



IMAMIA
SUNDAY
SCHOOL



SIRAAT

Name: _____

Class: _____

Teacher: _____

BOOK : 12

AGES: 16 Yrs

IMAMIA SUNDAY SCHOOL
Proposed School Calendar 2013-2014

WEEK	DATE	ISLAMIC DATE 1434/1435	COMMENTS	ISLAMIC EVENTS/NOTES
1	09/15/13	Dhu al Qa'dah 9		First Day of School/Orientation/25 Shawwaal Martyrdom of 6th Imam, Hazrat Imam Jaffer Sadiq (AS). 11 Dhu al qa'dah Birthday of 8th Imam, Hazrat Imam Reza a.s.
2	09/22/13	Dhu al Qa'dah 16		
3	09/29/13	Dhu al Qa'dah 22		25 Dhu al qa'dah Birthday of Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) and Hazrat Eesaa (AS)
4	10/06/13	Dhu al Qa'dah 30		1 Dhu al Hijjah Wedding of Imam Ali (AS) and Syedda Fatima Zehra (SA)
5	10/13/13	Dhu al Hijjah 7		9 Dhu al Hijjah Martyrdom of Hazrat Muslim ibne Aqeel (AS) / 10 Dhu al Hijjah Eid-ul-Adha
6	10/20/13	Dhu al Hijjah 14		15 Dhu al Hijjah Birthday of 10th Imam, Hazrat Imam Ali un Naqi a.s / 18 Dhu al Hijjah EID e Ghadeer
7	10/27/13	Dhu al Hijjah 21		24 Dhu al Hijjah Eid e Mubahila
8	11/03/13	Dhu al Hijjah 28		
9	11/10/13	Muharram 6		
10	11/17/13	Muharram 13		
11	11/24/13	Muharram 20		
12	12/01/13	Muharram 27	HOLIDAY	Thanksgiving Weekend/25 Muharram Martyrdom of 4th Imam, Hazrat Imam Zainul Abedin (AS).
13	12/08/13	Safar 4		7 Safar Birthday of 7th Imam Mossa Kazim (AS)
14	12/15/13	Safar 11		13 Safar Martyrdom: Bibi Sakina (SA) binte Hussain (AS)
15	12/22/13	Safar 18		Safar 20 - Arbaeen(40 th) of Shuhada of Kerbala
16	12/29/13	Safar 25		Safar 28-Martyrdom Prophet Muhammad SAW & 2nd Imam; Safar 29-Martyrdom 8th Imam Ali al Ridha AS
17	01/05/14	Rabi' al Awwal 3	MID TERM	4 Rabi' al Awwal -Wafat: Masooma-e-Qum (SA)
18	01/12/14	Rabi' al Awwal 10	MID TERM	9 Rabi' al Awwal -Eid e Zehra (S.A.)
19	01/19/14	Rabi' al Awwal 17		17 Rabi' al Awwal - Prophet Muhammad SAW & 6th Imam Jaffer as Sadiq AS / 18 Rabi' al Awwal - Birthday Syedda Umme Kulsoom bint Ali (AS)
20	01/26/14	Rabi' al Awwal 24	PARENTS DAY	Parents - Teachers Meeting
21	02/02/14	Rabi' at Thaani 1		
22	02/09/14	Rabi' at Thaani 8		10 Rabi' at Thaani - Birthday 11th Imam Hassan al Askari AS
23	02/16/14	Rabi' at Thaani 15	HOLIDAY	Presidents Day
24	02/23/14	Rabi' at Thaani 22		
25	03/02/14	Rabi' at Thaani 29		
26	03/09/14	Jamaada al Ula 7		5 Jamaada al Ula - Birthday Sayyida Zainab AS
27	03/16/14	Jamaada al Ula 14		13 Jamaada al Ula - Martyrdom Sayyida Fatima Zehar (S.A)
28	03/23/14	Jamaada al Ula 21		15 Jamaada al Ula - Birthday Hazrat Imam Zainul Abedin (AS).
29	03/30/14	Jamaada al Ula 28		
30	04/06/14	Jamaada al Thaani 5		3 Jamaada al Thaani - Martyrdom Sayyida Fatima Zehar (S.A)
31	04/13/14	Jamaada al Thaani 12		10 Jamaada al Thaani - Battle of Mu'ta & Maryrdom of Jaafar al Tayyar 8 AH
32	04/20/14	Jamaada al Thaani 19		20 Jamaada al Thaani - Birthday Sayyida Fatima Zehra S.A.
33	04/27/14	Jamaada al Thaani 26		26 Jamaada al Thaani - Martyrdom Imam Ali un Naqi (A.S.)
34	05/04/14	Rajab 4		1st Rajab - Birthday 5th Imam Ali un Naqi (A.S.)Mohammad Baqir (AS)
35	05/11/14	Rajab 11	FINALS	13th Rajab - Birthday 10th Imam Mohammad Taqi (A.S.)
36	05/18/14	Rajab 18	FINALS	
37	05/25/14	Rajab 25	HOLIDAY	Memorial Day Holiday
38	06/01/14	Shaban 2	RESULTS	RESULTS/GRADUATION PICNIC

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Introduction

The Book in your hands is part of a twelve-book series named “Sirāt Books”, produced by the ISSC West Madrasah (of Brampton, Canada) as part of their Religious Education (Diniyāt) programme.

Each book consists of 28 lessons: 7 each on Islāmīc Beliefs (Aqāid), Islāmīc Laws (Fiqh), Islāmīc History (Tārikh), and Islāmīc Ethics (Akhḷāq). The first seven books are also supplemented by Workbooks from which teachers can assign exercises either in class or as homework.

The ISSC West Madrasah’s objectives in imparting Islāmīc education to students as well as their approach and strategy in the creation of these Textbooks, can be reviewed in the “White Paper on Teaching at the Madrasah” available at its website: <http://www.madrasah.ca/>

The Sirāt Textbooks and Workbooks are also accompanied by a Teacher’s DVD and a Quiz Book. The DVD contains media intended to serve as a teaching aid and the Quiz Book covers all Diniyāt key concepts in every Sirāt Textbook. This Quiz Book, it is hoped, will be a great resource for children at home as well as at inter-Madrasah quiz events.

The ISSC West Madrasah hopes to *inshā Allāh* continue developing and enriching the Sirāt Textbooks and their related resources on an annual or bi-annual basis.

Each Sirāt Textbook also has the syllabus and objectives for its own grade printed at the start. Topics that are highly recommended for students to demonstrate proficiency in before the end of the Madrasah year are prefixed with an asterisk (in the syllabus). The ISSC West Madrasah plans to use this as their criterion for promoting students to the next grade.

It is hoped that these Textbooks will *inshā Allāh* not only be of relevance to other Madāris, especially in the North American continent, but will also benefit parents living in places where there is no local Madrasah and they need to home-school their students in Islāmīc education.

Note: The ISSC West Madrasah’s Islāmīc education programme consists of two main streams: Qur’ān and Diniyāt. These Sirāt books are related to the Diniyāt stream only. For Qur’ān, please visit our website: <http://www.madrasah.ca/>

Was salām
Management, ISSC West Madrasah
Brampton, Ontario (Canada)

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- Br. Khalil Jaffer : For the creation of the ISSC West Madrasah’s Diniyat Syllabus and the production of all the initial Textbook and Workbook drafts and updates.
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DU`A BEFORE STARTING A LESSON

In Islām, learning and teaching, like other virtuous acts, are *`ibādāt* – acts of adoration and worship of Almighty Allāh (s.w.t). They have both physical and spiritual aspects. The physical is what we normally do while learning and teaching. The spiritual is when we invoke Allāh (s.w.t) to purify our souls and give us success in our endeavours. This we can do by performing *wudu* and reciting a supplication (*du`a*) before learning and/or teaching. The following is a *du`a* that can be recited before studying. It is given in the *Mafātih al-Jinān* of Shaykh `Abbās al-Qummi.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(I begin) in the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

O Allāh, send your blessings on Muḥammad and his household

اللَّهُمَّ أَخْرِجْنِي مِنْ ظُلُمَاتِ الْوَهْمِ

O Allāh, remove me from the darkness of ignorance

وَ أَكْرَمْنِي بِنُورِ الْفَهْمِ

And favour me with the light of understanding

اللَّهُمَّ افْتَحْ عَلَيْنَا أَبْوَابَ رَحْمَتِكَ

O Allāh, open for us the doors of Your mercy

وَ انشُرْ عَلَيْنَا خَزَائِنَ عُلُومِكَ

And unfold for us the treasures of Your knowledge

بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ

By Your mercy, O the most Merciful of the Merciful

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

O Allāh, send your blessings on Muḥammad and his household

Syllabus for Book 12

Note: The [●] symbol indicates topics the ISSC West Madrasah highly recommends a student to know (and where applicable demonstrate successfully) before he/she is promoted to study the next Book.

Lesson	Aqāid	Fiqh
1	Religion is a Means - not the End	Categories of Islāmic Jurisprudence (fiqh) - The division of fiqh into 'Ibādāt (acts of worship) vs. Mu'āmalāt (social transactions and relations)
2	Islām - the Universal and Only Religion of God	Marriage in Islām - aims and importance of marriage - order regarding interacting with the opposite gender
3	Allāh (s.w.t) - What does 'One God' mean? - Why Allāh cannot be known with the mind – 'Irfān, the Science of Journeying to God - The Validity of 'Irfān in Qur'ān and Hadith	Marriage in Islām (Cont'd) - Types of Marriages in Islām - Conditions of Marriage - with whom permissible - rights of husband and wife
4	Allāh (s.w.t) - (cont'd)	Marriage in Islām (Cont'd) - The concept of divorce in Islām - rites of children at birth - foster-children in Islām
5	Sects of Islām - Shi'ah-Sunni theological differences - Early kalām, Mu'tazilites, Ash'arites and Shi'ah kalām - Shi'ah divisions - Akhbari vs. Usuli Shi'ah	ISLAMIC BIO-ETHICS: Contraception, abortion, adoption, euthanasia (mercy-killing), suicide
6	Sects of Islām (continued) - Jurisprudence differences - The four Sunni schools of law (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali)	Wasiyya & Wirātha - importance of making a will - those banned from inheriting
7	The History of Islāmic Philosophy and the merging of kalām, philosophy and mysticism to form Islāmic Theosophy - Mashshā'i (Peripatetic) philosophy vs. Ishrāqi (Illuminationist) philosophy - Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra	Wasiyya & Wirātha (cont'd)

Lesson	Tārikh	Akhlāq
1	MUSLIM DYNASTIES - The Umayyads – The Sufyānids and the Marwānids	Akhlāq - definition - importance – powers of the soul: intellect, anger, passion, imagination - addiction as an obstacle to spiritual growth - the soul's ultimate aim
2	MUSLIM DYNASTIES (Cont'd) - The Abbāsids	Development of Akhlāq and the Faculties of the Soul (cont'd from Lesson 1)
3	MUSLIM DYNASTIES (Cont'd) - After the Abbāsids - The Fatimids - The Ayyubids - The Ottoman Empire - The Safavid and the Mughal Dynasties - The End of the Ottoman Empire - The Crusades - The Rise of Wahhābism	Development of Akhlāq and the Faculties of the Soul (cont'd from Lesson 1)
4	Misconceptions about Islām - How Islām Spread - The Qur'ān's Perspective on Conversion to Islām - Sirah of Rasulullāh (s) on Conversion to Islām - The Spread of Islām vs. The Expansion of the Muslim Empire	Behaviour during afflictions - meaning of “balā” - the world is not a place for reward or punishment, reasons why believers are afflicted by balā - intensity of balā proportional to the level of imān - causes of balā
5	Misconceptions about Islām (cont'd) - Jihād in Islām - Islām a Religion of Peace - Examples of misquoted Qur'ān Verses - The Misuse of "Jihad" - Media and the Stereotyping of Muslims as Terrorists	Introduction to Nahj al-Balāgha
6	Misconceptions about Islām (cont'd) - The Marriages of Rasulullāh (s) - Polygamy in History and the Practice of Previous Anbiya - The Reasons for Each of Rasulullāh (s)'s Marriages after Sayyida Khadija ('a)	Nahj al-Balāgha (cont'd)
7	Misconceptions about Islām in History (cont'd) - Slavery in Ancient Times - Christianity and Slavery - How Islām Fought Slavery - The Origins of Black Slavery - Atlantic and East African Slave Trade - The Motives of those who abolished Slave Trade	Profile of the Perfect Youth

Objectives for Book 12

At the end of the year the student should:

For Aqāid

- (a) understand Islām's perspective that religion is a means to something greater and not an end in itself
- (b) understand the broader meaning of Islām and why Islām is the 'Only' Religion of Allāh - not in comparison and competition to any other ideology but because it is the only universal and natural way to relate to the Creator and His Creation
- (c) appreciate the challenges of being a muwahhid and the limitations of the mind in knowing God. Realize the importance and role of 'irfān in the journey towards knowing Allāh
- (d) know of the major sects in Islām and the Shi'ah-Sunni theological differences including early kalām differences between Muslims
- (e) know of the Jurisprudence differences between the Shi'ah and the Sunni and the Four Sunni Schools of Fiqh - Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali
- (f) understand the history of Islāmic philosophy and how it merges with kalām and 'irfān to form Islāmic Theosophy - the Mashhāi vs. Ishrāqi philosophies in Islām and the roles of Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra in the formation of Islāmic falsafa

For Fiqh

- (a) understand how Islāmic jurisprudence (fiqh) is broadly categorized by the 'ulama and key terminologies they use to categorize the obligatory matters (wājibāt)
- (b) appreciate the importance of marriage in Islām, the Islāmic criteria for selecting a spouse, basic conditions for marriage in Islām and basic rights of a husband and wife
- (c) understand Islām's view on the use of contraceptives, on abortion, adoption, mercy-killing and suicide
- (d) understand the importance of writing a Will in Islām and the basic rules of inheritance

For Tārikh

- (a) appreciate the History and Evolution of Muslim Dynasties from the time of Imām Ali ('a)'s martyrdom to Present Day Muslim Nations
- (b) know of the despotic rulers in the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs
- (c) be aware of how the Muslim rule and empires came to end including the Fatimid rule, the Uthmāni (Ottoman) rule up until the Second World War
- (d) understand and be able to defend against common misconceptions and myths regarding Islām that are propagated by Orientalists history and the media on topics such as the spread of Islām, Jihad, the marriages of Rasulullāh (s) and slavery

For Akhlāq

- (a) understand the importance of Akhlāq, the nature of the human soul and its faculties and powers and how to control them through moderation
- (b) understand the philosophy of suffering and afflictions in Islām and how it affects believers and how they respond to it and deal with it
- (c) be introduced to Nahj al-Balāgha as one of the most important texts of hadith and 2nd only to the Qur'ān and appreciate its value as guide and inspiration in one's life
- (d) understand what is the profile of the Perfect Shi'ah Youth and be inspired to adopt it

Aqáid **(Beliefs)**

Lesson 1

Religion – A Means not an End

Often we get confused when we see people that are very ‘religious’ but who reveal a lack of morals and integrity, such as cheating others or displaying extreme hatred, jealousy or selfishness. To add to this confusion, we may even meet people who seem very good and decent but are irreligious and may not even believe in God. Why does this happen and what does Islām have to say about such contradictions?

In the case of individuals who are religious but lack integrity, the problem is that they have assumed religion to be an end rather than a means to an end. And in the case of those who appear to be ‘good’ but are irreligious, the problem is that we mistake religion as only being a means to achieve personal and individual goodness. Let us first discuss this second group.

I’m Spiritual but not ‘Religious’

Often we meet people who we deem to be ‘good’ even though they do not follow any religion in particular. They may even claim to be ‘spiritual but not religious’. Life experience will show you that this self-prescribed spirituality only works when all is well in the individual’s material life and in due course leads only to more confusion and innovations in spiritual practices that are not useful (if not harmful). In fact, if we understand religion as a way of life, then every individual has a religion, even if he or she does not give it a name. In that sense, even an atheist follows a ‘religion’ that is governed by some principles and values.

Islām as a religion (deen) has other purposes besides encouraging goodness and morality in an individual. These purposes include, for example, upholding justice in society, teaching an individual about the hidden world that lies beyond death and how to prepare for it, correcting the human understanding of God and helping people free themselves from fear and greed, from superstitions and being enslaved by materialism and all forms of addictions by surrendering to the One God besides Whom there is no other, and so on.

The importance of holding on to Islām and the value of faith in Allāh is shown in verses of the Qur’ān such as this:

﴿وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً
فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ
مِنْهَا...﴾

Hold fast, all together, to Allāh's cord, and do not be divided [into sects]. And remember Allāh's blessing upon you when you were enemies, then He brought your hearts together, so you became brothers with His blessing. And you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, whereat He saved you from it...

-Surah Aal-I Imrān, 3:103

What this verse is alluding to is hatred amongst the warring Arab tribes before Islām and how they united as brothers through Islām. It reveals how religion unifies and saves people as opposed to the hate and disunity that permeate in society when man is driven by the illusion of being self-sufficient and thinks he lives in world where only the fittest survive. Atheism is satanic and ignorance masquerading as intelligence. It gives man the illusion that he came into existence by a random chance and he is 'the master of his own universe' when man deep down knows how fragile and vulnerable he is.

When a human believes he evolved from worms, he has no reason to seek nobility or any moral traits. His 'goodness' without religion is always surface-deep only and when challenged with difficult circumstances, he will always behaves like an animal that only has the motivation to survive and to overcome others in order to enjoy his temporary physical existence. On the flip side, when God is brought into the equation, man now has a greater purpose in life. He takes his true position in the universe as one who submits and surrenders unconditionally to God and in doing so, becomes His representative and one through whom God acts and manifests His attributes on the rest of His creation. Islām as a religion plays a role in ensuring man's understand of God is true and not imaginary.

We have discussed the need for religion at length in Book 8 (Aqāid Lesson 1). In this lesson we wish to focus on the second group that is religious but lacks integrity because of mistaking religion for an End rather than a Means.

Religion – A Means not an End

When Rasulullāh (s) declared his mission, he did not say, 'I have come to teach you how to pray, how to fast' and so forth, even though he came to instruct these acts of worship as well. Instead he said:

إِنَّمَا بُعِثْتُ لِأَتَمِّمَ مَكَارِمَ الْأَخْلَاقِ

Indeed, I was sent to perfect (human) character.

This tells us that the 'End' goal is to be a perfect human being with integrity, conviction, bravery, and the most noble and most excellent of character. Everything else is a means to help us achieve that.

When the Qur'ān talks of why Rasulullāh (s) was sent, it first mentions the matter of purification i.e. self-reform and spiritual purification:

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ
الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ﴾

*It is He who sent to the unlettered [people] an apostle from among themselves, to recite to them His signs, **to purify them**, and to teach them the Book and wisdom, and earlier they had indeed been in manifest error.*

- Surah al-Jumu'ah, 62:2

In a sense, when one sheds negative traits and mean habits and adopts noble characteristics, they come forth from darkness into light. Neither the Messenger (Rasulullāh (s) nor the Message (the Qur'ān) are the End. They both the means to this movement from darkness into light:

﴿يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ
بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ﴾

*With it (the Qur'ān) Allāh guides those who follow [the course of] His pleasure to the ways of peace, and **brings them out from darkness into light** by His will, and guides them to a straight path.*

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:16

﴿رَسُولًا يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مُبَيِّنَاتٍ لِيُخْرِجَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنَ
الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ...﴾

*An apostle reciting to you the manifest signs of Allāh that He may bring out those who have faith and do righteous deeds **from darkness into light**...*

- Surah at-Talāq, 65:11

The examples to show and prove that religion is a Means and not an End are endless. But here are two examples. Salāh is a Means. The End is to prevent us from indecencies (fahshā) and wrong (munkar):

﴿... وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ...﴾

*... and maintain the prayer (salāh). Indeed the **prayer (salāh) prevents indecencies and wrongs**...*

- Surah al-Ankabut, 29:45

Similarly, fasting (sawm) is a Means. The End is to have constant Godwariness (taqwa):

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَتَّقُونَ﴾

*O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, **so that you may be Godwary.***

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:183

When we insist on practising Islāmic rituals but it does not change us as individuals and we do not grow from that practice, it shows that we have stopped at the means and forgotten the end.

For example, when we pray but do not keep away from shamelessness and indecent acts, it proves that religion is only an End for us and the real End of perfecting our ethics and morals is misplaced.

Similarly, when we commemorate the ‘azā of Imām Husayn (‘a) and spend all our time and wealth on weeping for the martyrs of Karbala but we are indifferent to the injustices being committed to our fellow Muslims and neither do we speak out against the tyrants of our time, then Karbala and Muharram has become an End for us - when in fact, it was meant to be a Means to our becoming courageous and champions of justice.

Why does a Muslim praise Imām Husayn (‘a) for praying Salāt adh-Dhuhr on time and even praying Salāt al-‘Asr as he was being killed but he still doesn’t pray salāh himself? Why does a Muslim woman weep that Sayyida Zainab (‘a) lost her veil but her heart does not weep that other men look at her as she walks about in public without hijāb? Why do we praise our Imāms for going out in the middle of the night to distribute food to the poor but we do not care if anyone in our community is hungry? Why do Shi’ah in many parts of the world praise the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) for sitting to eat their meals with their servants and maids but they themselves keep their servants and maids in the kitchen while they eat? Why does a Muslim go for Salāt al-Jumu’ah in a holy city and then when he leaves and goes back to his trade, he cheats others by overpricing his goods? Why do some Muslims praise Rasulullāh (s) for eradicating racism and they praise how Muslims of different ethnicities and cultures all stand together in salāh as brothers yet they would never let their daughter marry someone who is of a different culture or ethnicity, even if he is a pious Muslim?

The answer to all these – and more – is that such Muslims have made religion an End rather than a Means. By practising their ‘religion’, they feel they have protected themselves from Hellfire and secured a place in Jannah. And this pseudo-religiousness shields them from their guilt for lacking integrity, honesty and true Islāmic values.

To put it differently, until we understand that religion is a Means to something greater, Islām will only remain on our lips and minds but not enter our hearts, and we will practice our own individual versions of 'Islām', which Allāh condemns in 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. قُلْ أَتَعْلَمُونَ اللَّهَ بِدِينِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ. 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.' Say, 'You do not have faith yet; rather, say, "We have surrendered", 'for faith has not yet entered into your hearts...' The faithful are only those who have attained faith in Allāh and His Apostle and then have never doubted, and who wage jihād with their possessions and their persons in the way of Allāh. It is they who are the truthful. Say, 'Will you inform Allāh about your 'religion' (deen) while Allāh knows whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is in the earth, and Allāh has knowledge of all things?' They count it as a favour to you that they have embraced Islām. Say, 'Do not do me any favours with your 'Islām'. Rather, it is Allāh who has done you a favour in that He has guided you to faith, should you be truthful.'*¹

- Surah al-Hujurāt, 49:14-17

The first step therefore, towards purifying our souls, towards understanding the real message of Islām, and towards reforming our Muslim societies is to realize that Deen (Religion) is a Means – not an End.

Discuss this in class with your teacher. Can you think of other examples where Muslims confuse the Means with the End? How would you describe your goal in life as a Muslim? And how do you see religion playing a role as a means towards that goal?

¹ That is, should you be sincere in your claim of having embraced Islām.

Lesson 2

Islām – The Universal Religion

Al-Islām means to surrender one's will to God and it comes from the Arabic root *s-l-m* (س - ل - م) from which words like *at-taslim* (surrender) and *as-salām* (peace) are also derived. Yet Islām is one of the misunderstood concepts in the world, by most Muslims as well.

The Meaning of Islām in the Qur'ān

It is true that there is only one religion with Allāh and that is Islām:

﴿إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ...﴾

Indeed, with Allāh religion is Islām

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:19

It is also true that no other religion is acceptable to Allāh besides Islām:

﴿وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ﴾

Should anyone follow a religion other than Islām, it shall never be accepted from him, and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter.

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:85

But what does this really mean? The debate on pluralism vs. exclusivism arises only when we see Islām as one amongst many religions i.e. just as there is Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and so on, some see Islām as yet another 'religion'. Furthermore, just as the Christians follow Jesus ('a) and regard the Bible as their sacred text and the Jews follow the teachings of Moses ('a) and regard the Torah as their sacred text, similarly, many Muslims see themselves as simply, the followers of Muhammad (s) who regard the Qur'ān as their sacred Book. And this precisely is where the problem lies. Before we explain the problem further and correct our understanding of what Islām is and what it means to be a Muslim, let us review the verses of Qur'ān that will give us a holistic understanding of Islām:

﴿فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَى مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ

أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَأَشْهَدُ بِأَنَّ مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

And when Isa sensed their (the Jews) faithlessness, he said, 'Who will be my helpers toward Allāh?' The Disciples said, 'We will be helpers of Allāh. We have faith in Allāh, and bear witness that we are Muslims.

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:52

Nabi Ibrāhim ('a) and his son Nabi Ismā'il ('a) prayed:

﴿رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ...﴾

'Our Lord, make us submissive to You (lit. **Muslims for you**), and [raise] from our progeny a Muslim nation (i.e. submissive to You)...

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:128

﴿وَوَصَّىٰ بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبُ يَا بَنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ لَكُمْ الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ. أَمْ كُنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ الْمَوْتَ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن بَعْدِي قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ وَإِلَهَ آبَائِكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُ

﴿مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

Ibrāhim enjoined this [creed] upon his children, and [so did] Ya'qub, [saying], 'My children! Allāh has indeed chosen this religion for you; **so never die except as Muslims**. Were you witnesses when death approached Ya'qub, when he said to his children, 'What will you worship after me?' They said, 'We will worship your God, and the God of your fathers, Ibrāhim, Ismā'il and Ishāq, the One God, and to Him do we submit (lit. 'for His sake we are Muslims').'

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:132-133

﴿رَبِّ قَدْ آتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الْمُلْكِ وَعَلَّمْتَنِي مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ فَاطِرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ﴾

(Nabi Yusuf ('a) said), 'My Lord! You have granted me a share in the kingdom, and taught me the interpretation of dreams. Originator of the heavens and earth! You are my guardian in this world and the Hereafter! **Let me die a Muslim** (i.e. in submission to You), and unite me with the Righteous.

- Surah Yusuf, 12:101

﴿وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ يَا قَوْمِ إِن كُنتُمْ آمَنْتُمْ بِاللَّهِ فَعَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلُوا إِن كُنتُمْ مُسْلِمِينَ﴾

And Musa said, 'O my people! If you have faith in Allāh, put your trust in Him, **if you are Muslims** (i.e. have submitted to Him).'

- Surah Yunus, 10:84

﴿... قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي وَأَسْلَمْتُ مَعَ سُلَيْمَانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

She (the Queen of Sheba) said, 'My Lord! Indeed I have wronged myself, and **I submit** (lit. 'become a Muslim') with Sulaymān to Allāh, the Lord of all the worlds.'

- Surah an-Naml, 27:44

﴿وَإِذْ أَوْحَيْتُ إِلَى الْحَوَارِيِّينَ أَنْ آمِنُوا بِي وَبِرَسُولِي قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَاشْهَدْ بِأَنَّا

﴿مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

And when I inspired the Disciples (of Isa ('a)), [saying], 'Have faith in Me and My Apostle,' they said, 'We have faith. **Bear witness that we are Muslims.**'

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:111

We can clearly see from all the verses above that Islām is not a 'religion' that started in the year 610 CE when Rasulullāh (s) was 40 years old. Rather, Islām is simply the one and only natural path that Allāh chose for the human race and that began with the first human being – Nabi Adam ('a).

The core message and principle of Islām is simply this: there is no god but One God. He is the Only Creator and the Only One worthy of worship. He is Nameless and Formless yet He is omniscient and omnipresent. He cannot be brought to imagination or described. In fact, He can never be known directly. He is recognized only through His signs and His creation. The human being is unique in that he is able to surrender to his or her Creator out of choice and with freewill and so he or she is chosen by Allāh to represent Allāh in the universe and it is through this human being that Allāh manifests His attributes to the rest of His creation.

When we begin to understand Islām in this fashion, we also begin to see why idol worship and any bringing of Allāh into imagination or form, restricts the human being from every knowing Allāh. In the end, Allāh permeates all things yet nothing can embody or incarnate Him. He is in fact the Only Reality. It is as if He is the Sun and all else are simply rays of the Sun that have no reality or existence without Him.

The great mufassir (exegete) of Qur'ān, Allama Sayyid Husayn Tabatabai, wrote in his Tafsir al-Mizān, that during the life of Rasulullāh (s) when the Qur'ān was being revealed, the meaning of Islām was different to what it later came to be known as when the Caliphs ruled as political and temporal leaders and used their military force

to ‘spread’ Islām. What Allama Tabatabai meant was that the Qur’ān does not understand Islām as a ‘religion’ with boundaries like other religions. It simply regards Islām to be its meaning – surrender to the Creator. The Qur’ān therefore talks of Islām, not as a religion, but as a universal way of life that is most natural and that brings success to humans when they live by it, because the whole universe lives by it and it is the ‘religion’ to which our instinct leans.

We could say, other than humans who choose not to be ‘Muslims’, everything in the universe is a ‘Muslim’ (i.e. surrendered to Allāh) – the mountains, the oceans, the forests, the animals and birds, the angels, the planets and stars, and so on. Thus the Qur’ān tells us:

﴿أَفَغَيْرَ دِينِ اللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ﴾

Do they, then, seek a religion other than Allāh’s, while to Him submits whoever there is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they will be brought back?

