

AKHLAQ

(Ethics)

Lesson 1

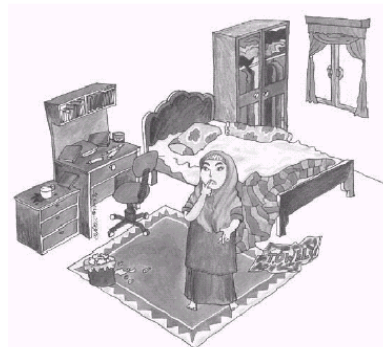
Personal Hygiene & Homes

Rasulullāh (s) has said, 'Allāh is pure and He loves the pure. He is clean and He loves the clean.' And Imām Ali ('a) has said, 'wash yourselves with water from bad odour that disturbs others... Allāh does not like people who are dirty and whose smell disturbs those who sit near them.'

Rasulullāh (s) also taught us to keep our houses clean and free of cobwebs, dust and dirt because these bring poverty and are the houses of shaytan. He (s) also said, 'be clean in every way you can because Allāh built Islam on cleanliness and only the clean will enter Jannah.'

Imām Ali ('a) taught that, 'wearing clean clothes takes away worry and sorrow.' And our eighth Imām, Imām Ali ar-Rida ('a) has said, 'cleanliness is the *akhlāq* of prophets.'

As Muslims we must therefore always make sure our bodies and clothes are clean and so are our homes, the spaces we study and work in and especially our bedrooms. Dirt not only causes sickness and diseases but also makes it hard for us to keep our thoughts clean and to worship Allāh in peace.



Some of the ways in which we keep our bodies clean is by taking a bath regularly, trimming our nails at least once a week and making sure they stay clean. It is mustahab to trim our nails on Thursdays or Fridays. Our hair must always be combed and if we have long hair, it should be tied back neatly. Rasulullāh (s) always combed his hair and some Imāms used to comb their hair and beard at the time of each salāh.

We must brush our teeth at least twice a day. Brushing cleans the mouth and also sharpens our memory. Rasulullāh (s) has said, 'you should brush your teeth because it purifies the mouth, and pleases Allāh, and brightens the eyesight. Indeed the angels hate the odour from a mouth not cleaned after eating food.' And our 5th Imām, Imām

Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) said, 'the reward of a two rak'ah salāh after brushing the teeth is more than 70 rak'ahs without brushing the teeth.'

Clean clothes should be worn at all times and they should be decent and modest clothing when we go out in public or are with others. There is a story told about a man who once entered the masjid of Rasulullāh (s) while he was very dirty and shabbily dressed. When Rasulullāh (s) saw the man, he came near him. He saw the man had dust and sand all over his face, his hair was untidy and dirty and his hands were not washed. His mouth was stinking and his clothes were not neat. Rasulullāh (s) got upset because of the way the man looked. He said to him, 'why do you live like this? Don't you know that cleanliness is a part of religion? Don't you know Allāh (s.w.t.) loves those who are clean? A Muslim must be clean and make use of Allāh (s.w.t.)'s blessings. Since there is water, make use of it and wash yourself and keep yourself clean and tidy.'

Besides keeping ourselves clean, we should make sure we eat food that is clean. Fruit and vegetables should be washed thoroughly before eating.

Cleanliness vs. Obsession with Physical Beauty

It is important to differentiate between cleanliness and being overly concerned with personal beauty. Often the society we live in emphasizes the importance of our physical bodies more than our souls. As a result young people are taken in by all the advertisements in the media that try and sell them products to keep them constantly looking young and glamorous.

Of course Islām teaches us not to neglect our bodies and to look after ourselves. But Islam also condemns excessive preoccupation with physical beauty while forgetting to improve our inner beauty (i.e. our character). Constantly worrying about our looks not only wastes a lot of our time and money but also keeps us busy with the world and what people think of us. It makes us forget Allāh and the hereafter. We should instead consider spending more of our free time gaining knowledge and thinking of what we can do for Islām and how we can help others.

Tattoos

When it comes to beautifying ourselves within reason, we should follow the Sunnah of Rasullāh (s) and what was taught to us by the Imāms from his family i.e. the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). It is recommended to use perfume, especially before salāh, but it is harām to use perfume if a non-mahram will smell it and be attracted to us.

Similarly, when we grow old, it is recommended in Islam to dye our hair. And if a non-mahram will not see their faces, it is also recommended for women to apply kohl to the eyes and to colour their hands with henna. Women are also encouraged to wear some jewellery when they are with their husbands, to make themselves look beautiful.

However, when beautifying our bodies, we should not imitate the culture of others. For example, Muslims should not tattoo pictures on their skin or pierce their bodies to imitate non-religious people. In particular, some mujtahids forbid tattooing pictures of living things. Before Islam, the Arabs used to tattoo pictures of their gods on their hands and chests, and this is forbidden in some ahādith. People who tattoo pictures on their bodies today are very similar to those early Arabs because they try and leave the mark of the heroes they 'worship' on their bodies. A good Muslim is never impressed with any craze or culture that is neither Islamic nor practised by the pious.

More Regarding Clothing and Jewellery

Islam is not an unreasonable religion; it permits men and women to enjoy what Allāh has given them. Clothing is mentioned in the Qur'ān as a blessing from Allāh:

﴿يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُؤَارِي سَوْآتِكُمْ وَرِيشًا وَلِبَاسٌ
التَّقْوَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ﴾

O children of Adam! We have certainly sent down to you clothing to cover your nakedness, and for adornment. And the clothing of Godconsciousness (taqwa) – that is the best...

- Surah al-A'rāf, 7:26

The first point that this āyah refers to is that clothing is for covering the body. We should avoid wearing clothes that are tight, thin, or so short that they do not cover the body and it is actually harām to wear such clothes in public or in the presence of non-mahram.

Within these limits, the Qur’ān calls clothing an adornment. It is therefore good to be well dressed if we can afford it. But a person should also not wear clothes that others around him or her can never afford just to show off or to wear clothes that make him or her proud.

It is harām for Muslim men to wear anything made of pure silk or gold. Women are allowed to wear jewellery and gold ornaments within the limits of modesty. The Qur’ān says:

﴿قُلْ مَنْ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَ لِعِبَادِهِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتِ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ قُلْ هِيَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا خَالِصَةً يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ كَذَلِكَ نَفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

Say: ‘Who has forbidden the adornment of Allāh which He has produced for His servants and the good things provided?’

- Surah al-A’rāf, 7:32

It is recommended that both men and women should wear rings with an aqiq stone on their right hand. However since it is harām for men to wear gold rings, they should wear silver rings with an aqiq stone. A ring with Allāh’s name on it or an āyah of the Qur’ān should not be worn on the left hand or when going to the washroom.

Homes

Our home is a blessing of Allāh. Islam believes every family should live in a comfortable house where they can find rest and happiness for their bodies.

However in Islam, the comfort of the body is only important as a means to help us in our spirituality and religion. Our homes should therefore not become an obsession and we should build it and decorate it within the limits of necessity and according to laws of the shari’ah.

A Muslim may decorate his or her home and own all necessary furniture; but the main purpose of the home is comfort, not luxury or extravagance. The home should not become a means of showing off. To acquire things as status symbols is against the teachings of Islam because it is a form of *isrāf* and promotes pride, showing off, greed and forgetfulness of the next world (that is our permanent and final home).

Statues

It is *harām* in the *shari'ah* to make statues. Some mujtahids consider it also *harām* to keep them in the house. Children's toys however (such as dolls) are permitted.

Paintings and Photographs

It is permissible to draw and paint non-living things according to all mujtahids, and such paintings and drawings may also be used for decoration. There are different views, however, about drawing and painting human and animal subjects; some mujtahids consider this permissible, while others do not.

Photographs are permitted by all mujtahids, although photographs of indecently dressed people or photographs of musicians and film stars, or tyrants and anti-religious thinkers should not be hung up. It is also better not to hang up pictures of sports stars as a form of hero-worship. This has a negative effect upon a Muslim's aim and goals in life.

Paintings or photographs should not be placed in the direction of the *qibla* in a place where people pray, because they will distract people from *salāh*, and also because this resembles the practice of idolaters, who worship statues or pictures.

Spiritual Cleanliness

We should think of cleanliness, not as something that we do or do not do, but as a part of us. Cleanliness should be in all our actions, thoughts and deeds.

We should not only keep our selves physically clean but also keep our thoughts and actions clean.

Our soul is like pure water, and that which holds it (our body), is like a vase. Whatever we see through our eyes, listen with our ears, think with our minds, etc. enters the 'water' of our soul. If we look at bad things, then we are polluting (making dirty) the water of our souls. When this happens, we start desiring to see and do things that will cause us even more harm, until the water of our soul will become so murky and filthy that we will never want to be guided or to succeed in the hereafter.

We have to keep our soul uncontaminated by only allowing those things that are good to enter it.

One of the ways to do this is by remaining in a state of tahārah constantly. Being in wudu all the time can help us keep our thoughts clean so that we are always remembering Allāh. In other words, outward (physical) tahārah can act as a shield against invisible najāsah such as evil thoughts that shaytan whispers into our minds and tries to plant into our hearts.

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'There will come a time when people will have unclean inner selves, but beautiful appearances. They will have greed for the world and they will not wish for that which is with Allāh. Their religion will be only for show. Then they will pray desperately like a person who is drowning but Allāh will not answer their prayer.'



Finally, one of the signs of a Muslim is that when he uses something, he leaves it in a cleaner condition than it was before. This means that we should set an example to others and keep the streets free from litter and keep our homes tidy. This will also give others a good impression of Islam because people judge Islam through our behaviour as Muslims. Cleanliness should be one of the main characteristics of every Muslim.

Lesson 2

Doing Good Only for Allāh

Islam teaches us to do good and to do it only for the sake of Allāh. Any good deed that is done only to make ourselves look good and to impress others is not accepted by Allāh. Even if a good deed is done, both for Allāh and for attention from others, it is rejected by Allāh. He only accepts deeds from us that are done 100% for Him and Him alone. When we do something good only for Allāh, we should try and conceal it from others so they do not know that we did it. And we should also never forget to thank Allāh for giving us the opportunity to do something good for His sake.

Doing good only for the sake of Allāh is called **ikhhlās**. And doing good only to show people is called **Riyā**. A person who does good with ikhlās is called a *mukhlis* and a person who does things with riyā is called a *murāi*.

When we do good to impress others it is as if we worship them besides Allāh. Everyday in our salāh, we recite Surah al-Fātiha in which we say:

﴿إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ﴾

You [alone] do we worship, and to You [alone] do we turn for help.

