used to do it all the time. Every du'a from our Imāms includes istighfār and tawbah and our fourth Imām, Imām Ali Zayn al-Abidin ('a) has a special du'a just for this called *Du'a at-Tawbah*.

The ma'sumeen ('a) of course do not commit sins but they would still beg Allāh forgiveness, out of humility because they always felt they had not worshipped Allāh as He deserves to be worshipped so they would ask forgiveness for that.

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'I recite istighfār seventy times every day.' And Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) said that Rasulullāh (s) never got up from any gathering without reciting istighfār 25 times. One good habit to form is to recite a tasbih of istighfār ('*astaghfirullāha rabbi wa atubu ilayh'*) every day. This can be at bedtime or after

Fajr salāh. Allāh praises in the Qur’ān those who do istighfār in the early hours of the morning:

﴿الصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْمُنْفِقِينَ وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ﴾

(The Godconscious are) Patient and truthful, obedient and charitable, and pleading [Allāh’s] forgiveness at dawns.

- Surah Al-Imrān, 3:17

﴿كَانُوا قَلِيلًا مِنَ اللَّيْلِ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ وَبِالْأَسْحَارِ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ﴾

They (the Godconscious) used to sleep a little during the night, and at dawns they would plead for forgiveness

- Surah adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:17-18

An Anecdote on Sincere Repentance

When the order prohibiting wine was revealed, Rasulullāh (s) sent out a caller who announced in all the streets of Madina that henceforth no one should consume alcohol. By chance, one day Rasulullāh (s) was passing through an alley when a Muslim also entered it carrying a bottle of wine in his hand. He was terrified on seeing Rasulullāh (s) approaching and he prayed to Allāh, ‘O Allāh! I sincerely repent for this and I shall never drink again. Please save me from being disgraced before your Messenger!’

When Rasulullāh (s) came closer, he asked, ‘What is there in the bottle?’

‘It contains vinegar’¹³, replied the man. Rasulullāh (s) put forward his hand and asked the man to put a little bit on his palm. With trembling hands, the man did so and when Rasulullāh (s) examined it, it was indeed vinegar. The person was overwhelmed with emotions and he began to weep and say, ‘By Allāh! It was wine! But just now I had repented and begged Allāh not to disgrace me,’ he cried.

Rasulullāh (s) confirmed this and said it was a practical example of how if a person repents sincerely, then *‘for such, Allāh will change their vices with good deeds, and Allāh is all-forgiving, all-merciful.’* (Surah al-Furqān, 25:70)

¹³ When wine is exposed to the air for a while, it changes to vinegar.

Lesson 6

Obedience, Love and Care for Parents

Obedience to Parents is a *Fard* (Obligation)

Allāh says in Qur'ān:

﴿وَاعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا...﴾

And worship Allāh and do not join any partners with Him; and do good to your parents...

- Surah al-Nisa, 4:36

These āyāt among others, that mention parents immediately after the worship of Allāh, show how important parents are in Islam. Numerous ahādith show us that it is absolutely wājib to obey parents and harām to disobey them.

Regardless of how good we are, if we displease our parents we cannot go to paradise (Jannah). That is why Rasullāh (s) said about parents, 'They (i.e. your mother and father) are your paradise and your hell.' Meaning depending on how you deal with them, they will become the means that will lead you to either paradise or hell.

Some children and youth think it is only wājib to obey parents if they ask you do a religious activity like praying or fasting. That is not true. Doing a religious activity is wājib anyway, whether your parents ask you to do it or not, because Allāh commands it. The reason it is wājib to obey parents *in addition* to Allāh is because parents may ask you to do something that is mubāh (neither wājib nor harām, and neither mustahab nor makruh). For example, if your parents ask you to go out with them shopping, or not to go out with your friends, or to do something for them or not to wear something, it is all wājib. And even when they ask you to do something mustahab, like going to the masjid or reciting the Qur'ān or going to madrasah, it becomes wājib because they have said so. Similarly, when they ask us not to do something, it becomes harām even if previously it was only mubāh or makruh.

Anything we do that makes our parents happy has a lot of thawāb and Allāh blesses us for it tremendously. Our wishes come true and life is lengthened. Anything we do to make our parents sad or unhappy brings Allāh's anger on us and it shortens our life, happiness and sustenance (*rizq*) as well.

The only time we *have* to disobey our parents is if they tell us to do something harām. This is because obedience to Allāh comes first. For example, if we are bāligh and our parents tell us to shave our beard (for boys) or not to wear hijāb (for girls) or not to get up for fajr salāh or not to fast in the month of Ramadan, then we *have* to

disobey them. But even when we refuse to obey them in sin, we cannot be rude to them. We have to politely refuse and try and explain to them.

Sometimes our parents are unfair to us and it is entirely their fault why they are upset with us. But even in such cases, we have no right to be upset with them or to blame them.