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:83

So when the Qur’ān invites humans to be Muslims, it is not asking them to ‘change’ religions or adopt something new. It is simply asking them to restore their natural state of existence where they are in constant surrender to Allāh like everything else.

Rasulullāh (s) is reported to have said:

كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُوَلَّدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ فَأَبَوَاهُ يُهَوِّدَانَهُ أَوْ يُنصِّرَانَهُ أَوْ يُمَجِّسَانَهُ

Every newborn is born on the instinct (of Islām). Then it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Zoroastrian.

Do you see why, therefore, it makes no sense at all to talk of pluralism or how ‘all religions are right because they teach the same good values’ and so on? There is no multiple religions – not because one is right and another is wrong – but because there *cannot* be more than one religion from One Creator. Two opposing understandings of God cannot both be ‘natural’. One will have to be unnatural.

What we can say, of course, is that every time humans went astray and forgot the original message of Islām, and Allāh sent another messenger (nabi or rasul) to guide people back to Islām. Those who refused to accept it still remained with some of the original truth that a previous prophet had taught. This is why we see parts of every religion still showing the same truth as the original religion of Allāh - Islām.

When a non-Muslim wishes to embrace Islām today, they require several years of research and thinking before they revert to Islām. Yet in the days of Rasulullāh (s) and the Aimmah (‘a), people would often embrace Islām after a brief conversation

only. Why do you think so? It is because today, we present Islām mixed with a lot of culture and it appears to be a very complex religion that one has to ‘study’ fully before embracing it. Whereas in the original message of the Qur’ān, people were told to simply shed what was wrong in their beliefs and they became Muslims.

As an example, in the Qur’ān’s vision, if a Hindu wanted to become a Muslim, he doesn’t need to change his language, what he eats, how he dresses, his name, and so on. He simply gives up worshipping idols and multiple gods or deities. He professes that there is only One God and that he will prostrate and surrender before none other than God and worship Him alone. And as a mark of this surrender, he acknowledges all the prophets and messengers or Allāh and all the scriptures and angels. And he is a Muslim!

﴿أَمَّنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ
وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نَفَرَقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ
الْمَصِيرُ﴾

The Apostle has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and all the faithful. Each [of them] has faith in Allāh, His angels, His scriptures and His apostles. [They declare,] ‘We make no distinction between any of His apostles.’ And they say, ‘We hear and obey. Our Lord, forgive us, and toward You is the return.’

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:285

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا آمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ عَلَيَّ رَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ
الَّذِي أُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ
ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا﴾

O you who have faith! Have faith in Allāh and His Apostle and the Book that He has sent down to His Apostle and the Book He had sent down earlier. Whoever disbelieves in Allāh and His angels, His Books and His apostles and the Last Day, has certainly strayed into far error.

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:136

﴿قُلْ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ
وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَالنَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نَفَرَقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ
لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

Say, ‘We have faith in Allāh, and in what has been sent down to us, and what was sent down to Ibrāhīm, Ismā’il, Ishāq, Ya’qub and the Tribes (of Bani Isrā’il), and that

which Musa and 'Isa were given, and the prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit.'

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:84

Thereafter, the issue of praying, fasting, etc. are a part of the 'shari'ah' (Islāmic legislation) rather than deen (religion). The shari'ah may even have changed from one prophet to another – but deen never changed and cannot ever change. A revert Muslim prays, fasts, etc. as a sign of his or her acceptance of the Qur'ān's commands and his or her surrender to God's laws that are meant to bring him or her closer to the Creator.

One could therefore say that just like Allāh, Islām actually does not have a name or a limited form. The word Islām simply highlights the primary call to return to the universal and most natural way of life i.e. surrendering to the One and Only Creator. That is why, in some verses of the Qur'ān, when Allāh mentions how the Jews boast of being 'Jews' and the Christians boast of following 'Christianity', the Muslims are not told to say, we follow 'Islām' or we are 'Muslims'. Instead of labelling themselves, Muslims are told to simply say, they follow the upright (*hanif*) and natural path that Nabi Ibrāhim ('a) followed:

﴿وَقَالُوا كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تَهْتَدُوا قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنْ

الْمُشْرِكِينَ﴾

And they say, 'Be either Jews or Christians, that you may be [rightly] guided.' Say, 'Rather, [we will follow] the creed (millah) of Ibrāhim, a hanif, and he was not one of the polytheists.'

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:135

﴿وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَاتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا...﴾

And who has a better religion than him who submits his will to Allāh, being virtuous, and follows the creed (millah) of Ibrāhim, a hanif?

- Surah an-Nisa, 4:125

﴿قُلْ إِنِّي هَدَانِي رَبِّي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قِيمًا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنْ

الْمُشْرِكِينَ﴾

Say, 'Indeed my Lord has guided me to a straight path, the upright religion, the creed of Ibrāhim, a hanif, and he was not one of the polytheists.'

- Surah al-An'ām, 6:161

﴿وَاتَّبَعْتُ مِلَّةَ آبَائِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ مَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ نُشْرِكَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ...﴾

(Nabi Yusuf ('a) said), 'I follow the creed of my fathers, Ibrāhim, Ishāq and Ya'qub. It is not for us to ascribe any partner to Allāh.'

- Surah Yusuf, 12:38

﴿ثُمَّ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ أَنْ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ﴾

Then We revealed to you [saying], 'Follow the creed of Ibrāhim, a **hanif**, and he was not one of the polytheists.'

- Surah an-Nahl, 16:123

Nabi Ibrāhim ('a) is mentioned repeatedly because he is seen as 'the father of monotheism' since he restored Tawhid in the world when Shirk (polytheism) was rampant. All religions that claim to be monotheistic trace their origins back to him. Notice however that when the Qur'ān says Nabi Ibrāhim ('a) was neither a Jew nor a Christian, it first describes him as a 'hanif' and then as a 'Muslim':

﴿مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ﴾

Ibrāhim was neither a Jew nor a Christian. Rather, **he was a hanif, a Muslim**, and he was not one of the polytheists.

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:67

Why doesn't the verse call Ibrāhim ('a) a 'Muslim' directly? It is for fear that it will be seen as a label and a contrast to being a 'Jew' or a 'Christian'. In other words, one who surrenders to Allāh (i.e. a Muslim) is not 'this' or 'that'. He is simply one who follows the natural and universal way that all of Allāh's creation follows. It is only to be able to talk about this Path and relating to it, that Allāh has given it the name Islām and named those who follow this Path, Muslims:

﴿هُوَ سَمَّاكُمْ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا...﴾

...He named you 'Muslims' before (in previous scriptures), and in this (the Qur'ān)...

- Surah al-Hajj, 22:78

So when the Qur'ān declares that 'the only religion with Allāh is Islām' (3:19), we need to bear in mind that we are not followers of Prophet Muhammad (s) only. We are followers of all the prophets. And Rasulullāh (s) is simply the final messenger who brings the final revelation to all mankind and clarifies the original message that

Adam, Nuh, Ibrāhim, Musa, Isa (peace be on them all!) and all the prophets and all the messengers between them brought and preached. The Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are also simply a continuation of God's guidance to the human race towards Islām and primarily and essentially Teachers of Tawhid.

Allāh promised Nabi Ibrāhim ('a) that there will be Imāms from his descendants but they will not unjust (2:124) and Allāh also mentions His favours and blessings on the progeny of Nabi Ibrahim ('a) (4:54) and we know that the Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are descendants of Nabi Ibrahim ('a) and of course the most worthy of those qualified by these verses of the Qur'ān.

We should therefore invite others to Islām. But when we invite them to follow Islām as taught by the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) of Rasulullāh (s), remember we are not inviting people to 'a new' or alternative religion. We are simply asking them to restore their understanding of God to the original, universal and natural understanding that God always wanted for the human race. And it is to this understanding that Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) will bring all of mankind. This is what the Qur'ān means when it says, there will come a time when Islām will prevail over all false understandings of God and there will be nothing but Islām in the whole world:

﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا
اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ
خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ
الْفَاسِقُونَ﴾

*Allāh has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors in the earth, just as He made those who were before them successors, **and He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them**, and that He will surely change their state to security after their fear, **while they worship Me, not ascribing any partners to Me**. And whoever is ungrateful after that—it is they who are the transgressors.*

- Surah an-Nur, 24:55

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ
الْمُشْرِكُونَ﴾

*It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance **and the religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over all religions**, though the polytheists should be averse.*

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:33

Project Ideas:

Choose any one of these four points and write a brief essay on it, explaining what you understand of it:

1. Muslims insist on calling the final message brought by Rasullāh (s) 'Islām' and themselves as 'Muslims'. Other religions are named after a person (Christianity, Buddhism) or place (Judaism, Hinduism). The Orientalists tried quite hard to name Muslims as 'Mohamedans' and Islām as 'Mohamedanism' but failed to do so. Why is it so important that we insist we are Muslims and our deen is Islām?
2. Imām 'Ali b. Ali Tālib ('a)'s definition of Islām:

لَأَنْسَبَنَّ الْإِسْلَامَ نَسَبَةً لَمْ يَنْسَبْهَا أَحَدٌ قَبْلِي الْإِسْلَامُ هُوَ التَّسْلِيمُ وَالتَّسْلِيمُ هُوَ
الْيَقِينُ وَالْيَقِينُ هُوَ التَّصَدِيقُ وَالتَّصَدِيقُ هُوَ الْإِقْرَارُ وَالْإِقْرَارُ هُوَ الْأَدَاءُ وَ
الْأَدَاءُ هُوَ الْعَمَلُ

'I will define Islām in a manner no one has defined before me: Islām is submission (*at-taslim*); and submission is conviction (*al-yaqin*); and conviction is affirmation (*at-tasdiq*); and affirmation is acknowledgement (*al-iqrār*); and acknowledgement is the discharge (of obligations) (*al-adā*), and the discharge of obligations is action (*al-'amal*).'²

Explain this hadith by elaborating on it.

3. In 16:52, the Qur'ān calls Islām *the enduring religion* (*ad-din wāsiba*).

﴿وَلَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَهُ الدِّينُ وَاصْبَاً أَفْغَيْرَ اللَّهِ تَتَّقُونَ﴾

To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth, and to Him belongs the enduring religion. Will you, then, be wary of other than Allāh?

- Surah al-Nahl, 16:52

Discuss the verse above with emphasis on why you think 'the enduring religion' is such an apt description of Islām. What do you think it means?

² Sayyid ar-Radi, *Nahj al-Balāgha*, aphorism 125; al-Alusi, *Tafsir Ruh al-Ma'āni*, 3:19.

4. A Jew once asked Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a), 'what is Islām?' Imām Ali ('a) replied him that Islām is:

التَّعْظِيمَ لِأَمْرِ اللَّهِ وَالشَّفَقَةَ عَلَى خَلْقِ اللَّهِ

To respect the command of Allāh and to have love and compassion for the creatures of Allāh.

In other words, Islām is about service to the Creator and service to His creation. Allāh's creation includes all human beings, regardless of their faith or race and all animals, birds and everything we perceive as living or non-living around us, including the environment and the entire universe.

If we ever wish to see how much of a 'Muslim' we are, we should ask ourselves: 'how much do I respect Allāh's commands and how much love do I have for His creation?' Elaborate on the importance of these two facets of Islām: Submission to the Creator and Service to the Creation.

Lesson 3

Allāh (s.w.t)

In this and the next lesson, we wish to look at Tawhid more deeply. Tawhid is the root and cornerstone of Islām. Everything else in Islām rests on and depends on Tawhid. How perfect one's 'Islām' is depends on how deeply one understands Tawhid.

In particular, we would like to understand:

1. How the mind is incapable of 'knowing' the Creator directly. The Creator can only be known by the mind through His Signs.
2. How the Creator *can* be 'known' directly but only by the heart. This is done by undertaking a journey of complete surrender towards the Creator, such that one is 'stripped' of one's human attributes and one allows the Creator to use him or her to reflect His own attributes to the rest of His creation.

The Complexity of Becoming a Muwahhid

The subject of Tawhid (monotheism, unicity of God) is perhaps the deepest of all matters to grasp in religion. It is the most difficult to imagine and conceive, and most entangled to unravel, because it is highly above the general topics that human understanding grasps, and much beyond the common theories and ideas that the human intellect is familiar with.

Consider for example, the following hadith of Imām as-Sādiq ('a) to his companion Hishām b. Al-Hakam:

And the Name is different from the Named. So one who worshipped the Name ('Allāh') without the Meaning behind it has denied God (*faqad kafara*) and has worshipped nothing. And one who worshipped the Name and the Meaning has associated a partner to God (*faqad ash-raka*) and worshipped two gods. But one who worshipped the Meaning without the Name, then that is indeed Tawhid... (the word) 'Allāh' has a Meaning that all these Names (Asmā al-Husna) point to yet none of them are Him.³

Or consider the sermon of Imām Ali ('a) in which he describes God as follows:

Praise is due to Allāh whose praise cannot be achieved by speakers, whose bounties cannot be counted by those who count, and whose right cannot be fulfilled even by those who strive to do so. He, whom the highest of intellectual efforts cannot comprehend and the deepest diving of understanding cannot grasp. He, for whose

³ Kulayni, *Usul al-Kāfi*, v. 2, Chapter on the Meanings of Names, p. 114

attributes there is no limits; no eulogy of praise exists, no time is ordained and no duration is fixed.⁴

Clearly then, the subject of trying to understand our Creator who is nameless and formless is complicated and bound to be perceived in diverse ways by different minds, because of the multiplicity of thinking with which mankind is created. Every individual has a separate understanding and experience of life and this in turn affects his or her understanding of God.

The Qur'ān affirms this diversity when it says:

﴿... قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ﴾

Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only those who possess intellect take admonition.

- Surah az-Zumar, 39:9

﴿فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْ مَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَلَمْ يُرِدْ إِلَّا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا. ذَلِكَ مَبْلَغُهُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ ...﴾

So avoid those who turn away from Our remembrance and desire nothing but the life of the world. **That is the ultimate reach of their knowledge.**

- Surah an-Najm, 53:29-30

﴿... فَمَا لِهَؤُلَاءِ الْقَوْمِ لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ حَدِيثًا﴾

What is the matter with these people that they would not understand any matter?

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:78

﴿... انظُرْ كَيْفَ نُبَيِّنُ لَهُمُ الْآيَاتِ ثُمَّ انظُرْ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ﴾

Look how We clarify the signs for them, and yet, look, how they go astray!

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:75

So although Allāh has hardwired the nature of all His creation to instinctively lean towards Him, their Creator, (what we call *fitra*⁵), yet there is a great difference and a wide chasm between what one human mind grasps as the meaning of Tawhid versus another.

⁴ Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 1.

⁵ Cf. Qur'ān, 30:30 for 'the *fitra* of Allāh on which He patterned humans' as well as the Prophetic hadith, 'every newborn is born on the *fitra*' that is given in Lesson 2.

What does 'One God' Mean?

Some people's intellect, for example, leads them to idol-worship. They are convinced that God incarnates in different forms. So they carve idols and statues from wood and stone, and even from flour, cheese and clay made with urine of goats and sheep. Then they declare these to be partners and colleagues of God. They worship these idols and beg them for their needs, showing utmost devotion to them. Even if they claim that there is only one God, it is not long before God is discarded and their full attention is devoted to the idols that they imagine fulfil their needs.

And if such people were to give up idol worship, their relationship with the One God will be the same as with the idols – only to ask for their needs and worship in fear of displeasing God. Furthermore, the call to 'One' God by Rasullāh (s) was understood by the ignorant Arabs (before his *bi'thah*) as a call to a numerical 'oneness'. It was only a number to them. So they could not understand why they should give up the advantage of having many gods and limit themselves to One God.

﴿وَعَجِبُوا أَنْ جَاءَهُمْ مُنذِرٌ مِنْهُمْ وَقَالَ الْكَافِرُونَ هَذَا سَاحِرٌ كَذَّابٌ. أَجْعَلِ الْآلِهَةَ
إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عَجَابٌ﴾

And they are amazed that there has come to them a Warner from among themselves; and the disbelievers say: "This is a sorcerer, a liar. What! Does he make the gods a single God? This is surely a strange thing!"

- Surah Sād, 38:4-5

Whereas what the Qur'ān was calling them to was the realization that there is only One God - not as a number - but because there *cannot* be another God besides Him:

﴿وَإِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

Your god is the One God, there is no god except Him, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:163

﴿هُوَ الْحَيُّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ...﴾

He is the Living One, there is no god except Him. So supplicate Him, putting exclusive faith in Him....

- Surah Ghāfir, 40:65

In other words, it is not so much that there is 'One' God as much as the fact that there is 'Only God'. The problem with thinking of God as a numerical 'One' is that the mind will inevitably distinguish that 'One' from another or 'others' through confinement of space and dimension.

When we say Allāh is One, His Oneness cannot be compared and contrasted to anything. If I say ‘Zayd is one man’, you may be able to conceive that there can be another man but he does not exist in the context of my statement. But can the mind imagine Zayd as one man besides whom it is impossible and inconceivable for another man to exist?

It is difficult because the mind cannot comprehend how anything can exist without having a beginning and an origin. And if something has an origin, then surely another like it can also have an origin. It is for this reason that even when some people say ‘Allāh is Eternal’, they mistakenly think of ‘eternal’ as endless time. But what is time? It is a measure of the amount of movement in moving bodies. How can it be perceived for Allāh? He is not bound by the limits of time. He created Time. It is therefore hard to imagine eternity as timelessness, let alone imagine how Allāh is ‘Eternal’. Can you imagine something existing in a dimension of ‘no-time and no-space’ let alone the Creator Himself?

Besides the attribute of being *Ahad* (the Only One), the same is true with Allāh’s other attributes (*sifāt*). He is Living, but without any taint of non-existence. He is Powerful but not in the sense that He can be subdued or His Power can be measured against anything. Hence He says:

﴿... إِنَّ الْعِزَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا ...﴾

...indeed all might belongs to Allāh...

- Surah Yunus, 10:65

﴿... لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ ...﴾

...Nothing is like Him⁶...

- Surah ash-Shura, 42:11

Yet if we were to say, ‘Allāh is not just All-Powerful – He is Power itself. Allāh is not just All-Knowing – He is Knowledge Itself’ and so on, then the mind immediately thinks of Power and Knowledge as non-conscious and abstract concepts and therefore God becomes impersonal and pantheistic as simply a universal force or energy at best. It is for this reason that we are told in hadith not to try and rationally understand Allāh directly but to understand Him through His signs. And also, anything you imagine Allāh to be – that He is not. In other words, Allāh cannot be known by anyone but His own self. Even when we surrender to Him completely and lose ourselves in His Love, He is only known when He knows Himself through us and when there is no ‘I’ to know ‘Him’.

⁶ Which can also be translated as, ‘There is nothing like His likeness.’

Allāh says in the Qur'ān:

﴿... وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِهِ عِلْمًا﴾

...but they cannot comprehend Him in their knowledge.

- Surah Tā Hā, 20:110

﴿سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ﴾

Clear (and above) is Allāh of whatever they describe [about Him], - [all] except Allāh's exclusive servants.

- Surah as-Sāffāt, 37:159-160

And yet, when these 'exclusive servants' describe their Creator, how do they describe Him? Rasullāh (s) 'describes' Allāh as follows:

لَا أُحْصِي ثَنَاءً عَلَيْكَ أَنْتَ كَمَا أَثْنَيْتَ عَلَيَّ نَفْسِي

I do not count Your praise; You are as You have praised Yourself.

And in Dua al-Mashlul taught by Amir al-Mu'minin ('a) - just before he glorifies Allāh with all His Beautiful Names (Asmā al-Husna) – Imām Ali ('a) confesses to Allāh:

يَا حَيُّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ، يَا هُوَ يَا مَنْ لَا يَعْلَمُ مَا هُوَ وَلَا كَيْفَ هُوَ وَلَا حَيْثُ هُوَ إِلَّا هُوَ

O Ever-Living, there is no god but You! O He! O One Whom no one knows what He is or how He is or where He is, except He!

Therefore even the attributes of perfection that we use for Allāh (such as Omnipotent (al-Qādiru), Omniscient (al-'Aalimu), etc.) are limited attributes, and far be it from His glory to be subject to limitation and restriction.

In a most amazing expression on God, the Commander of the Faithful (Amir al-Mu'minin ('a)) said:

The foremost in religion is the knowledge of Him; the perfection of knowing Him is to testify Him; the perfection of testifying Him is to believe in His Oneness; the perfection of believing in His Oneness is to adhere to Him purely; and the perfection of adhering to Him purely is to deny Him attributes because every attribute testifies that it is different from that to which it is attributed and everything to which something is attributed testifies that it is different from the attribute.

Thus whoever attaches attributes to Allāh joins Him (to another thing) and who

joins Him (to another thing) regards Him two; and who regards Him two recognizes parts for Him; and who recognizes parts for Him is ignorant of Him; and who is ignorant of Him pointed at Him; and who pointed at Him admitted limitations for Him; and who admitted limitations for Him numbered Him ...⁷

The words of Imām Ali (‘a) in the sermon above, that *‘perfection of adhering to Him purely is to deny Him attributes...’* is alluding to the fact that when we say Allāh is All-Knowing, we are incapable of thinking of Him with all his other infinite attributes at the same time. And when we try and think of Him as being All-Powerful, All-Knowing, All-Loving, etc. at the same time, we merely ‘join’ these attributes and try and bring them together but that is wrong because Imām Ali (‘a) continues to explain, *‘Thus whoever attaches attributes to Allāh joins Him and who joins Him regards Him two; and who regards Him two recognizes parts for Him...’*

Allamah Tabatabai in his Tafsir al-Mizān explains that when a person reaches unique levels and understandings of Tawhid and becomes a ‘Friend’ of Allāh, then he or she also realizes his or her inability to know Allāh or to ascribe to Him the attributes worthy of His Greatness and Majesty. Such a person sees that whatever attributes he or she uses for Allāh are merely ideas that have been perceived by looking at created things and then amplifying them for Allāh.

The following beautiful sermon also shows that Allāh is described by what He *is not* rather than what He *is*:

Shaykh as-Saduq reports from Imām Abu Abd Allāh Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) that while Amir al-Mu’minin (‘a) was delivering a sermon on the pulpit of Kufah, a man named Dhi’lib stood up - and he had a fluent tongue, eloquent speech and a brave heart - and said, ‘Commander of the Faithful! Have you seen your Lord?’ Imām Ali (‘a) replied, ‘Woe unto thee, O Dhi’lib! I am not the one to worship Whom I have not seen.’ And Dhi’lib said, ‘Commander of the Faithful! How did you see Him?’ And Imām Ali (‘a) said:

‘O Dhi’lib! Eyes do not see Him through eyesight but hearts perceive Him through the realities of belief. Woe unto thee, O Dhi’lib! Indeed my Lord is the most kind yet He is not described in terms of kindness; the most exalted, but not described in terms of exaltedness; the greatest, but not described in terms of greatness; the most grand, but not described in terms of thickness.

He is before everything, yet it is not said that there is before; He is after everything, yet it is not said that for Him there is an after. He willed creation but not through effort; He is in everything, but neither intermingled with them nor separate from them. He is Manifest but not in physical sense; He is Evident but not through sighting with eyes. He is separate but not because of distance; He is near but not by proximity....

He is existing but not after non-existence. He is the Doer, but not under compulsion; the Ordainer, but not with movement... He hears and sees but not

⁷ Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 1.

depending on any organ. Space does not encompass Him, Time does not accompany Him and Attributes do not limit Him.

His Being preceded Time, and His existence preceded Non-existence, and His eternity preceded the beginning. By His creating the senses it was known that He has no senses; and by His making the substances it was recognized that He has no substance; and by His creating the contraries in various matters it is known that He has no contrary; and by the similarity between things it is known that there is nothing similar to Him.

He has made light contrary to darkness, dryness the opposite of moisture, and cold the contrast of heat. (And because He made all these, none of these apply to Him).

He produces affinity between separate things, which are then joined together. These things, by their separation lead us to their Separator and by their joining point to their Joiner; and this is the word of Allāh, the Mighty, the Great: *In all things We have created pairs that you may take admonition* (Qur'ān, 51:49). He separated them with a before and after, in order that it may be known that for Him there is no before or after.

They (all things created) prove through their nature that their Creator has no nature; their being bound by time makes it known that He Who thus binds them is not bound by time. He veils some of them from others, that it may be understood that there is no veil between Him and His creation - except the creation itself. He was the Sustainer when there was no sustained, the God when there was no worshipper, the Knower when there was no known, and the Hearer when there was nothing to be heard.'

Then Imām Ali ('a) recited, saying:

*“And my Master was always well-known by praise,
And my Master was always described for magnanimity;
And He was, when there was no light to illuminate,
Nor was there darkness keeping to horizons;
So our Master is unlike the whole creation,
And unlike all that could be imagined by minds.”⁸*

Conclusion

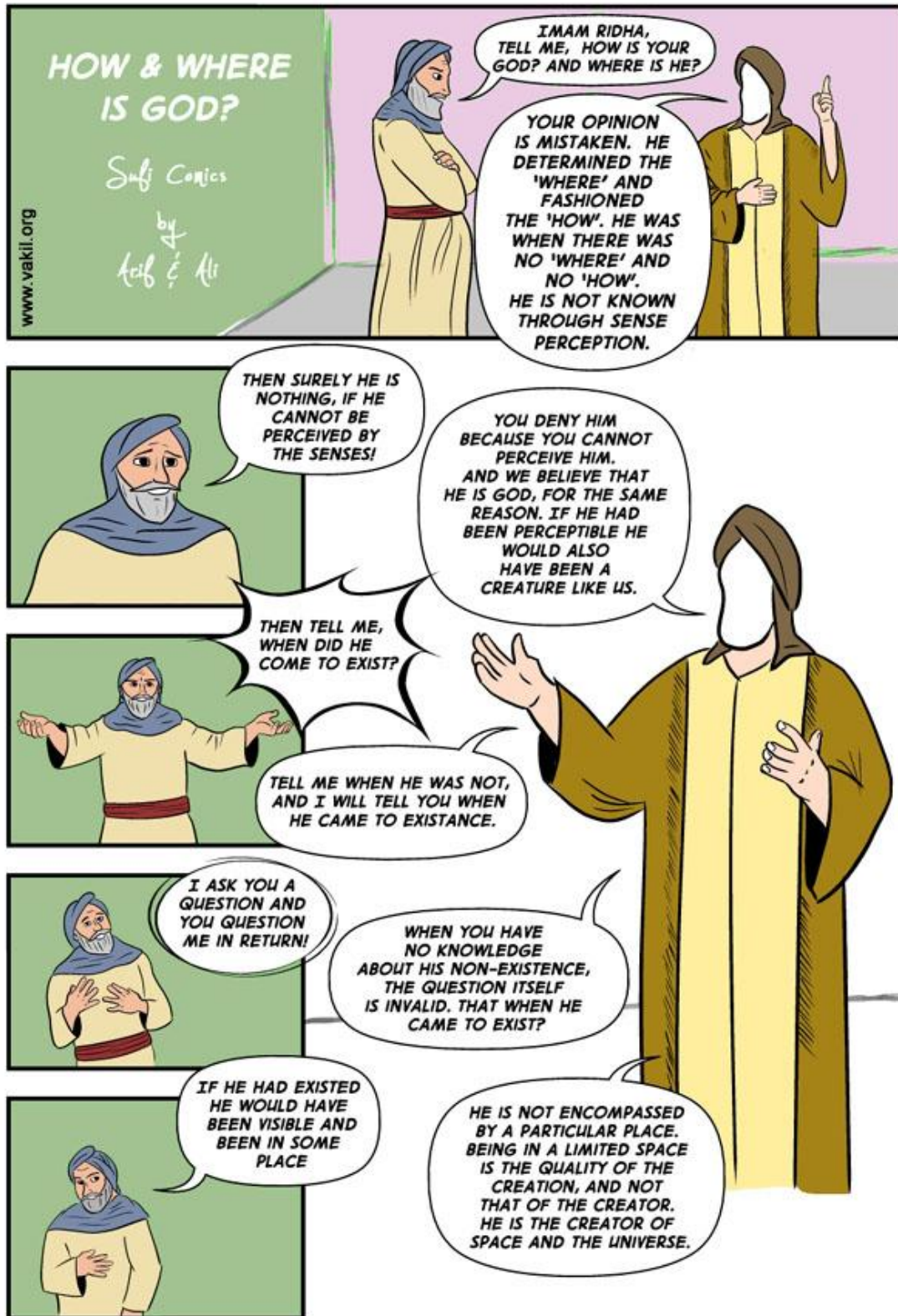
Explaining the meaning of 'One God' to a Bedouin, Imām Ali ('a) once said that when we say 'Allāh is One', we do not mean there is no other God in the numerical sense. Rather we mean there is nothing like Him and He is One in His Essence (Dhāt). He cannot be divided in existence, reason, or in imagination.

⁸ Shaykh Saduq, *at-Tawhid*. Some parts of this sermon can be found in Nahj al-Balāgha sermons 179 and 186. Tabatabai, *Tafsir al-Mizān*, v. 11, p. 121-122 (WOFIS edition).

Similarly, when we say 'Allāhu Akbar' (Allāh is Greater), we do not mean He is 'Greater than anything else' (*Allāhu akbar min kulli shay*) because nothing can be compared to His Greatness and in fact He was al-Akbar (the Greatest) even when there was nothing in existence. Rather by saying 'Allāhu Akbar' we mean 'Allāh is Greater than to be described by anyone' (*Allāhu akbar min an yusaf*).