- Surah al-Fātiha, 1:5

Rasulullāh (s) said, ‘If you are sincere in your deeds, a little action will be sufficient for you.’ In other words it is better to do only the wājib sincerely than to do lots and lots of mustahab actions only to show off and impress others.

Nabi Isa (‘a) once said, ‘Sincerity means to do something for Allāh only, not wanting anyone to praise you for it.’

A murāi is like a hypocrite (munāfiq) because a murāi does good deeds only to impress people and to be praised but pretends he is doing it for Allāh. Similarly, a munāfiq is someone who does not really believe in Islam but pretends to be a Muslim only to fool people.

In the Qur’ān, Allāh condemns those who pray only to show off:

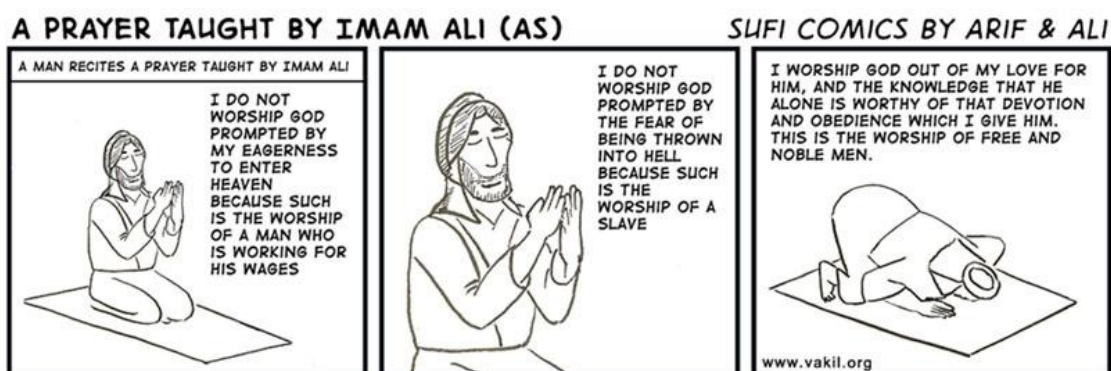
﴿فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ﴾

Woe to them who pray – those who are forgetful in their prayers, those who show off...

- Surah al-Mā’un, 107:4-6

Rasulullāh (s) taught us, ‘Allāh does not accept an action that has even an atom’s weight of riyā.’ And he (s) also said, ‘Allāh has made Jannah harām on every murāi.’

Imām Ali (‘a) did not even worship Allāh because he wanted to go to Jannah or because he feared Hellfire. Instead he worshipped Allāh only out of love for Him and because Allāh deserves to be worshipped. This is the highest level of ikhlās.



Imām Ali (‘a) also said, ‘A person whose outside appearance (of being good) is better than his or her inner state (of being pure in heart) will have few good deeds (on the Day of Judgement).’

And our sixth Imām, Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) once said, ‘Some people will be brought on the Day of Judgement before Allāh with their salāh and they will say to Allāh, ‘O Allāh I prayed all this for You’. And Allāh will say, ‘you are lying. You prayed all this so that people should say, ‘look at how much he prays!’ Then Allāh will say, ‘Take him to the fire.’

How do we know if we suffer from the sickness of riyā? Imām Ali (‘a) said, ‘the signs of a murāi are four:

1. They rush to do good when people are watching them.
2. They are lazy to do good when they are alone.
3. They do more of a good action if they are praised for it.
4. And they do less of a good action if no one praises them for it.'

Both our fifth Imām, Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) and our sixth Imām, Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) warned us that preserving our good deeds until the Day of Judgement is much harder than doing the good deed itself. They said, for example, sometimes a person does a good deed only to please Allāh but then after many years he praises himself for the good action to others and it becomes useless. When a person does a good deed secretly, Allāh writes a lot of thawāb for it because it was done secretly. Then when he or she tells one person, it is written as a good deed that was done publicly and therefore has less thawāb. And then when he or she tells a second person about it, it is erased as a good deed and it is written that it was not done for Allāh but it was done as *riyā* to show off to people and impress others besides Allāh.

So always be on guard to do good secretly and to protect all the past good deeds you have done. A good way to protect past good deeds is not to remember them. Allāh will preserve them for us. We should instead focus on the future: how to improve ourselves and become better and how to do more good deeds.

How do we increase our ikhlās? Ikhlās will only happen when our obedience and worship of Allāh comes from our hearts and we truly and really love Allāh and Islam more than anything else in the world. Even our love for Rasulullāh (s), the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), and the Qur'ān should come out of our love for Allāh and because of how special they are to Allāh. We should love Allāh even more than we love our own lives.

It is this pure love that is called ikhlās. Ikhlās is the essence of religion and tawhid. That is why every act of worship has a niyyah (intention) in Islam and every niyyah must be done '*qurbatan ilallāh*' (to seek closeness to Allāh) i.e. only for the sake of Allāh.

Even if a person worships Allāh all night or gives a million dollars in charity or fights for Islam until he bleeds to death, if the intention is not to worship and serve Allāh - only for His sake and His pleasure - then it is

all useless and a waste of time and money. It has no value whatsoever. Hence the famous hadith of Rasullāh (s), 'Actions are judged by their intentions.' (*al-'amālu bin-niyyāt*).

This means that the sins or blessings we get for doing something depends on WHY we did it.

Your student workbook has three different anecdotes on Ikhlās vs. Riyā. Your teacher may share some of these anecdotes or you could read them yourself at home.

Lesson 3

Working Hard & Not Being Lazy

Islam does not like people who are lazy, especially those who are able to work for themselves but expect others to do their work or to give them money for nothing.

A person who begs from other than Allāh loses his or her respect. Allāh has promised to feed everyone as long as they keep trying to help themselves and they work hard. Working hard and asking only from Allāh are signs of a good Muslim.

In fact, a faithful (mu'min) Muslim has to work harder than most people. This is because most people work only for this life i.e. for food, their home, money, family, comfort, and so on. However a mu'min has to work for *both* this life and the next. Fortunately, with the right intention (niyyāh), a person can do both at the same time. For example, a person who goes out to work with the intention to feed his family is also building his hereafter and earning thawāb. Similarly, a person who eats food with the intention of gain strength to worship Allāh is also being rewarded for eating.

Working hard for the next world requires us to be constantly mindful of Allāh and His creation. This means for example, to pray sincerely and on time, and to be fair to others and helpful to all in need.

Your workbook has a comic strip of an incident where Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) was once working hard and digging on one of his farms on a hot and sunny day. A person passed by and saw the Imām sweating and working away at the ground. He condemned the Imām and said, 'O (grand) son of Rasulullāh, how can you do this!' The Imām ('a) looked up from his work and asked, 'Why, what have I done?' And the man answered, 'you are working so hard for this world instead of worshipping your Lord! What if you died because of the heat whilst sweating for the world!'

Imām as-Sādiq ('a) replied him that doing hard work that is halāl is one of the best forms of worship and it would be no shame if a person died

whilst working to help himself and his family. In fact he would be rewarded by Allāh.

This shows that Islam promotes a well-balanced life. Its rules are not just on recitation of Qur'ān and salāh, but also on work and livelihood.

To rely on others to provide for you, especially when you are an adult, means to depend on them. Dependence on an adult is ok if you are a child. But when we are adults, our children and old parents and grandparents should depend on us. We should work hard and depend on Allāh for help.

Some people are like parasites that feed on others. They form a habit of constantly asking others to do things for them even when they can do it themselves. This is a dreadful habit and indicates laziness and taking wrong advantage of other peoples' kindness. Rasulullāh (s) once told his companion Abu Dhar that if you wish to be successful in this world and the hereafter, never depend on others. Even if your whip falls from your hand while you are on a horse, get down and pick it up yourself. If we learn to practice this habit of working for ourselves, we will begin to see the wisdom of Rasulullāh (s)'s advice to Abu Dhar.

If our parents or grandparents ask us to do things for them, however, we should do it for them. That is their right and it is an honour and pleasure for us to serve them and we should thank Allāh for the opportunity to do something for them.

In fact, while we should not take favours from others, we should always be happy to help others. Islam, for example, teaches us never to beg from others but also never to turn away a beggar who begs from us.

Some examples of how you can be self reliant and hard working is to ensure that you make your own bed in the mornings, you clean your own room, help to wash the dishes, and do your own chores. We should not expect others to follow us around making sure that our duties are performed for us, and reminding us to do everything.

A lot of times we complain that our parents treat us like little children. This happens because we don't show a sense of responsibility. We can show we are responsible when we do things without being asked and

especially when we do more than just helping ourselves. Like, for example, when we take the garbage out without being asked to do so and without expecting a 'reward'. This shows we care to do more than just our part at home and we are mature and have a sense of responsibility. As long as we cannot do this, our parents will not trust us and will continue treating us like little kids.

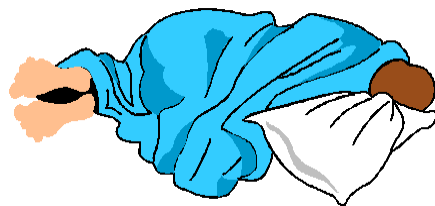
Laziness

Laziness means to avoid work, or putting in the least amount of effort to get something done. Laziness is also addictive. The lazier we behave, the lazier we truly become.

You will never find a truly faithful Muslim lazy and idle. You will always find a faithful Muslim working hard for himself or herself and even helping others. Only hypocrites are lazy while pretending to be religious.

Teenagers who are lazy and do not change as they grow older face many problems later in life. Some of them become untrustworthy because they steal or cheat others to take shortcuts in life and make quick money. Others become like parasites always 'feeding off' and depending on others. And many lose their will to work hard so their families break up.

Of course being tired and relaxing after hard work is not being lazy. A person may even need to socialize with friends or play some sports to re-energize. However sitting around all day, doing nothing meaningful, just watching television or playing computer games are all signs of laziness. In some cases sleeping too much may be a condition that requires medical treatment and such a person should ask for help rather than letting it get worse.