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) said, 'A person who looks at his parents angrily even while they have been unjust, his prayers are not accepted.' And he also said, 'If they beat you, you say, "O Allāh forgive them!"'

Rasulullāh (s) has said that Allāh says to a person who displeases his or her parents until they disown him or her: 'Do as much good as you please. I will never forgive you!'

That is why, in Islam, even if our parents are not Muslims, we still cannot cut off relations with them and we still must be polite to them and serve them and look after them in their old age. And in fact we still must obey them unless they ask us to do something harām.

Why does Islam place so much emphasis on parents? This is not easy to understand until we become parents ourselves. Parents give up all their comfort, freedom, wealth, time and practically all their life just for their children's happiness and well-being. Parents fall in love with their children from the time they are conceived and well before they are even born. They busy themselves shopping for their children, deciding on what to name them and planning all the wonderful things they would like to do for them when they are born. Thereafter they stay up in the night and work hard during the day just for the children's happiness. They try and give them the best education possible and they constantly worry about them and look out for them, stopping anyone or anything from harming them. Parents are overjoyed when they see their children happy, or enjoying themselves, even if it just eating or sleeping, because they know they played a part in their children's comfort and happiness - though the child never thanks them or appreciates it. So in sense parents play the role of Allāh's agents because Allāh is the one who blesses us, feeds us, clothes us, and gives us happiness. But when we are children, He does all this for us through our parents.

When we are ungrateful to our parents, we are actually selfish and ungrateful to Allāh. Allāh reminds us why we must be grateful to our mothers for example:

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَىٰ وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي
 وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا
 تُطِعْهُمَا وَصَاحِبُهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا...﴾

We have enjoined man concerning his parents: His mother carried him through weakness upon weakness, and his weaning takes two years. Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me is the return. But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them (but) keep their company honourably in this world ...

- Surah Luqmān, 31:14-15

Parents also play a very important role in the upbringing of children. Islam considers the training during our childhood to be very important because a child is like a clean slate that is ready to accept every impression. Our character as adults is largely influenced by our upbringing as children.

Our parents usually look after themselves. They work, earn money, buy food and clothes, pay the bills, and look after their own home. But we cannot pay the rent or even afford our own meals. Being younger, we still depend on them to provide for us out of their love. Our sense of security and confidence also comes from their presence (even if we don't realize that). If it were not for their love and care, most of us would not grow up being healthy and well mannered.

As we begin to grow into teenagers and older, we must realize that no one has perfect parents and that parents are also human like us. They are just older. They usually want only what is good for us based on their past experiences. They have lived longer and understand the challenges of being an adult much better.

Some of the many ways to respect our parents include:

- Never raise your voice at them.
- Do not walk in front of them unless told to do so.
- Do not speak when they are speaking.
- Never correct them in front of others.
- Never insult, argue or shout at them.
- Never call them by name but use respectful words like 'dad' and 'mum'.
- Do things to help them without waiting to be asked first.
- Do not sit when they are standing. If you are sitting and they enter the room, stand up until they sit. Never stretch your legs in their presence.
- Thank them often and pray for them every day.

Rasulullāh (s) has said, 'One who hurts his parents hurts me, and one who hurts me hurts Allāh, and whoever hurts Allāh is cursed in the Tawrāt, Injeel, Zabur and Qur'ān!'

In Surah al-Isrā (chp. 17) āyah 24, Allāh gives us the perfect du'a to recite for our parents everyday:

﴿وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا﴾

'My Lord! Have mercy on them, just as they reared me when I was [a] small [child]!'

The Love of Parents for Us as Adults

Humans are said to be fully grown and mature at the age of forty. Once a Muslim reaches forty, all his or her excuses for disobeying Allāh or not focusing on the hereafter are exhausted. From this point onwards, not only do people begin to weaken physically and decline but they must also now work harder for the next life instead of this life.

Parents not only want us to be happy in this world but also the next. Even when we are fully grown, independent adults, parents continue to advise us and worry about us. If we are good and obedient to Allāh, they pray for us and encourage us. And if we have chosen to disobey Allāh and are heading towards Hellfire, no one cares about us but parents will still not lose hope and will continue trying to guide us.