And therefore any interrogative particle like When? Why? How? Who? Where? What? And so on, cannot be used for Allāh. For in the words of Imām Ali ('a), 'He who describes Him puts limits on Him, and he who puts limits on Him counts Him, and he who counts Him rejects His eternity.'

In the next lesson, we shall study how Allāh is 'known' through the heart and the validity of this process or journey 'towards' Allāh, otherwise known as the *Science of 'Irfān*.



Lesson 4

Allāh (s.w.t.) (cont'd)

In the previous lesson, we concluded that the human mind is incapable of knowing Allāh or understanding His Essence (Dhāt) directly. Hence the Qur'ān points us to Allāh, not directly, but through His creation and His favours as His signs and proof of His Being. For example:

﴿... إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَنْ يَخْلُقُوا ذُبَابًا وَلَوْ اجْتَمَعُوا لَهُ وَإِنْ يَسْلُبْهُمُ الذُّبَابُ شَيْئًا لَا يَسْتَنْقِذُوهُ مِنْهُ ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَالْمَطْلُوبُ﴾

Indeed those whom you invoke besides Allāh will never create [even] a fly even if they all rallied to do so! And if a fly should take away something from them, they cannot recover that from it. Feeble is the seeker and the sought!

- Surah al-Hajj, 22:73

﴿خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ بِغَيْرِ عَمَدٍ تَرَوْنَهَا وَأَلْقَى فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجٍ كَرِيمٍ. هَذَا خَلْقُ اللَّهِ فَأَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ...﴾

*He created the heavens without any pillars that you may see, and cast firm mountains in the earth lest it should shake with you, and He has scattered in it every kind of animal. And We sent down water from the sky and caused every splendid kind [of plant] to grow in it. **This is the creation of Allāh. Now show Me what others besides Him have created...***

- Surah Luqmān, 31:10-11

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَانِي تُؤْفَكُونَ﴾

O mankind! Remember Allāh's blessing upon you! Is there any creator other than Allāh who provides for you from the sky and the earth? There is no god except Him. So where do you stray?

- Surah al-Fātir, 35:3

﴿قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَصْبَحَ مَاؤُكُمْ غَوْرًا فَمَنْ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِمَاءٍ مَعِينٍ﴾

Say, 'Tell me, should your water sink down [into the ground], who will bring you running water?'

- Surah al-Mulk, 67:30

﴿قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ اللَّيْلَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَهُ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِضِيَاءٍ أَفَلَا تَسْمَعُونَ. قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ النَّهَارَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَهُ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ تَسْكُنُونَ فِيهِ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ. وَمِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ﴾

Say, 'Tell me, if Allāh were to make the night perpetual over you until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than Allāh could bring you light? Will you not then listen?' Say, 'Tell me, if Allāh were to make the day perpetual over you until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than Allāh could bring you night wherein you could rest? Will you not then perceive?' Out of His mercy He has made for you the night and the day, that you may rest therein and that you may seek from His grace and so that you may give thanks.

- Surah al-Qasas, 28:71-73

And many other such verses.⁹

On the other hand, we find many verses of the Qur'ān inviting us to 'know' Allāh and to realize Who He is. Numerous traditions tell us that humans are very special to Allāh because they are His only creation that is able to 'know' Him and represent Him to His creation.

For example, consider the following verse:

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾

I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me.

- Surah adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:56

The exegetes (mufasssirin) are unanimous, and the Shi'ah have quoted Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) as saying, that 'worship Me' (*ya'budun*) in this verse means 'know Me' (*ya'rifun*).

And this makes perfect sense because prior to the creation of humans, everything else was already worshipping Allāh (and continues to do so):

⁹ **Project/Homework Idea:** Review Surah al-Wāqī'ah verses 57-73 for other such arguments of the bounties of Allāh (s.w.t) and write a brief essay listing all the arguments can you find in these verses. In what ways are humans so dependent on these bounties for survival?

﴿تَسْبِيحٌ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ
وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا﴾

The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth [too], and whoever is in them. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification.

Indeed He is all-forgiving, all-forgiving.

- Surah al-Isrā, 17:44

If the purpose of humans was to glorify Allāh and worship Him in the ritual sense only, then there would be no special reason for Allāh to say humans and jinn were created to 'worship' Him.¹⁰

We therefore conclude, the purpose of life is to 'know' Allāh. This knowing however is not a rational or intellectual knowing that is often called 'ilm. Rather it is *ma'rifah*, which is better translated as 'realization'. And from the word *ma'rifah* is derived 'Irfān (the science of realizing God or becoming enlightened) and 'ārif(a), one who 'knows' Allāh (plural is 'urafā).

'Irfān – The Science of Journeying to God

Over the centuries, the humans who struggled physically against their egoic selves to 'know' their Lord have recorded their struggle as a 'journey' that involves various steps or stages of progression.

The purpose of this lesson is not to describe the 'journey' or stages in 'Irfān but to emphasize its validity in Islām as well as the fact that each human being must undertake this journey individually. The process of becoming an 'ārif and fulfilling the purpose of one's existence cannot be taught by one to another. A teacher of 'Irfān can only guide his or her students and help them experience and discover sublime truths for themselves. But in the end, it is an individual experience.

The reason why the 'realization' of tawhid cannot be taught in a class or explained in words is because to explain something we depend on language and words. Language is the result of human physical and emotional experiences and its words describe what we can see, touch, hear, smell, feel, taste. Tawhid is understood by the heart in a language that has no words and transcends physical sensation or sensory experience. No matter how hard we try to explain it in words, the mind will always misunderstand it. As we saw in the previous lesson, even Rasullāh (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt ('a) described Allāh only by saying Who He is not!

¹⁰ The jinn are also said to be sentient beings with freewill but while they have been given greater physical abilities over humans, their capacity to know Allāh is less; which is why, all prophets, messengers and Imāms were always human, even over the jinn.

The need to want to 'know' one's Creator is so natural that one could say it is also part of the human instinct (*fitra*). We see for example, that although most people are preoccupied with earning their livelihood and pay little attention to spiritual matters, yet every person has an inherent desire to know the truth. Sometimes a misfortune in life needs to be experienced before this desire becomes a determined purpose of one's life and forces one to think deeply about life and its purpose.

The lives of the 'urafā (pl. of 'ārif) also tells us that once one begins focusing on gaining proximity to Allāh, the 'pull' felt makes one forget all else and removes the desire of everything besides Allāh that other uninitiated humans feel. Most significant about the 'urafā is the fact that they no longer worship and obey Allāh out of fear or greed but out of love and with true sincerity. Such individuals are in fact ashamed of worshipping Allāh for His rewards instead of simply His Magnanimity and His being worthy of adoration. The 'urafā express how they feel with an anecdote given by the famous poet-mystic Sa'di in his famous work Bustān:

Someone once criticized Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna because of his love for Iyāz. 'What charm has he, the Sultan's friend Iyāz?' he remarked, 'A flower indeed with neither colour nor smell. How strange that the nightingale should set its heart upon such a thing.' Now Iyāz was a short, unattractive man whom most people would avoid and describe as 'ugly'.

Someone conveyed these remarks to the Sultan who said, 'I love Iyāz for his character and disposition and not for his looks or his stature.'

One day, the Sultan went out on a parade and passed by a narrow defile where one of his treasure-chests broke open after a camel fell. The Sultan, unlimited in his treasures did not care for it and moved on hastily. Those with him however fell upon the pearls and corals, their thoughts now turning from the Sultan to the treasure. None followed the Sultan... except for Iyāz.

Looking back, the Sultan saw him and beholding Iyāz, his face like a flower blooming with delight, asked him, 'what booty have you brought along O Iyāz?'

'None,' said Iyāz, 'I hurried after you, preferring Your service to treasures and bounties!'

The poet Sa'di then says:

*If you look to your friend for his favours,
You are attached to yourself not to your friend.
A breach of the Way it was if the saints
Desired of God anything other than God!*

The Validity of 'Irfān in Qur'ān

There are numerous āyāt of the Qur'ān that encourage people to embark on a journey of self-discovery and the ma'rifah of Allāh. We list a few just as a sample:

﴿... فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ ...﴾

...so whichever way you turn, there is the face of Allāh!

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:115

﴿فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكَرْكُمْ...﴾

Remember Me, and I will remember you...

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:152

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

When My servants ask you about Me, [tell them that] I am indeed nearest. I answer the supplicant's call when he calls Me.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:186

﴿فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي...﴾

So when I have proportioned him (i.e. man) and breathed into him of My spirit...

- Surah al-Hijr, 15:29

﴿اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ

الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ

يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ

وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ﴾

Allāh is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp—the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star - lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western, whose oil almost lights up, though fire should not touch it. Light upon light. Allāh guides to His Light whomever He wishes. Allāh draws parables for mankind, and Allāh has knowledge of all things.

- Surah an-Nur, 24:35

﴿... وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ﴾

...and We are nearer to him (i.e. man) than his jugular vein.

- Surah Qāf, 50:16

﴿هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ...﴾

He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden...

- Surah al-Hadid, 57:3

﴿وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا. فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا. قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا. وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ

﴿دَسَّاهَا﴾

(I swear) by the soul and Him who fashioned it, and inspired it (to distinguish between) its virtues and vices: one who purifies it (i.e. the soul) is felicitous, and one who betrays it fails.

- Surah ash-Shams, 91:7-10

And the list of verses goes on. All such āyāt arouse our curiosity and desire to look deeper into our selves and ask questions such as: Who am I? How did I get here? Who created me? How can I know God better? And so on.

Similarly, there are numerous ahādith that not only validate but actually encourage us to understand Tawhid deeply and realize who Allāh is (i.e. gain ma'rifah). Not through the mind and its logical deductions and philosophical arguments alone, but through purifying the heart and making this purification process a 'journey' towards Allāh so that He is known directly through personal experience and what is called an 'unveiling' (*kashf*). Below we present a very small sample of such ahādith.

The Validity of 'Irfān in Hadith

1. A very popular hadith al-qudsi, well-known amongst the 'Urafā as "Hadith Qurb al-Nawāfil" states:

Rasulullāh (s) has said that Allāh (s.w.t) says: 'When My slave seeks to attain closeness (*qurb*) to Me through non-mandatory acts of worship (*nawāfil*) and good deeds, I fall in love with him. And when I love him, I become his ears with which he hears, his eyes with which he sees, his tongue with which he speaks and his hand with which he grasps.'¹¹

2. And it is reported in al-Kāfi that one day after performing his dawn prayers, Rasulullāh (s) saw a weak and lean young man whose colour was pale, whose

¹¹ Shahid Mutahhari, *Light Within Me*, p. 24.

eyes were sunken and who could only balance himself with difficulty. Rasulullāh (s) asked him who he was and he said, 'I carry conviction (yaqin).'

'What is the sign of your conviction?' asked Rasulullāh (s) and the young man said, 'It is my conviction that grieves me and keeps me awake during the night (in worship) and thirsty during the day (in fasting). It has made me oblivious of everything in the world. I see as if the Throne of Allāh has been set up for the accounting of deeds and the inhabitants of Paradise enjoying themselves while the inmates of Hell are being punished. Even now, it is as if I can hear the roar of the flames of Hellfire.'

Rasulullāh (s) turned to his companions and remarked, 'This is man whose heart Allāh has illumined with the light of faith.' Then he turned to the young man and said, 'Keep up this state of yours and do not lose it.'

The young man asked Rasulullāh (s) to pray for him to attain martyrdom and he was killed in a battle soon after.

Note: This incident shows us that if 'Irfān or the practical striving to know Allāh (s.w.t) was wrong, then Rasulullāh (s) would have condemned the young man.

3. Imām Ali ('a) said in a sermon: 'Certainly, Allāh, the glorified, has made His remembrance the light of hearts which hear despite deafness, see with its help despite blindness, and become submissive with its help despite unruliness. In all the periods and times when there were no prophets, there have been individuals with whom Allāh - precious are His bounties - spoke in whispers through their conscience and intellects.'¹²

Note: These words of Amir al-Mu'minin (a') show how the heart is the organ of receptivity to truth and knowing Allāh, and not the mind. Even one who is blind, deaf or mute can know Allāh as long as he or she has a heart and it is purified. It is beautiful that Allāh and His remembrance is accessible to all His creation and can never be taken away from them. Whether one is male or female, free or imprisoned, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, able-bodied or handicapped... in every circumstance, Allāh and His remembrance is accessible. Such that sometimes one even hears a child or one who is mentally-handicapped glorifying Allāh. This, so that, no one can say on the Day of Judgement that they were unable to journey to Allāh because they were poor or illiterate or imprisoned or handicapped, and so on.

4. In another sermon, Imām Ali ('a) is reported to have said, 'He (the faithful) revives his intellect and mortifies his self, until his body becomes lean and his coarseness turns into refinement. Then an effulgence of extreme brightness shines forth for illuminating the path before him, opening all the doors and

¹² Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 222.

leading him straight to the gate of safety and the (permanent) abode. His feet, carrying his body, become fixed in the position of safety and comfort on account of that which engages his heart and on having won the good pleasure of his Lord.¹³

Note: Observe once again how, Tawhid, attaining of realization, enlightenment and even salvation is attained by purifying one's self and polishing the heart. Of course it is not simply devotion and worship. The attainment of knowledge through Qur'ān, hadith and deep reflection are a necessary means towards the ma'rifah of Allāh. But ultimately it comes about through direct experience and an unveiling (*kashf*) rather than a rational process of philosophical arguments. Only in this way is one completely convinced of the truth and beyond any doubt regarding Allāh and the Real World to come.

Terminologies in 'Irfān

The following are some terms we may come across in relation to 'Irfān.

Sayr wa Suluk. This is commonly translated as 'wayfaring'. It refers to the actual spiritual journeying that one chooses to undertake and all the stages one encounters in that journey.

Sufism. Some people like to say 'Irfān is to the Shi'ah what to Sufism is to the Sunni. Both terms have, however, been used by both groups interchangeably. The Shi'ah have tried to avoid associating themselves with the term 'Sufism' because often Sufism is identified by organized groups following a particular leader and some Sufi groups having been known to practice extreme rituals that have no basis in Islām. Some Sufi groups have also promoted a particular lifestyle, dressing or behaving in a particular manner, growing their hair, wearing rosaries around their necks, giving up social life or earning a living, and so on. The Shi'ah insist that there is no 'Sufism' in the madhhab of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) because the same Imāms from whom we take our theology ('aqidah) and jurisprudence (fiqh) are also our spiritual guides. We shall look at Sufism in more detail in the last two Aqāid lessons of this Book when discussing Sects in Islām.

Shari'ah, Tariqah, Haqiqah. In the language of mystics (*'urafā*), shari'ah is the exoteric or outer dimension of Islām i.e. its laws. Tariqah is the esoteric or inner dimension of Islām. It is the spiritual path that one follows by understanding the wisdom behind the shari'ah and acting on it sincerely. For example, one who follows shari'ah only, prays salāh in a series of standing, bowing and prostrating. One who follows the tariqah as well, is as concerned about his or her heart standing, bowing and prostrating before Allāh as he or she is concerned about the outer body. And

¹³ Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 220.

Haqiqah is simply the Truth and the core of Islām that one seeks to reach after following the Shari’ah and Tariqah.

In other words, shari’ah is the husk and tariqah is the kernel. And in comparison, tariqah is the husk and haqiqah is the kernel; which is why some mystics refer to Haqiqah or the ultimate truth of Tawhid as “the kernel of the kernel”.

The first condition of embarking on the journey of ‘Irfān is of course that one must follow the shar’iah to the letter and neither skip any wājibat nor indulge in muharramat. ‘Irfān is a duty on all but it is not an alternative to following the rules of Islām. It is responding to the Call of Allāh within the framework of the laws of Islām but with greater devotion and sincerity. One cannot be ‘spiritual’ without following the shari’ah. To explain with an analogy: Shari’ah is the ship. Tariqah is the ocean. Haqiqah is the Great Pearl that lies in the middle of the ocean. It is impossible to get to the Great Pearl without both the Shari’ah and the Tariqah.

Project Idea

Using at least (but not limited to) three Qur’ān verses and three ahādith from the Qur’ān and Hadith references below, write an essay arguing that in the opinion of Islām, it is the heart that knows truth beyond doubt and not the mind. The mind is a tool and means to help direct our contemplation but ultimately conviction can only come from the heart.

Remember: You don’t need to quote the entire Qur’ān verse that you choose to use. You can quote only the parts of it that are relevant to your essay.

You will require an English translation of the Qur’ān to look up the verses. It is recommended that you glance at the translation of every verse of Qur’ān in the list below before deciding which three (or more) verses you will use in the essay.

Qur’ān References:

Al-Baqarah, 2:74

Al-i Imrān, 3:8

Al-Anfāl, 8:24

Al-A’rāf, 7:179

Ar-Ra’d, 13:28

Ash-Shu’arā, 26:88-89

Ghāfir, 40:35

Muhammad, 47:24

Mutaffifin, 83:14

Hadith References:

In a hadith al-Qudsi, Allāh says: ‘Neither the heavens nor the earth can contain Me. But the heart of a faithful (mu’min) contains Me.’

Rasulullāh (s) said, ‘The heart of a believer is the throne of the Merciful.’

Rasulullāh (s): 'Allāh, the Most High, has vessels (or 'containers') in the world. Behold! They are the hearts. So the ones most loved by Allāh, and the purest of them and most solid are the ones that are most affectionate and loving to their brethren, the purest from sins and the most solidly rooted in the Essence (dhāt) of Allāh.'

Rasulullāh (s): 'Allāh, the Glorious and Most High, does not look at your faces or your wealth. He looks at your hearts and your actions.'

Imām Ali ('a): 'The hearts are receptacles. So the best of them are the most receptive.'

Imām as-Sādiq ('a): 'The status of the heart (*qalb*) to the body is like that of the Imām to the people.'

Lesson 5

Sects in Islām

All Muslims believe there is no god but Allāh and Muhammad (s) is His Messenger. All Muslims pray five times a day towards the Ka'bah. All Muslims believe in the Qur'ān as the final revelation from Allāh, and so on. But there are also some important differences between various groups of Muslims. The major groups or sects in Islām are broadly divided into the Shi'ah Muslims and the Sunni Muslims.

One who understands Islām as the religion of Allāh chosen for the human race, is still faced with the decision of which sect of Islām to follow. Sometimes a new Muslim may even get frustrated with all the different groups in Islām and say, 'I am just a Muslim, neither a Shi'ah nor a Sunni!' But of course this does not help him or her because some of the differences between the Muslim sects are quite important, as we shall see.

Shi'ah and Sunni Differences

The reason why sects formed in Islām is because after the passing away of Rasulullāh (s), many different opinions began to form and each group promoted its own opinions and came to be identified with a name for their own 'sect'.

In matters of belief and the law, most Muslims simply followed local scholars that they looked up to and whose views the rulers and governments of their times encouraged, promoted or at least tolerated. This is what we see in all ages, even today. Most people are occupied with earning their living and go about their daily chores, simply following along with the culture and ideology they are born into. In terms of obeying the law, they simply go along with the laws and rules of the country they live in, even if they don't agree with all of its laws. Very few people speak out against the wrongdoings of a government or their community and when they do, they are quickly labelled as 'fanatics', 'rebels', 'renegades' and essentially trouble-makers and outcasts.

We, the Shi'ah Ithnā Ashari believe that Rasulullāh (s) did not pass away without appointing a successor. Rather, he declared Imām Ali ('a) as his successor on many occasions. We also believe that Rasulullāh (s) himself, on numerous occasions, mentioned words like "Ali and his Shi'ah" and therefore neither the title "Shi'ah" of Ali nor the loyal following of Imām Ali ('a) is an innovation in Islām. For example:

It is reported in several Sunni sources of hadith and tafsir, from Ibn Abbās that when the verse, *'Indeed those who have faith and do righteous deeds - it is they who are the best of creatures (khayr al-bariyya)'*¹⁴ was revealed, Rasulullāh (s) said to Imām

¹⁴ Surah al-Bayyinah, 98:7

Ali ('a), 'It is you and your Shi'ah (that are being referred to in this verse), on the Day of Judgement, pleased with Allāh and He pleased with you [all].'¹⁵

The Shi'ah therefore insist that they are not a later formation nor are they a breakaway sect in Islām; rather they are the best of Muslims, loyal to the Household (Ahl al-Bayt ('a) of Rasulullāh (s) as per the instruction of Rasulullāh (s) in his famous Hadith ath-Thaqalayn.

In contrast to this, the word 'Sunni' did not exist in Islām until much later. During the early years of Islām, the majority of the Muslims simply followed along silently with whatever the rulers and their tribal leaders advocated. Those who remained loyal to the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) were called 'Shi'at Ali'. Later when Mu'āwiya and his son Yazid ruled the Muslims, the division became more defined and people spoke of being "Shi'at Ali" vs. "Shi'at Mu'āwiya", or Alawi vs. Umawi. It was only much later on, during the reign of the Banu Abbās when the government began officially promoting certain schools of law and adopting specific madhāhib (schools of law) that the rulers and their governments began calling themselves "Ahl as-Sunnah" (meaning the followers of the Sunnah of the Prophet (s)). The idea was to promote the belief that anyone who complied with them was a part of the orthodox or original Islām and anyone else, such as the Shi'ah of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) who opposed them, were 'renegades' (rāfidi) and so on.

Besides the few years that Imām Ali ('a) held power as the Caliph, the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and their Shi'ah have never held political authority. This means the 'official' history of Islām was always written with a bias against the Shi'ah. It is only in modern times where individual countries like Iran and Iraq can be talked of as being a Shi'ah government.

The purpose of studying the differences between the Shi'ah and the Sunni is not to promote division and hate. Rather it is to understand our own faith and why we, who call ourselves the Shi'ah Ithnā Ashari, follow the School (madhhab) of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and not any other school or sect. Unless we know our history, we will neither value what we have nor will we have a clue on how to preserve it for posterity.

Theological Differences

Theology is called *'ilm al-kalām* or simply *kalām* in Islām. It is a science that discusses and debates all matters of belief (usul or 'aqidah) and in particular the differences of opinion in matters of belief between the various sects (madhāhib) in Islām. Muslim theologians (i.e. those who engage in kalām) are called *mutakallimun*.

The Muslim scientist and scholar al-Farābi (d. 339 AH / 950 CE) for example, defined kalām as 'a science that enables a person to support specific beliefs and actions laid

¹⁵ Ibn Mardawayh, *Manāqib Ali*, hadith 578-581; Suyuti, *Durr al-Manthur*, v. 6 p. 379; Ibn Hajar, *Sawāiq al-Muhriqa*, p. 161; as well as other sources.

down by the Legislators of religion and to refute all opinions contradicting them.’ And Ibn Khaldun (d. 807 AH / 1404 CE) defined kalām as, ‘the science that involves arguing with rational proofs in defence of the articles of faith and refuting innovators who deviate from the beliefs of early Muslims and Muslim orthodoxy.’¹⁶

This means ‘Ilm al-Kalām discusses matters ranging from the Being and Attributes of God to matters relating to Prophethood, Imāmah and Ma’ād. A major cause of Muslim division into sects stems from their differing views regarding the matters that are discussed under kalām.

It is important to note however that despite its importance, ‘ilm al-kalām does not hold a central place in Islām as it does in Christianity. Theology has, over the centuries, played a profound role in the religious and spiritual understand of Christians whereas in Islām it has played a more peripheral role. As well, much of what is discussed under ‘theology’ in Christianity is to be found in Islāmic Philosophy (as we shall see in Lesson 7).

It is true that kalām is very important to understand certain aspects of Islāmic thought and how sects formed in Islām, but the deepest spiritual and intellectual expressions of Islām are to be found in *falsafa* (philosophy) and *‘irfān* (gnosis) and not *kalām*.¹⁷

This is important to note because the Shi’ah are often criticized for not having their own ‘kalām’ until much later; and even of simply borrowing and taking from the Sunni Mu’tazilite kalām after it was dying out and was replaced by the Sunni Ash’arite theology. As we shall see, the Mu’tazilites were supportive of the use of rationality in understanding theological matters and the Ash’arites were not. The Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) always encouraged the use of rationality and the intellect. It is therefore natural that one might see similarities between the all but extinct Mu’tazilite theology and the Shi’ah theology. But the differences between them are also significant and for the latter, it comes from the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) only.

Early Kalām

Traditionally, Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib (‘a) is credited with having established the science of kalām in Islām and his sermons in Nahj al-Balāgha contain the first rational proofs of the unity of Allāh (tawhid), outside the proofs in the Qur’ān and hadith. This in itself proves that the Shi’ah did not take their understanding of usul or kalām from the Mu’tazilites even if they never felt the need to put their theology in writing until much later in their history.

At first, Muslims felt the need to engage in kalām only as a protection and defence of Islām. The theology of other religions – especially Christianity – challenged the young

¹⁶ Nasr & Leaman, *History of Islāmic Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 75.

¹⁷ Nasr, *Islāmic Spirituality*, vol. 2, chp. 22, p. 396.

faith of Islām. Added to this, texts on Greek philosophy were being translated into Arabic and raising new questions for Muslim scholars.

As well, the rapid spread of Islām brought diverse groups into the fold of the Islāmic community and therefore necessitated a clear definition of the creed to prevent confusion. Before that, Muslims were mostly concerned with Divine Law (shari'ah) and its practice but these challenges forced the creation of theologians who could respond to external challenges that questioned the general understanding of God and other theological matters, which in turn forced the theologians to look at the Qur'ān and hadith more deeply.

The Mu'tazilites

The first systematic school of kalām grew from a circle of traditional scholars of Qur'ān and hadith in the second (AH)/eighth (CE) century and came to be known as the Mu'tazilite school. Its founder Wāsil b. 'Ata (d. 131 AH/748 CE) was a student of the famous hadith and Sufi teacher Hasan al-Basri. But he separated from his master and established his own school in Basra. His teacher, Hasan al-Basri, is said to have remarked, "*i'tazala 'anna Wāsil*" ('Wāsil has withdrawn himself from us') and from his word "*i'tazala*" is said to have come the name Mu'tazilites (i.e. 'the Withdrawers').

The Mu'tazilites were seen as free-thinkers and rationalists. They dominated the scene in Iraq for over a century and created an imposing theological school that emphasized the use of reason and the importance of freewill. In fact, their main flaw was that they gave preference to reasoning even above revelation (i.e. the Qur'ān).

This lasted until the time of the Abbāsi Caliph al-Ma'mun and in the early third (AH)/ninth (CE) century, the Mu'tazilites began to decline and they were replaced by the Ash'arite school of kalām, strongly supported by al-Ma'mun's successor al-Mutawakkil.

The Mu'tazilites did not die out complete though. They continued to survive in small groups and in recent times there has been some revival of their ideas.

The Mu'tazilites taught that God is unknowable to a point that God is almost seen as an abstract idea. Their aim was to oppose any notion of anthropomorphism (that God has a form or a physical being) and to this end, they emphasized that even the Speech of God (i.e. the Qur'ān) is a creation just like other creations. This last belief came to be a serious matter for the Ash'arites and much blood was shed between Muslims over the issue of whether the Qur'ān was eternal in its essence (the Ash'arite view) or whether it was created (the Mu'tazilite and also the Shi'ah view).

On the matter of Justice ('adālah), the Mu'tazilites emphasized that God's justice and promise in the Qur'ān demands that He rewards the good and punishes the evil, to the point that He cannot do otherwise; and those in Hellfire cannot be taken out of it

nor can they benefit from any intercession. In opposition to this, the Ash'arites later reacted strongly and went to the other extreme of saying, if God wills, He can and He will put all the righteous in Hell and all the evil in Paradise and that man's action do not earn him the right to Paradise. The Ash'arites went further to say that 'justice' as it is understood by humans does not apply to God. Whatever God does is just even if He admits the prophets and their successors in Hell and Fir'aun and his likes in Paradise. The Shi'ah, taking from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), argued that there is a difference between what God 'can do' and what He 'will do'. It is true that God *can* do as He pleases but God as well, takes pride in the Qur'ān that He never breaks His promise and therefore it is wrong to say that He may cause the righteous to enter Hell or that 'whatever He does is just even putting the righteous in Hellfire.'

The Mu'tazilites also taught that man is completely free and that God does not interfere in creation. Everything is determined by cause and effect. The Ash'arites opposed this greatly and again, in extreme reaction, argued that man is completely bound by God so much so that God predestines every action. Every good deed and every sin is willed and committed by God. But man is the puppet through whom this action takes place. And because man 'acquires' (*yaksibu*) the action, therefore he can be punished for what occurs through him.

The Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) naturally opposed this (as we have discussed in detail in Book 10) and Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) in particular taught the principle of "*al-amr baynal amrayn*" (the matter is between the two matters) meaning neither are the Mu'tazilites right (that man is completely free) nor are the Ash'arites true (that Allāh forces people to act in good or evil). It would be unjust for Allāh to punish a person for an act He commits and it also makes no sense that Allāh should warn and ask people to refrain from sins (in the Qur'ān) if they have no option but to do what He intends. In the Shi'ah understanding therefore, man is free in his actions but many matters such as his birth, what he earns, when he dies, his sustenance, etc. are not entirely in his hands but decreed by Allāh. Man must learn to surrender to Allāh and be pleased with Allāh's decree and then act freely to prove this surrendering and therefore earn eternal bliss.

In conclusion then, the Mu'tazilites were the first group of Muslim thinkers to apply rational arguments systematically to various questions of religion and it is the development of a rational theology that they are most known for in the history of Islāmic thought. In this way, they influenced all later theological debates including the discussions of the Sunni Ash'arites and the Shi'ah Muslims.