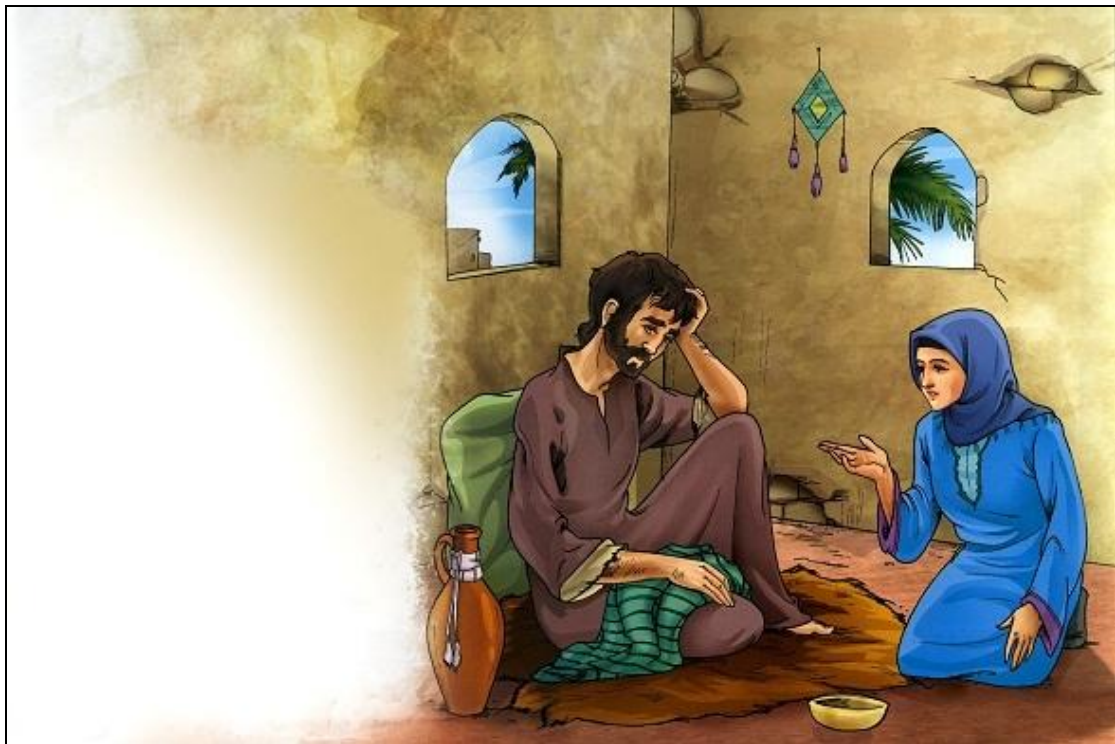


Remember: Never say 'I am bored!!' That is only what people who lack imagination say. If you have finished doing all your work, then pick up a book and read. You don't have to read only for school. Think of what you're good at. That's your gift from Allāh. Now find an interest or a

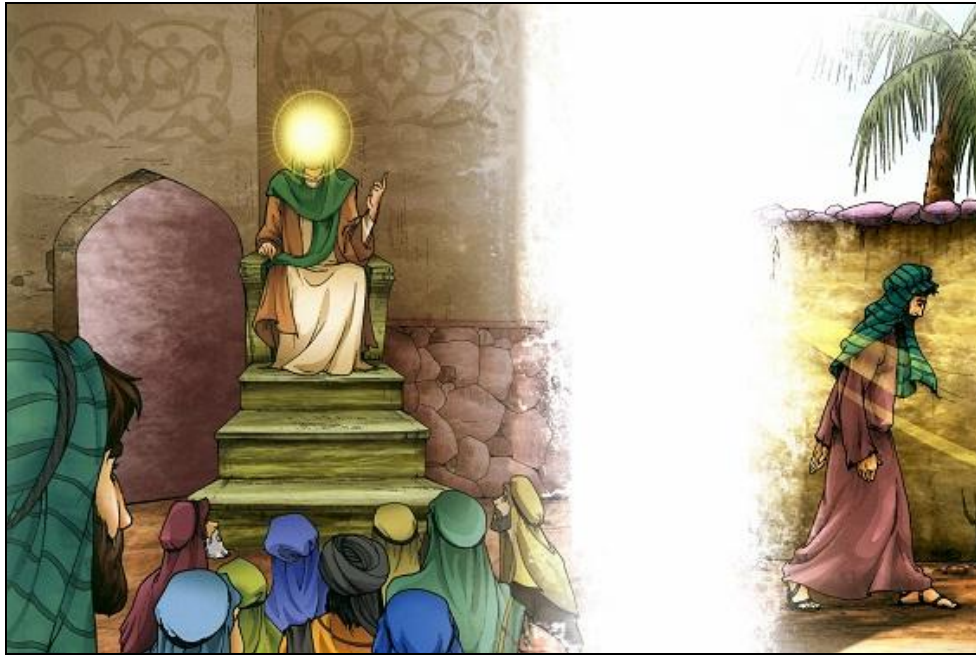
hobby to help you grow your gift. Recite the Qur'ān or read a passage from Nahj al-Balāgha. Join a Book Club or Study Circle. Volunteer with an Islamic youth group or start a group that does projects to help others.

Remember the moral of the story you are about to read is: **Allāh helps those who help themselves.**

The Man Who Wanted Help

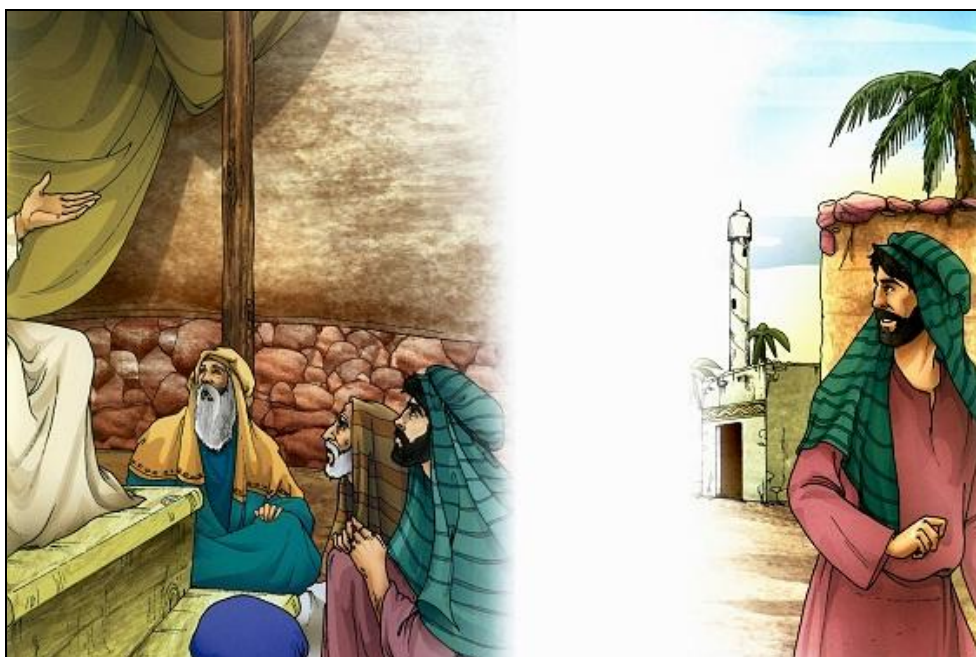


Abdullah sat down feeling hopeless because he could not find any means of providing food and support for his family. His wife noticed how sad and worried he was and said to him, 'Why don't you go to Rasulullāh (s) and ask him to help us with some money?'



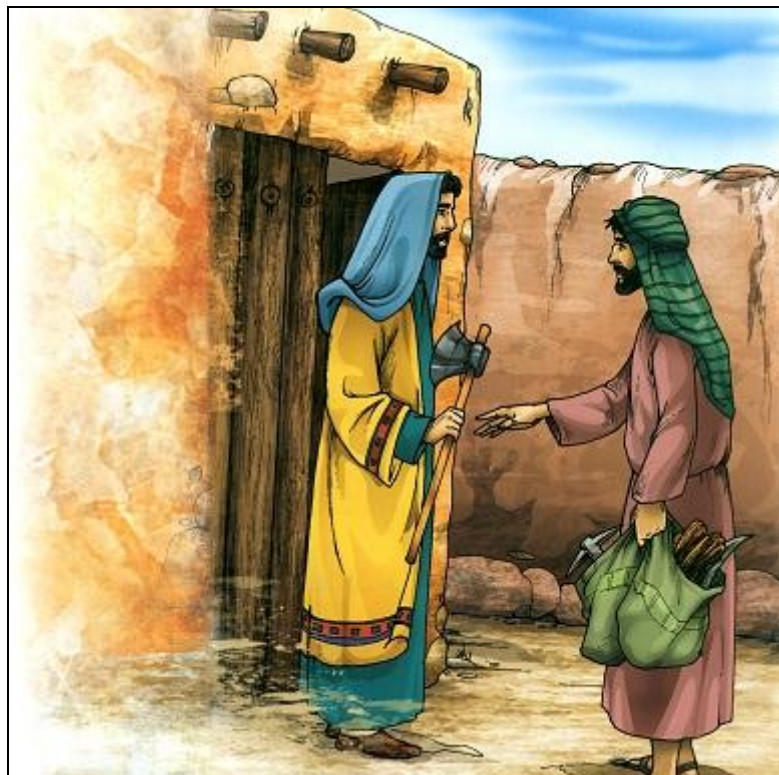
So Abdullah plucked the courage and set out to meet Rasulullāh (s) and to ask for help. Before he could meet Rasulullāh (s), he heard Rasulullāh (s) saying: *'Whoever asks us, we will give him. But one who tries to help himself, Allāh helps him.'*

So Abdullah never said a word and went back home hiding his problem. But his poverty forced him to go again to Rasulullāh (s) and ask for help. Again he heard Rasulullāh (s) saying the same thing as before. Once again, Abdullah kept quiet and went back home. But soon he felt he had to go and ask for help.

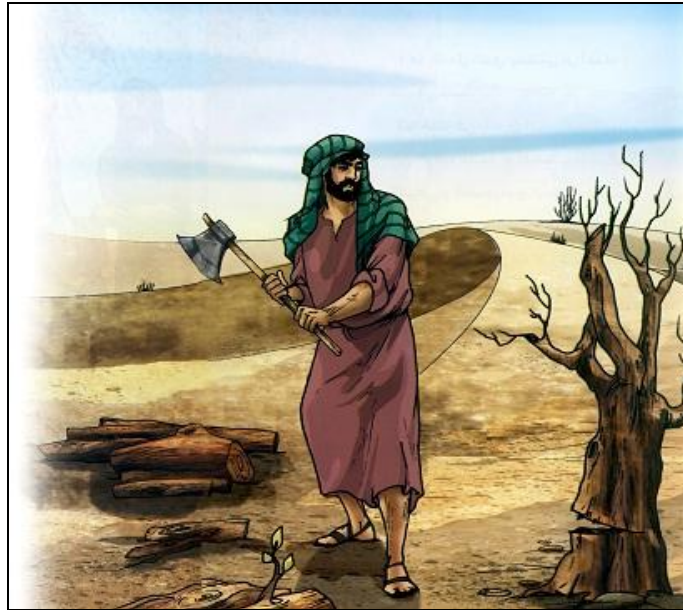


So on the third day, he stood up determined that he would tell Rasullāh (s) of his problem. But again he heard the same hadith. This time however, when he heard the words, 'Allāh helps the person who tries to help himself', they had a different effect on him. Instead of feeling hopeless, Abdullah felt as if he had just understood the key to unlocking all his problems. He stood up and walked out with determination to help himself. Abdullah now refused to beg or ask for help. He began thinking how strong he was and what he could do with his own hands without asking someone else for help!!