This is shown graphically in the following āyāt of the Qur'ān:

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ إِحْسَانًا حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ كُرْهًا وَوَضَعَتْهُ كُرْهًا وَحَمْلُهُ وَفِصَالُهُ ثَلَاثُونَ شَهْرًا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَبَلَغَ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً قَالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ وَأَصْلِحْ لِي فِي ذُرِّيَّتِي إِنِّي تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَإِنِّي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ تَتَّقُلْ عَنْهُمْ أَحْسَنَ مَا عَمِلُوا وَتَتَجَاوَزُ عَنْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ فِي أَصْحَابِ الْجَنَّةِ وَعَدَ الصَّادِقُ الَّذِي كَانُوا يُوعَدُونَ. وَالَّذِي قَالَ لُوَالِدَيْهِ أَفٍّ لَكُمْمَا اتَّعَدَانِي أَنْ أَخْرَجَ وَقَدْ خَلَّتِ الْقُرُونُ مِنْ قَبْلِي وَهُمَا يَسْتَعْجِلَانِ اللَّهَ وَيُنَازِعَانِي مِنْ إِيمَانِي أَنْ أَدْعُو اللَّهَ فَقُلُّ مَا هَذَا إِلَّا أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ. أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقَوْلُ فِي أُمِّ قَدْ خَلَّتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِنَ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسِ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا خَاسِرِينَ﴾

We have enjoined man to be kind to his parents. His mother has carried him in travail, and bore him in travail, and his gestation and weaning take thirty months. When he comes of age and reaches forty years, he says, 'My Lord! Inspire me to give thanks for Your blessing with which You have blessed me and my parents, and that I may do righteous deeds which may please You, and invest my descendants with righteousness. Indeed I have turned to you in penitence, and I am one of the muslims.'

Such are the ones from whom We accept the best of what they do, and overlook their misdeeds, [who will be] among the inhabitants of paradise—a true promise which they had been given.

As for him who says to his parents, 'Fie on you! Do you promise me that I shall be raised [from the dead] when generations have passed away before me?' And they invoke Allāh's help [and say]: 'Woe to you! Believe! Indeed Allāh's promise is true.' But he says, 'These are nothing but myths of the ancients.'

Such are the ones against whom the word became due concerning the nations that have passed away before them of jinn and humans. They were indeed the losers.

- Surah al-Ahqāf, 46:15-18

When Parents Grow Old

When people grow old, they go back to being a child in every way. A child is weak, ignorant, fussy and helpless. So are humans as they grow old. They lose their energy and strength, they get hurt easily, they begin losing their memory, their eyesight dims, their hearing dims, they lose their teeth, they become irritable and dependent on others.

The Qur'ān talks about this in several places. For example:

﴿اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ ضَعْفٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ضَعْفٍ قُوَّةً ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ ضَعْفًا وَشَيْبَةً يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْقَدِيرُ﴾

It is Allāh who created you from [a state of] weakness, then He gave you power after weakness. Then, after power, He ordained weakness and old age: He creates whatever He wishes, and He is the All-knowing, the All-powerful.

- Surah ar-Rūm, 30:54

﴿وَمَنْ نُعَمِّرْهُ نُنَكِّسْهُ فِي الْخَلْقِ أَفَلَا يَعْقِلُونَ﴾

And whomever We give a long life, We cause him to regress in creation. Then will they not apply reason?

- Surah Yā Sin, 36:68

A lot of times adults will lose patience with their old parents and fight with them or break relations or even abandon them and leave them on their own. The main reason for this tragedy is because they assume their parents are adults and therefore should behave like them and be reasonable and understanding, etc. What they forget however is that when humans grow very old, they are only adults in physical size. But in their understanding, reasoning and insecurity, they are no different from infants and little children.

Islam demands that the more our parents grow older (and weaker) and we grow stronger, the gentler and kinder we need to be.

Which is what Allāh tells us clearly in the Qur’ān as well:

﴿...إِمَّا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا
وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا وَاخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا
كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا﴾

...Should they reach old age at your side—one of them or both—do not say to them, ‘Fie!’¹⁴ And do not chide them, but speak to them noble words. Lower the wing of humility to them, out of mercy, and say, ‘My Lord! Have mercy on them, just as they reared me when I was [a] small [child]!’

- Surah al-Isra, 17:23-24

The Rights of Parents after their Demise

The rights of our parents remain even after they pass away. It is in fact wājib to continue serving parents even after they are dead. Those who forget their parents after they die are the same as those who forget them while they are alive in this world. Some of their rights after they die include:

- We should remember them in our prayers and pray for their forgiveness.
- If they have any debts against Allāh (e.g. *qadā*), we should repay it for them.
- If they have any debts with other people, we should settle it for them.
- We should respect their friends who are still alive and keep in touch with them.
- We should not do anything to spoil their name.
- We should pray to Allāh to grant them a place in Jannah and to unite us there with them.

The books of du’as and a’māls have many prayers that we can recite to ask Allāh to bless our parents while they are alive and even after they pass away.

¹⁴ That is, do not grumble or speak to them in an ill-tempered manner. The Arabic word for ‘Fie!’ in the āyah is *Uff*. *Uff* is an expression of displeasure and being fed up.

Lesson 7

Chastity & Modesty in Islam

In Book 7 (Akhlāq Lesson 7) we learnt about ‘Sins of the Tongue’ such as lying, backbiting, slander, boasting, and flattery. In this lesson we wish to look at major sins in Islam that are related to the private parts, such as fornication and adultery (*zinā*), homosexuality (*liwāt*), pornography and masturbation (*istimnā*).