The Ash'arites

During the third (AH)/ninth (CE) century, after the reign of Ma'mun, who made the Mu'tazilite doctrine compulsory, the traditional jurists (*fuqaha*) and traditionists (muhaddithun), especially the followers of Ahmad b. Hanbal, opposed all rational proofs for the tenets of faith. Muslims were asking to accept the doctrines of faith 'without asking how' (*bilā kayf*).

Naturally, this extreme reaction against the rational tendencies of the Mu'tazilite kalām could not last indefinitely. The Qur'ān itself emphasized the use of the intellect ('aql) and invited people to ponder on its verses. This would be impossible without the use of rationality and 'asking how'. Those who saw themselves as leaders of orthodox Islām were therefore forced to allow the use of rationality in theological discussions – even if it was within defined limits - rather than banning it altogether.

And it was this task that Abul Hasan al-Ash'ari attempted to undertake and thus he came to be known as the founder of the Ash'arite theology that the whole Sunni world subscribes to today.

Abul Hasan al-Ash'ari was born in Basra around 260 AH/873 CE and he died in Baghdad around 330 AH/941 CE. Until the age of 40, he was a student of the famous Basrean Mu'tazilite al-Jubbā'i but then he turned against the Mu'tazilite doctrines and 'repented' seeking to return to what he saw as the authentic teachings of the Qur'ān. He is said to have gone to the main mosque of Basra and publicly declared his repentance as follows:

He who knows me, know who I am. And he who does not know me, let him know that I am Abul Hasan Ali al-Ash'ari; that I used to maintain that the Qur'ān is created, that the eyes of men shall not see God, and that the creatures create their actions. Lo! I repent that I have been a Mu'tazilite. I renounce these opinions and I take the engagement to refute the Mu'tazilites and expose their depravity.¹⁸

Some of the essential views of the Ash'arites can be derived from the words of al-Ash'ari himself: that the Qur'ān is in its essence as eternal as God; that people will be able to see Allāh on the Day of Judgement and that God is responsible for all the actions of man.

One of the most famous doctrines of the Ash'arites (which was later expanded on by famous Ash'arites like al-Ghazāli) was the rejection of causality. What this means is that, for the Ash'arites, nothing has an independent nature to cause anything. Only God is the cause of everything. For example, fire does not burn because it is in its nature to do so but because God has willed it. Tomorrow He could will otherwise and as a result fire would cease to burn. There is no such thing as 'the nature of fire', they argued. What in fact appears to us as cause and effect – for example, fire causing a piece of cotton to burn – is nothing but a habit of the mind ('ādah), because we have constantly seen fire being brought near a piece of cotton and then the cotton being in flames. God is the only cause; it is His Will that makes fire burn the cotton. Miracles are in fact nothing other than breaking of this habit of mind.

Then to prove this theory, the Ash'arites backed it with verses from the Qur'ān and said, 'do you not see how when Nabi Ibrāhim ('a) was thrown in fire, it did not burn him because God did not will it?'

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 400.

Our response to the Ash'arites is that this very same incident in the Qur'ān proves that Allāh has given everything its own nature and ability to cause things. Their ability to cause is of course by Allāh's Will that He can retract at any time, but it doesn't prove they don't have any ability to affect another thing. Look at the verse where Allāh commands the fire not to burn Nabi Ibrāhim ('a):

﴿قُلْنَا يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ﴾

We said, 'O fire! Be cool and safe for Ibrāhim!'

- Surah al-Anbiya, 21:69

Notice that Allāh commands, 'O Fire! Be cool...' If the cause of fire burning was Allāh alone, then why would He order the fire not to burn Nabi Ibrāhim ('a)?

In summary then, if we imagine God's Will to be a vertical cause and all actions of creation (including humans) as horizontal causes that bisect the Vertical Cause, then we could say that Ash'arite kalām sought to dissolve all horizontal causes and deny their existence. It is no wonder then that Ash'arites strongly opposed Islāmic philosophy, which seeks to know the cause and nature of things leading ultimately to the First or Ultimate Cause (i.e. Allāh).

The famous Ash'arite scholar al-Ghazālī studied philosophy and then wrote against it his well-known *tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*). Later, the Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes) responded to al-Ghazālī and wrote a rejoinder calling his work *tahāfut al-tahāfut* (*Incoherence of the Incoherence*). Similarly, one of the most famous Ash'arite scholars and exegetists of Qur'ān, Fakhr ad-Din ar-Rāzī wrote criticisms against the Muslim philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and his criticisms were counter-challenged by the Muslim philosopher Nāsir ad-Din at-Tusi in his work *ishārāt wal tanbihāt*.

The Ash'arites did not contribute to the flowering of Islāmic science either, because most Islāmic scientists were also philosophers and very few of them were Ash'arite *mutakallimun* (theologians).

One of the contributions of the later Ash'arites however was the merging of Ash'arite theology with Sufism. At a time when traditional 'ulama were at odds with the mystics, al-Ghazālī (a strong proponent of Ash'arite theology as well as Sufism) and others were able to reconcile the two parts and show how they can co-exist. This in itself is remarkable – how despite its 'anti-intellectualism' the Ash'arite view not only became the prevalent theology in the Sunni world but also combined (in certain aspects) with Sufism at whose heart lies gnosis (ma'rifah) and illuminative knowledge (more on this in the Lesson 7).

In more modern times, Sunni (Ash'arite) scholars like Muhammad Abduh (d. 1323 AH/1905 CE) and Muhammad Iqbāl (d. 1357 AH/1938 CE) have given greater importance to the use of reason in their works, thus reviving some Mu'tazilite perspectives.

The Shi'ah Kalām

For the Shi'ah, the dominant Ash'arite view that opposes the use of rationality in theological matters is seen as an impediment to acquiring Divine knowledge. It goes against the very basic teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) that encourage deep intellection of the Qur'ān and hadith and understanding Tawhid and its branches beyond just the literal translation of Qur'ān verses and hadith.

Based on the Prophetic hadith, 'I am the City of Knowledge and Ali is its Gate', the Shi'ah argue that if true understanding of Tawhid lies in the City (i.e. with Rasulullāh (s)) and access to this treasure of divine knowledge comes through the Gate (Imām Ali ('a) and by extension the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)) then the Ash'arite doctrines of opposing the use of rationality are the 'walls of the city' that act as an impediment to the City.

Indeed the dominant non-Shi'ah view has been that any interpretation of the Qur'ān is 'off limits' and discussing and debating theological and philosophical matters are wrong and an innovation (*bid'ah*). The famous Imām Malik b. Anas¹⁹ (d. 179 AH/795 CE) who died even before al-Ash'ari was born, is reported to have said, 'Beware of innovations... those who talk about the names and attributes of God, His Word, His Knowledge and His Power, and do not keep silent about things which the Companions of the Prophet (s) and their followers have kept silence.'²⁰

And when he was asked to explain verses of Qur'ān such as '*Indeed your Lord is Allāh, who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then settled on the Throne...*' (Al-A'rāf, 7:54), as to how exactly God 'settled' Himself on the Throne, Imām Malik b. Anas responded by saying, 'We know He settled Himself on the Throne. How it occurred is not understandable. The belief in it is obligatory and asking questions about it is an innovation (*bid'ah*)!'²¹

In other words, Imām Malik (and later on the Ash'arites) believed that instead of interpreting verses of Qur'ān that do not make literal sense, we should simply accept them 'as is' and remain silent without asking how (*bilā kayf*).

The Shi'ah on the other hand have argued that if God did not want us to understand such verses, then what was the point of revealing them? The reason for not knowing the answer to such questions is not because there is none but because of turning away from the Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) who are the true inheritors of the knowledge of Rasulullāh (s) and the Qur'ān. It is concerning them that Allāh revealed, '*...ask the People of the Reminder (ahl adh-dhikr) if you do not know...*' (an-Nahl, 16:43).

Ash'arite scholars like Ghazāli and Suyuti lamented that Muslims were plagued with theological and philosophical concerns only because of the infiltration of Greek philosophy into Islām. But this is not entirely true. We know from at least one report

¹⁹ Founder of the Maliki madhhab.

²⁰ Nasr & Leaman, *History of Islāmic Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 71.

²¹ Ibid, p. 106.

that Rasulullāh (s) himself came out one day and found a group of Muslims discussing the subject of predestination (*qadar*).²²

Furthermore, the Qur'ān discusses matters of law (*fiqh*) in less than 600 verses out of it's over 6600 verses. Most of the Qur'ān explains matters of aqāid and kalām such as the unity of Allāh, prophethood, the refutation of idol worship and polytheism, the Hereafter, and so on.

From a Shi'ah perspective, there are numerous examples of atheists and philosophers who debated theological matters with the Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). Nahj al-Balāgha has numerous examples of Imām Ali ('a) discussing tawhid in deep philosophical terms. The theological debates of Imām al-Bāqir ('a), Imām as-Sādiq ('a), Imām ar-Ridā ('a) as well as other Imāms with the scholars of other faiths are widely recorded in the Shi'ah books of hadith.

It is true that Rasulullāh (s) and the Imāms ('a) did not encourage people to ask too much about certain matters like predestination or the Hour of Judgement; but this was not to discourage curiosity or learning. It was because the matter was beyond the understanding of the people at the time. When Rasulullāh (s) was asked by a companion, 'when is the Hour of Judgement?' he replied, 'what have you prepared for it?' In other words, Rasulullāh (s) wanted him to realize is that if he has prepared for it, then 'when' is not important and if he hasn't prepared for it, then again, knowing 'when' will not be of any use to him, given that he could die at any moment.

Rasulullāh (s) himself engaged in theological debates, such as with the Christian delegation from Najrān regarding Nabi Isa ('a), after which the Ayāh of Mubāhala (3:61) was revealed. These debates, recorded in many tafāsir works, clearly show Rasulullāh (s) arguing with logic and reasoning as to why God cannot have a son and why Jesus was human and not divine.

The Shi'ah and the Ash'arites also differ on the issue of Imāmah and concepts related to them but these have all been discussed in previous books. For the Shi'ah understanding of Imāmah and its necessity, see Book 8. For the concept of Infallibility ('ismah), see Book 7. For the subject of Intercession (*shafā'ah*), see Book 8 and for the matter of Intermediaries (*wasila*), see Book 10. Regarding the possibility of a Prophet or Imām having hidden knowledge ('ilm al-ghayb), see Book 9. In all these matters, the Shi'ah believe in and uphold these concepts while the Ash'arites do not or are not unanimous in their belief on them.

It is often said that the early Shi'ah thinkers were mostly concerned with hadith, tafsir (Qur'ānic commentary) and fiqh (jurisprudence) and that Shi'ah kalām did not develop until much later when Shaykh Mufid (d. 413 AH/1022 CE) developed Shi'ah kalām after taking from the Mu'tazilites. As mentioned earlier, this is not true.

²² Ibid, p. 71.

Shaykh Mufid himself has refuted the claim that Shi'ah theology was copied from the Mu'tazilites in his book *Awā'il al-Maqāl*.²³

What is true however is that the Shi'ah did not occupy themselves with kalām as did the others because rather than treating it as a separate subject, they discussed the issues of kalām under their philosophical (falsafi) and hadith works. In fact, some of the greatest Shi'ah theologians were philosophers and experts in other sciences.

For example, even though Shaykh al-Mufid is regarded as one of the earliest Shi'ah scholars to discuss kalām independently, a systematic treatise on Shi'ah Ithna Ashari kalām is said to have first been written by Nāsir ad-Din at-Tusi (d. 672 AH/1273 AH), who was a celebrated mathematician and philosopher. And though he was a scientist, Tusi's work *Tajrid al-'Itiqād* rapidly became a standard theological text; more than a hundred commentaries have been written on it. The most famous commentary is the *Kashf al-Murād* of Allama Hilli (d. 726 AH/1326 CE), who is the most notable Shi'ah mutakallim (theologian) after Tusi.

These works clearly show how the Shi'ah defer from the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites in their theological views. But as we shall see in Lesson 7, many of these issues are best discussed under philosophy. Indeed, to understand Shi'ah kalām thoroughly, one has to study the philosophical works of the Shi'ah.

An example of issues in kalām that necessitate a study of philosophy is the Shi'ah confirmation of the reality of horizontal causality (that the Ash'arites deny). Another example is the Shi'ah rejection of all 'hadith' that portray God in anthropomorphic terms.

The Shi'ah pride themselves in upholding the purest form of Tawhid (as taught by the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)) and this in itself is impossible to discuss without engaging in philosophy. Perhaps it is because the two sciences are so intertwined that Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kāshāni (d. 1091 AH/1680 CE) and Abd ar-Razzāq Lāhiji (d. 1071 AH/1660 CE) - the most notable students of the famous Shi'ah philosopher, Sadr ad-Din Shirāzi (Mulla Sadra) (d. 1050 AH/1640 CE) – are regarded by some to be more scholars of kalām than of falsafa.²⁴

Shi'ah Divisions

The term 'Shi'ah' is not used exclusively for the followers of the twelve Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). Those who follow up to the 4th Imām ('a) and then follow his son Zayd are known as Zaydi Shi'ah. And those who stop at the 6th Imām ('a) and then follow his son Ismā'il are known as Ismā'ili Shi'ahs and they are further divided into the Dawoodi Bohra Shi'ahs and the Nizari Ismā'ili (or Aga Khani) Shi'ahs.

²³ Ibid., p. 123.

²⁴ Nasr, *Islāmic Spirituality*, vol. 2, chp. 22, p. 409.

In all these lessons, when we mention the word, 'Shi'ah' we do not mean any of the above sects but rather we mean the Shi'ah Ithnā Ashari who follow the twelve Imāms and believe in the final Imām as being the Mahdi ('atfs) who is in ghaybah.

The words "Ithnā Ashar" means 'Twelve' in Arabic and some people therefore also refer to us as 'the Twelver Shi'ah'. The Shi'ah Ithnā Ashari form the majority amongst all sects referred to as 'Shi'ah'.

All Muslims acknowledge that Rasulullāh (s) declared that the Imāms and leaders after him will be twelve and they will all be from the Quraysh. All Muslims also believe that Rasulullāh (s) said, 'I leave behind two important things: the Book of Allāh and my Ahl al-Bayt. If you hold on to them, you will never go astray after me.' (Hadith ath-Thaqalayn). But no Muslim sect follows the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in all matters of Islām as well as believes in precisely twelve Imāms, except for the Shi'ah Ithna Ashari Muslims.

The Shi'ah Ithna Ashari are also divided into the Usuli and Akhbāri, the majority being the Usuli Shi'ah Ithna Ashari.

Akhbāri Shi'ah Ithna Ashari

The Akhbāri Shi'ah Ithna Ashari rely on hadith (also called *akhbār*) only for their laws. They reject the following of a mujtahid who is not infallible (ma'sum). Thus they are opposed to taqlid and marja'iyā as found among the Usuli. Today the Akhbāris are found mostly in India, Bahrain and some parts of southern Iraq and western Iran.

But the differences between the Usuli and Akhbāri are not limited to fiqh matters only. Amongst their differences in beliefs, the Akhbāri regard the Kutub al-Arba'a (Four Shi'ah Sources of Hadith) to be all authentic while the Usuli Shi'ah Ithna Ashari do not. The Akhbāri believe in Tahreef of Qur'ān i.e. that the Qur'ān in our hands today is not the complete Qur'ān and that the original complete Qur'ān is with Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs). We the Usuli believe the present Qur'ān is the complete, unchanged revelation of Allāh. The Akhbāri also believe that declaring "Aliyyun Waliyullah" is an obligatory (wājib) part of the Kalimah while the Usuli do not consider it to be wājib in order for one to be accepted as a Muslim.

Lesson 6

Sects in Islām (cont'd)

Jurisprudence Differences

By jurisprudence (fiqh) we mean the laws of practice (or what is called the Shari'ah) in Islām. In the early decades of Islām after Rasulullāh (s), the Muslims continued to practice Islām based on what they had learnt from Rasulullāh (s). Around the time of Imām Ali Zayn al-Abidin ('a), Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) and Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a), many of the companions of Rasulullāh (s) had died and Islām had expanded rapidly to other lands. It therefore became necessary to preserve the shari'ah from corruption or even disappearing.

The Shi'ah simply continued following the Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in their practices just as they did in all other matters such as beliefs, Qur'ān interpretation, hadith and spirituality. And in due course, the Shi'ah madhhab also came to be known as the Ja'fari School of Law because it followed Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a), in whose times the Sunni Schools of Law began acquiring a formal name and structure.

The Sunni Muslims today follow one of four schools of law: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i or Hanbali. But this was not always the case. After Imām Ali ('a) when the Banu Umayya reigned as Kings and were not knowledgeable in Islāmic law themselves, they relied on scholars to be judges in their courts. Different cities have different 'mujtahids', each promoting their own opinion or 'school'. At one point it is believed there were almost twenty schools of law, including the school of Hasan al-Basri, the school of al-Awzāi, the school of Tabari, the school of Sufyān ath-Thawri, and so on.

The government of the time was concerned with all these unregulated schools of law cropping up and therefore most schools of law were either banned or died out, with only four of them being allowed to crystallize and survive over time.

The Four Sunni Schools of Law

Hanafi

It is the oldest of the four and was founded in Iraq by Abu Hanifa (d. 150 AH/767 CE). Abu Hanifa's real name was Nu'man b. Thābit. He was a Persian but he was born in Kufa and died in Baghdad. Abu Hanifa studied under Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) in Madina and later developed his own opinions in Islāmic law.

The Hanafi School allows deriving legal judgements and Islāmic laws based on self-opinion (ra'y) and the use of analogies (qiyās). It is therefore the most liberal and flexible of the four Sunni Madhāhib. Today, the Hanafi madhhab has the largest following in the Sunni Muslim world and it is particularly dominant in Central and Western Asia (Afghanistan to Turkey), parts of Egypt, and the Indian subcontinent. It

is basically dominant in the countries that were once a part of the Turkish Empire and in India.

Because Abu Hanifa had supported a Zaydi revolt, he was arrested and he died in prison. His followers later on ascribed to him a genealogy that made him a descendant of Persian Kings and he was regarded as a hero because he refused to serve as a religious judge (qādi) under the Umayyads. Under the Abbāsids however, his followers readily entered government service and gained favour by a willingness to accommodate the needs of the ruling princes in matters of law. Abu Yusuf (a Hanafi) who wrote a treatise on land tax became the first Supreme Judge (Qādi al-Qudāh) under the Caliph Hārūn ar-Rashid, and gained official sanction for what became known as the Hanafi School of Law.²⁵

Maliki

The second surviving school was founded in Madina and the Hejaz by Malik b. Anas (d. 179 AH/795 CE). Malik b. Anas was born and died in Madina. Like Abu Hanifa, he studied under Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) and later started his own school.

He was a collector of hadith but even more a supporter of the customary practices (a'māl or sunnah) of Madina, which he saw as the earliest centre of Islāmic law and government and on which he relied heavily in his approach to the Shari'ah. Unlike Abu Hanifa, he relied on the customary practices of Madina first and then on Consensus (ijmā') and Opinion (ra'y) secondarily.

Malik's famous work, Al-Muwatta ("The Path Made Smooth") is the earliest collection of Hadith and the first book of law for Sunnis. It contains his opinions and judgments and the sources he used to reach them. The Maliki madhhab is prominent today in North & West Africa (including parts of Egypt) and Arab West.

Shafi'i

This madhhab is attributed to Muhammad b. Idris ash-Shafi'i (d. 205 AH/820 CE). Shafi'i was born in Palestine and raised in Makkah. He is buried in Cairo. He studied law in Madina under Malik b. Anas and he also pursued studies in Baghdad thus becoming intimately acquainted with Hanafi law. He was therefore a student of the students of Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a).

Against Malik b. Anas's practice of depending primarily on the customary usages (sunnah or a'māl) of Madina and against Abu Hanifa's methods of deriving laws based on deductions and speculations, Shafi'i promoted the idea that the Hadith and Sunnah of Rasullāh (s) should be the primary authority for interpreting the Qur'ānic laws and injunctions. These, he argued, were more important than analogy (qiyās) and Consensus (ijmā') in legitimizing any law.

²⁵ Glasse, *The New Encyclopedia of Islām*, entry on "Abu Hanifa".

Shāfi'is arrangement of the Qur'ān, hadith & sunnah, qiyās and ijmā' as jointly being the 'roots of jurisprudence' (usul al-fiqh) and the principles on which laws were to be derived, became the standard methodology that was later adopted by all the four surviving Schools of Law. This is seen as his greatest contribution.

Shafi'i did not himself found a school of law. This was done by his disciples. The Shafi'i madhhab is dominant in Malaysia, Indonesia, East Africa and the Philippines. It is also found in Egypt along with the Maliki and Hanafi sects.

Hanbali

It was founded by Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241 AH/855 CE) who carried Shāfi'is enthusiasm and trust in hadith farther than any other jurist had. He was extremely conservative and founded a rather fundamentalist school. This is perhaps why the Wahhābi school in Arabia was influenced by his thoughts.

The Hanbali School is observed only in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Technically the Wahhābi consider themselves to be 'non-imitators' or 'not attached to tradition' (*ghayr muqallidun*) and therefore answerable to no school of law at all. They instead claim to follow what they call the practice of early Islām (salafism). However, to do so corresponds to the ideal aimed at by Ahmad b. Hanbal and thus they can be said to be of his 'school'.

Conclusion

From this we can conclude:

- The four Sunni Schools of Law came about by coincidence. Any of the innumerable schools could have survived. These survived not because of any particular legitimacy but because of certain reasons such as their founder being venerated as a martyr and so on.
- The four Sunni Imāms never saw themselves as founders of any school or representatives of God's laws. It was their followers and circumstances that made them the 'founders'.
- Those followers of a madhhab who supported a caliph or government had the chance to make their madhhab legitimate and 'orthodox'. In other words, if the Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) had served the ruling princes and kings and worked for them in their courts as religious judges, then the Ja'fari madhhab would also have been accepted as a 'valid' madhhab in Sunni Islām today. And therefore we cannot ignore the politics that was involved in determining whether a particular school of law was valid in Islām or not.

Nonetheless, in time, the Sunni Muslims came to believe that one had to follow one of these four schools of law otherwise one was not a part of 'orthodox Islām' and one's acts of worship were invalid.

Yet the clear flaw with this is that the early Muslims, who were the companions (sahāba) of Rasulullāh (s) as well as the followers of the sahāba (i.e. the tābi'un) did not follow any of these schools (because they never existed!). And none of these schools are legislated by Islām (i.e. by Qur'ān or hadith). They simply represent the opinions and research of four scholars or 'mujtahids'.

Furthermore, to believe that Islām has precisely four shari'ahs only, all of which are valid simultaneously, seems convenient but not sensible. This is not the same as the case with the Shi'ah madhhab where living mujtahideen may express minor differences of opinion in the law. No Shi'ah mujtahid is permitted to express his personal opinion in the law and no one has the right to claim that only certain mujtahids are to be followed and only their views represent the true Islāmic law, even long after they are dead.

Besides, any sect making such a claim would have to have one School of Law only. To say there are four schools, no more no less, and all these four are 'equally correct', though their creation was a coincidence in history and has no proof of legitimacy in Qur'ān or hadith, is hard to accept. It suggests uncertainty - that we don't really know what the true law of Islām is.

The clearest criticism to such an idea is given by Imām Ali b. Ali Tālib ('a), ironically long before the formation of these sects:

When a problem is put before anyone of them he passes judgement on it from his imagination. When exactly the same problem is placed before another of them he passes an opposite verdict. Then these judges go to the chief who had appointed them and he confirms all the verdicts, although their Allāh is one, their Prophet is one, their Book (the Qur'ān) is one.

Is it that Allāh ordered them to differ and they obeyed Him? Or He prohibited them from it but they disobeyed Him? Or (is it that) Allāh sent an incomplete Faith and sought their help to complete it? Or they are His partners in the affairs, so that it is their share of duty to pronounce and He has to agree? Or is it that Allāh the Glorified sent a perfect faith but the Prophet fell short of conveying it and handing it over (to the people)? The fact is that Allāh the Glorified says:

﴿... مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ...﴾

...We have not neglected anything in the Book (Qur'ān)...

- Surah al-An'ām, 6:38²⁶

²⁶ Sayyid ar-Radi, *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 18.

Lesson 7

Islāmic Philosophy (Falsafa)

and the merging of kalām and ‘irfān in falsafa

In the Islāmic perspective, the intellect (al-‘aql) and the spirit (al-ruh) are closely related and represented by the sciences of philosophy (falsafa) and gnosis (‘irfān) respectively. We have said in previous lessons that the Truth is known by the heart but the mind plays a role in guiding the heart and acts as a vehicle towards self-purification and the realizations that come to one’s heart.

Some scholars engage in theology and intellectual debates alone. Others focus on spiritual practices only. But by far, the most eminent of them all are the philosopher-mystics who combine the two and who are purified not just in action and in body but in thought and spirit as well.

In this final lesson, we wish to discuss Islāmic philosophy and the role it has played in the development of other sciences such as kalām (theology) and ‘irfān (gnosis). To understand the significance of Islāmic philosophy, we must go beyond the definition of philosophy in the West, which is simply an intellectual study of matters that are related to existence, knowledge, values, language, and so on. We must also go beyond the prevalent Western view of Islāmic philosophy, according to which ‘falsafa began with al-Kindi and terminated with Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Ibn Khaldun.’²⁷

First, we must understand that *falsafa* is Islāmic philosophy and not Arabic philosophy. It is true that al-Kindi and Ibn Rushd were Arabs but the majority, including major figures like Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, were all Persian. In particular in later centuries, Muslim India and Persia were the home of Islāmic philosophy.

Falsafa is also Islāmic because it is tightly related by its concepts, roots and world view to the Islāmic revelation (Qur’ān and hadith), which also moulded the mind and soul of those intellectual figures who developed this philosophy.

Mashshā’i (Peripatetic) Philosophy

One of the earliest and most well known schools of Islāmic philosophy is the Mashshā’i or Peripatetic philosophy. It is a synthesis of the tenets of Islāmic revelation with the Aristotelian and Neo-platonic schools.

The word ‘peripatetic’ literally means to pace or walk about. The great Greek philosopher Aristotle (whom some Muslim scholars believe was a Nabi) used to walk

²⁷ Nasr, *Islāmic Spirituality*, vol. 2, chp. 22, p. 410.

around while teaching; and his students would also pace while thinking and discussing their philosophical ideas. Hence they came to be known as the 'Peripatetics'. The Arabic word 'Mashshā'i' is an almost literally translation, also meaning, 'one who walks about'.

The Mashshā'i school of philosophy was founded in the third (AH)/ninth (CE) century in the rich intellectual climate of Baghdad by Abu Ya'qub al-Kindi (d. 260 AH/873 CE). Al-Kindi was known as 'the philosopher of the Arabs' and composed over 200 treatises, in which he dealt with science as well as philosophy thus beginning a trend that later produced a whole class of philosopher-scientists who studied philosophy alongside astronomy, mathematics, medicine, chemistry, physics, arts, and so on.

Much of the Greek philosophical works were translated to Arabic in Baghdad during the lifetime of al-Kindi. And al-Kindi's main concern was the discovery of the truth wherever it might be. Some of his famous words that are quoted often are:

We should not be ashamed to acknowledge truth and to assimilate it from whatever source it comes to us, even if it is brought to us by former generations and foreign peoples. For him who seeks the truth there is nothing of higher value than truth itself; it never cheapens or abases him who reaches for it, but ennobles and honours him.²⁸

In a sense, Al-Kindi was echoing the words of Imām Ali ('a), 'wisdom (hikmah) is the lost property of the faithful. So take wisdom even if it is from hypocrites.'²⁹

It was this universal conception of truth that always characterized Islāmic philosophy – a truth, however, not bound by the limits of reason. Rather it is the illimitable Truth reached by the intellect (al-'aql), which al-Kindi and later Islāmic philosophers, distinguished clearly from 'reason' as the analytical faculty of the mind (that Western philosophers relied on solely).

If a Nabi or Rasul was an instrument and means for Allāh's "outer revelation" then this intellect ('aql) - sometimes called the heart (qalb) - was the instrument of "inner revelation" that could be used to reach to the Truth. And this again relates to the words of Imām Ali ('a):

In all the periods and times when there were no prophets, there have been persons with whom Allāh, precious are His bounties, whispered through their reflections and spoke to them through their intellect.³⁰

Al-Kindi was also deeply interested in the relation between religion and philosophy, or faith and reason, and tried to create harmony between the two. Al-Kindi's greatest achievement was the moulding of the Arabic language as a vehicle for the expression of philosophy. He pioneered the creation of Arabic philosophic

²⁸ Ibid., p. 411.

²⁹ Sayyid Radi, *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Saying No. 80.

³⁰ Ibid., Sermon 222.

vocabulary and himself a devout Muslim, came to be known as the father of Islāmic philosophy.

Al-Kindī's immediate students were mostly scientists and it was only a generation later that his real successor in Mashshā'i falsafa was born in Khorāsān. He was Abu Nasr al-Farābi (Alfarabius) (d. 339 AH/950 CE). Al-Farābi was born in a family with Turkish background and was raised in Persian culture. He was already a famous philosopher when he came to Baghdad for a short period, before migrating again to Damascus, where he spent the rest of his life. He was also a logician, a metaphysician and a political thinker.

Al-Farābi was attracted to the spiritual life from an early age but he was also well versed with all of Aristotle's works and he commented on all of them. In time, he came to be known as The Second Teacher (*al-mu'allim al-thāni*), the First Teacher being Aristotle himself.