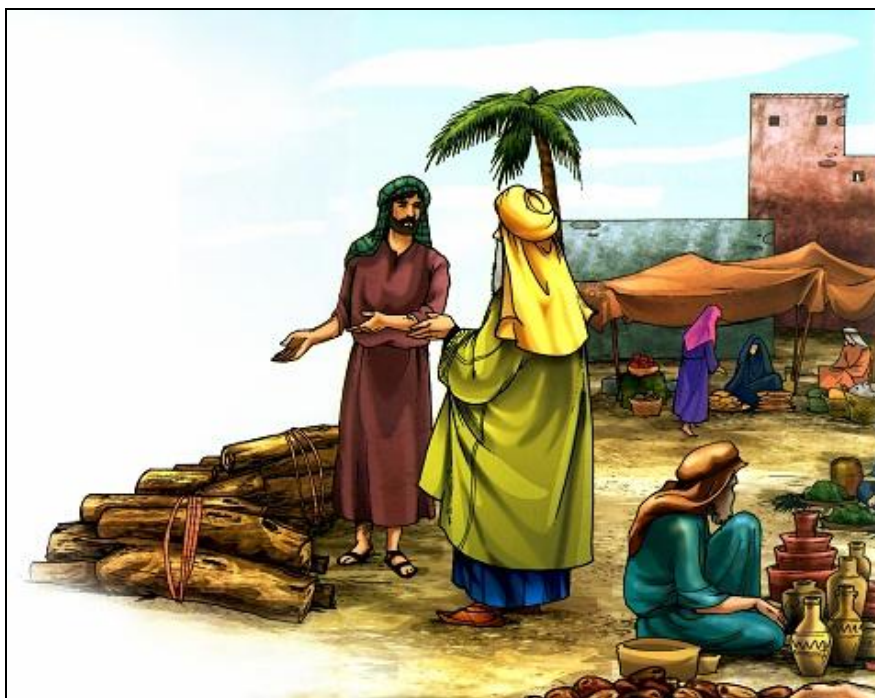
'What work can I do?' he began asking himself. Then he noticed that everyone needs firewood everyday but the wood is not easily available and has to be brought from the mountains and the shrubs in the desert. So he decided he would chop wood and sell it as firewood.



But Abdullah did not have any tools to chop wood and he could not afford to buy any. Just then he remembered he had a friend who had an axe. So he went to his friend and asked him if he could borrow the axe to chop wood.



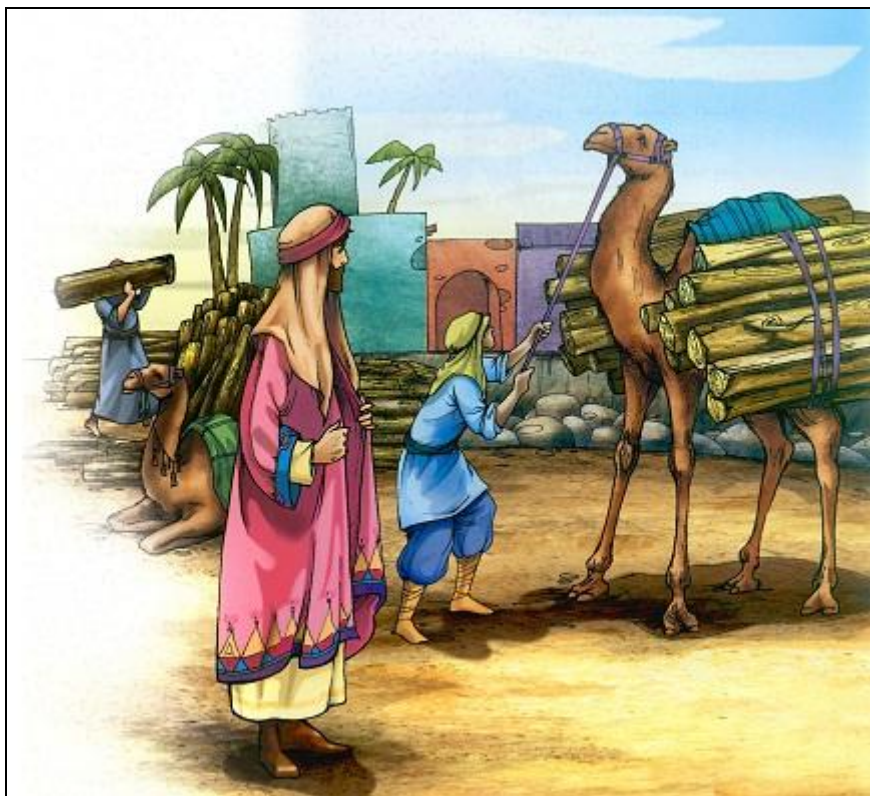
When Abdullah got to the desert, he was surprised to see how far one dead tree was from the other and how far he would have to carry the heavy wood back to the city to sell it. The sun was also very hot and the sand would sometimes blow into his eyes. But every time Abdullah remembered his hungry children and family, he would gain courage to work and he would chop the wood and walk long distances carrying them so that his family would not be hungry and in need again.



As the sun began going down, Abdullah had to rush back before the market places would close and people would go back home. With all the

strength he had left after chopping the wood, Abdullah carried the logs to the market and began shouting at the top of his voice: 'Wood!... wood!... firewood!... lots of firewood!'

People began buying from him and Abdullah began seeing the reward of his hard work and tasting the pleasure of struggling with his own hands. His wife could not believe her eyes when she saw Abdullah coming home with food for dinner that night. She was even more amazed when he proudly told her that he did not beg or ask anyone for help.



The next morning Abdullah woke up very early and went out again to chop more wood. He did this for many days and soon he was able to return the axe to his friend and buy a new one of his own. After sometime, Abdullah became rich. He bought a camel and hired two people to help him carry the wood from the desert. Abdullah became an example for anyone willing to work hard for himself and how not to beg or depend on anyone except Allāh, *subhānahu wa ta'ala*.

Lesson 4

Trust in Allāh

Trust in Allāh is called at-Tawakkul in Arabic. Allāh tells us to always place our trust in Him and if we do that, He will always take care of us and do what is best for us, even in the worst moments of our lives. For example, He tells us in the Qur'ān:

﴿... فَقُلْ حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ ...﴾

...say, 'Allāh is sufficient for me. There is no god except Him. In Him I have put my trust...'

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:129

﴿قُلْ هُوَ رَبِّي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ مَتَابُ﴾

Say, 'He is my Lord; there is no god except Him; in Him I have put my trust, and to Him will be my return.'

- Surah ar-Ra'd, 13:30

Tawakkul requires courage. It is easy to say 'I trust in Allāh' when everything is going well. But we can only know how much we trust Allāh when we face a problem in life. For example, if we work hard but still fail an exam, do we lose hope of ever succeeding? What do we do next? Do we remain patient, try harder and place our trust in Allāh that He will help us? Or do we give up?

If we place our trust in Allāh, we will never feel sad or afraid even if most people are against us. But if we place our trust in friends or money we will always feel insecure when we lose them. To trust Allāh we must be convinced that no one has more power than Him. That way, we are never worried no matter what happens to us in life because we know that as long as Allāh is there to look out for us and protect us, we will be fine.

Allāh mentions this in the Qur'ān as well:

﴿إِن يَنْصُرْكُمُ اللَّهُ فَلَا غَالِبَ لَكُمْ وَإِن يَخْذَلْكُمْ فَمَن ذَا الَّذِي يَنْصُرُكُم مِّن بَعْدِهِ
وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ﴾

If Allāh helps you, no one can overcome you, but if He leaves you, who will help you after Him? So in Allāh let all the faithful put their trust.

- Surah Al-i Imran, 3:160

And Allāh praises those who never lose hope and trust in Him even when other people try and frighten them. After the Battle of Uhud, when many Muslims were hurt and injured, some hypocrites tried to frighten them but the Muslims showed tawakkul and so Allāh praised them:

﴿الَّذِينَ قَالَ لَهُمُ النَّاسُ إِنَّ النَّاسَ قَدِ جَمَعُوا لَكُمْ فَآخَشَوْهُمْ فزَادَهُمْ 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, and they said, 'Allāh is sufficient for us, and He is the best One to trust.'

- Surah Al-i Imran, 3:173

Of course trust in Allāh does not mean that we become lazy and irresponsible and never do anything to help ourselves. Tawakkul is not to just sit at home and hope Allāh will send everything you need. It is to work hard as if it all depends on you and then to place your trust in Allāh as if it all depends on Him.

For example, when we are sick, we should seek all the medical treatment we can. Thereafter we should trust that Allāh will do what's best for us and therefore never lose hope. Similarly we should study and work as best as we can whilst placing our trust in Allāh to help us.

The following story is about our ninth Imām, Imām Muhammad al-Jawād ('a) and how great his tawakkul on Allāh was even from a young age. It shows the relation between courage and trust in Allāh. The more trust a person has in Allāh's protection and power, the more courage they will have in danger. And the opposite is also true.

Trust in Allāh – Never Fear of a Tyrant

After poisoning Imām Ali ar-Rida (‘a), the Abbasi Caliph Ma’mun could no longer stay in Khorasan. The people there hated him even more and wanted to overthrow him so he had to move his capital from Khorasan in Iran to Baghdad in Iraq.

In Baghdad, Ma’mun set up another kingdom for himself and began cheating people into believing that he was a good man and a pious Muslim.



In his heart, Ma’mun knew that the young son of Imām ar-Rida (‘a), the ninth Imām, Muhammad al-Jawad (‘a) was the rightful successor of Rasulullāh (s).

Ma’mun ordered his people to bring Imām Muhammad al-Jawad (‘a) from Madina to Baghdad so that he could keep an eye on him. The spies of Ma’mun were watching every move of Imām al-Jawad (‘a).



Ma’mun’s main concern was to keep people away from Imām al-Jawad (‘a) and that is why he brought him to Baghdad. But even there, Imām al-Jawad (‘a), despite his young age, began to teach people religion and other sciences.