Islam views sins related to sexual behaviour and lifestyles as the result of a lack of chastity and modesty or put simply, a lack of shame (*hayā*) i.e. shamelessness. In the western world chastity is defined only as sexual abstinence before marriage. But the word ‘chaste’ and ‘chastity’ originally meant ‘pure’ or ‘virtuous’. In Islam a person who fulfills the needs of his or her body lawfully but is essentially pure and pious in character and behaviour is said to be chaste. In other words, a Muslim can and should be chaste in speech, dress, interaction with others, as well as of course in their sexual behaviour.

Similarly, modesty is often defined as downplaying one’s achievements, being humble or shy. But in this lesson when we say ‘modesty’ we mean behaving and appearing in public decently as opposed to, for example, dressing indecently or suggestively to incite sinful desires and lust in others.

Chastity and modesty are particularly emphasized for women on whom hijāb is wājib. *Hayā* is like self-respect. If a person loses it, it requires a lot of effort to regain it again.

Hayā

Let us first review some ahādith on *hayā*. Your teacher will not read all of them but will review some and you can review the rest on your own.

Keep in mind that in the following ahādith, wherever the word *hayā* occurs, we mean modesty, chastity and shamefulness (in the positive sense and as opposed to shamelessness),.

1. Rasulullāh (s), ‘One who is not ashamed of Allāh in public will not be ashamed of Allāh in private.’
2. Rasulullāh (s), ‘A person should feel shame from the two angels with him as if he has two righteous neighbours that are with him night and day.’
3. Rasulullāh (s), ‘Hayā has ten parts. Nine parts are in women and one in men.’

4. Rasulullāh (s), 'Whenever there is indecency in something it makes it ugly. And whenever there is hayā in a thing – without exception – it makes it beautiful.'
5. Rasulullāh (s), 'If hayā was a person, he would have been a virtuous one.'
6. Rasulullāh (s), 'Hayā is religion itself, all of it.'
7. Imām Ali ('a), 'The best clothing in this world is hayā.'
8. Imām Ali ('a), 'A lot of hayā in a person is proof of his or her faith (imān).'
9. Imām Ali ('a), 'Three things are not to be ashamed of: For a man to serve his guests (himself), to stand up in the midst of a gathering for one's father or teacher, and to seek a right (that belongs to a person) even if it is little.'
10. Imām al-Hasan ('a), 'One who has no religion has no shame (hayā).'
11. Imām al-Kādhim ('a), 'Hayā is from faith (imān) and faith (imān) is in Jannah.'
12. Imām al-Kādhim ('a), 'Be ashamed of (disobeying) Allāh in privacy as you are ashamed of people in public.'

Zinā (Fornication & Adultery)

In English, fornication is usually referred to sexual relations between an unmarried man and woman. And adultery is when a married man or woman has sexual relations with another married man or woman who is not his or her spouse. In Islam, both are harām and major sins and referred to by one word – *zinā*.

Zinā is therefore to have sexual relations with anyone besides one's lawfully wedded husband or wife. The Qur'ān forbids it strictly:

﴿وَلَا تَقْرُبُوا الزِّنَىٰ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا﴾

Do not go near fornication. It is indeed an indecency and an evil way.

- Surah al-Isrā, 17:32

﴿... وَلَا يَزْنُونَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ يَلْقَ أَثَامًا يُضَاعَفْ لَهُ الْعَذَابُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَيَخْلُدْ

﴿فِيهِ مُهَانًا﴾

...and (those who) do not commit fornication. Whoever does that shall encounter its retribution, the punishment being doubled for him on the Day of Resurrection. In it (Hell) he will abide in humiliation forever,

- Surah al-Furqān, 25:68-9

So it is clear that those who commit zinā and do not repent are promised Hellfire in the hereafter. And in this world as well, the punishment is severe. A married person who commits zinā, for example, is sentenced to death in an Islamic court of law and an unmarried person is lashed a hundred times. This of course is only after they are proven guilty beyond doubt and with four witnesses.

Rasulullāh (s) warned, 'Zinā has three punishments in this world and three in the hereafter. In this world, a person loses his or her respect, their life is shortened and they will become poor (i.e. their sustenance – *rizq* – will be cut off). And in the hereafter, they will have a harsh trial (*hisāb*), Allāh will be wrathful with them and they will live in Hell forever.'

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) also warned, 'The person who will be punished most severely on the Day of Judgement is the man who commits zinā.'

Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) said, 'Rasulullāh (s) said, 'When zinā becomes widespread after me, sudden deaths will also become very common.' And Imām as-Sādiq ('a) similarly predicted, 'When zinā becomes widespread, earthquakes will become more frequent.'