It took another two generations for Al-Farābi's real successor to emerge. This was Abu Ali Sina (Avicenna). With Ibn Sina, Mashshā'i falsafa reached its peak. He is regarded by some to be the most influential Islāmic philosopher and even the great philosophers who came after him, such as Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, developed their philosophies on his foundation.

Ibn Sina was a Persian born in Bukhara in 370 AH/980 CE. He wandered most of his life in various Persian cities, especially Rayy, Isfahan and Hamadan, and finally died from colic in Hamadan in 428 AH/1037 CE at a relatively young age.

Ibn Sina was an incredible intellectual figure. He was at once a philosopher as well as the most famous physician in the period that the West calls 'Middle Ages'. He composed more than 200 books, including the monumental Kitāb ash-Shifā (The Book of Healing), which is an encyclopedia of peripatetic philosophy and science.

Ibn Sina is regarded as the greatest Mashshā'i philosopher because he created the final synthesis of Islām with Aristotelian and Neo-platonic philosophy. However, towards the end of his life, Ibn Sina criticized mashshā'i philosophy, including his own, as being the common philosophy meant for everyone. Instead he pointed to another philosophy that he considered to be for the intellectual elite, which he called *al-hikmah al-mashriqiyyah* (Illuminating Philosophy). This philosophy was based on knowing the truth by illuminating the soul and 'journeying' with the help of a guide, towards Allāh, the Ultimate Truth and Reality.

A century and a half later, Shihāb ad-Din Suhrawardi would build upon this and found his School of Illumination (*ishrāq*) and after him, Mulla Sadra would develop and perfect this philosophy in what he called *al-hikmah al-muta'āliya* (Transcendent Philosophy).

Ibn Sina was therefore not only the elaborator of the most complete version of mashshā'i philosophy but he was also the guide to the start of the *theosophy*

(theology + philosophy + mysticism) of illumination whose main mark was the inseparable union between philosophy and spirituality.

After Ibn Sina, *mashshā'i* philosophy became temporarily eclipsed in the eastern lands of Islām as a result of the attacks of Ash'arites against it.

Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination (al-Ishrāq)

The complete harmonization of spirituality and philosophy in Islām was achieved in the School of Illumination (al-*ishrāq*) founded by Shaykh al-Ishrāq Shihāb ad-Din Suhrawardi. Born in the small village of Suhraward in Western Persia in 549 AH/1153 CE, he studied in Zanjān and Isfahān (both cities in Iran), where he completed his formal education in religious and philosophical sciences and entered into Sufism. He then set out for Anatolia and settled in Aleppo (Halab) (city in the north of Syria), where as a result of the jealousies and opposition of certain jurists (*fuqaha*), he was sentenced to death by the King at a young age in 587 AH/1191 CE.

Suhrawardi was a great mystic and philosopher. He saw theosophy as the result of the wedding between the training of the theoretical intellect through philosophy and the purification of the heart through *'irfān* (or Sufism). He considered the means of attaining supreme knowledge to be "illumination" (*ishrāq*), which at once transforms one's being and bestows knowledge.

One of Suhrawardi's most important works in Islāmic philosophy is his *hikmat al-ishrāq* (the Philosophy (or Wisdom) of Illumination). Suhrawardi insisted that there existed from the beginning an "eternal dough" (*al-khamirat al-azaliyyah*), which is none other than eternal wisdom. It is hidden in the very substance of man ready to be "leavened" and actualized through intellectual training and inner purification.

That said, Suhrawardi insisted however that the real means of attainment of true knowledge was through Allāh and His revealed Book (i.e. the Qur'ān). He therefore based much of his teachings on the Qur'ān and quoted verses to prove his views. He is therefore regarded to be the first major Muslim philosopher to quote the Qur'ān extensively in his philosophical writings.

In the teachings of Suhrawardi, a philosopher or *hakim* was expected to be not only a person possessing cerebral knowledge but a saintly person transformed by his knowledge. Philosophy here onwards ceased to be just a mental activity divorced from spiritual realization and the inner life. It was only a legitimate undertaking when it was a wisdom thought and reasoned as well as lived and experienced. Suhrawardi called the first "discursive philosophy" and the latter "intuitive philosophy" and in the introduction to his magnum opus, "The Philosophy of Illumination" (*al-hikmah al-ishrāq*), he wrote:

This book of ours is for the student of both intuitive philosophy and discursive philosophy. There is nothing in it for the discursive philosopher not given to,

and not in search of, intuitive philosophy.... the reader of this book must have reached at least the stage in which divine light has descended upon him – not just once but regularly. No one else will find any profit in it.³¹

Mulla Sadra and the School of Isfahān

Three centuries of the drawing together of the various schools of Islāmic thought culminated in the Safavid period in Persia with the School of Isfahan. Its founder was Mir Dāmād (d. 1041 AH/1631 CE), a theologian, philosopher, mystic and poet but its most important figure was to be Mir Dāmād's student, Sadr ad-Din ash-Shirāzi, best known as Mulla Sadra.

Mulla Sadra was a Shi'ah Ithna Ashari and is regarded to this day to be the greatest of all Muslim metaphysicians. This remarkable figure was born in Shiraz about 979 AH/1571 CE. He studied in Isfahan at first and then due to opposition of the jurists (*fuqaha*) of the time, he retired to a village outside Qum and disappeared from public view for about 10 years. Mulla Sadra then emerged in Shiraz, where he spent the last thirty years of his life writing and training students who came to him from as far away as North Africa and Tibet. He died in Basra in 1050 AH/1640 CE while returning from his seventh pilgrimage on foot to Makkah.

Mulla Sadra incorporated the ideals of Suhrawardi to which the perfect philosopher or theosopher (*hakim muta'allih*) must have undergone both intellectual training and inner purification. But he also challenged some of the basic philosophical ideas in Suhrawardi's philosophy and his (Mulla Sadra's) own philosophy remains unchallenged to this day.

Later Islāmic philosophers bestowed Mulla Sadra with the title *Sadr al-Muta'allihin* (the Foremost amongst Theosophers).

Mulla Sadra composed some fifty works, the most famous of which is his *al-hikmah al-muta'aliyya* (Transcendent Theosophy), also sometimes called *al-asfār al-arba'ah* (the Four Journeys). His teachings were based on the fact that there are three paths to the truth open to man, namely, revelation (*wahy*), intellection (*'aql*) and mystical unveiling (*kashf*). In his *Asfār*, Mulla Sadra has dealt with the philosophies of great masters like Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi and Ibn Arabi as well as Shi'ah and Sunni *kalām*.

He also wrote a mystical commentary to various surahs of the Qur'ān and his commentary on the Shi'ah hadith collection *Usul al-Kāfi* (of Shaykh al-Kulayni), is one of Mulla Sadra's philosophical masterpieces.

All the works of Mulla Sadra reveal the central significance of the Qur'ān and the ahādith of Rasulullāh (s) and the twelve Imāms as the source of all philosophical meditations and inspirations. Among Mulla Sadra's major achievements is the creation of a perfect harmony between faith and reason or religion and philosophy -

³¹ Suhrawardi, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, p. 4 (BYU Press, 1999. Transl. by Walbridge & Ziai)

the achievement of the goal of some nine centuries of Islāmic theology and philosophy.

It is simply amazing how extensively Mulla Sadra quotes the Qur'ān and the ahādith of the Ma'sumeen ('a) to back all his views; he therefore took pride in the fact that he was able to synthesize the two with no contradictions.

The other great achievement of Mulla Sadra is the range of issues he was able to discuss and deal with. No other Islāmic philosopher has dealt in depth with matters of faith ranging from the basis of ethics to eschatological imagery depicted in the Qur'ān and hadith as has Mulla Sadra. His writings on Islāmic eschatology (dealing with life after death and the Hereafter) from a philosophical perspective are simply magnificent.

Nor have any of the philosophers dealt as thoroughly as he with all the questions which concerned the scholars of kalām. In fact, Mulla Sadra claimed that the mutakallimun did not possess the divine knowledge (*ma'rifah*) necessary to deal with the questions they were treating and that therefore their activity was illegitimate. It was for the *hukamā al-ilāhi* (literally, 'the theosophers') to deal with such questions and provide answers for the enigmas and complex problems in religious teachings.

Much of what Christians understand by theology would find its counterpart in Islāmic thought in the writings of Mulla Sadra rather than the Ash'arite vs. Mu'tazilite kalām, except that Mulla Sadra's "theology" was always immersed in the light of 'irfān (gnosis) and not restricted to rational arguments concerning the tenets of faith.

Mulla Sadra's "transcendent theosophy" (*al-hikmah al-muta'āliyyah*) is in fact falsafa (philosophy), kalām (theology) and 'irfān (gnosis) combined.

Due to his personal spiritual experience and intellectual visions, Mulla Sadra was able to create a revolution in Islāmic philosophy and perfect what Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi had started. You will notice that in this lesson, we have discussed the history of Islāmic philosophy but not as much about 'what' the core ideas of these philosophers were. This is because it is a vast subject that requires separate treatment and a lot of background knowledge. It must be pursued as higher studies for those interested.

Mulla Sadra's most famous immediate students were his two son-in-laws, Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kāshāni (d. 1091 AH/1680 CE) and Abd ar-Razzāq Lāhiji (1072 AH/1661 CE). These two students however devoted themselves mostly to pure religious sciences such as hadith and kalām and not directly the transcendent theosophy of Mulla Sadra, due to the opposition of the exoteric (traditional) 'ulama to the teachings of Mulla Sadra. But they were well versed with this school of thought and did train students who kept the tradition alive.

The celebrated philosopher on Mulla Sadra's teachings however came two centuries later and he was Hājjī Mulla Hādi Sabzwāri (d. 1289 AH/1878 CE). He was a great

saint, philosopher and poet. He wrote the *sharh manzumah*, which summarizes the principles of Mulla Sadra's philosophy, and numerous other philosophical and gnostic works in both Arabic and Persian, including a commentary on the *mathnawi* of Rumi. He was also revered as a saintly figure throughout Persia and even the king went to visit him in his home in Sabziwar in Khorāsān.

After the Second World War in 1945 CE, Qum also became an important centre for the teaching of Islāmic philosophy thanks mostly to Allama Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai, Ayatullah Khomeini and others, who in turn trained students like Shahid Murtada Mutahhari (d. 1399 AH/1979 CE). This revival of interest in Islāmic philosophy has continued to this day and is not limited to Iran alone.

When one studies later Islāmic philosophers, the close relationship between intellection and spiritual experience is immediately realized. This fact – that knowledge is inseparable from inner realization and mystical unveiling (*kashf*) – is perhaps why Islāmic philosophy has been and remains to this day an important element in the world of Islāmic spirituality.

Fiqh **(Laws)**

Lesson 1

Categories of Islamic Jurisprudence (fiqh)

Fiqh in Qur'ān and Hadith

The word *fiqh* is usually defined as 'Islāmic Jurisprudence' but literally means 'in-depth study' or 'profound understanding'. A person with deep knowledge of Islāmic Laws, is called a 'faqih' (fem. 'faqiha' and pl. 'fuqahā').

The Qur'ān uses the word *fiqh* to mean 'learned':

﴿فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِنْ كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ﴾

But why should not there go forth a group from each of their sections to become learned in religion, and to warn their people when they return to them, so that they may be aware?

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:122

From this āyah we realize that often one has to go out and travel abroad in order to learn religion and access knowledge. We also realize that learning the laws of religion is *wājib kifāi*, meaning a duty that is a must on everyone until some people from the community take up the responsibility to study religion and guide the community. Then the obligation is lifted from the rest of the community.

Rasulullāh (s) is reported to have said, 'whoever memorizes forty hadith for the sake of my nation (ummah), will be raised by Allāh on the Day of Judgement as a learned *faqih*.'³²

It is not known whether the term *faqih* was applied to the learned companions of Rasulullāh (s). However, we certainly know that the generation that followed the companions (*sahāba*), known as *tābi'un*, used this title for a number of scholars among them.

Imām Husayn ('a) wrote a letter to his friend and companion Habib b. al-Mazāhir in the year 61 AH, just before the event of Karbala, and addressed Habib as a '*faqih*' (a learned man).

Also, there were, for example, seven great jurists among the *tābi'un* who are known as the 'al-Fuqahā as-Sab'a' (The Seven Jurists). And the year 94 AH was known as

³² <http://www.al-islam.org/fiqh/chap1.html>

'Sanat al-Fuqahā' (the Year of the Fuqahā) because in that year, apart from our fourth Imām, Ali b. Husayn Zayn al-'Abideen ('a), jurists like Sa'id b. Musayyab, Urwah b. Zubayr, Sa'id b. Jubayr and others died. Thereafter, great Islāmic scholars, particularly the jurists were commonly referred to as *Fuqahā*.

Our Imāms (peace be on them) also used the term *faqih* quite often. They encouraged some of their companions to study religion thoroughly and become fuqahā. We also know that quite a few students of our Imāms ('a) were known as 'Shi'ah Fuqahā' by their contemporaries.

Limiting the terms *Fiqh* and *Faqih* to Jurisprudence

The Scholars (*'ulama*) in Islām have divided Islāmic teachings into three broad areas:

- 1. Principles of Faith:** These are the fundamentals that are related to one's faith, like the belief in Allāh, the Resurrection and Day of Judgement, Prophethood, the divine revelation, the angels, and Imāmah. The science that deals with all this is called Aqāid, or 'Ilm al-Kalām or Usul ad-Dīn (sometimes referred to as Theology).
- 2. Moral Behaviour and Ethics:** These sciences are aimed at improving human behaviour and cultivating spiritual aspects of our existence. They deal with God-consciousness (*taqwa*), justice, generosity, bravery, patience, submission to the Will of Allāh, and so on. And the sciences that discuss these are called Akhlāqiyāt, 'Irfān, and so forth.
- 3. Practical Laws:** This subject deals with the rules and regulations laid down for acts of worship, human relations with others, and also providing guidelines for the way these acts are to be performed. The practical laws of Islām are often very precise 'dos' and 'don'ts'. They categorize all human actions into obligatory (*wājib*), forbidden (*harām*), recommended (*mustahab*), disliked (*makruh*), and neutral (*mubāh*). In general the Islāmic code of practice is called the *Shari'ah*. And the study of the Islāmic laws, as a science, is called '*ilm al-fiqh* (science of jurisprudence) and one who studies and masters fiqh is called a *faqih* (jurist).

The 'ulama have therefore restricted the use of the word *fiqh* to the third category; perhaps because it has been a matter of most concern, and Muslims have sought such guidance more often. Today, only people with proficiency in this branch of Islāmic knowledge are known as fuqahā (jurists) (even if the term 'faqih' was used in the broad sense of '*ālim* in the early days of Islām).

Of course, in addition to the three common areas above, scholars can specialize in other areas as well, such as Qur'ān sciences and exegesis (*tafsīr*), hadith sciences, Islāmic history (*tārikh*), and so forth. But Qur'ān and hadith are seen as sources (*nusus* [sing. *nass*]) rather than subject areas on their own. They are invariably required and referred to by all sciences and branches of Islām.

Usul al-Fiqh & Fiqh

In the early days of Islām, scholars only relied on the Qur'ān and hadith to understand the practical laws of Islām. They grouped all the traditions (ahādith) at their disposal based on jurisprudential issues. It has therefore been said that the early jurist (faqih) was in fact no more than today's expert of hadith (muhaddith).

In time though, a jurist had to be skilled in other sciences as well, because many practical issues arose that were beyond the scope of just a literal interpretation of the Qur'ān and hadith. There was now a need for a science that, for example, discusses not only the jurisprudential content of Qur'ān verses or ahādith but also the *general principles* behind them, that jurists could adhere to when deriving other laws on other issues. This science is called the 'Science of the Principles of Jurisprudence' (*'ilm usul al-fiqh*) or (in short) *'ilm al-usul* (the Science of Principles) or *usul al-fiqh* (the Principles of Jurisprudence). In fact many hawza scholars simply refer to Usul al-Fiqh as 'Usul' (not to be confused with Usul al-Din that discusses Islāmic principles of faith).

Of course a faqih/faqihā must also be familiar with many other sciences before he/she can derive laws in Islām. These other sciences include classical Arabic, logic (*mantiq*), exegesis (*tafsir*) of Qur'ān, sciences (*'ulum*) of Qur'ān, science of hadith (*'ilm al-hadith*), the science of hadith narrators and reporters (*'ilm al-rijāl*), history (*tārikh*), theology (*aqā'id*), philosophy (*falsafa*), ethics (*akhlāqiyāt*), and so on. And he must also be in touch and aware of current political affairs and developments in secular sciences (such as medicine) so that he can respond with the Islāmic view on these matters.

But despite all these sciences, anyone who studies at an Islāmic Seminary (hawza) with the intention of becoming a jurist and being able to derive laws on his own (i.e. becoming a mujtahid/mujtahida), the main subject of study for them is fiqh. It is *the science* around which all the other sciences revolve.

In the past, it would take 20-40 years of study before an individual could reach the level of ijtihād (i.e. become a mujtahid and faqih who derives laws in Islām independently). Nowadays, with access to modern facilities and resources, the time to attain ijtihād can be reduced significantly. However, one still needs to study at a hawza and experience the personal mentoring by other fuqahā and mujtahidín. Such mentors would usually recognize and advise a student when he/she is ready to graduate and take on the role of a faqih/faqihā.

The study of fiqh is further divided into branches and categories.

Categories in Fiqh

Due to the numerous topics to be reviewed and mastered within fiqh, the early Shi'ah 'Ulama divided all the topics into four main categories:

1. **'Ibādāt (singular 'Ibādah):** Literally means 'Acts of Worship'. All those acts which must be performed according to the sharī'ah and must be preceded by a niyyah of 'qurbatan ilallāh' are a part of the 'ibādāt. These include the acts of worship we call Furu' ad-Dīn like daily prayers (salāh), fasting (sawm), Hajj and even their prerequisites like matters related to tahārah and najāsah and ablutions (wudu, ghusl, tayammum).
2. **Ahkām (singular Hukm):** Literally means 'Legal Judgements'. Those duties that are to be performed according to sharī'ah but do not require any niyyah or any pronouncement of a specific formula while performing them are all a part of *ahkām* in fiqh. For example, the laws of inheritance, the penal code (hudúd) in an Islāmic court of justice, the laws of compensation and blood money, the laws on foods and drinks, the laws when you find lost property or stolen goods, and so on.
3. **'Uqúd (singular 'Aqd):** Literally means 'Contracts'. Those contracts of sharī'ah which do not require a niyyah but must be declared with the pronouncement of a special formula in which one party declares the intention and another responds by acceptance, are all categorized under 'Uqúd in the study of fiqh. For example, marriage (nikāh), ijārah (letting or leasing), mortgages, tijārah (buying and selling), peace treaties, joint ownerships and business partnerships, endowments and charities, making a will & testament, etc.
4. **Iqā'āt (singular Iqā'ah):** Those matters in fiqh that require pronouncements but the pronouncements do not require participation of two parties are called Iqā'āt. In other words, a person makes a pronouncement or declaration unilaterally, and the act is considered valid in sharī'ah. For example, remission of debt (releasing a debtor from his liabilities), divorce, taking vows and making pledges, offering reward or compensation in public for some work, and so forth.

The early fuqahā would write a complete book (kitāb) or booklet on each subject within a category. And each category may have 10-20 subjects. For example, within the category of 'Uqúd, a faqih would write a separate book called Kitāb an-Nikāh (the Book of Marriage) which would discuss all his findings on the laws of marriage in utmost detail, and deal with all special cases, circumstances and exceptions. Similarly, there would be a Kitāb at-Tahārah, Kitāb al-Salāh, Kitāb at-Talāq, and so forth.

The book of 'Islāmic laws' or *risāla* of a marj'a that we refer to in English is usually a very brief and summarized version of their entire work and it covers only the common day-to-day laws that people may need to know. For more detailed laws, we must refer to their original work in Arabic or ask the marj'a directly or someone from his office and either he or one of his representatives (*wukalā*) (sing. 'wakīl') would reply our questions/concerns.

Note: Some scholars divide all the fiqh topics into two categories only:

1. 'Ibādāt, which are the laws that deal with a human being's relation to Allāh i.e. acts of worship like wudu, salāh, sawm, hajj, zakāh, khums, and so on.

2. Mu'āmalāt, laws which deal with social transactions and human relations amongst themselves, such as marriage and divorce, business dealings, contracts, and so on.

It is useful to remember that the ten matters that we call *furu' ad-dīn* are part of the 'ibādāt but there are many other matters in fiqh that also have Islāmic rules and laws but they are from the Mu'āmalāt and not included within the *furu' ad-dīn*.

Lesson 2

Marriage in Islam

Islāmic Understanding Regarding Sexual Conduct

Sex is a natural instinct, but, like all natural instincts, it must be channelled towards the good, and limits must be set for it. Islām is against the suppression of sexuality; and celibacy and monasticism are severely condemned in Traditions (ahādith). Every Muslim should marry early after adulthood; in fact, marriage becomes wājib if by not get married a person is likely to engage in unlawful acts. Even devotion to religious and spiritual pursuits at the expense of marriage is not approved by Islām.

Rasulullāh (s) said:

النِّكَاحُ مِنْ سُنَّتِي فَمَنْ رَغِبَ عَنْ سُنَّتِي فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي

Marriage is my sunnah (practice), one who leaves this sunnah is not one of my followers.

Sexual needs therefore should be satisfied, but also regulated. Just as some foods are permissible and others forbidden in Islām, so also are some sexual activities permissible and others forbidden. In Islām the only legitimate way of satisfying one's sexual desires is with one's legitimate spouse; all other kinds of sexual activity, including adultery, homosexuality, and masturbation are forbidden and are major sins.

Most religions condemn adultery, and Islām considers it a cardinal sin. Adultery and fornication lead to the erosion of the family, confusion about parentage, the spread of diseases, and, worst of all, declining moral standards in society. Once adultery is considered acceptable, it can engulf the whole society, leading to an unhealthy preoccupation with sex which saps the vitality and discipline of the society and starts the process of decay.

Islām is so sensitive to this issue that it tries to block any avenue which may lead to sexual excitement and illicit relations. All kinds of nudity, pornography (whether in pictures or movies) and even nude statues are prohibited (*harām*); music and dancing that is typically played in places of sin are *harām*, and in particular music and songs with a sexual content are forbidden.

Islām puts restraints on the intermingling of the sexes. Hence it is, for example, explicitly forbidden for a man and woman to be together in private if there is the possibility of sexual temptation. It is forbidden to look at someone of the opposite sex with desire, unless, of course, one is married to them. One should not be naked in the presence of others apart from one's spouse, or look at another's private parts, even those of one's own gender. It is also forbidden for a Muslim to have any

direct physical contact with the opposite gender - even if it is just shaking hands or kissing when meeting – unless it with close relatives (*mahārim*). Close relatives only include those with whom marriage is not permitted. It is strictly forbidden for men and women to bathe or swim together.

For women it is forbidden to appear before men other than close relatives without proper hijāb. Proper hijāb for women means covering the entire body include the hair. Only the face and the palms may be left uncovered. This hijāb must also be loose clothing that does not reveal the shape of the body and an integral part of the hijāb is modest behaviour with strangers i.e. not flirting, joking and fooling around with them.

Muslims should also be reserved when speaking with strangers of the opposite sex. Nothing should give the impression that they are flirting or being frivolous. It is forbidden to try to seduce someone, in whatever way (in person, via internet chat or email, etc.). Muslim men and women should be models of chastity and dignity.

This does not mean, however, that women should be confined to their homes. They should study, work and participate in all social and political activities, but without infringing any of the precepts mentioned above. During the time of Rasullāh (s), women participated in the construction of the Islāmic society and State; they helped their men defend Islām on the battlefields. There have been, and are, prominent scholars, thinkers and spiritual personalities among women - all within the prescribed limits of *shari'ah*. It can thus be seen that Islām firmly restricts sex to the marriage relationship, and to this end, an Islāmic society should provide facilities for young people to get married.

The Importance of Marriage in Islām

Many Qur'ān āyāt and Traditions (*ahādith*) emphasize the importance of marriage, because the family is the fundamental social unit upon which a society is built.

The man and the woman who enter into an Islāmic marital relationship are considered to be equals, but, in order to ensure the smooth working of the family as a integral unit, man has been given the role of leader. The idea behind this is that in the organization of the family, as in the management of all political and economic structures, large and small, plurality of authority results in chaos. The husband, however, is restrained by checks so that he may not abuse his authority. He has accepted the wife as his life-partner: he should respect not only her individuality, but also her rights as they have been laid down by the shari'ah. But perhaps more importantly, the relationship between them should be based on love, affection, and understanding, and not on the dictatorial imposition of one partner's will.

First, it is the responsibility of the husband to be kind and loving towards his wife. Rasullāh (s) said: 'The best man is one who is kind to his wife and children'. Imām

Ali ('a) said: 'Women are like flowers, they should be treated kindly, gently and with affection.'

If a man's wife has some characteristics which he does not like, she will also have other characteristics which are valuable. He should think that he himself also has some qualities disliked by his wife, and that both of them should concentrate more on each other's positive rather than negative qualities. A husband should try to accommodate his wife instead of always trying to change her to his liking, because she, like he, has her own personality. It is very detrimental to a marriage relationship for one partner always to dwell upon mistakes and flaws in the other and not to appreciate what is good. One who always blames his or her spouse should realize that this will only generate enmity in their spouse towards them. It is especially deplorable and undesirable for someone to criticize his or her spouse openly before others, because it is an insult to the spouse's individuality.

Love, understanding, and mutual respect between a husband and wife is also necessary for the bringing-up of children. It is generally accepted that most of the problems that face the young are actually the effects of a poor relationship between the parents.

It is also the duty of the husband to earn for the family and support it financially. It is a legal obligation for a husband not only to provide sustenance for his wife and children, but also to provide all the necessary comforts for his wife which he can afford. A husband should not think that his wife must carry out the household work, for Islām has not stipulated this as one of her duties and he has no right to compel her; she must not be treated like a servant. Although it is very commendable if the wife cooks and manages the house while the husband works outside to earn their living, this should be out of love and understanding and not as a result of coercion.

Islām also does not neglect the sensual aspect of a marriage. It is a duty of a husband and wife to satisfy each other sexually. It is forbidden for the husband to leave his wife for a long time at a stretch. He may not be absent, without her consent, for more than four months; some mujtahidin have even maintained that the period is four days. Unfaithfulness between the marriage partners is strictly forbidden. Neither of them must flirt with anyone outside the marriage, let alone have sexual relations with them. Not only will such behaviour sour the marriage and also affect the children, but it will also have its punishment in the Hereafter. However, Islām also stipulates that husbands and wives should not be suspicious of each other: a false accusation of adultery carries a harsh penalty in Islāmic law.

Since the husband has these duties towards his wife within the Islāmic marriage, the wife also has her duties towards her husband. Islām enjoins upon her to be loving and obedient to her husband when he fulfils his obligations. The Qur'ān and Traditions (*ahādith*) have praised those women who obey their husbands and are devoted to them. It is the duty of a wife not to go where her husband does not want her to go. The wife should try to please her husband and keep the home free

of tensions. She must not allow anyone into the house whom the husband does not want to let in, and should not communicate with those with whom the husband dislikes her to converse. It is undesirable for a wife to face her husband with problems when he returns home; she should strive to create a peaceful atmosphere. It is also desirable that each spouse should hold the other's relatives in respect and treat them kindly, because this will increase the bonds of love between man and wife.

The husband and wife are recommended to adorn themselves and apply perfume only for each other, and are actually forbidden to do so for persons who are outside the relationship of mahārim. They are also trustees of each other secrets and should not communicate intimate affairs to others. Since a husband and wife have a life-long relationship, some occasions will inevitably arise when there is discord and anger. At that time, the other should show patience and restraint. There should always be mutual tolerance within the family.

Spouse Selection

Sometimes a marriage proposal comes to a woman's family from the family of the man asking for her hand in marriage. This is usually the culture in many communities but Islāmically, there is nothing wrong if a woman (or her family) were to propose marriage to a man. Indeed several examples of this are recorded during the lifetimes of Rasullāh (s) and the Imāms ('a) including Sayyida Khadija ('a)'s proposal to marry Rasullāh (s).

The most important quality that one should look for in a spouse is taqwa (Godconsciousness). One who has taqwa will never violate the limits of religion and therefore will not be unjust to his or her spouse as well. If a woman or her father receives a proposal from a man who is Godconscious, prays the daily salāh, comes from a respectable family and is not a reputed sinner, the proposal should not be rejected only because of the man being financially poor. Some ahādith relate that the cause of corruption and mischief in society is when women reject the proposal of decent men or demand high sums of dower (mahr).

What sustains a marriage in the long-term is not physical looks or wealth but piety, kindness of heart, patience, love and doing one's best selflessly. And what often causes a marriage to break is selfishness, laziness, intolerance, impatience and sinful habits and disregard for Allāh and religion, even when there is beauty, wealth and material possessions. A pious and religious spouse who is intelligent and not lazy will also be a positive influence on one's progeny; and the children from such a marriage will also be productive and useful members of their society. As a rule of thumb, one should seek a life partner who is as close to his or her self in religious values and social status. There is also no harm in seeking someone who is closer in financial status, education, culture and even physical stature as such closeness and compatibility only helps the new marital relationship adjust and thrive more easily and cement faster.

Lesson 3

Marriage in Islam (cont'd)

Types of Marriage

In Islāmic law two kinds of marriage are sanctioned, permanent and fixed-term marriage. In permanent marriage (*'aqd ad-dā'im*) no time-limit is mentioned and it is forever, unless terminated by divorce or death of one spouse; in fixed-term marriage (*mut'a*) the length and period of the marriage is specified. It is permissible for a Muslim man to have up to a maximum of four wives at any one given time. A Muslim woman cannot marry more than one man at a time.