So Ma’mun then began sending all the learned scholars to sit with Imām al-Jawad (‘a) and to debate with him and ask him difficult questions. But whatever they asked, Imām al-Jawad (‘a) was able to answer all their questions easily.

And Imām Muhammad al-Jawad (‘a) also asked them questions but they were not able to answer him.



One day, Ma'mun decided to go fishing with his ministers and soldiers. A large number of troops came out on the streets of Baghdad. They were many horses and soldiers everywhere in the streets of Baghdad and people began running home and hiding away out of fear of the cruel Ma'mun and his people.

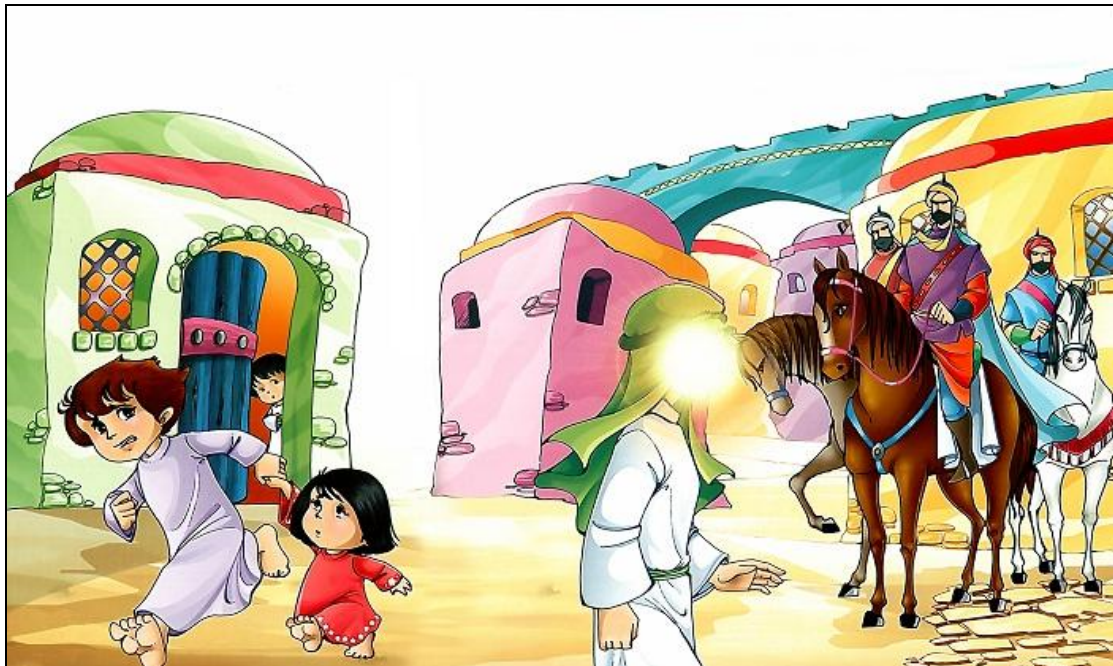


All the mothers in the streets took their children and ran home while the shopkeepers shut down their shops and hid inside.

Ma'mun rode on his horse through the streets of Baghdad with a lot of pomp and glory, very proud of his power and how everyone was afraid of him. This is how all tyrants are. They love it when even innocent people are scared of them.

On one of the streets, there were children playing and Imām al-Jawad ('a) was passing by them, when all the children began running away to

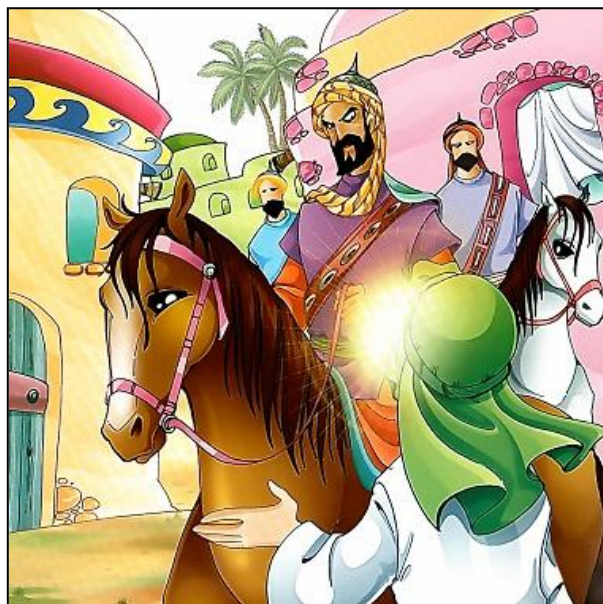
their homes because they saw the horses of Ma'mun approaching. Soon everyone was hiding in their homes.



But Imām Muhammad al-Jawad ('a) did not run away. He stood there without any fear and was walking casually, ignoring Ma'mun and his soldiers, as if nothing important was happening.

The Caliph Ma'mun saw how all the children ran away except this one young boy, Imām al-Jawad ('a) and he was not happy. When he came closer, he pretended he did not recognize who this boy was and asked him, 'Little boy, why did you not move out of the way and run away like all the other children who got scared?!!'

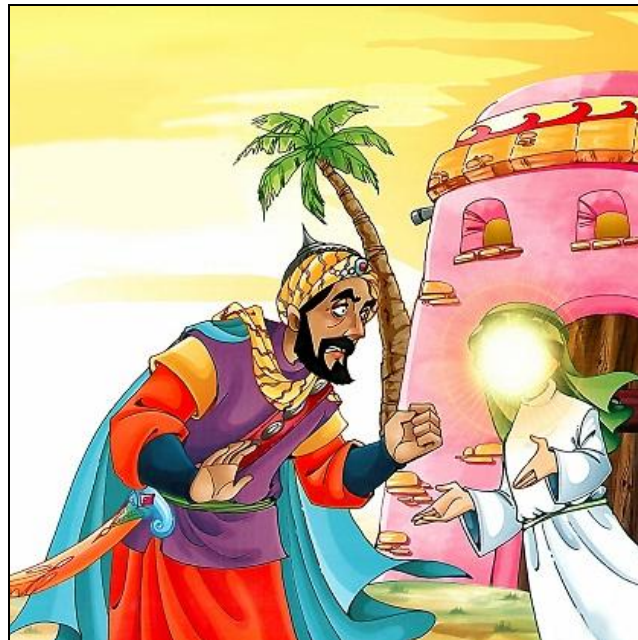
Imām al-Jawad ('a) replied the Caliph Ma'mun fearlessly, 'the road is wide enough for you to pass with your soldiers and I can walk without coming in your way. And I have not committed any crime or done anything wrong to deserve punishment, so why should I run away or be afraid of you?'



And so Ma'mun passed with his soldiers and went off fishing. But his pride was broken by Imām al-Jawad ('a) and he was disgraced by the courage and the brave answer that Imām Muhammad al-Jawad ('a) gave him despite his young age.

When Ma'mun returned from fishing, he called Imām al-Jawad ('a) to his palace and said to him, 'Tell me, what am I hiding in my hand right now?!

And Imām al-Jawad ('a) replied him, 'You are hiding a little fish that you caught from the river Dajla and you are asking me this question because you want to test me to see if I am really an Imām and if Allāh has really taught me everything!!'



Al-Ma'mun was shocked to hear this and said, 'Truly, you are the son of ar-Rida ('a)!!'

Lesson 5

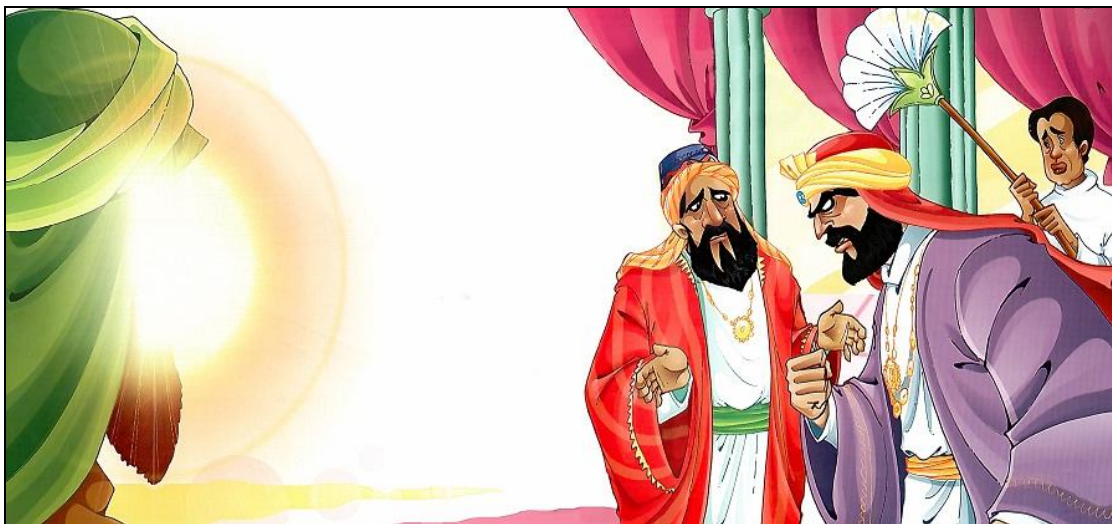
Allāh Protects Those He Loves

In the previous lesson we learnt about tawakkul and how we automatically become courageous when we trust no one and nothing more than Allāh. In this lesson, we continue studying the same virtue of tawakkul.

A person who has trust in Allāh knows that unless his or her time to die has come, nothing can harm him or her without Allāh's will and permission. So the faithful are not harmed even when there is great danger that they are unaware of and unprepared for. Whether they are surrounded with friends or about to meet an enemy, the true faithful have more trust in Allāh's protection than their own strength and ability. And when a person surrenders himself or herself to Allāh, then Allāh takes charge of his or her protection.