Zinā of course starts first with looking at a non-mahram. This is called zinā of the eyes. Then it is followed by thinking sinful thoughts (zinā of the mind) and then followed by speaking sinful things or walking towards it. That is why we are taught in hadith that even the legs can commit zinā and even putting perfume just to attract a non-mahram is a form of zinā. A Muslim is filled with purity and shame and modesty and never thinks of going towards zinā.

Imām Ali ('a) said that only those who were born out of wedlock will love zinā and he said, 'One who thinks he was born legitimate while he loves zinā is lying (to himself).'

The best way never to be attracted to zinā and not to even be tempted by it is to associate it with dirt and filth. When a person thinks of anything sinful (*harām*) to be the same as, for example, sticking one's hand down a dirty toilet, they will never be attracted to it because they will always associate sins with filth.

Some of the many reasons why Islam forbids zinā is because it discourages people from getting married, it brings social calamities in societies, it breaks families, causes children to be born without knowing who their fathers are (i.e. the spread of illegitimate children), denies children their rightful inheritance, causes the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs), promotes prostitution (that in turn leads to alcohol and drug use) and generally drives human beings to become immoral and to live like animals in the wild. And as this continues from generation to generation, with no sensible family set-ups, human beings continue to be raised without values and it leads to the increase of crime and other social ills.

Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) said, 'Whoever commits zinā with a Muslim, Jew, Christian or Majus (Magian) woman, whether she is a slave or a free woman; and

dies without repenting of his sin, then the Almighty Allāh opens three hundred doors of punishment in his grave. From each door many snakes and scorpions emerge from the fire and burn and torment him till the Day of Judgement.'

And Imām Ali ('a) has said that on the Day of Judgement a bad stench shall be released in the air and all the people will become restless because of it. So much so that it would be difficult to breath. Then a caller will proclaim loudly, 'O people! Do you know what this stench is? It is the stench from the fornicators who died without repenting for their sins...' And there will not remain a single person who will not curse them.

Allāh promises Paradise and much rewards in this world and in the hereafter to a young person who is offered the chance to commit zinā but he refuses (like Nabi Yusuf ('a)) and says '*I fear Allāh, the Lord of the Worlds.*'

To counter zinā, Islam encourages early marriage. As soon as a young person is mature physically and emotionally, Islam asks them to get married so as to safeguard them from falling into harām and sins like zinā. Even if a young person still has to go to university and find a job, etc., Islam encourages parents to help their children get married and to support them so that they remain chaste.

This is also why the requirements of marriage in Islam are so simple and easy. In an Islamic State the government is required to help the poor who are unmarried to get married so as to minimize the danger of corruption spreading in society due to permissiveness and uncontrolled sexual desires.

It is also because of the evils of zinā that Islam forbids all matters related to it such as pornography, night clubs, dressing indecently, listening to music that incites lust, unnecessary interaction between non-mahrams, and so on.

Liwāt (Homosexuality)

Practising homosexuality or a 'gay' lifestyle (also called sodomy) is having a sexual relationship with someone of the same gender. This is a major sin in Islam and has unfortunately become widespread in the world today as being 'normal' and 'natural'.

Islam expressly forbids it and regards it as unnatural and shameless and those who are caught practising homosexuality with witnesses as proof, are sentenced to death in an Islamic court of law, without exception.

The Qur'ān talks of the people of Nabi Lūt ('a) who practised liwāt and it curses them and describes how severely they were punished:

﴿فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا جَعَلْنَا عَالِيَهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا حِجَارَةً مِّن سِجِّيلٍ مَّنصُودٍ﴾

So when our decree came to pass, we turned them upside down and rained down upon them stones, of what has been decreed, one after another.

- Surah Hud, 11:82

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'May the curse of Allāh and the angels and all of mankind be on one who masturbates and one who engages in homosexuality.'

Rasulullāh (s), Imām Ali ('a) and Imām as-Sādiq ('a) all said that if a person practises homosexuality and dies unrepentant, they are 'hit' with a stone similar to that of the people of Nabi Lut ('a) and after they are buried or cremated, their souls move to the same place of torment as the people of Nabi Lut ('a) and on the Day of Judgement they will all be raised together and sent to the fire of Hell.

Islam takes several steps to discourage zinā and liwāt. Firstly it forbids any two adults who are not husband and wife from sharing a bed or the same sleeping space or one blanket, even if they are in their clothes, on a journey travelling together or any other circumstances.

Furthermore, Rasulullāh (s) has said, 'Keep a separate bed for your children above ten years. And two brothers or two sisters or a brother and a sister should not be made to sleep on the same bed.'

It is also discouraged in Islam for a man to keep a child over 6 years of age on his lap or to kiss them on the face or have excessive physical contact with them even if they are the father or uncle of the child.

Homosexuality Today

In the Western world today, being gay is considered as normal and an acceptable way of fulfilling the sexual urge. Countries like Canada have even taken the shameful step of legislating and legalizing gay marriages. Communities that uphold and promote homosexuality are always at risk of being punished and destroyed by Allāh.