Those Whom It is Forbidden to Marry (*mahārim*)

In Islām it is forbidden to marry very near blood or foster relations and near blood relations of one's spouse. Such relations are called *mahārim* (sing. *mahram*). They have been simplified into a table (below):

The following are the most common examples of <i>mahram</i> relations to a male	The following are the most common examples of <i>mahram</i> relations to a female
Mother and any wives of father (step-mothers)	Father and any previous husbands of mother or step-father
Grandmother (paternal or maternal)	Grandfather (paternal or maternal)
Daughter	Son
Granddaughter (from son or daughter)	Grandson (from son or daughter)
Sister	Brother
Niece (from sister or brother)	Nephew (from sister or brother)
Aunt (paternal or maternal)	Uncle (paternal or maternal)
Mother-in-law	Father-in-law
Daughters of wife from previous marriage	Sons of husband from previous marriage
Wife's paternal and maternal grandmother	Husband's paternal and maternal grandfather

A man cannot marry his wife's sister unless he has divorced his wife or she is no longer alive. This rule applies to both permanent and fixed-term marriage. And a man cannot marry his wife's niece without his wife's permission.

If a person is guilty of certain kinds of harām sexual relations such as fornication or homosexuality, one of the penalties include that he can then never marry even the relatives of the person with whom he committed the sinful act. For example, if a man has sex with another man he may not marry the mother, sister or daughter of that person.

It is forbidden for a Muslim to marry a non-Muslim. If a Muslim becomes non-Muslim, his or her marriage will terminate automatically. The only exception to this

rule is that a Muslim male may conclude a fixed-term marriage with a woman from the People of the Book (Jew or Christian).

The 'Aqd of Marriage

'Aqd means contract. In a permanent marriage, a solemn contract is made between a man and a woman to become life-partners and to fulfil all the responsibilities and enjoy those rights that the *shari'ah* has laid down for them; in fixed-term marriage, the contract specifies a period for the duration of the marriage.

There are pre-conditions for the validity of the 'aqd:

1. It must not take place during the *ihram* period of the Hajj.
2. The man and woman must give their free consent to marry each other, and the marriage is invalid if their consent is obtained under duress. If it is known that the woman is satisfied with the marriage, the contract is valid even though she does not explicitly state her satisfaction. A woman who is a virgin must, as an obligatory precaution (*ihdiyāt wājib*), obtain the permission of her father or paternal grandfather. The permission of the mother or brother is not necessary.
3. The man must give, or promise to give, an amount of money or property to the wife as a dower (*mahr*).

Rules Regarding the Dower (Mahr)

The *mahr* (also called *sadāq*) is the *wājib* wedding gift that the bridegroom undertakes to give the bride. It is a token of friendship, a mark of honour for the woman, and security for her. It becomes the property of the wife and she has full rights to dispose of it as she likes.

Anything that has value can be given as dower, and there is no specified amount. It should not be so high as to be beyond the financial status of the husband. It may be given at, or immediately after, the marriage, or at any time later on. It may be paid in one or several instalments. The woman has the right to allow the husband to have a physical and intimate relationship with her before or even without taking the dower.

The Permanent Marriage

The permanent marriage 'aqd (or *zawāj*) *ad-dā'im* consists of the recital of the formula (*sigħa*) that contains the assent (*ijāb*) of the bride and the acceptance (*qabul*) of the bridegroom. For the marriage to be valid the mere consent of the two parties is not enough, the marriage contract must be performed.

Either the formula can be recited by the man and woman themselves or they can deputize others to be their representative (*wakil*). The *sigha* must be read in correct Arabic, otherwise the contract is void (*bātil*). So if it is impossible for the man and woman to do this, they have to appoint someone who knows Arabic. However, if no such person is available, they are permitted to pronounce it in any language. But it must convey the sense of assent (*ijāb*) and acceptance (*qabul*) on the part of the bride and the bridegroom respectively.

One who is reciting the '*aqd* formula should be a sane, adult, practising Muslim. The reciter must have the *niyyah* (solemn intention) of reciting it for marriage, and the bride and groom must be specified. The bride and groom can have their own representative or one person can recite the formula as the representative of both, but it is recommended that the '*aqd* formula should be performed by two righteous persons, one representing the bride and the other the groom.

The Sigha with Two Representatives

First of all the representative of the bride and the representative of the bridegroom should seek the permission of the two and ask them whether they consent to be married with the other for the agreed amount of dower (*mahr*). The representative of the bride should also seek the permission of the father or grandfather of the bride, if she is a virgin.

Then the two representatives should sit together, usually in a gathering where the guests and members of the two families are present. It is recommended that first of all the representative of the bride should recite a sermon (*khutba*) that mentions the importance of marriage in Islām.

After the mustahab *khutba* (sermon) the main rite of marriage begins. What is given below is the minimum that must be recited, as it appears in the *risālas* of the *mujtahidin*. The representative of the bride says:

زَوَّجْتُ مُوَكَّلَتِي بِمُوكِّلِكَ عَلَى الصِّدَاقِ الْمَعْلُومِ

I marry my client, _____ (name of the bride) to your client, _____ (name of the bridegroom) for the dower that was agreed.

The representative of the bridegroom answers immediately:

قَبِلْتُ التَّزْوِيجَ لِمُوكِّلِي عَلَى الصِّدَاقِ الْمَعْلُومِ

I accept on behalf of my client _____ (name of the bridegroom) for the dower that was agreed.

The marriage is now complete and the man and woman become lawful to each other. It should be noted that the assent on the part of the bride's *wakil* and the

acceptance on the part of the bridegroom's representative even once is enough; the phrases are repeated with a change of words merely as a recommended precaution.

The Sigha with No Representatives

The rite for a man and a woman who do not want to engage representatives for the recitation of the formula of 'aqd is as follows. The bride says:

زَوَّجْتُكَ نَفْسِي عَلَى الْمَهْرِ الْمَعْلُومِ

I have married myself to you for the dower that was agreed upon.

The groom answers:

قَبِلْتُ التَّزْوِيجَ

I accept the marriage.

The Abrogation of a Permanent Marriage

There are some situations in which the bride or bridegroom can abrogate a permanent marriage and separate without any divorce. The following are some of the defects which, if a man finds in the woman he married when he had not been informed about them before the marriage, he is entitled to abrogate the marriage:

- insanity
- blindness
- certain sexual abnormalities
- paralysis, leprosy, leucoderma, and other similar defects.

Likewise, the woman can abrogate the marriage if, among other things:

- she comes to know after the marriage that her husband had been insane before the marriage
- the husband becomes insane after the marriage
- the husband is impotent.

Also, if a man or woman denies Islām and ceases to be a Muslim, the marriage is considered void and the Muslim spouse should immediately separate himself or herself from the spouse who is no longer a Muslim.

Fixed-term Marriage (*Mut'a*)

In *mut'a*, a fixed period for the marriage is specified. A validly contracted *mut'a* need not include any intimate relations; indeed, a woman can make it a condition of the contract that no intimacy or physical relations will take place. *Mut'a* is often

contracted when the object is to establish a *mahram* relationship (e.g. during an engagement period). When a fixed-term marriage has been entered into, the man may waive the remaining period of the marriage or wait for it to expire before contracting a permanent marriage with the same woman. In the case of a fixed-term marriage as well, if a woman is a virgin, her father or paternal grandfather's permission is necessary.

The Sigha for a Fixed-Term Marriage

If the man and the woman wish to perform the *'aqd* rite for the *mut'a* by themselves, they should first agree on the period for which they wish to be married, and the amount of dower (*mahr*) for the woman.

The woman should say:

مَتَّعْتُكَ نَفْسِي فِي الْمُدَّةِ الْمَعْلُومَةِ عَلَى الْمَهْرِ الْمَعْلُومِ

I have married myself to you for the length of time agreed upon for the dower agreed upon.

The man should answer:

قَبِلْتُ الْمُتْعَةَ

I accept the fixed-term marriage.

If the man and woman cannot recite this in Arabic, it is permitted for them to conclude the contract in their own language. The *'aqd* for *mut'a* can also be recited by representatives and it is just like the *'aqd ad-dā'im* except that the words 'for the length of time agreed upon' (*li muddat al-ma'lumah*) are added.

Rights and Obligations in a Fixed-Term Marriage

If a woman becomes pregnant in a *mut'a* relationship, the child will be the legitimate son or daughter of the father and will inherit from him. But the wife who has entered a fixed-term marriage only has the right to claim the dower (*mahr*); she does not inherit from him, nor he from her, unless such a condition was specified in the contract. The man is also not obligated to pay for the woman's expenses and upkeep unless it was agreed to in the contract.

There is no divorce in a fixed-term marriage. It terminates with the end of the specified period, or if the man waives the remainder period of the marriage.

Lesson 4

Marriage in Islam (cont'd)

Nursing a Child (*ar-Rada`*) and Foster Relations

Ar-Rada` is a technical term in fiqh and means the kind of nursing which results in foster relationships, and these in turn affect those with whom the child has a *mahram* relation. In Islāmic law there are conditions for this nursing among which are:

- the child must take milk directly from the woman who will be his or her foster mother i.e. not through a bottle, etc.
- the child must take milk more than fifteen times, or be fed entirely on the woman's milk during one day and one night.
- the child must be less than two years old.
- the milk which the child sucks must be lawful (e.g. it should not be a result of the woman's adultery).

If a child is nursed by a woman, and these conditions are fulfilled, she will become the child's foster-mother, her husband the foster-father, and her children the foster-brothers and sisters. The child will be *mahram* to them and cannot marry them. The parents and siblings of the woman who nursed the child also become *mahram* to the child. Likewise the uncles and aunts of the foster-mother, parents of the foster-father, his siblings and uncles and aunts also become *mahram* to the child.

However, the foster relatives of a child do not become *mahram* to the siblings of the child unless the sibling(s) were also nursed by the same foster-mother.

If a man marries a woman who already has a foster-daughter, he cannot marry the foster-daughter either and she also becomes his mahram after his marriage to the woman is consummated.

Note: It is recommended that foster relatives should respect each other and look out for each other, but they do not inherit from each other.

Birth of a Child

After delivery, it is recommended that the child should be nursed with its mother's milk, and the nursing period is up to two years.

Also, after the birth of a baby, it is recommended that the adhān should be recited in its right ear and the iqāmah in its left ear. This act should be performed immediately after the child is washed and wrapped in a cloth, or even later but within a few days.

It is recommended that Surah al-Hāqqah (69), Surah al-Falaq (113) and Surah an-Nās (114) should be written on a piece of paper and attached around the neck of the baby as an amulet against evil and harm.

`Aqiqa

On the seventh day after the birth of a child *'aqiqa* is performed. Family, friends and other Muslims should be invited. *'Aqiqa* consists of giving a name to the baby, shaving its hair, and offering a sacrifice. It is recommended that the newborn baby should be given either a compound name containing one of the beautiful Names of Allāh (e.g. 'Abd al-Hamid), or the name of one of the fourteen Ma'sumeen ('a) or another holy personality; or that a name should be found from the Qur'ān. In the latter case, the Qur'ān is opened with the *niyyah* (solemn intention) of seeking Allāh's guidance and blessings and saying *Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahim*, and then a name derived from the root of one of the Arabic words found and chosen on that page.

The following du'a is then recited:

If it is a boy:

In the Name of Allāh and through Allāh, this is the 'aqiqa of ... (name of the boy), son of... (name of the father): its flesh [i.e., the flesh of the sacrifice of the 'aqiqa] for his flesh, its blood for his blood, its bone for his bone, its hair for his hair, its skin for his skin. O Allāh, let it be a protection of the family of Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family.

And if it is a girl:

In the Name of Allāh and through Allāh, this is the 'aqiqa of... (name of the girl), daughter of... (name of the father): its flesh for her flesh, its blood for her blood, its bones for her bones, its hair for her hair, its skin for her skin. O Allāh, let it be a protection of the family of Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family.

The hair of the baby is then shaved. It is recommended to weigh the cut hair then give the value of the same weight in silver, to the poor or orphans as alms.

A goat, a sheep, or other such animal should then be sacrificed either after shaving the hair or at the same time, but not before. It is recommended to read the following prayer at the time when the animal is about to be slaughtered:

O gathering, I am free from what you associate; I turn my face to He who split the heavens and the earth, a true believer and a Muslim, and not one of the polytheists. My prayer, my piety, my living, and my dying are for Allāh, the Lord of the Worlds. O Allāh, from You and to You, in the Name of Allāh; Allāh is greater. O Allāh, bless Muhammad, and accept [this] from ... (name of the child) son/daughter of... (name of the father).

After the sacrifice, the greater part of the meat should be distributed among the poor and needy. It may also be served to the guests, but it is disapproved for the parents of the baby and their dependents to eat it.

If, due to any reason, 'aqiqa is not performed on the seventh day after the birth of the child, it may be offered later on, at any time, even by the child itself after attaining puberty.

This rite (of 'aqiqa) is mustahab and not wājib but there are many ahādith that emphasize it.

Circumcision (Khatn)

The circumcision (*khatn* or *khitan*, or in many Islāmic countries simply 'sunnah') of a male child is an obligation (wājib) on every Muslim before the child reaches puberty. If the parents fail to have this rite performed, it is the duty of every adult uncircumcised Muslim to be circumcised. Those who embrace Islām should also perform this rite if they are not already circumcised. Circumcision is not mentioned in the Qur'ān, but it is much emphasized in the ahādith, and the consensus of the 'ulama is that it is obligatory (*wājib*) on all Muslim men.

Circumcision should preferably be performed when the baby is only a few days old, or otherwise at any time before his puberty. In many countries it is normally carried out between the ages of three and seven, but it is recommended to perform this rite on the seventh day after the birth of the child. Facilities for circumcision are normally provided at hospitals.

In this rite also it is recommended to invite guests and family friends and arrange food for the poor. It is also recommended to recite the following du'a at the time of the circumcision:

O Allāh, this is Your practice and the practice of Your Prophet (s), Your blessings be upon him and his family; obeying Your ideal and Your Books is the result of Your volition, and Your will and judgement are the result of a command which You willed, a judgement you decreed, a rule You executed. So take away from him the pain of the knife in his circumcision and his scarification through a command - You are more knowing of it than I, O Allāh. And cleanse him of sins, prolong his life for me, drive away injury and pain from his body, increase him in wealth, and fend off poverty from him; for You know and we do not.

Divorce

Divorce is permissible but highly discouraged and disliked in Islām. In Islāmic law a married man automatically has the right to divorce his wife, but a woman only has that right if she makes it a pre-condition at the time of making the marriage contract. In certain cases, when it becomes evident that a husband is not fulfilling his

responsibilities and is treating his wife unjustly, a mujtahid can interfere and pronounce a divorce even without the husband's consent.

If a husband divorces his wife, there are pre-conditions for the validity of the divorce:

1. The man must be sane and adult, and should not be forced by anyone else to divorce his wife.
2. He must pronounce the divorce with the intention of divorcing; thus, if he pronounces the formula in jest, it will not be a valid divorce.
3. At the time of divorce the woman should not be in a state of menstruation (*haid*) or puerperal bleeding (*nifās*). Any divorce pronounced during these periods is null and void (*bātil*).

The Rules of Divorce

The formula of divorce must be uttered in correct Arabic. The word *taliq* (divorced) must be said, and two witnesses of probity (*'adil*) must be present for the divorce to be valid.

Revocable and Irrevocable Divorce

In Islāmic law, all forms of divorce belong to one of two categories: revocable (*raj'i*) and irrevocable (*bā'in*). If a divorce is revocable, the husband has the right to return to his wife during the *'idda*, approximately three months, which follows a divorce. In an irrevocable divorce, the marriage is immediately terminated and dissolved.

The usual kind of divorce is the revocable. It allows the man and woman to settle their differences and return to each other within the *'idda*. During the *'idda* the woman continues to live in her husband's house and is supported by him financially. She also has to obey him and not leave the house without his permission. However the husband and wife cannot have physical relations unless the husband decides to revoke the divorce. If the man informs the woman of his intention to revoke the divorce, or makes it clear by gesture that he has done so, they will become husband and wife again. The presence of witnesses is not necessary in revoking a revocable divorce.

'Idda

'Idda is the prescribed **period of waiting** after the end of a marriage during which a widow or a divorced woman may not arrange another fixed-term or permanent marriage. Its purpose is to leave no doubt about the paternity of a child born after the dissolution of the marriage. In cases of divorce it also gives the man an opportunity to change his decision if it was taken in haste or under stress.

'Idda is prescribed in almost all cases of the dissolution of a marriage which has been consummated.

For a widow, the 'idda is four months and ten days. If she is pregnant she should observe an 'idda equal to the time between the death of her husband and the birth of the child, or of four months and ten days, whichever is the longer. A widow has to observe 'idda even if she is past the menopause or the marriage was not consummated.

During a widow's 'idda, she may not marry and should mourn her husband. Wearing colourful clothes and jewellery, or using perfume is forbidden (harām) for her during this period.

If a woman was married in a fixed-term marriage and the marriage was consummated, then after the fixed-term marriage has come to an end of the specified period (or because the husband has waived the rest of the time) the woman must observe an 'idda period of two menstrual periods. If she has no menstruations she should wait for forty-five days. If she is pregnant, her 'idda lasts until the child is born.

If a woman is divorced before the marriage was consummated then there is no 'idda, regardless of whether it was a permanent or fixed-term marriage.

Lesson 5

Islamic Bioethics

Life is a gift from Allāh. No one has a right to take it away except Allāh. It is harām for a person to even attempt taking his or her own life. When Islām legislates capital punishment for certain crimes or jihād as an armed struggle, it is only in extreme cases, after many conditions have been fulfilled, and because Allāh commands that, in order to prevent harm to the rest of the human society and/or to preserve Islām, the religion of Allāh.

Similarly, Islām values human relations and the family structure in Islām. Any practice that affects a child's right to inheritance (such as having children out of wedlock) or destroys the Islāmic view of a family (such as gay marriages) is condemned by Islām.

This lesson looks at some common practices in the field of medicine that have ethical implications and what Islām has to say about them. This is called Islāmic bioethics. Bioethics itself is a philosophical study of the ethical controversies brought about by advances in biology and medicine. This includes issues like organ transplantation, end-of-life care, use of respirators and life-support machines, abortion, cloning, artificial insemination and so on.

Life Bioethics

Reproduction: When it comes to matters related to reproduction and the birth of human beings, Islām allows the use of science and medicine to help in the process when it is not naturally possible for a lawfully wedded husband and wife to conceive. 'Lawfully wedded' means a marriage based on an established religion - not a civil marriage that is recognized by the government only. So an Islāmic marriage between a man and a woman is a lawful marriage. A Christian man and woman who are married according to the laws of their religion are also lawfully married. But a gay marriage, a common-law relationship, or even a civil marriage is not considered to be a lawful marriage in Islām. A man and woman married in court only are still non-mahram to each other.

Examples of lawful practices that a lawfully wedded husband and wife can engage in, in order to have children, include taking fertility drugs, artificial insemination, In Vitro Fertilization (IVF), and so on.

All these are permissible in Islām, provided the procedure does not involve using or taking anything from a man/woman other than the lawfully wedded man and woman. Examples of unlawful practices are artificial insemination when a woman 'buys' sperm from a sperm bank or takes it as a donation from a man not married to her. Similarly, using the egg of a woman who is not the wife of a man is not

permissible. Also, it is not permissible to use another woman to carry the child of a couple in her womb.

Organ Donation: Islām allows a person to receive the organ of another person who is dead e.g. lungs, heart, eyes, etc. However the dead body of a Muslim cannot be cut open unless it is absolutely necessary e.g. to save the life of another Muslim or for a criminal investigation. So the organs of a dead Muslim cannot be donated to a non-Muslim. This is not about discrimination because Islām *does* allow a Muslim to donate certain things to non-Muslims whilst still alive, provided it does not harm him or her e.g. donating blood or bone marrow.

As science progresses and makes new discoveries in cloning, organ farming, and so on, these basic principles will continue to be guidelines on what is and is not permissible.

Adoption

Islām speaks very highly of adoption especially if it involves the care of orphans. The Qur’ān has numerous āyāt on orphans and there are very many ahādith as well. The Messenger of Allāh (s) had himself adopted a son called Zayd, who is also mentioned in the Qur’ān.

The Messenger of Allāh (s) said: ‘I and the guardian of an orphan shall be like ‘this’ in Paradise... (and he joined his index and middle fingers when saying ‘this’)³³

In his will, just before passing away, Imām Ali (‘a) said: ‘Allāh, Allāh (i.e. I remind you of Allāh) concerning the orphans. That they should never be hungry or lost while you are present. For I heard the Messenger of Allāh (s) saying: ‘One who supports an orphan until his needs are met, Allāh, the Mighty & Glorious, makes Paradise wājib on him because of that; just like He makes the Fire wājib on one who consumes the property of orphans.’³⁴

And Imām Ali (‘a) has also said: ‘If any believing man or woman places their hand on the head of an orphan, out of mercy for them, Allāh would write for them a good deed for every hair that their hand passes through.’³⁵

So it is clear that Islām encourages adoption. However, there are certain rules that must still be observed with adoption:

1. Because an adopted child is not a biological child, he/she does not become mahram to the parents adopting them unless the child was nursed by the mother at birth. This means if the adopted child is a girl, she will become a non-mahram to the father (and any bāligh boys in the family) after she

³³ Mizan al-Hikmah, Hadith # 22881

³⁴ Mizan al-Hikmah, Hadith # 22877

³⁵ Mizan al-Hikmah, Hadith # 22880

attains bulúgh. And if the adopted child is a boy, he will become a non-mahram to the mother (and any bāligha girls in the family) after he attains bulúgh.

2. An adopted child cannot take the name of the adopted family. He/she must maintain his/her biological parents name unless they are not known, etc. Even then, it is important that the adopted child does not claim to be the real son/daughter of the adopting parents. This is to ensure there is no mix-up in matters like marriage, inheritance, and so forth.
3. An adopted child is not automatically entitled to inheritance of the adopting parents according to the Islāmic laws (as are other biological children). Adopted children can get a share if the parents give them that share during their lifetime or if they specify a share for them in their Will. But Islām allows a person to only decide about one-third of his estate in his Will. The remaining two-thirds are divided according to Islāmic *shari'ah* and given to spouses and blood relatives. In later lessons we learn more about these laws.

End of Life Bioethics

When it comes to matters of death and dying, as mentioned earlier, only Allāh has the right to take a life and in exceptional cases, Allāh allows others to do so, such as for capital punishment (when decreed by a just and lawfully appointed Islāmic court of law) or in the case of Jihād if all other options have been exhausted and the only way to save Islām or defend one's honour, property or life is by fighting and killing the enemy.

Suicide: Suicide is absolutely forbidden in Islām and a person who takes his own life is doomed to be punished in the Hereafter by Allāh. In a hadith of Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq (a), he was asked if a true believer can die of leprosy. He said, a believer can even die of drowning or being burnt, etc. A believer can die any death, except one: he or she never commits suicide. If a person is clinically diagnosed with depression, it is wājib for them to take the necessary medication and seek therapy or any help to prevent suicidal thoughts.

Birth Control: If a husband and wife wish to stop the birth of a child, they are allowed to take measures to stop conception from taking place (such as, by the use of contraceptives). But abortion is not allowed and absolutely *harām* unless the life of the mother is in danger if she continues with the pregnancy. In exceptional cases like when it is known in advance that the child to be born is severely deformed and handicapped, a mujtahid would have to be consulted on what to do.

Euthanasia: Sometimes a person is very ill or in a coma and is not expected to survive and some people choose to end the person's life in order to relieve his or her suffering and pain. This is called euthanasia or 'mercy-killing'. It is *harām* in Islām. However it is not wājib to put a person on a respirator or other machine that helps keep them alive, if they are already in a coma.

If a patient is in a coma but able to breathe on their own and not expected to ever wake up again, you can choose not to use any life-support machine and leave the matter in Allāh's hands. This is usually the best choice. Or you can choose to use the machine. But once you do that, you cannot remove it if you know that removing it will definitely kill him/her. You can only remove it again if the doctors say the patient is strong enough to breathe on their own and there is a chance they will not die immediately if the machine is disconnected.

Also, if a patient in a coma is having a hard time breathing and the doctors wish to administer strong drugs to calm the patient, it is allowed in Islām even if doing so may further reduce their chance of survival. Because the intention is not to end their life. It is to give them relief from pain.

Of course if a person is conscious or if medical experts believe there is a strong likelihood of their survival and waking up again, then it is wājib to do everything possible to save their life even if they will be handicapped or paralysed thereafter.

Remember always: Life is precious and a gift from Allāh. Allāh says in the Qur'ān:

﴿مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا﴾

...Whoever takes a life without any reason... it is as though he has killed all of mankind; and whoever saves a life, it is as though he has saved all of mankind....

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:32

Lesson 6

Inheritance Laws in Islam

Importance of Leaving a Will (*Wasiya*) in Islām

It is recommended that a person should make a last will before his or her death, especially when they feel that death is near. He or she should return to people what they owe them, and all debts should be settled, or the executors of their will should be instructed to do so through the will. If he or she has not paid khums, it should be paid, and also instructions should be given for Hajj, if that duty was unfulfilled, and also missed prayers (*salāh*) and *wājib* fasts.

A person who thinks that death is near should also inform his successors about his or her assets, especially any concealed assets that they may not discover. Those Muslims appointed as executors to a Muslim's will (*wasiya*) are bound to act according to the instructions in the will unless the instructions are for a sinful act or denying the Islāmic right of an heir, and so on.

A person can also cancel his will at any time before death and make a new one. In this case, it is the final version that is binding.

One who makes a will should be intelligent enough to discriminate between right and wrong and make it of his or her own free choice. The will of a child who is ten years of age or older is legal as far as the relatives are concerned. The executor(s) to whom the will (*wasiya*) is addressed must be sane (*'āqil*), adult (*bāligh*) Muslims who are trustworthy. If a person agrees to be someone's executor then it is *wājib* for them to fulfil that duty. They can only reject this responsibility while the testator is alive and not after his or her demise.

It is *wājib* for the heirs of the deceased to use any wealth the deceased leaves behind to first pay for the Hajj if it was due on the deceased, and for any missed fasts and prayers, and to pay any khums and *zakāh* which was due, even if the deceased did not make a will or specify this in his or her will.

Is It Necessary to Write a Will?

Even though in *shari'ah* it is *mustahab* to leave a will behind, it becomes *wājib* given the circumstances we live in today (i.e. in non-Muslim countries). In Canada for example, If a person dies without a will, the government appoints an executor who will divide the estate among the heirs as he sees fit. The executor/lawyer will also take his pay for the work he does from the estate of the deceased. A lot of one's estate is lost to lawyers' fees and bureaucracy and often there is a lot of delay before even the heirs get anything. Furthermore, the division by the executor will not be according to the Islāmic law.

Therefore a Muslim living in a non-Muslim country should consider it as wājib to leave a will behind so that he is not guilty of not giving his heirs their rightful Islāmic share. Even if a spouse or child contests a person's Islāmic Will after his or her demise and the court decides in their favour, the deceased will have at least done his or her Islāmic duty before Allāh.

If a person does not have the means or funds to hire a lawyer and to get a formal will made for himself, they should write their entire will in their own handwriting and sign it. Such a will is called a 'holographic will' and in many courts of law it is accepted even if there are no witness signatures to the will. In order to write a will, a person does not have to know all the divisions and rights of heirs according to Islāmic law. They can simply write in their will that they would like their estate to be divided as per the laws of the Usuli Imāmiya Shi'ah Ithna 'Ashari Muslim faith and they may also specify the name of a Shi'ah scholar or individuals from the Shi'ah Muslim community that they would like to be the executors of their will. It is much better of course, if a person also asks these executors beforehand and if possible, make them witnesses who sign the will as well.

It is also a good idea to mention in one's will that in case both you and your spouse were to pass away suddenly (e.g. in a tragedy) who you would like to designate as the guardian of your children. This is especially important if your extended family – siblings, uncles, aunts, parents, etc. – do not live in the same country as you. Typically if a person does not specify a guardian and there are no relatives to take care of the child, the government will put the child under the care of the Ministry of Child Services who in turn will put the children in a foster home. Very often this is a non-Muslim foster home where the children stay until they get adopted by others.

The One-Third Share

Instead of permitting a Muslim to distribute all his or her estate as they please or the other extreme - not giving them any say - Islām allows a Muslim to dictate how up to one-third of their estate is to be distributed after them, provide they make this request a part of their will. If a person does not mention how they wish to spend up to a maximum of one-third of their estate, then the entire amount is distributed as per the Islāmic law. In fact, according to some scholars, when the Qur'ān asks a person to make a *wasiyyah* before death (e.g. 2:177) it is referring to the one-third only. And when the Qur'ān talks of sinning by depriving an heir his or her right (e.g. in 2:182) it is referring to the two-thirds.

If the specified expenditure by the deceased is more than one-third of the estate, the will is valid only if his legitimate heirs explicitly agree; otherwise it will be binding only to the amount of one-third. If the specified expenditure by the deceased is more than one-third of the estate, and the legitimate heirs give their consent during the lifetime of the deceased, they cannot revoke this agreement after the death of the deceased, and it will be binding.