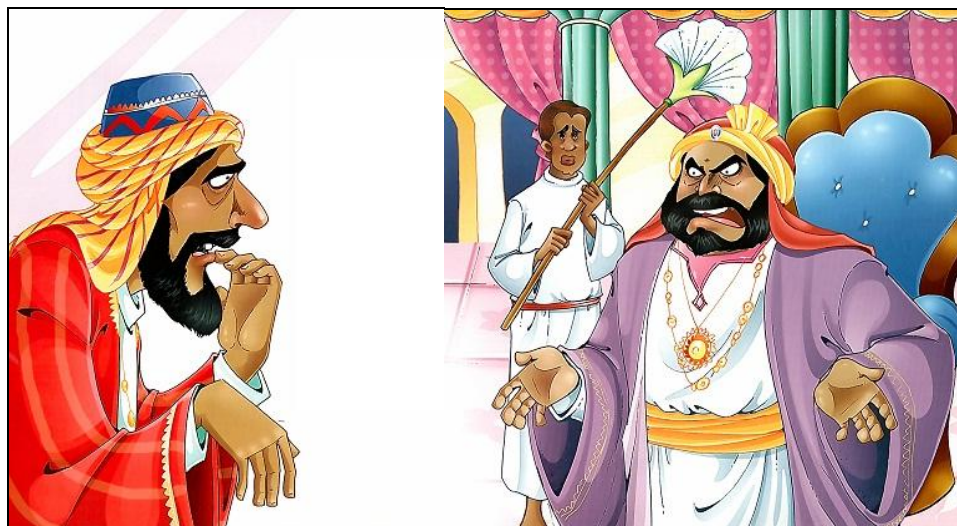
The following is a beautiful story about our tenth Imām, Imām Ali al-Hādi ('a) and how wherever he went, Allāh always protected him.

Imām al-Hādi ('a)'s Invisible Guards



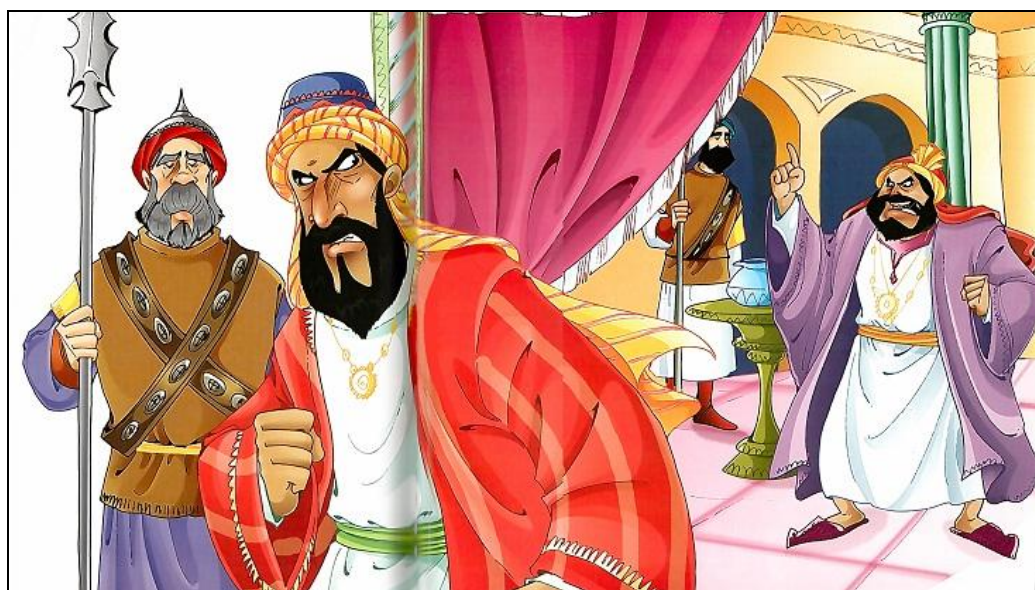
The cruel king and caliph Mutawakkil al-Abbasi was always angry at others. But one day, he was even angrier and more upset than normal.

Mutawakkil especially hated the family of Rasulullāh (s) and when he was really angry, the people did not know what to do. Everyone was scared to tell him to calm down because he might order them to be killed. So no one could even speak to him when he was angry.



Just then, the vizier of Mutawakkil, whose name was Fath bin Khāqān, entered the palace and saw how angry Mutawakkil was. When he tried to find out the reason, he was told it was because some of the spies had told Mutawakkil about some words that the tenth Imām, Imām Ali al-Hādi (‘a) had said against him.

The vizier Fath bin Khāqān tried to calm the caliph Mutawakkil down and told him, ‘I am sure Ali al-Hādi never said any words against you. Maybe we should check if what the spies have told you is correct.’



But Mutawakkil got even angrier. He shouted in the face of the vizier and said, 'my spies are right. Ali bin Muhammad is from the family of Rasulullāh (s) and he hates me and wants to overthrow me. I trust my spies. They would never lie to me!!'

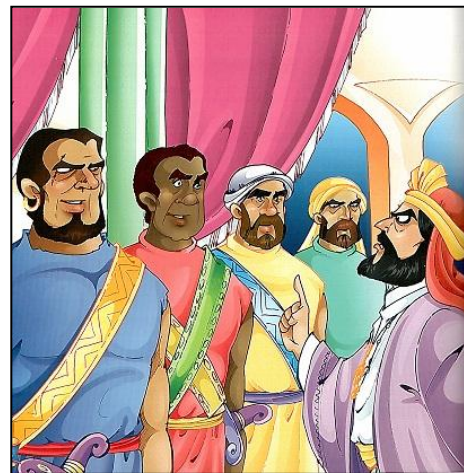
The vizier Fath bin Khāqān said, 'But Imām Ali al-Hādi has not done anything against you so far... why do you suspect him?'



This made Mutawakkil even angrier and he refused to listen to the words of his vizier. Mutawakkil really hated the family of Rasulullāh (s). He had already destroyed the grave of Imām Husayn ('a) and imprisoned and killed hundreds of Shi'ahs. This was because he knew that the

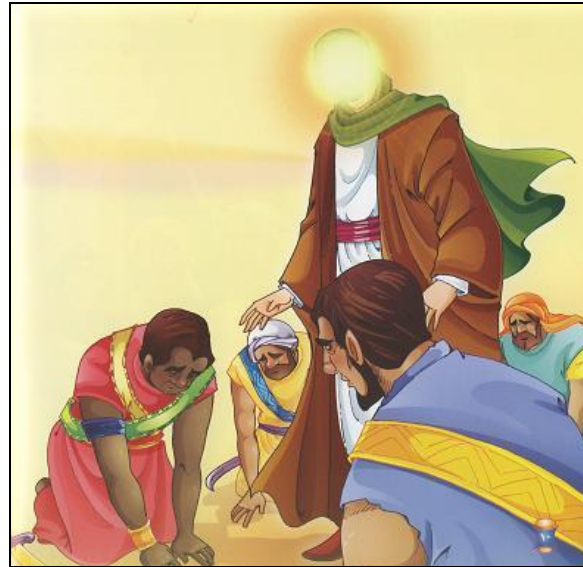
real Imām and rightful successor of Rasulullāh (s) was Imām Ali al-Hādi ('a) and not him.

Mutawakkil then began thinking of all the things his spies had told him about Imām Ali al-Hādi ('a). And the more he thought about it, the more he hated Imām Ali al-Hādi ('a) and began thinking of how to kill him.

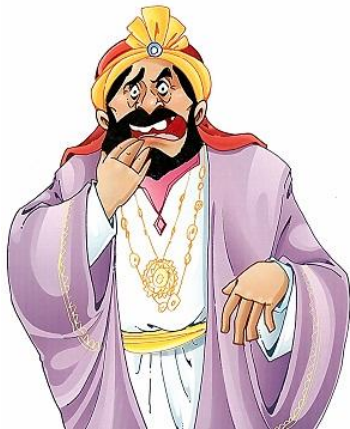


Finally, he called four of his cruelest soldiers and told them, 'I am going to invite Ali bin Muhammad al-Hādi to the palace right now. When he comes in, I want you all to pounce on him and cut him into pieces with your swords!!'

And so Mutawakkil summoned Imām Ali al-Hādi ('a) to his palace. The four strong men got ready with their swords to attack the Imām and to kill him. But as soon as he came in and they saw him, they were overwhelmed with his personality and felt so weak in front of him that they dropped their swords and fell on the ground and began kissing his feet.



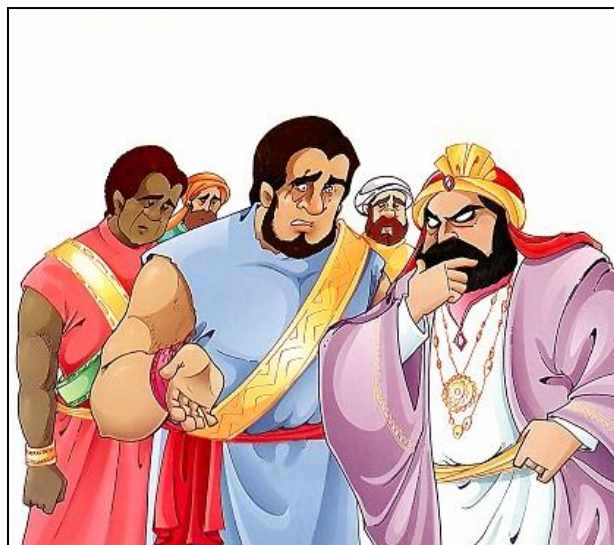
The caliph Mutawakkil became speechless. He did not know what to say or do. So he sat down with the Imām for a bit to talk to him and then, by the grace of Allāh, Imām al-Hādi (‘a) left the palace of Mutawakkil and went home safe and sound.



When Imām Ali al-Hādi (‘a) had left, Ma’mun asked his four guards, ‘Why didn’t you kill him and why did you disobey me?!’

They said, ‘master, when al-Hādi entered the palace, we saw swords all around him

protecting him but we couldn’t see who was carrying them. We got so scared that our swords dropped from our hands and we fell to the ground and were speechless.’



Lesson 6

Friends & Friendship

Friendship



Islam places great emphasis on friendship. After our own family and relatives, the closest human beings to us are our friends. Often our friends will influence us more than even our family. This is because we don't choose our family but we get to choose our friends. And friends are usually close to us in age and therefore have similar interests, ambitions and goals as us.

Imām Ali ('a) has said, 'Friends are like one soul in different bodies.'

But the influence of friends can be positive or negative. When we hang out with friends who have non-Islamic values or bad morals, they exert a negative influence on us and through peer pressure, we may become like them. People around us also judge us according to the kind of friends we keep.

Nabi Sulayman ('a) once said, 'Do not judge a person until you see who he spends time with. Because a person is known by those like him' (i.e. his friends and whose company he keeps).



Imām Ali ('a) also said, 'Every person leans to his own type'. This is very similar to the English expression, 'Birds of a feather flock together.'

Sinful Friends

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'People are attracted to the religion of their friends. Therefore you should see who your friends are.'

The Qur'ān as well teaches us that some people on the Day of Judgement will regret very much the friends they kept because had it not been for the bad influence of the friends, they would have gone to

Jannah forever instead of Jahannam forever. But because of their friends they will cry out with a lot of regret:

﴿يَا وَيْلَتِي لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فُلَانًا خَلِيلًا﴾

Woe to me! I wish I had not taken so-and-so as a friend!