Homosexuality is of course not a 20th or 21st century phenomenon; it has always been there. But in the past, being gay was considered a perverted sexual behaviour whereas now it is being labelled as 'natural' and as a result of an 'inborn tendency'. However, all revealed religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam preach against such sexual behaviour. It has been clearly condemned in the Bible and the Qur'ān.

The argument that are given in favour of accepting gay relationships is that 'some people are just born that way' and that they do not feel any attraction to the opposite gender due to their genetic makeup and it is through no fault of theirs.

Islam does accept that it is possible for someone to be born without the natural attraction to the opposite gender at puberty. However this does not mean that it is 'normal'. There are many people who are born with certain medical conditions

through no fault of theirs or due to their genetic makeup. Yet we don't ignore it and say it is 'normal'. Instead the society tries to help them to find solutions that will allow them to live in society like the rest of humankind.

Similarly Islam does not say that anyone who is born without a natural attraction to the opposite gender is evil and must be killed or even condemned. They can choose to live in society without practising a gay lifestyle or if they like, Islam allows them to have a medical procedure to change their gender i.e. to have a sex change. Thereafter there is no reason for them not to live like other members of society.

What happens in societies that do not respect the laws of Allāh is that the excuse of the few who are truly born without this natural attraction is used by others who have no reason to be gay and are just unchaste and permissive. They promote gay clubs, gay movements, and so on. This is why increasingly now there are people in the west who claim to be bisexual meaning they have sexual relationships with both the opposite and the same gender. All this proves that it is evil that is behind the spread of the gay movement and not a genuine issue that cannot be solved.

To discourage people from condemning anyone who practises homosexuality, those with evil motives create words like 'homophobic' (i.e. 'one who has an irrational fear of homosexuals') and as soon as you condemn anyone who practises homosexuality, you are labelled as being 'homophobic'. As Muslims we should not be afraid to condemn the gay lifestyle even if people label us. We distance ourselves from anything that Allāh curses and opposes.

Ways to distance ourselves from zinā and liwāt include:

- Do not watch TV programmes or movies that promote gays or adulterers.
- Keep a distance from any students or work colleagues that you know openly lead a gay lifestyle.
- Do not be ashamed or embarrassed of condemning homosexuality even if others call you 'homophobic'. For example, speaking against governments that legalize gay marriages does not mean you are calling for violence against gays. You are simply stating your religion's belief that promoting the gay lifestyle is detrimental to society.
- If you have to work with someone who is openly gay, do not socialize with them or smile or laugh or be too friendly with them so that they imagine you are ok with their lifestyle. Instead keep conversations with them to a minimum and do not associate with them beyond what is necessary.

Masturbation (Istimna)

Masturbation is any form of self-stimulation to get sexual pleasure.

Many secular schools and ‘experts’ teach students that masturbation is natural and normal. Islam does not believe this to be a natural or normal habit. It considers this to be a depraved habit that is *harām* under all circumstances. It is therefore *wājib* on all Muslims to keep away from this shameful act and to consider this as a serious sin that should not be practised.

Masturbation is also habit-forming and if a person makes a habit of it, it can and does affect their marital relationship later in life.

Typically, before a person commits any sin, they use their imagination to fantasize and create sinful thoughts that then leads to acting out the fantasy physically. In their imagination, they may fantasize satisfying their natural desires with an imaginary spouse but because it is not natural for a person to satisfy their sexual desire on their own, it leads to further frustrations rather than creating any sense of satisfaction or giving any peace of mind.

Islam does not view sex as being sinful, evil or even bad. But it wants people to use sex as a means to seek and provide physical satisfaction with one’s lawfully wedded spouse and as a means to start a family.

For those who attain puberty but are not able to get married as yet, some advice given by the *‘ulama* include:

1. All sin starts with the thought of it. One should learn to control one’s thoughts and as soon as a sinful thought comes to mind, one should remove it by saying “*astaghfirullah*” aloud and glorifying and remembering Allāh.
2. Keep in touch with religion and seek inspiration from it: constantly praying to Allāh for help, reciting the Qur’ān, adopting a habit for *salāt al-layl*, reciting *du’as*, and trying to elevate one’s level of Godconsciousness (*taqwa*).
3. Never stay alone at home especially when you are not busy with things to do. Try and stay in the company of friends and family especially when you know you are likely to be tempted to sin. If you are all alone at home and are tempted to sin, eradicate the thought and distract yourself e.g. read the Qur’ān, reflect on the punishment of the sin and the terror of the Day of Judgement, reflect on the reward of one who remains chaste, go out for a walk, etc.
4. Avoid being idle all the time. Have hobbies and take up physical sports that will require you to channel your energies in healthy activities.
5. Avoid eating excessively, especially rich foods such as meat, chocolates, cookies, ice creams, oily foods (burgers, fries) and in general junk and processed foods. All these cause outbursts of desires. When you’re not fasting, try and eat more fruits and vegetables and drink more water instead of soda pop, artificial juices, etc. Eating healthy and drinking water flushes your body and keeps it clean that in turn keeps your mind and thoughts healthy and clean. Your thoughts and behaviours are influenced by the foods you eat, hence the saying, ‘You are what you eat’!