Basics of Inheritance in Islām

In Islāmic law, people who have a blood or matrimonial relation with the deceased can inherit. The relatives who can inherit are classified into three categories. In the presence of relatives of the first category, even if there is only one, the relatives of the second category do not inherit anything. And in the presence of relatives of the second category, even if there is only one, relatives of the third category do not inherit anything. A person belonging to the lower category will receive an inheritance only if there is no person in the higher category. That said, a husband and wife always inherit from each other in all cases.

The Three Categories

The first category consists of the deceased's parents and children. If there are no children, his or her grandchildren inherit in their place, but they do not inherit if even one son or daughter of the deceased is alive.

The second category consists of the deceased's brothers and sisters and paternal and maternal grandfathers and grandmothers. If no brother or sister is alive, their children inherit in their place, but they do not inherit if even one brother or sister of the deceased is alive. Relatives of this category inherit only if there is no relative belonging to the first category.

The third category consists of the paternal and maternal uncles and aunts. If none of them is alive, their children inherit in their place; but they do not inherit if even one uncle or aunt is alive. If there are no uncles and aunts or cousins of the deceased, then the deceased's parents' paternal and maternal uncles and aunts (or their children or grandchildren) inherit. In such rare cases, if the deceased only has, for example, a paternal step-uncle and the son of a real paternal uncle, then the son of the real paternal uncle will inherit from him to the exclusion of the paternal step-uncle.

A husband and wife are outside these three categories. They inherit from each other regardless of the presence of any relative of the three categories.

The shares of the inheritance allotted to the members of the appropriate categories are worked out following a fairly complex calculation, and it is advisable to consult a qualified legal (*fiqh*) expert to determine the proportions of the inheritance. Some basic calculations are discussed in the next lesson.

Those who are banned from Inheriting in Islām

In some cases, those who normally inherit from a deceased relative are not allowed to receive their share. These include:

1. A murderer does not inherit from his victim, even if he or she is the nearest relative of the deceased. But one who has killed someone unintentionally can receive inheritance.
2. One who has renounced Islām cannot inherit from a Muslim relative, but a Muslim can inherit from a non-Muslim relative.
3. If the deceased is heavily in debt, these debts must first be settled from his assets, and if nothing remains, his relatives will not receive anything.

Hiring Someone to Pray and Fast

During one's lifetime it is not permitted to hire anyone to perform salāh on your behalf, even if you are unable to perform them. However, after death, it is possible for the eldest son to hire someone to perform the compensatory (qadā) prayers for a parent's omitted wājib prayers. It is therefore permissible to pray and to fast in compensation for the missed prayers and fasting of a deceased person and to receive payment for this.

The person who is hired must be an Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ah who is bāligh and 'āqil. He or she must know the necessary rules (*ahkām*) of salāh (or fasting as applicable). A person who is hired for this purpose may pray for a person of the same or of the opposite sex, and must pray according to what is prescribed for themselves, e.g. a woman must perform all the prayers in a lowered voice, and man must perform the morning, evening, and night prayers in a loud voice, even if performing the qadā prayer for someone of the opposite sex.

The person who is performing qadā salāh for a deceased person must make the intention of performing them for the missed prayers of that person, and must also specify which salāh he or she is compensating for. When the compensatory (qadā) salāh has been performed, the deceased person will be considered free of his or her obligation.

What is Estate?

An 'estate' is the collective name for everything you own at the time of your death.

Before distributing a person's estate amongst the rightful heirs, the executor(s) of the will must pay off all the deceased's debts, legal as well as religious. Legal debt would be, for example, money the deceased had borrowed from others or payments they had to make but never settled. Religious debts are outstanding dues such as unpaid zakāh, khums, kaffāra, and so on. It also includes the cost for wājib hajj, and missed prayers and fasts (if someone needs to be hired to compensate for them). Additionally, the cost for the **wājib** portion of the funeral expenses can also be deducted from a person's estate before it is distributed (e.g. cost of grave, coffin and shroud).

So an executor must:

1. Calculate the total estate.
2. Subtract any legal or religious debts.
3. Subtract any costs for the funeral that are **wājib**.
4. Following the deceased's instructions for up to one-third of his estate (if the deceased specified this in his or her will).
5. Finally distribute the **remaining estate** to the heirs as per Islāmic laws.

Sometimes a person may have joint bank accounts (e.g. with a spouse) in which both partners have agreed to share everything equally. In such a case, only half of the total amount in all such joint bank accounts and investments belong to the deceased. The other half is not a part of the estate unless a different understanding existed between the partners that is specified in the will or another document of proof.

The House: For most people, most of their assets (financial worth or value) lies in the value of their Home. According to Canadian law, when a person dies, the home belongs to the spouse. According to Islāmic law, 50% of the house's value belongs to the deceased and therefore must be counted as a part of his or her estate.

To circumvent this matter, so that the surviving spouse is not left homeless, each spouse can give their share to the other, in their lifetime, as a 'conditional gift' (*hiba mashruta*). The gift is conditional because it is given 'on the condition that it must be returned if the marriage ends in a divorce or the spouse dies.'

This means if there is a divorce, each one takes his and her share back and the house's value is divided equally. And if one spouse dies, the surviving spouse gets back their original share that they had given away (since it was *hiba mashruta*) plus they have the share of the spouse who died since it was given to them in their life time. In this manner, both a husband and wife are assured of not being homeless if the other dies and the house is then not added to the estate for distribution to the other heirs.

Lesson 7

Inheritance Laws in Islam (cont'd)

Calculating Inheritance Based on Islāmic Laws

Heir Categories

Category	Group (must be biological/blood-related)	Rule
1	Parents & Children	No one else inherits as long as someone from this group is alive.
1b	Grandchildren	Only inherit the share of their parents (who are children of the deceased) if not a single child of the deceased is alive.
2	Grandparents & Siblings	Only inherit if no one from the previous categories is alive.
2b	Nephews & Nieces	These are the children of the siblings (in category 2). They inherit the share of their parents (i.e. the deceased's siblings) only if their parents were deserving to inherit and not a single sibling of the deceased is alive.
3	Paternal & Maternal Uncles & Aunts	Only inherit if no one from the previous categories is alive.
3b	Children of Paternal & Maternal Uncles & Aunts	Only inherit if their parents would have (from the deceased) and not a single paternal or maternal uncle or aunt is alive.
	Spouse	Spouse always has a share regardless of who else inherits unless he/she was divorced before the deceased passed away.

Notes:

1. A person can only state how one-third of his estate is to be distributed. Two-thirds is dictated by Islām.
2. The cost for fulfilling wājibāt and paying off debts of the deceased must be subtracted before estate is distributed. E.g. missed hajj or salāh or sawm by the deceased or wājib parts of his funeral e.g. cost of kafan and burial/grave.

Fraction Shares For Spouse and First Category

1. First distribute the 1/3 option if the deceased had made any special requests for it in his/her Will.
2. Then calculate the spouse's share.
 - a. Wife gets 1/8 (12.5%) of total distributable estate (after removing obligatory costs and debts) if there is a child.
 - b. She gets 1/4 (25%) if there is no child.
 - c. Husband gets 1/4 (25%) if there is a child. He gets 1/2 (50%) if there is no child.
3. Then calculate parent's share.
 - a. Mother gets 1/6 (16.66%) if deceased has child or brother (even though brother does not inherit when mother is alive). She gets 1/3 (33.33%) if the deceased has no child or brother.
 - b. Father gets 1/6 (16.66%) if deceased has a child. Otherwise he gets all the balance after spouse and mother have been given their share.
4. Then calculate children's share.
 - a. Children get all the rest of the estate after spouse and parents have been given their share. The male children get twice the amount that the female children inherit.
5. The reason why male children or husbands always inherit twice what female children or wives inherit is explained below. If a person wishes to give more to his daughter or wife, then he can specify this as the 1/3 option in his Will that he is allowed to distribute as he pleases.

The Share of Male vs. Female

Why does Islām give a son twice the share of a daughter? And why does a husband inherit more from the wife than the wife from the husband? This is often misunderstood as a male vs. female issue, when in fact it is not. If it was about favouring one gender over the other than it would not allow cases when the female inherits more than the male. For example:

- If a daughter is the only heir of her father, she inherits 100% to the exclusion of the male members of the family in the 2nd and 3rd category like her grandfather and uncles.
- A mother, in most cases, gets the same 1/6 share as the father.
- In the categories 1b and 2b in the table above, when grandchildren or nephews and nieces inherit the share of their parents, the granddaughters and nieces will get more than grandsons and nephews if the former are

taking the share of male heir (i.e. their father) and the latter are taking the share of a female heir (i.e. their mother).

The reason therefore why Islām gives more to the son and husband as a general rule is because in Islām, the responsibility of maintaining a family is always on the male. A girl's upkeep is the responsibility of her father (and grandfather) before marriage and her husband after marriage. If she is widowed, her son is obligated to pay her expenses and look after her. Even if a woman owns businesses or is employed or very wealthy, according to Islāmic law, she is not obligated to spend any of her wealth for the expense of the family. For a man, it is the opposite. His father is not obligated to keep supporting him once he is mature and grown up. He must maintain his wife and children and when his parents and grandparents grow old, it is wājib for him to also look after them and cover their expenses if he can. He may also have to look after his sisters who never get married or are divorced.

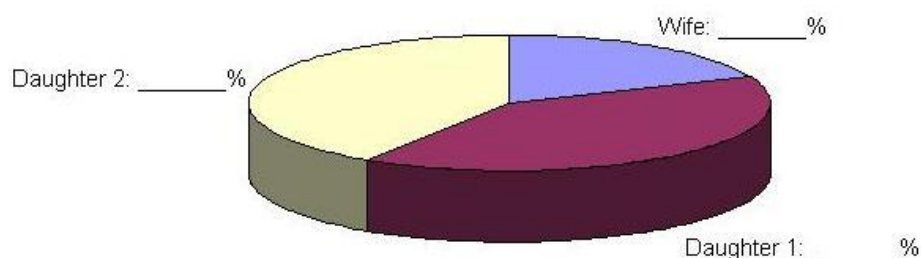
Special Circumstances:

The laws of Islām are to cover most general situations. There may however be situations where a man knows before his demise that his daughters are in greater need of support than his sons, and so forth. This is where a person is encouraged to act responsibly and use two options at his or her disposal:

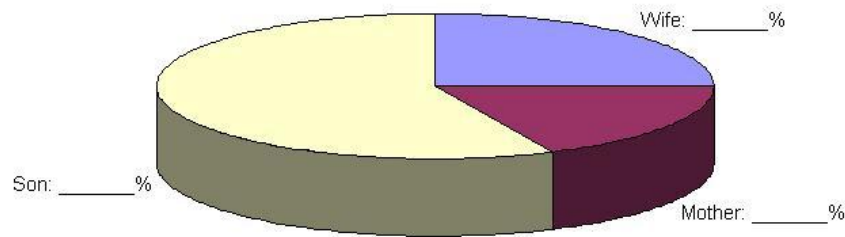
1. Give away some wealth or assets during one's lifetime to those who may inherit less after one's demise. What is given away in one's life time is not a part of a person's estate.
2. Exercise the one-third option. Since every Muslim can dictate where they want up to one-third of their estate distributed, a person may specify that they wish to give one-third of their estate to their daughters, for example. And in this way, the daughter will in fact inherit even more than the son because she is still entitled to her Islāmic share from the two-thirds as well. The last question in the exercises below will demonstrate this.

Exercise Questions:

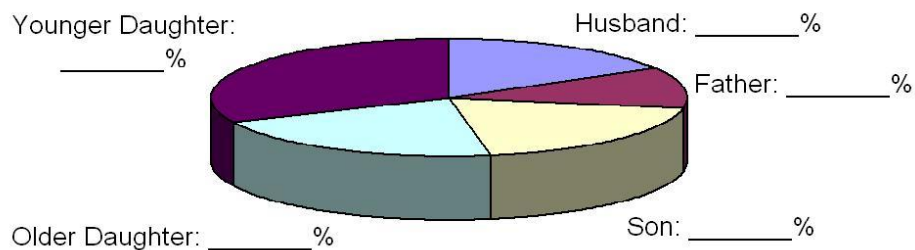
1. A man dies and leaves only a wife and two daughters. What percentage of his estate will each one receive?



2. A man dies and leaves a mother, a wife and a son. What percentage of his estate will each one receive?



3. A man dies leaving \$43,000. He never performed hajj that was wājib on him. And he had borrowed \$3000 from someone that he never paid back. The cost of hajj at the time of his demise was \$6000. The cost of a grave including burial and kafan is \$4000. His family also wishes to erect a tombstone on his grave that costs \$500. How much of his wealth is to be distributed for inheritance?
4. A woman dies and leaves a father, husband, a son and two daughters. She also specifies in her Will that out of the 1/3 option to distribute her estate as she pleases, she would like to divide that into 3 parts and give one part to the older daughter who is married and two parts to the younger daughter who is not married. What percentage of her estate will each one receive?



A Sample Islāmic Will

This is the last will and testament of

.....

son/daughter of

.....

currently residing at

.....

.....

made on (date)

I hereby revoke all former wills and testaments made by me and declare this to be my last will.

I testify that I am a practising Muslim of the Shi'ah Ithna Ashari faith believing in one God, His Prophets - the last of whom is Muhammad (s) and the institution of Imāmah with the Imām of the time being Imām Muhammad al-Mahdi ('a).

I appoint

.....

of

to be the executor of this, my WILL.

I DIRECT that all my debts, funeral and testamentary expenses be paid as soon as is convenient after my death.

I DIRECT my Executors to pay

..... my KHUMS.

After all these payments have been made the remainder of my estate should be divided in the following proportions.

One third of the estate - here forth known as portion A

Two thirds of the estate - here forth known as portion B

Fiqh

Portion A (specify details below)

Portion B

This conforms to the Shi'ah Ithna Ashari laws of inheritance.

In witness, whereof I, the said (name)

.....

have signed my name on this (day and date)

.....

Signed by the said (signature)

.....

In the presence of us both present at that time, who in his/her presence and in the presence of each other have hereto subscribed our name as witnesses:

1

.....

2

.....

TARIKH (History)

Lesson 1

Muslim Dynasties

Most of us are familiar that after the passing away of Rasulullāh (s), Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthmān became caliphs one after the other. After Uthmān was murdered, the people asked Imām Ali (‘a) to lead them and he did so for 3½ years before he was martyred. The Sunni Muslims refer to the first four caliphs as ‘The Rightly-Guided Caliphs’ (*khulafā ar-rāshidun*) because the caliphs after them were not regarded to be ‘rightly-guided’.

In Book 11, we studied the history of the first three Caliphs and their legacy as well as the history of Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib (‘a) as the Caliph. In this lesson and the next two, we wish to study about the dynasties that ruled after Imām Ali (‘a) until the collapse of the global Muslim Empire.

The first two dynasties that ruled after Imām Ali (‘a) - the Umayyads (Banu Umayya) followed by the Abbāsids (Banu Abbās) - are perhaps the most important to know about because during their rule, all the Muslim lands belonged to one Empire. It was only towards the end of the Abbāsīd Dynasty that different empires formed within the Muslim lands, one overlapping the reign of another and each ruling over different Muslim regions. We shall study about these post-Abbāsīd Muslim dynasties in Lesson 3.

The Umayyad (Banu Umayya) Dynasty

Even though strictly speaking the first Umayyad ruler was the 3rd Caliph Uthmān b. Affān (and it was he that gave his family members positions of power that led to the creation of the Umayyad dynasty), historians general mark the start of the Umayyad dynasty after the martyrdom of Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib (‘a) in 40 AH.

The first three Umayyads caliphs after Imām Ali (‘a) were descendants of Abu Sufyān and the rest were from a different line of descent of the Banu Umayya and called themselves “descendants of Marwān” (Aal Marwān). The names of all the Umayyad rulers are as follows:

Sufyānids (Aal Sufyān): 661-684 CE

1. Mu’āwiya b. Abi Sufyān (661-680 CE)
2. Yazid b. Mu’āwiya (680-683 CE)
3. Mu’āwiya b. Yazid (Mu’āwiya II) (683-684 CE)

Marwānids (Aal Marwān): 684-750 CE

4. Marwān b. Hakam (684-685 CE)

5. Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (685-705 CE)
6. Al-Walid b. Abd al-Malik (705-715 CE)
7. Sulaymān b. Abd al-Malik (715-717 CE)
8. 'Umar b. Abd al-Aziz (717-720 CE)
9. Yazid II b. Abd al-Malik (720-724 CE)
10. Hishām b. Abd al-Malik (724-743 CE)
11. Al-Walid II b. Yazid II (743-744 CE)
12. Yazid III (744 CE)
13. Marwān II (744-750 CE)

What follows is a brief biography of the most famous (or infamous) of the Umayyad rulers.

Mu'āwiya b. Abu Sufyān

He was the son of Abu Sufyān, the arch-enemy of Rasulullāh (s), and his mother was Hind, the woman who chewed the liver of Hamza the uncle of Rasulullāh (s) after he was martyred at Uhud.

Mu'āwiya was appointed governor of Syria by the 2nd Caliph Umar and when Imām Ali ('a) became the Caliph, he immediately asked Mu'āwiya to step down as governor but he refused. Instead he fought Imām Ali ('a) at the Battle of Siffin that was inconclusive. When Imām Ali ('a) was martyred in 40 AH (661 CE), Mu'āwiya bribed the commanders of Imām Hasan ('a)'s army and finally agreed to a peace treaty with Imām Hasan ('a) that he quickly broke.

In 50 AH (670 AH), Mu'āwiya had Imām Hasan ('a) poisoned through his wife Ja'dah and in Rajab 60 AH (680 CE), Mu'āwiya died after appointing his son Yazid as his successor.

Mu'āwiya killed many companions of Rasulullāh (s) and Imām Ali ('a). One of them was Ammār b. Yāsir who was killed in Siffin by Mu'āwiya's men. Another great companion was Hujr b. Adi in Kufa who was a tribal leader and a very loyal Shi'ah of Imām Ali ('a). Mu'āwiya had Hujr b. Adi and a large group of his men executed through his governor Ziyād b. Abih. Ziyād was a brutal man whose mother was a prostitute and he never knew who his father was. Mu'āwiya promised to let Ziyād call himself the son of Abu Sufyān since Abu Sufyān used to visit Ziyād's mother often. Ziyād killed many Shi'ahs for pleasure including Rushayd al-Hajari who was a close companion of Imām Ali ('a). Ziyād amputated Rushayd's hands and feet and hung him to death because he refused to curse Imām Ali ('a) or disassociate from him.

Mu'āwiya's closest adviser was a Christian named Sarjun (Sr. John). Another prominent adviser to Mu'āwiya, especially in the Battle of Siffin, was Amr b. al-Aas, a crafty man who agreed to help Mu'āwiya become the caliph provided he was given to rule as governor of Egypt. Amr b. al-Aas's mother was also a prostitute named

Nābigha so he was known by his enemies as 'Ibn al-Nābigha' (Son of Nābigha). Amr was also responsible for killing and poisoning Imām Ali ('a)'s closest companions like Muhammad b. Abi Bakr and Malik al-Ashtar.

Yazid b. Mu'āwiya

He was the son of Mu'āwiya and his mother is said to have been a Christian from the Byzantine Empire whom Mu'āwiya married and divorced three times. When he was finally not permitted to keep her as a wife, he still did and had Yazid as his illegitimate and only son.

Yazid loved drinking wine, playing with dogs and monkeys and gambling. He had absolutely no respect for religion and believed that the Qur'ān was forged by Rasulullāh (s) just so that the Banu Hāshim could take power! When his father died, Yazid ruled for 3 years only. The first year he killed Imām Husayn ('a) and his 72 companions in Karbala and imprisoned the rest of the family members of Rasulullāh (s). The second year he ransacked Madina and his soldiers murdered over a thousand men, including companions of Rasulullāh (s) and over a thousand women were raped. The third year, he attacked Makkah, and attacked the Ka'bah with catapults and burnt it down.

Yazid's governor in Kufa was Ubaydullah b. Ziyād who was as cruel as his father Ziyād and equally enjoyed torturing the Shi'ah. Ubaydullah was also of illegitimate birth. His mother was a well-known prostitute called Marjānah and therefore Ubaydullah was also known as 'Ibn Marjānah'. Ubaydullah oversaw the army of Umar b. Sa'd in Karbala and sent Shimr Dhil Jawshan to kill Imām Husayn ('a).

Ubaydullah also murdered Maytham at-Tammār, one of the favorite Shi'ah of Imām Ali ('a). He cut Maytham's hands and legs and crucified him on a tree and when Maytham continued praising Imām Ali ('a) from the tree, he had his tongue pulled and cut out and Maytham remained there until he bled to death and died slowly and painfully.

Marwān b. al-Hakam

After Yazid died, his son Mu'āwiya II was not interested in ruling and condemned his father Yazid. Mu'āwiya II (also known as 'Mu'āwiya the Good') died shortly afterwards and is believed to have been poisoned by his family members. His teacher was buried alive because the Umayyads believed he had influenced him.

The Umayyad rule was then taken over by Marwān b. al-Hakam who was also an Umayyad. He was a cousin and also the son-in-law of the 3rd caliph Uthmān b. Affān. Marwān continued ruling like a King and oppressing the Shi'ah.

Abd al-Malik b. Marwān

He was the son of Marwān. He is well known for his atrocities such as poisoning the fourth Imām, Ali Zayn al-Abidin (‘a), attacking the Ka’bah and appointing the evil Hajjāj b. Yusuf ath-Thaqafi as one of his governors.

Hajjāj b. Yusuf is recorded as one of the cruelest men in history. He used to kill for fun and in particular enjoyed watching old people and children being tortured and killed. His favourite pastime was to kill the Shi’ah of Imām Ali (‘a). People would be afraid of even being ‘accused’ of being a Shi’ah. Wherever a Shi’ah was found, his limbs were immediately amputated and then he was killed or he would be thrown into prison and tortured. Amongst the famous Shi’ah that Hajjāj killed were: Qanbar (the servant of Imām Ali (‘a)), Kumayl b. Ziyād, and Sa’id b. Jubayr, all known for their piety and closeness to Imām Ali (‘a).

Another favourite pastime of Hajjāj was to make fun of Imām Ali (‘a) and to curse him. He had special gatherings for this. When Hajjāj finally died, he had tortured and killed at least 120,000 Muslims (besides those he attacked and killed in battles and looting). There were 50,000 men and 30,000 women in his prison out of whom at 16,000 were naked. And the prison was designed to ensure the inmates suffered from the extreme heat of summer and extreme cold and rains of winter. If a prisoner tried sitting in any shade, stones would be thrown at him to move him and the food was mixed with dirt and ashes. There was a constant wailing and crying from Hajjāj’s prisons.

The Caliph Abd al-Malik b. Marwān chose Hajjāj as his governor specifically for Irāq and Hijāz (today’s Saudi Arabia) to ensure he would have no opposition from these regions while he ruled Syria, Yemen, Iran and other Muslim regions.

When Hajjāj died in 714 CE, the Muslims rejoiced and offered thanks to Allāh for the relief. The people of Iraq rejoiced openly in the streets and the Caliph Umar b. Abd al-Aziz (717-720 CE) later thanked Allāh for removing a ‘tyrant’. Hajjāj’s name at birth was Kulayb (which means “little dog”) but he later changed it to Hajjāj which means “The Bones Crusher”.³⁶

In total, Abd al-Malik b. Marwān ruled for 21 years and died in 86 AH (705 CE).

The Sons of Abd al-Malik

After Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, his sons Walid, Sulaymān, Yazid II and Hishām ruled one after another, with a brief break when Umar b. Abd al-Aziz ruled between the time of Sulaymān and Yazid II.

³⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Hajjāj_bin_Yousef

Walid b. Abd al-Malik was as cruel as his father. He continued to support Hajjāj, who died during his reign. Sulaymān b. Abd al-Malik took over in 96 AH. He was known to be a glutton and a womanizer. He could eat an amazing amount of food constantly. Even when he slept he kept dishes of food besides him so that as soon as he woke up he would eat. Sulaymān ruled for only 2 years and a few months before he died in 99 AH.

Umar b. Abd al-Aziz

Umar b. Abd al-Aziz was a cousin to the sons of Abd al-Malik. He succeeded Sulaymān and ruled for 2½ years. Unlike all other Umayyad caliphs, he was loved by people for his honesty and justice. He is often regarded by the Sunnis as the ‘fifth rightly-guided Caliph’. One of his virtues is that he stopped the cursing of Imām Ali (‘a) after every Friday (Jumu’ah) prayer and from every pulpit – a practice that was established by Mu’āwiya b. Abu Sufyān for the previous 60 years.

Another great deed of Umar b. Abd al-Aziz is that he returned the garden of Fadak to the descendants of Sayyida Fātima az-Zahra (‘a) because he believed it was taken from her unjustly. It is believed that the reason Umar b. Abd al-Aziz was so different from the other Umayyad Caliphs is because his teacher loved Imām Ali (‘a) and had guided him correctly when he was a child. This was just like the case of Mu’āwiya II (the son of Yazid) who was poisoned by his family. This tells us the important role that teachers’ play and how they can influence a person even over the influence of parents, whether it is at school, madrasah or university.

Other Sons of Abd al-Malik

When ‘Umar b. Abd al-Aziz died, Yazid II b. Abd al-Malik took over as Caliph. He was fond of wine, women and all sinful matters. He was constantly surrounded by singing girls who poured wine for him and sang and danced before him. Like his ancestor namesake Yazid b. Mu’āwiya, he was a sinful and cruel man. He reversed a lot of what Umar b. Abd al-Aziz had established and usurped back the garden of Fadak from the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). Yazid II ruled for 4 years and died at the age of 37.

Thereafter his brother Hishām b. Abd al-Malik ruled. He was also a cruel man, who specifically ordered his governors to torture the Shi’ah and keep them behind bars. He poisoned Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir (‘a). One of the sons of Imām Ali Zayn al-Abidin (‘a) called Zayd b. Ali, who was very learned and brave, tried to fight Hishām. He gained a lot of support but was eventually killed. Hishām then mutilated his body and hung it near a dumpsite in Kufa. Later his head was cut off and like his grandfather Imām Husayn (‘a), Zayd b. Ali’s head was paraded from city to city. Some say it is buried in Cairo (Egypt). In Cairo there is a mosque called Masjid al-Husayn (‘a) where some people believe the head of Imām Husayn (‘a) is buried. It is possible that the head there is actually of Zayd the son of Imām Zayn al-Abidin (‘a).

Walid b. Yazid b. Abd al-Malik

After ruling for 19 years, Hishām died and was succeeded by his nephew Walid b. Yazid bin Abdul Malik. Walid’s mother was the niece of the tyrant Hajjāj and Walid himself continued the Umayyad policy of tormenting the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) and their Shi’ah.

Walid was particularly fond of wine. He constructed a pool of wine and would swim in it with prostitutes. He is even said to have abused his own daughter. The ruins of his palaces with paintings of naked women are still found today.³⁷

One day Walid opened the Qur’ān and the verses he saw before him were:

﴿...وَوَخَّابَ كُلُّ جَبَّارٍ عَنِيدٍ. مِنْ وَرَائِهِ جَهَنَّمُ وَيُسْقَى مِنْ مَاءٍ صَدِيدٍ﴾

...and every arrogant tyrant was defeated. Before him is Hell and he will drink a putrid drink (in it).

- Surah Ibrāhim, 14:15-16

This made him furious. ‘Do you call me an arrogant tyrant and threaten me?’ he said to the Qur’ān. Then he took a bow and began shooting arrows at the Qur’ān until he tore it to pieces. Then he said, ‘When you go before your Lord on the Day of Judgement, then tell Him, “O Lord! Walid tore me to pieces!”’

The Fall of the Umayyad Dynasty

As the Umayyads continued to show their hatred for the family of Rasulullāh (s) and to lead sinful lives, the Muslims became more impatient and there were constant risings and oppositions against them. At the forefront of these oppositions were the Banu Abbās – the descendants of Abbās, the uncle of Rasulullāh (s).

At first the Banu Abbās led the Muslims to believe that they were fighting for the right of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). They made the motto of their uprising, ‘*ar-ridā li Āli Muhammad*’ (“for the sake of the family of Muhammad”) and so they got a lot of support from the masses. But once they overthrew the Banu Umayya, they now claimed that they were closer to Rasulullāh (s) in relationship and they held on to power themselves. In due course they were even crueler to the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) than the Umayyads.

In 132 AH (750 CE), the Abbāsids defeated the army of Marwān II and took over Damascus. Marwān II – the last Umayyad Caliph - was killed in Egypt. The Abbāsids destroyed all the tombs of the Umayyads in Syria except for the tomb of the pious Umar II. The remaining Umayyad family members were hunted down and killed. One grandson of Hishām b. Abd al-Malik – Abd ar-Rahmān – escaped to Spain and

³⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umayyad_Caliphate

established the Umayyad caliphate there. The rest of the Muslim world was taken over the Abbāsids.

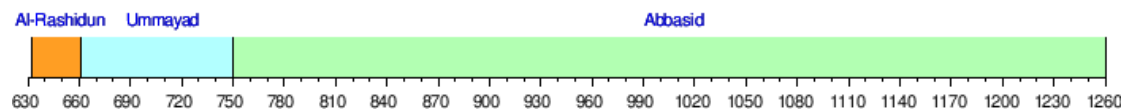
In total the Umayyads ruled the Muslims for 90 years or according to some historians, exactly 1000 Islāmic months.

Lesson 2

Muslim Dynasties (cont'd)

The Abbāsīd (Banu Abbās) Dynasty

While the Umayyad dynasty lasted ninety years only (661-750 CE), the Abbāsīd dynasty lasted for over five centuries at least (750 to 1258 CE).