- Surah al-Furqān, 25:28

And some people, because they were wise and strong in their *imān* (faith) and they refused to listen to the negative influence of friends and they left them, they will be very happy on the Day of Judgement because they didn't listen to such 'friends'. They will look down into Hellfire and see the bad 'friend' who almost managed to destroy his chance to go to Jannah:

﴿فَاطَّلَعَ فَرَآهُ فِي سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ . قَالَ تَاللَّهِ إِن كِدَّتْ لَتُرْدِينِي . وَكَوَلَا نِعْمَةً رَبِّي

لَكُنْتُ مِنَ الْمُحْضَرِينَ﴾

Then he will take a look and see him in the middle of hell. He will say, 'By Allāh, you had almost ruined me! Had it not been for my Lord's blessing, I too would have been among those called to account (i.e. punished)!'

- Surah as-Saffāt, 37:55-57

It is for this reason that Rasulullāh (s) taught us, 'It is better to be alone (without friends) than to have a sinful friend (who is a bad influence).'

And Imām Ali ('a) gave us a very good example of how friends influence us. He said, 'A sinful friend will bring sin to you just like if you hang around a stench, you carry the bad smell on you even when you leave and go elsewhere.'

A good friend obviously has the opposite effect and we carry a fragrance of goodness with us wherever we go.

And our ninth Imām, Imām Muhammad al-Jawad ('a) also gave us another example by saying, 'Beware of an evil friend. He is like a sword – shiny and beautiful to look at but it is dangerous and cuts you when you touch it.'



Friends to Keep and Friends to Avoid

The Qur'ān tells us to avoid 'friends' who make fun of religion and have no respect for Allāh and His signs (such as the Qur'ān, Rasullāh (s), the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).)

﴿وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ الَّذِينَ يَخُوضُونَ فِي آيَاتِنَا فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّى يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِ وَإِمَّا يُنْسِيَنَّكَ الشَّيْطَانُ فَلَا تَقْعُدْ بَعْدَ الذِّكْرِى مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

When you see those who gossip impiously about Our signs, avoid them until they engage in some other discourse; but if Satan makes you forget, then, after remembering, do not sit with the wrongdoing lot.

- Surah al-An'ām, 6:68

1. Keep a friend who is good for your religion and your hereafter. This is a friend who reminds you of Allāh, loves Islam and encourages you to help in Islamic activities.
2. Keep a friend who always prays on time and encourages you to pray also. Avoid a friend who skips salāh or doesn't pray at all.
3. Keep a friend who loves you and defends you even when you are not present and when others try to say nasty things about you.
4. Keep a friend who loves his or her family and encourages you to love and respect your parents and family. Avoid a friend who hates his parents and does not keep relations with his or her family.
5. Keep a friend who shares with you in any work you do together and shares in the cost of anything you buy e.g. takes turns to pay for a meal. Avoid a friend who always expects you to work for him or her and to pay all the time. Such a person is only using you and will leave you when you have no money or cannot help him.
6. Avoid a friend who loves listening to your secrets but then tells it to others. Such a person is not trustworthy.
7. Avoid a friend who praises you on your face but backbites and speaks ill of you to others when you are not present.
8. Keep friends who are intelligent and hard working at school. Avoid friends who are lazy and don't like gaining knowledge and spend all their time only talking about games, fun and pleasure.

9. Keep friends who are Muslims and your mahram. A Muslim never has 'friends' of the opposite gender who are not his or her mahram, even if they work together and are very respectful toward each other. A Muslim also never has very close friends or 'best' friends who are not Muslims.
10. Remember: Our best friends are Allāh and our living Imām ('atfs). You should not love anyone more than them and not disobey them for anyone.
11. Remember: Your parents love you more than any friend ever will. Even when your parents scold you or annoy you. When you are in trouble, your parents will always be there for you.

Our 4th Imām, Imām Ali Zayn al-Abideen ('a) has said that you should not make friends with the following people:

1. Liars, because with their lies they deceive you from the right path.
2. Sinners because their friendship is not dependable.
3. Stingy people because at the time of need and difficulty these people will not be your friends.
4. Foolish people because they may try to help you but will cause you more harm due to their ignorance.
5. People who cut off relations with their own family because Allāh has cursed these people.



And our sixth Imām, Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) has said you can never know if someone is a true friend until you test him or her in three things:

1. Until you see him when he is angry. Does he change from being fair and become unfair?
2. Until you see him with money. Does he help you if you need to borrow money?
3. Until you travel with him and see how he behaves when on a journey.

An Anecdote

Everyone needs friends, but friends are only worth having if they are true friends.

Two travellers were on the road together, when a robber suddenly appeared. One man ran for a tree and climbed up and hid in the branches. The other was not as fast so he threw himself onto the ground pretending to be dead.

The robber came to the man on the ground, whispered something in his ear and went away.

When the robber had gone the man in the tree climbed down and asked his friend what the robber had whispered in his ear.

His friend replied that the robber had told him to find a better friend who would not leave him at the first sign of danger!

Rights of a Friend

True friends have many rights. Some of them are that:

- You should respect and love them as well as respect their parents and family.
- You should invite them to your home every once in a while and you should visit them when they invite you over.
- You should bring them gifts when you return from a trip.
- When you see them doing something wrong, you should correct them gently and when you see them doing something good, you should praise and encourage them.
- If someone speaks ill of them when they are not present to defend



themselves, you should defend them.

- You should ask about them if you don't see them or hear from them in a while.
- You should visit them when they are sick.
- You should help them when they are in trouble.
- You should remember them in your duas.
- You should attend their funeral when they pass away and continue praying for them and visiting their grave.

Joking and Teasing

When friends get together they usually try and make each other happy. The most common way is by joking and laughing. This is very good provided we remember two rules when joking:

1. Never lie even when joking.
2. Never make fun of anyone whether he or she is present or absent. People who get pleasure out of teasing others just to make others laugh are cowards who want to look good themselves but would never be happy if they were teased by others.

Rasulullāh (s) said, '(Even) I joke but I don't say except what is true.'

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) also said, 'Every true believer has a sense of humour.' And he once asked a companion called Yunus ash-Shaybani, 'How is the jesting and joking amongst yourselves?'

'Very little,' replied Yunus. 'You should have some of it,' Imām as-Sādiq ('a) said, 'for it is part of good character. Through it you get a chance to make another fellow Muslim happy. Even Rasulullāh (s) would sometimes make a person laugh just to make him feel happy and good.'

But this kind of joking is light-hearted to bring happiness and a smile to a faithful's face. On the other side, loud laughter that involves lying, making up stories, making fun of other people or other ethnicities or cultures is against the *akhlāq* of a Muslim.

A Muslim should neither laugh nor make others laugh so much that they forget Allāh or the Hereafter and become occupied with the world and its pleasures. A Muslim should also not imitate others or clown around or make a fool of himself or herself just to make others laugh so that people should like him.

Remember that even if people say they love you because of how ‘funny’ you are, they may not really respect you. No one respects a clown who makes a fool of himself. They only like being around you because you make them laugh and while you enjoy the attention they give you briefly, when they go away, they think of you as being ‘silly’ or a ‘clown’. And this is not how a *mu'min* should be thought of.

Some ahādith say that when a person laughs or jokes too much he or she loses the light (*nur*) of their face and some of their wisdom and knowledge. Excessive laughter and useless jokes take away your self-respect and even later when you grow up and have a family, you are only remembered for how you were before and people may label you with nicknames and continue to tease you for the rest of your life.

This also means that a Muslim should not be a professional comedian who makes a living out of making others laugh by talking nonsense, teasing others and telling rude and dirty (vulgar) jokes.

In summary, a Muslim should neither be serious and angry all the time nor silly and always joking and laughing. Instead a Muslim should always smile at people, speak and laugh softly and joke light-heartedly to bring happiness to others.

Islamic Culture & Values

The reason why Islam emphasizes having Muslim friends is because friends will also influence our culture and values – how we dress, what we eat, how we talk, how we behave with our parents and others, what we always think about and our goals and values in life. This is what culture is: a set of values and habits that a group of people follows as part of their lives.

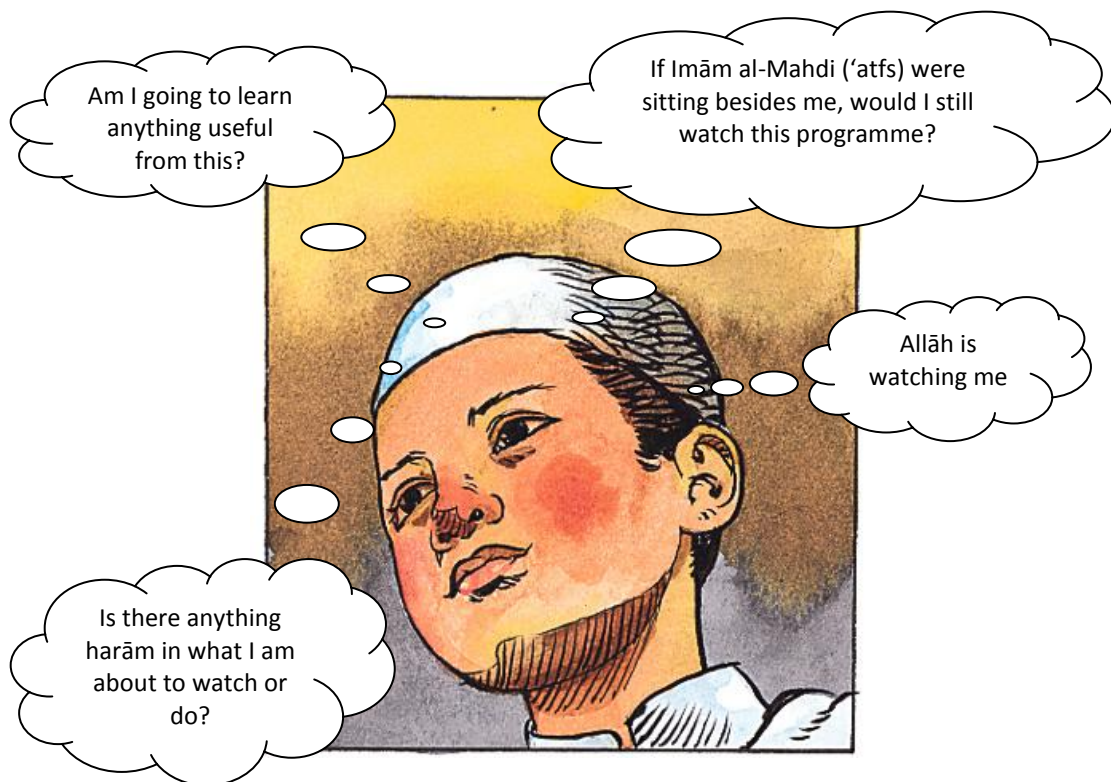
Besides friends, other means that influence our culture are the TV, the computer and other such modern technology. In particular we can be influenced by the computer games we play and the internet sites we visit. Sometimes we even have virtual friends whom we never meet physically but we chat with them on the internet. These too can have a positive or negative influence on us.