6. Make a habit of fasting often even when it is not Ramadan. The Messenger of Allāh (s) used to encourage those who are not married to fast, in order to keep away from sins caused by excessive desires.
7. Avoid excessive sleep and lying in bed when you are not sleepy.
8. If you can, discuss with your parents or an older relative you trust (who can speak to your parents on your behalf) about your need to get married sooner. This is especially true if your parents expect you to complete university, find a job, etc. before getting married. Parents usually want their children to show a sense of responsibility before they get married. Learn to be responsible and mature so that you can take on the responsibility of your own family sooner.
9. Be sincere. Unless one really wants to avoid committing a sin, one will not have the willpower to resist it.
10. Avoid watching TV programmes or reading books/magazines/websites that will further tempt you to sin.
11. Avoid the influence of bad friends who love talking about sex, dirty jokes, etc.
12. Avoid hanging around the malls and gazing at non-mahram (which itself is *harām*).

In one hadith we are told that when a person is tempted to look at a non-mahram but lowers his gaze, Allāh marries him to a *hour al-ʿayn* (beautiful maiden) in paradise who eager awaits him. But if a person fills his eyes with gazing sinfully at one who is *harām* for him, Allāh will fill the sockets of his eyes with nails of fire on the Day of Judgement.

A man asked Imām as-Sādiq [a] concerning masturbation. The Imām said: ‘It is a major sin. Allāh has forbidden it in His Book (the Qurʾān). If I knew that a man masturbates, I would not sit to eat with him.’ The man then asked: ‘Son of Allāh’s Messenger, please show me where it is mentioned in the Qurʾān’. The Imām replied: Allāh says:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَعْيُنِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ
مَلُومِينَ فَمَنْ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ﴾

‘(The faithful are those) ...who guard their private parts except from their spouses...
for then they are not to be blamed; **but whoever seeks [anything] beyond that**—it is
they who are transgressors.

- Surah al-Muminun, 23:5-7

‘Istimna is part of ‘*whoever seeks [anything] beyond that*,’ added the Imām (‘a).

In another hadith Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) said, ‘One of the people whom Allāh will refuse to look at on the Day of Judgement and nor will He purify them and for them is a painful punishment is one who masturbates.’

And Rasulullāh (s) also said, ‘One who masturbates is cursed (*mal’un*).’

One of the reasons why schools in the West teach children that there is nothing wrong with *istimna* and it is in fact beneficial is because they are thinking from the perspective of the human body only. They are also hoping that this habit will keep young people away from *zinā*, which will in turn stop the spread of diseases and teenage pregnancies.

But Islam does not look at the needs of the society first. It looks at the needs of the individual first. And Islam does not look at the body alone. It looks at the health of the body, the mind and the soul altogether.

If a person relies on the mind and imagination to fantasize sexual acts just for *istimna*, in due course not only will they not be able to hold a healthy sexual relationship in marriage but their fantasies will keep getting more perverted until they will start thinking of all forms of sinful sexual acts only to get a brief unfulfilling satisfaction.

Imām Ali (‘a) says in one hadith, ‘How evil is the act whose desire passes away quickly but whose consequences and sin remains forever. And how good is the act of patience whose pain passes away but whose reward remains forever!’

Pornography

Pornography is any material (books, pictures & photographs, websites, video clips, TV channels, etc.) that depicts erotic (sexual) behaviour and is intended to cause sexual excitement.

To engage (read, look, listen, etc.) in any form of pornography is absolutely *harām*. Firstly, it is *harām* to see another person when he/she is naked or dressed sensuously unless it is one’s spouse. Secondly, pornography creates the temptation to commit sins such as masturbation, fornication, etc.

It is therefore *harām* to even go to shops, bookstands, websites, etc. where one fears they may be exposed to pornography. We must also avoid “friends” who take an interest in pornography and could influence us. They are not true friends but enemies of our soul because they will lead our soul to Hellfire on the Day of Judgement.

There are many reasons why pornography is *harām* even if it seems harmless. Pornography will destroy and shatter your sense of chastity, and your purity and faith in Allāh. It creates unnecessary sexual arousal and excitement. It leads to wicked thoughts and fantasies. It is very addictive and does not stop until a person becomes totally depraved. It is unhealthy for the body and the mind. It decreases attraction towards marriage for the unmarried and towards the spouse for the married. And it also depicts violence and abuse of women or children.

How Can we Be Chaste?