As Muslims, our culture should come from two sources: the Qur'ān and Hadith. The more we practice the teachings and knowledge from these two sources, the more Islamic our culture and behaviour will be.

Remember also, when we go around with Muslim names and wear hijāb, we are also carry the name of Islam with us. People look at us and judge Muslims and Islam. So represent it right!

Let us make Islam a part of our daily lives and not just something we practice in the masjid and madrasah. This is will automatically influence the kind of friends we choose, the TV programmes we watch and what we make as our goals in life.

Before you turn on the TV, visit a website or chat online, think:



Lesson 7

Tark as-Salāh

‘Tark’ in Arabic means to leave something. *Tark as-Salāh* is therefore to skip salāh that is wājib by not praying at all or praying on and off or always making it *qadā*. This is a major sin in Islam.

Salāh is the most important pillar of Furu’ ad-Din. Rasulullāh (s) has said:

الصَّلَاةُ عَمُودُ الدِّينِ . إِنَّ قُبِلَتْ قُبِلَ مَا سِوَاهَا وَإِنْ رُدَّتْ رُدَّتْ مَا سِوَاهَا

Salāh is a pillar of religion. If it is accepted all else will be accepted. And if it is rejected, all else will be rejected.

Rasulullāh (s) also said, ‘The thing that turns a Muslim into a Kāfir is to skip salāh intentionally or to offer salāh but to consider it insignificant and unimportant.’ And he (s) also said, ‘There is no difference between faith (*imān*) and disbelief (*kufr*) except the omitting of salāh’.

Someone once asked our sixth Imām, Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) why a person who commits other major sins does not become a kāfir but a person who stops praying salāh becomes a kāfir?

Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) replied that when a person commits other sins, it could be because of some reason like being tempted or being angry. But when a person stops praying there is no reason except that they no longer have faith in Allāh.

In his last moments before leaving this world, Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) said, ‘Our help on Day of Judgement (*shafā’ah*) will not benefit those who take their salāh lightly.’

Some people, when they are told to pray, they make up excuses like saying Allāh (s.w.t.) is not in need of our prayers, He only looks at how good we are, salāh is only to make us good and if we are good we don’t need to pray, and so on. These are all silly excuses whispered in their minds by shaytan. It is true that Allāh does not need our salāh but salāh is done in obedience to Allāh’s command. It shows our willingness to surrender and bow before our Creator. It is also our connection and

'rope' to Allāh and so we always need it no matter how good we think we have become.

Tark as-Salāh in the Qur'ān

There are numerous āyāt in the Qur'ān that emphasize the importance of salāh and condemn *tark as-salāh* or even neglecting salāh and treating it lightly. Here are some of the āyāt:

﴿فَخَلَفَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ أَضَاعُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَاتَّبَعُوا الشَّهَوَاتِ...﴾

But there came after them an evil generation, who neglected salāh and followed their desires...

- Surah Maryam, 19: 59

﴿وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَلَا تَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ﴾

...And keep up the prayer (salāh) and do not be of the polytheists...

- Surah ar-Rūm 30: 31

The āyah above means that a person who neglects salāh becomes like the idol worshippers and polytheists (*mushrikin*).

﴿إِلَّا أَصْحَابَ الْيَمِينِ فِي جَنَّاتٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ عَنِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ مَا سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرٍ قَالُوا لَمْ نَكُ مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ﴾

Except the People of the Right Hand. [They will be] in gardens, questioning about the guilty: 'What brought you into Hell?' They will answer: 'We were not among those who prayed...'

- Surah al-Muddaththir, 74:39-43

﴿فَلَا صَدَقَ وَلَا صَلَّى. وَلَكِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى﴾

So he (who is deserving of Hellfire) did not accept the truth, nor did he pray (salāh), But he called the truth a lie and turned away...

- Surah al-Qiyāmah, 75:31-32

﴿فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ﴾

So woe be to those praying ones, who are unmindful of their salāh, who do (only) to be seen (by others)

- Surah al-Mā'ūn, 107: 4–6

Rasulullāh (s) said that a person who neglects salāh and is lazy in fulfilling his wājib salāh will have fifteen punishments. Six of them in this life, three at the time of death, three in the grave (during barzakh) and three in the hereafter:¹

The punishments for one who forsakes or neglects salāh in this world are:

1. His or her life is reduced.
2. His or her sustenance (rizq) is reduced.
3. The mark of goodness disappears from his or her face.
4. None of his or her good deeds will be accepted and he will not be rewarded for them.
5. His or her du'as will not be answered.
6. Even when virtuous people pray for him or her, it will not benefit him or her.

The punishments that befall such a person at the time of death are:

7. He or she will die with disgrace.
8. He or she will die feeling terrible hunger.
9. He or she will die with such terrible thirst that even if they were to drink all the water of the earth their thirst would not be quenched.

The punishments that he or she will suffer in the grave are:

10. An angel will be appointed to punish him or her.
11. His or her grave will be made very narrow and confined.
12. His or her grave will be dark and horrifying.

And the punishments in the hereafter and on the Day of Judgement are:

13. The angels will drag him or her for accounting whilst others will be watching.
14. His or her accounting will be very strict and unforgiving.

¹ 'Allamah Dastghayb, Dhunub al-Kabirah on Tark as-Salah

15. Allāh will not look at him or her with mercy or purify them and there is a terrible punishment waiting for them.

Salāh - The Most Important Religious Obligation

We have already mentioned the hadith of Rasulullāh (s) that if salāh is accepted all else will be accepted and if it is rejected, all else will be rejected. Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) said the same thing and also added, 'On the Day of Judgement, the first thing that one has to account for is their salāh.'

Salāh is so important that as part of *al-amr bil ma'ruf* and *an-nahi 'anil munkar*, we should not even keep friends with Muslims who don't pray their salāh. Rasulullāh (s) said, 'One who laughs (in a friendly manner) with the neglecter of salāh, is like a person who has demolished the Ka'bah 70 times.'

This means that we should not encourage or even befriend and help a person who neglects salāh if by doing so the person will continue to skip salāh.

And for ourselves, we should always ask how we could make our salāh better and more beautiful. For example, during salāh we stand before our Creator and the Lord of the Universe. How can we make it more special? Can we wear special clothes for salāh? Can we make our ruku' and sujud longer and pray with more concentration? Can we learn to pray more slowly? We should always give our salāh very special importance and try and get ready for salāh as if we are going to meet someone really, really important. It is an honour that Allāh has given us over all His other creation that five times a day we can stand before Him and glorify and praise Allāh and talk to Him.

One way to make our salāh more beautiful is to do extra mustahab acts before and after salāh. These are called the *ta'qibāt* of salāh.

We should always try and do the following before our salāh:

1. Wear clean clothes preferably white and loose clothing.
2. Apply perfume.

3. Pray in a quiet corner (when at home) that is neat and tidy with no pictures or objects or mirror in front of us.
4. Brush our teeth before salāh.
5. Wear an aqiq ring.
6. Comb our hair.
7. For boys, wear a prayer cap.
8. Do the adhān and iqāmah before starting to pray.

And we should always try and do the following after salāh:

1. Recite the Tasbih of Sayyida az-Zahra ('a).
2. Recite du'as that are recommended after that particular salāh.
3. Ask Allāh for forgiveness by reciting a tasbih of istighfār.
4. Doing a sajdah of shukr at the end, to give thanks to Allāh for everything He has blessed us with and to beg Him to accept our salāh. We can do this by, for example, saying 'shukran lillāh' a hundred times in sajdah.
5. Recite ziyārah of the Ma'sumeen ('a).

How Salāh is Neglected

We all understand the meaning of *tark as-salāh* as skipping salāh or not praying at all. But what does taking salāh lightly or being unmindful of salāh mean?

Here are some of the ways in which salāh is taken lightly:

1. When we rush through our salāh as fast as possible because we want to go back to play our games or enjoy ourselves with our friends.
2. When we are absent-minded and we let our minds wander without focusing on Allāh or what we are saying to Him.
3. When our ruku's and sujud are very brief and it is as if we are just tapping our heads on the ground.

4. When we make a habit of praying late and just before *qada* time instead of praying on time.
5. When we stand to pray very lazily and with sluggishness and half-heartedness.
6. When we pray while we are distracted by noise (like TV) or we are very sleepy and hardly aware of what we are doing.

Taking our salāh seriously is the opposite of all the above. It means to pray carefully and slowly, to prolong our salāh especially our qunut, ruku' and sujud, to concentrate whilst praying, and so on.

Importance of Visiting Masājid (pl. of Masjid)

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'Come to the masājid because the masājid are the houses of Allāh on the earth. Whoever comes to the masjid after purifying themselves (i.e. with wudu), Allāh purifies them from their sins.' And Rasulullāh (s) also said, 'to sit in the masjid waiting for the time of salāh is an act of worship (ʿibadah) as long as a person is not backbiting.'

In another hadith Rasulullāh (s) said that when a person goes to the masjid with the intention of praying salāt al-jamā'ah, they get the reward of 70,000 good deeds for every step they take.

And he (s) also advised us saying, 'Do not just pass by a masjid without stopping to pray two rak'ahs in it.' This means even if it is not time for salāh, if you stop at a masjid just to pick something or for another event, you should pray two rak'ahs to Allāh out of respect for the masjid. This is called *Salāt Tahiyat al-Masjid* (The Salāh for Respect of the Masjid).

When in the masjid, we should be occupied with praying or reciting Qur'ān and du'as or gaining some knowledge from a book or a scholar. We should not be occupied with talking about the world and business and other people when in the masjid.

It is forbidden to carry any najāsah into a masjid or to make any part of a masjid najis. It is wājib to immediately purify any part of a masjid or objects in it that become najis by accident.

Hanging paintings and pictures of living creatures such as humans or animals in the masjid is harām.

When in a masjid, remember that you are in a sacred place and a house of Allāh and therefore always try and be in wudu.

Cleaning the masjid, taking care of the lighting, and other acts of general maintenance are also highly recommended.