Remaining chaste in today's world is not easy. This is because physical pleasure is greatly emphasized and sex is thrown at our face everywhere – in newspapers, the TV, computer games, the internet, advertising billboards, magazines at checkout counters and really all around us.

In addition, most societies are now Godless. This means religion has no value to people and no one sees a problem with having a girlfriend/boyfriend, dressing indecently, drinking alcohol, listening to all kinds of music, swearing, partying and just making physical pleasure the goal of life.

Even when people take an interest in spirituality, they do so outside religion and the laws of Allāh so that it is a convenient self-styled 'new age' spirituality to make people feel good about themselves and give them the illusion of being 'spiritual'. Whereas true spirituality is to surrender to Allāh. To be humble and simple. To stand in awe and fear before Allāh and to obey Him and prostrate before Him while being pure in thought, speech and action.

The desire for a companion and spouse is not evil or wrong. It is natural. But Islam has provided marriage as the means to acquiring that. One of the ways of combating the indecency all around us is to be married.

Another way to be chaste is to observe hijāb especially when interacting with the opposite gender. Hijāb starts with wearing a scarf by women but does not stop or end there. Hijāb for men is to lower their gaze, to grow a beard, to dress modestly, to speak with Godconsciousness and not to flirt with the opposite gender. Hijāb for women is also to dress decently with loose clothing, not to interact excessively with the opposite gender, whether in person or online, and so on.

We can also be chaste by avoiding places where we know we will see people dressed indecently such as beaches and swimming pools or roaming around and hanging out unnecessarily in shopping malls during summer time.

It is not permitted for a person to swim in the same pool, beach, etc. with non-mahrams. Allāh tells us in the Qur'ān:

﴿قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَعْضُوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ﴾

Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; indeed Allāh is Aware of what they do.

﴿وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ﴾

And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands...

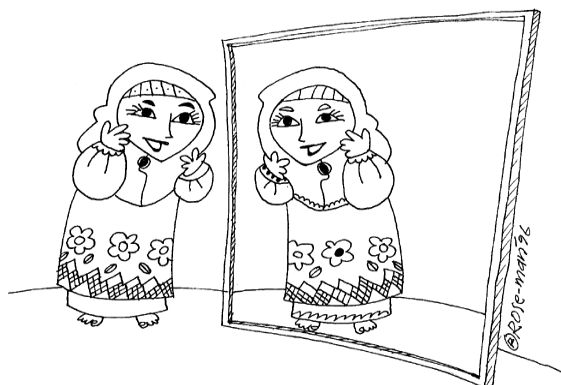
- Surah an-Nur, 24:30-31

Being chaste means to be decent and modest. It means to be morally pure in our thoughts and behaviour. Being chaste does not mean to isolate oneself from society. We can get involved in society whilst ensuring that we remain chaste.

When we dress modestly and don't like to imitate those who dress indecently, we are chaste. We can be chaste in our speech by avoiding telling dirty stories, rude jokes, swearing, and watching films that display these habits. Not only should we avoid this but also we should strongly dislike and hate it.

We can be chaste in our eyes by not looking at other people's bodies with sinful thoughts or flirting with people of the opposite sex.

Chastity starts with being pure in thought and heart. We should always be aware that Allāh is watching us and always ask ourselves this question: "If Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) was with me here today would he be proud to call me his Shi'ah? What would Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) think of me if he saw me doing this right now, or was with me in the shopping mall right now, or was sitting beside me while I'm on the internet or using my cellphone right now?"



Sometimes young people who are very chaste in their speech and dress will behave indecently when on the computer, chatting with friends, etc. This is because it is easier to 'hide' behind the keyboard, webcam, text messages, etc. But we must never forget, it doesn't matter whether people can see us or not. What matters is that Allāh can see us.

Imām Ali (‘a) has said, ‘Beware of sinning when you are alone because at that time, the Judge is also the only Witness!’

Being chaste also means avoiding unislamic culture such as imitating the latest fashion, craze and music in non-Islamic societies.

Movies & Music

Everyone loves to watch movies. But movies often have scenes that are sexually explicit or with too much or too loud harām music. Instead of going to watch movies out where you cannot control what you see and hear, rent movies and watch them at home instead. When the movie comes to scenes that are sinful fast-forward them. You don’t need to see that to understand the movie’s plot. When the music is too much or too loud, reduce the volume or mute it.

Remember: In Islam, wasting time is harām. Rather than watching movies just because you are bored, try and select movies and documentaries that are beneficial and that you can learn from and gain inspiration. Avoid horror movies, movies filled with senseless violence, etc. as these affect your thoughts, behaviour and moral values.

In hadith we are told, music is a part of the ‘vain talk’ that the Qur’ān condemns. The Qur’ān praises the faithful in the following words:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ﴾

(the faithful are those)...who avoid vain speech...

- Surah al-Mu’minun, 23:3