As mentioned in the previous lesson, the Banu Abbās were descendants of Abbās, the uncle of Rasulullāh (s). They were quick to capitalize on the general feeling that the Caliphate should be restored to the members of the family of Rasulullāh (s), the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). They even fought the Umayyads based on the slogan "*ar-ridā li Āli Muhammad*" ("for the pleasure and rights of family of Muhammad"). Soon they gained widespread support. But having removed the Umayyads, the Banu Abbās took over the reins of power for themselves.

The Caliphs of the Banu Abbās are too many to list here. You can find their entire family tree on the internet.³⁸ But we will discuss the lives of some of the most famous (or infamous) of them.

Abul Abbās as-Saffāh (750-754 CE)

Abul Abbās was the first Caliph of the Abbāsīd Dynasty. He ruled out of Kufa from 132 AH (750 CE) until he died in 136 AH (754 CE). Most of his rein was spent in hunting for the Umayyads and killing them. He was known as as-Saffāh (The Shedder of Blood) because of the number of people he killed.

In one account he is said to have invited 80 members of the Banu Umayya on the pretext of rewarding them and sharing a meal. When they arrived, he ordered them to be killed. Then carpets were laid on their half-dead bodies and while the Umayyads were crying and dying slowly and painful under the carpet, as-Saffāh had his meal; and when he finished eating, he remarked, ‘Never have I had such a delicious and wholesome meal!’

The Abbāsīds did hire poets to compose poetry against the descendants of Imām Ali (‘a) and in their favour so that no one would favour the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) over them,

³⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbāsīd_Caliphate

but they did not kill the Shi'ah as much during the reign of as-Saffāh as they were busy hunting for the Umayyads.

During the years when the Abbāsids were busy fight the Umayyads, Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) and Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) used the opportunity to set up schools in Madina to teach Islāmic sciences. A lot of the contributions that Muslim scientists and philosophers made later on were the result of their teachings.

Mansoor Dawāniqi (754-775 CE)

Mansoor was the second Abbāsīd Caliph and the brother of as-Saffāh. He moved the capital of the Abbāsids to Baghdād and he was the first Abbāsīd Caliph to start focusing on the torture of the descendants of Imām Ali ('a) and their Shi'ah.

In particular, Mansoor tortured many descendants of Imām Hasan ('a). He would have them chained and thrown into prisons where they were left to die of starvation.

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) was the Imām of the time during the reign of Mansoor and even though he was focused on teaching Islāmic sciences, Mansoor felt threatened by him. He is said to have once remarked, 'although I have killed more than a thousand descendants of Fātima ('a) (the daughter of Rasulullāh (s)), I have not yet killed their leader and chief.' He finally succeeded in poisoning Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) in 148 A.H.

Mansoor was also known to invent new ways of torturing and killing the Shi'ah. For example, he would have their eyes whipped so that they would go blind or he would have them placed between walls of a new building construction so that they were buried alive.

Mansoor died in 158 AH (775 CE) after having ruled for 22 years. After his death, rooms were found with numerous dead bodies of the descendants of Hadrat Abu Tālib ('a) and their parentage had been written on pieces of paper and hung from their ears.

Mahdi (775-785 CE) & Hādi (785-786 CE)

Mahdi was the son of Mansoor and Hādi (whose original name was Musa) was the son of Mahdi. They ruled after Mansoor successively, both as cruel as their father and grandfather, respectively. Mahdi died in 169 AH after ruling for 11 years and Hādi ruled for 15 months only.

During their time, the Shi'ah and descendants of Imām Ali ('a) became almost non-existent. There was so much fear that the Sādāt (descendants of Imām Ali ('a) and Sayyida Fātima ('a)) as well as the Shi'ah changed their names to hide their identities

and others fled to far off foreign lands where they lived in poverty and secrecy. Many of the Sādāt were too scared to even tell their wives and children their real identities. As a result, many generations of Sādāt became Sunni, following the teachings of their local schools and mosques. Even today there are many Sunnis who are Sādāt and in particular Hasanis (i.e. descendants of Imām Hasan (‘a)) who call themselves “Sharifs”. They now know they were descendants of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) but they have been following the Sunni madhhab for generations.

Hārūn ar-Rashid (786-809 CE)

Hārūn ar-Rashid is probably the most famous Abbāsīd Caliph. He succeeded his brother Hādī and ruled from 170 AH to 193 AH (23 years). He is said to have promoted a lot of learning in the Muslim Empire by encouraging art and culture and building mosques, schools, hospitals, bridges, roads and canals throughout the Muslim Empire. Some historians praise his era as the ‘Golden Islāmic Era’. However he was no different from his forefathers regarding the descendants of Imām Ali (‘a) and Sayyida Fātima (‘a) and he continued the policy of imprisoning, torturing and killing the Sādāt and their Shi’ah.

The reason why the Banu Abbās were constantly threatened by the presence of the Banu Hāshim is because the Banu Hāshim and the Shi’ah had supported them against the Umayyads and the agreement was to restore the right of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) but once the Abbāsīds took power, they adopted Sunni Islām and isolated the Shi’ah completely.³⁹ The Abbāsīds also claimed they were the rightful Caliphs based on their relationship with Rasūlullāh (s) but they knew full well that the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) were closer to Rasūlullāh (s) and more learned and deserving to be the rulers of the Muslims. One of the ploys the Banu Abbās used was to argue that they were descendants of Abbās, the uncle of Rasūlullāh (s) who was a man while the Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) were related to Rasūlullāh (s) through Sayyida Fātima (‘a) who was a woman and therefore the relationship link through the man was stronger.

This of course was not true because the relationship through a child (even if it be a daughter) is far stronger than the relationship through an uncle or cousin. Furthermore, Rasūlullāh (s) had repeatedly said, ‘everyone traces their lineage through their sons but I trace my lineage through my daughter.’ He had also repeatedly declared who his Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) were and declared Imām Ali (‘a) and his descendants as his successors. The early Muslims used to refer to Imām Hasan (‘a) and Imām Husayn (‘a) as the ‘sons’ of Rasūlullāh (s).

Hārūn ar-Rashid once asked a descendant of Imām Hasan (‘a) to prove he was closer to Rasūlullāh (s) than the Abbāsīd Caliphs. The descendant of Imām Hasan (‘a) asked him, ‘if Rasūlullāh (s) asked for your daughter’s hand in marriage, would you accept the proposal?’ ‘Of course, it would be an honour,’ replied Hārūn. ‘Well,’ said the Sayyid, ‘he wouldn’t ask me for my daughter’s hand in marriage because she would

³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbāsīd_Caliphate

be his *mahram* (as his great-grand daughter)! This answers your question: while I am a descendant of Rasulullāh (s), you are not.' Hārūn was very angry at having been thus defeated and left the gathering in a rage.

On another occasion, Hārūn came to Madina and stood before the grave of Rasulullāh (s) and exclaimed, 'Peace be on you, O Cousin, O Messenger of Allāh!' He did this to show off his relation to Rasulullāh (s) because his ancestor Abbās b. Abd al-Muttalib and Rasulullāh (s) father Abd Allāh b. Abd al-Muttalib were brothers. Just then Imām Musa al-Kādhim ('a) came in and said, 'Peace be on you, O Grandfather, O Messenger of Allāh!' This humiliated the Caliph Hārūn and enraged him to no end.'

Hārūn was responsible for imprisoning Imām Musa al-Kādhim ('a). He had him transferred from one prison to another and from Madina to Basra and then Baghdād until he finally poisoned him through the cruel Sindi b. Shahak in Baghdād.

Hārūn's rule ended after 23 years and he died in Tus (Northeastern Iran). Before he died, he appointed his eldest son Amin as his successor.

Amin (809-813 CE)

Amin ruled for 4 years during which he was too busy leading a life of pleasure to cause much trouble to the descendants of Imām Ali ('a). His younger brother Ma'mun plotted to overthrow Amin. A war broke out between the two brothers and Amin was killed.

Ma'mun (813-833 CE)

During the rule of Ma'mun, there was rivalry between the Arabs and the Persians. Unlike his step-brother Amin, Ma'mun's mother was Persian but his father's side was Arab and he was keen to reconcile the two. He also realized that the policy of his ancestors to persecute the Shi'ah was not helping the cause of the Banu Abbās. He therefore decided to use the Imāms of the Shi'ah to his advantage. His plan was to convince the Shi'ah that he loved Imām Ali ar-Ridā ('a) and therefore win the support of the Shi'ah and the Persians, many of whom loved the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

When Imām Ali ar-Rida ('a) refused to play along with Ma'mun's plan, Ma'mun had the Imām brought from Madina to his capital in Tus by force. There Ma'mun threatened the Imām and forced him to accept the position of being his heir i.e. his successor.

Imām Ali ar-Rida ('a) knew this was only a plot because Imām ar-Ridā ('a) was much older than Ma'mun and an heir is usually younger. So the Imām defeated Ma'mun by saying he would accept the position provided he would not be asked to appoint or dismiss anyone in the government and he would not be consulted or asked to get

involved in any government affair. In other words, it was only a title but with no meaning. Ma'mun accepted it thinking it would still help his cause.

For a while, the Shi'ah enjoyed some safety from persecution because of Imām ar-Ridā ('a)'s position though the Imām himself was isolated from his family and kept in the far off land of Tus. The people around the area of Tus began realizing the difference between Ma'mun and Imām ar-Ridā ('a) and soon the Imām was far more popular and loved than the Caliph himself. Ma'mun was therefore displeased and jealous. He had Imām Ali ar-Ridā ('a) poisoned.

When Imām ar-Ridā ('a) was martyred, Ma'mun pretended to cry for him and to keep the loyalty of the Shi'ah, he married his daughter Umm Fadl to Imām Muhammad al-Jawād ('a), the son of Imām ar-Ridā ('a).

Ma'mun was also hoping that if Imām al-Jawād ('a) had any sons from his daughter then the 10th Imām would be his grandson. But Imām al-Jawād ('a) did not have any children from Ma'mun's daughter. Ma'mun died in 210 A.H

Mu'tasim Billāh (833-842 CE)

Ma'mun was succeeded by Mu'tasim who ruled for 8 years. He imprisoned Imām Muhammad al-Jawād ('a) but then released him and allowed him to return from Baghdād to Madina. A few years later he had him recalled to Baghdād where he got the Imām ('a)'s wife Umm Fadl (the daughter of Ma'mun) to poison him.

Wathiq (842-847 CE)

After the death of Mu'tasim, Wathiq came to power and he ruled for 5 years. He is said to have been kinder to the descendants of Imām Ali ('a). Wathiq died in 232 AH.

Mutawakkil (847-861 CE)

After the death of Wathiq the oath of allegiance was given to his brother Mutawakkil who ruled for 14 years. Mutawakkil was perhaps the cruellest Abbāsīd Caliph and the 'Yazid' of the Abbāsīds. He was also notorious for his sinful lifestyle, immodesty and addiction to wine. He threw parties of pleasure, drink and vain talk.

It was during the rule of Mutawakkil that the Abbāsīd Empire began to deteriorate, as corruption and evil behaviour became widespread. Mutawakkil did not love knowledge but loved the idea of magnificence and of being a king. He built the Great Mosque of Samarra, which was once the biggest mosque in the world. The ruins of its minaret – a vast spiralling cone - still stands today in Samarra.

Mutawakkil also had an extreme hatred for the Shi'ah and the Sādāt. He killed innumerable of them. He banned people from going for the ziyārah of Imām Husayn ('a) in Karbala and even tried to remove all traces of Imām Husayn ('a)'s grave by directing the flow of the river Furāt towards the graves of the martyrs of Karbala but it all failed.

During the rule of Mutawakkil the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) lived under house arrest and with such extreme poverty that the women had only one patched dress that was not badly ripped and they used to share it to offer their salāh. Often Mutawakkil would send his men to the house of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) to take away their possessions and any extra clothes they found.

Mutawakkil once asked a very learned man called Ibn Sikkit – who was the teacher of Mutawakkil's son Mu'taz – 'who do you consider to be better, my two sons Mu'taz and Mu'ayyad or Hasan and Husayn (the grandsons of Rasulullāh (s))?'

Ibn Sikkit bravely replied, 'I consider Qanbar, the servant of Imām Ali to be better than you and your sons.' Enraged, Mutawakkil ordered Ibn Sikkit's tongue to be pulled out from the back of his head and Ibn Sikkit died from this.

Mutawakkil was finally killed by his own son Muntasir while he was drunk in a party in his palace. This was during the time of Imām Hasan al-Askari ('a).

Decline of the Abbāsīd Dynasty

The power of the Abbāsīd Dynasty began to decline after Mutawakkil. The Abbāsīds had hired many Turkish slaves to be soldiers and army commanders and after the reign of Mutawakkil, these Turkish commanders ran the show. The Abbāsīd Caliphs were appointed and deposed or killed by the influence of these Turks and the Caliphs remained as puppets living in fear of their commanders at all times.

As a consequence of this development, the Shi'ah were able to breathe in peace. During these later periods many great Shi'ah scholars were able to contribute to our present day knowledge of Islām.

In all there were 37 kings of Banu Abbās, and their reign lasted until 656 AH (1258 CE), when Hulagu Khān, the Mongol King ransacked Baghdād. Three years later, the Abbāsīds did resurface in Cairo (Egypt) but their rule was mostly in the hands of the Mamluks (their Turkish slaves) and they were figureheads only, claiming religious authority, until they were completely replaced by the Ottoman Empire in 1517 that established its capital in Constantinople (present day Istanbul, Turkey).

Lesson 3

Muslim Dynasties (cont'd)

We concluded in the previous two lessons that after Rasullāh (s), four Caliphs ruled and thereafter the Banu Umayya ruled followed by the Banu Abbās. It is important to have some understanding of what happened *after* the Banu Abbās and how the history of Muslim rule and leadership developed until the present time.

A Summary of Muslim Dynasties after the Banu Abbās

As the Abbāsīd Dynasty grew, it soon became too large an empire to run and the cost of managing it became too great. Furthermore, as we concluded in the previous lesson, the Abbāsīd rulers became mere puppets after the reign of Mutawakkil and the rivalry between the Arabs, the Persians and the Turks increased.

In the meantime, a group claiming descent from Imām Ali (‘a) and Sayyida Fātima (‘a) (who came to be known as the Fatimids), established their own rule in North Africa covering what is today Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. They actually founded the city of Cairo and made it their base. The Fatimids were very tolerant of other groups and appointed people on merit rather than sect. Despite being Ismaili Shi’ahs themselves, many of their officials were Sunni Muslims as well as Christians and Jews. The rest of the Muslim world (outside North Africa) was still under Abbāsīd rule.

Beginning the 8th Century CE, the Christian Roman Empire (that extended from England to the borders of Spain), under orders from the Pope, decided to invade the Muslim lands and take back Jerusalem that they considered to be a holy land. These attacks are known as the Crusades and lasted for several centuries.

Around the late 12th century, another Muslim dynasty rose in North Africa and the Eastern Arabian Peninsula called the Ayyubid Dynasty. Its most famous ruler was Salāh ad-Din al-Ayyubi (known as ‘Saladin’ in the West). He is most famous amongst Muslims for his success in fighting back the Christian Crusaders and taking Jerusalem back into Muslim control in 1187 CE. The significance of the Crusaders in Muslim history is that though they never managed to keep Jerusalem and the Muslim lands they had invaded; they did however weaken the Muslim Empire and prevent it from spreading further into Europe beyond Spain.

Salāh ad-Din also attacked the Fatimids and took Egypt from them, making it Sunni again. Because the Fatimids were Shi’ahs, Salāh ad-Din and the Ayyubids were oppressive to the Shi’ah. According to some historians, it was Salāh ad-Din who removed the words “*hayya ‘ala khayril ‘amal*” from the adhān in Egypt (since the Sunnis do not proclaim it in adhān) and he even reinstated the celebration of Ashura as an ‘Id. Salāh ad-Din also had all Shi’ah libraries burnt and destroyed in Egypt

including the famous library of Alexandria (north of Egypt) that housed almost 200,000 books in different sciences. While he may have been brave, Salāh ad-Din is regarded by the Shi'ah as being a fanatic who sought to eliminate the Shi'ah and force them to become Shāfi'is and Mālikis.

The Ayyubid dynasty lasted until the mid-13th century and covered North Africa from Egypt to the borders of Tunisia; and in the Middle East it ruled over Syria, Hejaz, Yemen and parts of Iraq (Northern Mesopotamia). The other parts of the Muslim world were still ruled by the Abbāsids.

While the Crusaders attacked the Muslim empire from the Western regions (i.e. Europe), in the early 13th century, the Muslim Empire was attacked from the East (i.e. Asia) by the Mongols, under the leadership of Genghis Khān. This marked a violent end of the Abbāsid era. The Mongol Empire spread rapidly through Central Asia and Persia. They took over Isfahān (the capital of Persia), Baghdād (the capital of the Abbāsids) and all other major cities including Damascus and Aleppo (in Syria). The last Abbāsid Caliph al-Musta'sim was captured and killed and Baghdād was ransacked and destroyed.

In time, the Mongols were defeated by the Mamluks – the Turkish slaves of the Abbāsids who became powerful rulers and commanders and took over Egypt and Syria. The Mamluks also fought the Crusaders. Meanwhile, the defeated Mongol rulers embraced Islām as they favoured it over other religions.

In the 15th and 16th centuries three major Muslim empires emerged: the Sunni Uthmānid (or Ottoman) Empire in much of the Middle East and North Africa, the Shi'ah Safavid Empire in Iran and the Mughal Empire in South Asia (today's India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan).

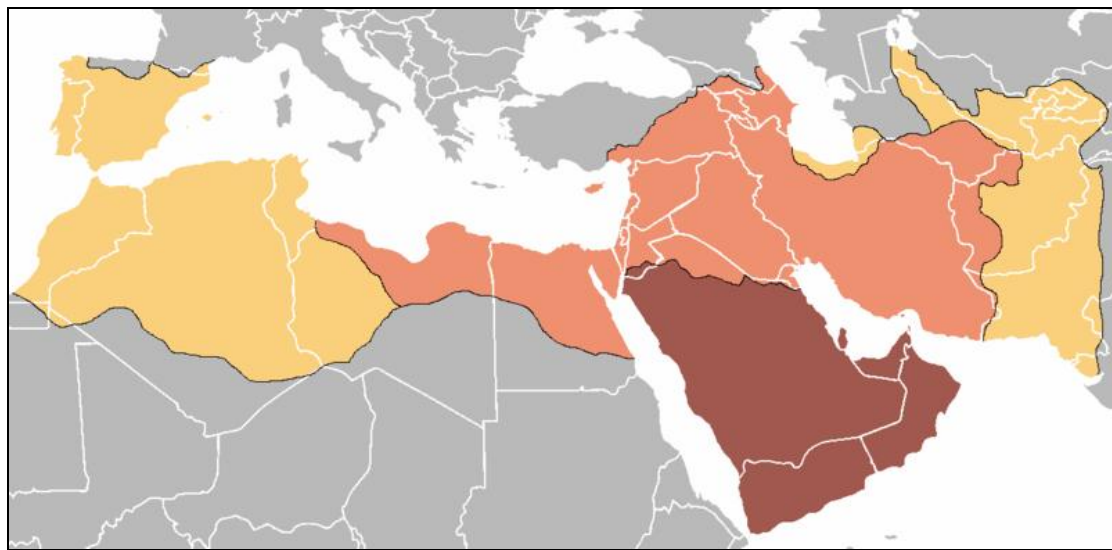
By the end of the 19th century all these three empires had declined significantly. The last to stand was the Ottoman Empire which was official abolished in July 1923 and reduced to what is now the Republic of Turkey. With the end of the Ottoman rule the last Muslim empire (or in the Sunni understanding the 'khilāfah') collapsed. Foreign powers took over the Middle East and broke it up into little countries.

Egypt then became the voice of the Sunni Muslims and Iran and Iraq as Shi'ah-majority countries (where most of the marāj'i were to be found) represented the voice of the Shi'ah. To a large degree the Shi'ah and Sunni lived peacefully in recognition of each other. In 1935, the Wāhhābis who hold extreme views of Islām (based on the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya) invaded Hejaz and renamed it to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and in the 1950s and 1960s when they discovered oil wealth, they soon began propagating their teachings and replaced Egypt as the voice of Sunni Muslims. The Wāhhābi despise the Shi'ah and do not regard them as Muslims. The Shi'ah on the other hand have continued to promote Muslim unity throughout the world. Many Sunni Muslims do believe in Muslim unity as well but do not have a government to represent them and support their voice.

Also after the Second World War, the Jews attacked Palestine and took over the land to establish the State of Israel in the heart of the Muslim world. The strife and war between Israel and its neighbours continues to this today. Israel (or more appropriately 'Occupied Palestine') largely continues to survive and oppress the Palestinians living there today, with financial and military support from the United States.

Map Review

The map below shows the regions that were under Muslim rule during the time of Rasulullāh (s), the first Four Caliphs and the Umayyads.

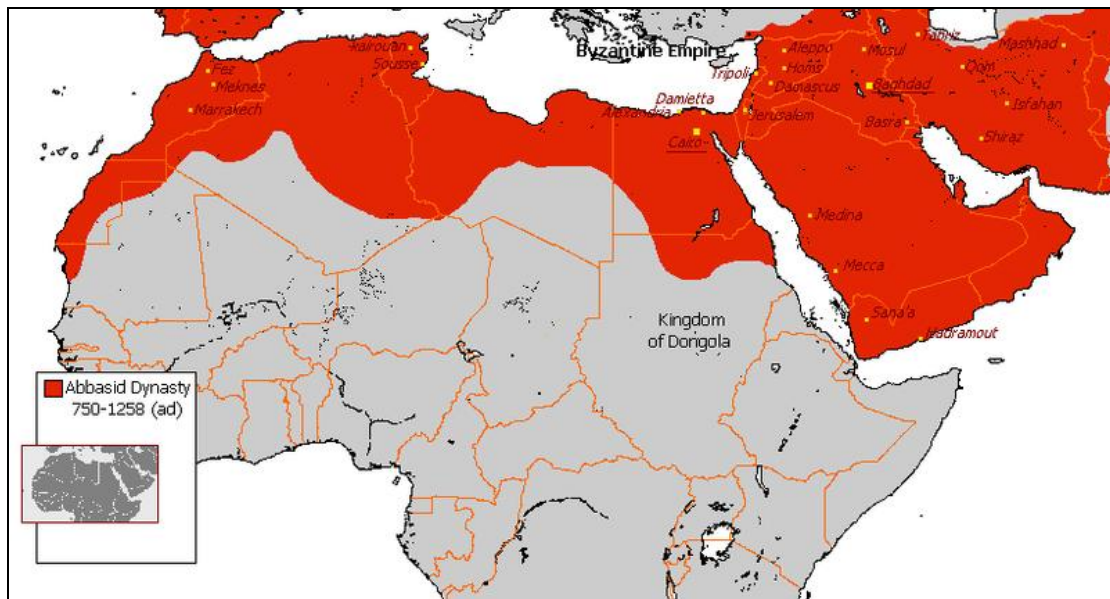


- Muslim Rule under Muhammad, 622-632 CE
- Expansion during the First Four Caliphs, 632-661 CE
- Expansion during the Umayyad Caliphate, 661-750 CE

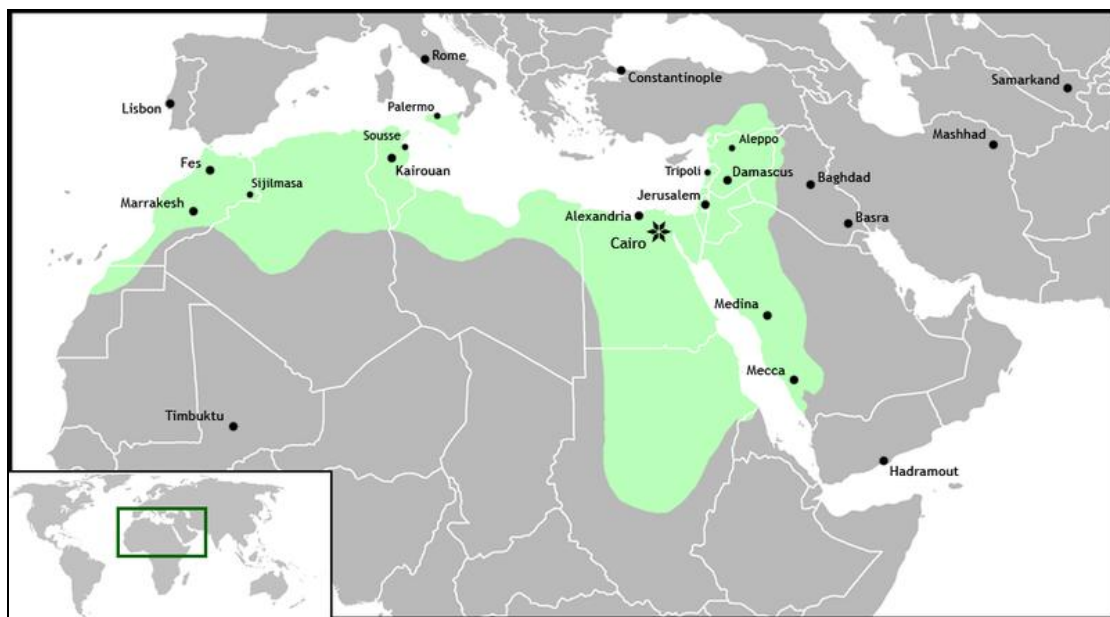
The Umayyads ruled, to the West across North Africa and into Spain. And to the East, until Iran and India.

The map on the next page shows the Abbāsīd Caliphate at its greatest extent:

The Abbāsīds ruled for over three centuries, except for Spain that continued to remain under the Umayyads. The Abbāsīds weakened because of being overcome by their Turkish slaves (later the Mamluks of Egypt) and because of the rise of the Fatimid Dynasty. They were finally destroyed by the invasion of the Mongols.

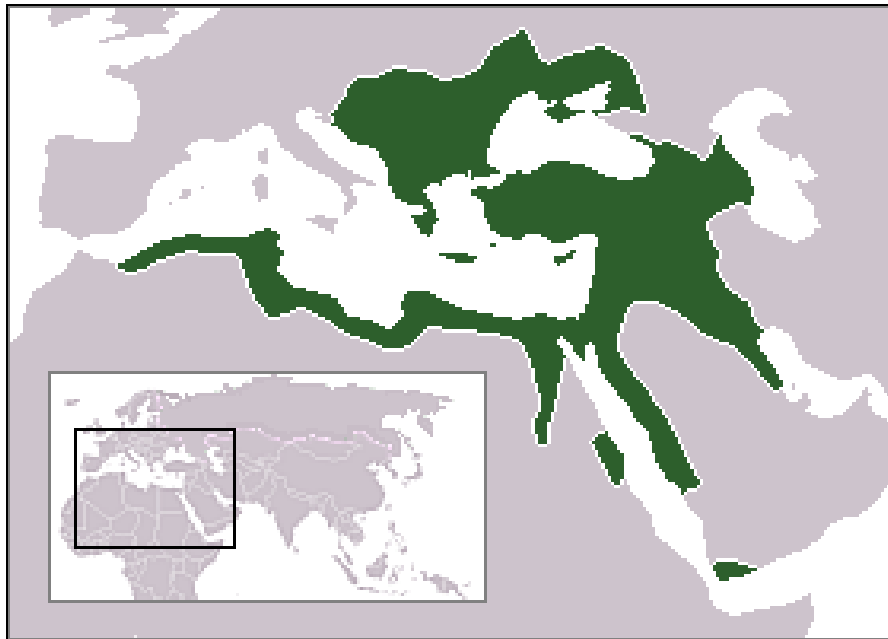


Below is the map of the Fatimid Caliphate showing its cities:



The Fatimids were a Shi'ah dynasty belonging to the Ismaili branch. They were known for being tolerant to other faiths including the non-Shi'ah Muslims and non-Ismaili Shi'ahs. They were defeated by the Ayyubids.

Below is the map of the Ottoman Caliphate:



From the 15th Century onwards, the Muslims were ruled by three empires: the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Mughals. The Ottoman Empire was the largest and the last to fall when it was abolished in 1923 and the Republic of Turkey was formed. At the height of its power in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Ottoman Empire extended into three continents and ruled over southeastern Europe, North Africa and western Asia.

With Constantinople (now called Istanbul, the capital of Turkey) as its capital city, the Ottoman Empire was a centre of interaction between the Eastern and Western worlds for six centuries. One of its most famous rulers was Suleiman the Magnificent (who ruled from 1520 to 1566).

Homework Assignment:

Using an atlas, write down the names of the countries in the first map that shows the Muslim rule from the time of Rasulullāh (s) to the time of the Umayyads.

Lesson 4

Misconceptions about Islām in History

In this lesson and the next we shall study various issues that are surrounded by myths to the detriment of Islām. These myths have been propagated over the centuries either out of ignorance or maliciously with the intent of defaming Islām. The issues we will study inshā Allāh will include:

1. How did Islām Spread? The myth that it was spread by the sword.
2. Jihād in Islām. The myth that Islām promotes violence and terrorism.
3. The Marriages of Rasulullāh (s). The myth that Rasulullāh (s) married many wives like ancient kings and rulers, just for power and pleasure.
4. Slavery & Islām. They myth that Islām was not opposed to slavery.

1. How Did Islām Spread?

“Islām is an evil religion. It promotes violence.” These are some common labels used against Islām by the anti-Islāmic media. Such bias is based on the historical stereotype that the Arabs forced the non-Arabs into the Islāmic faith. In the recent past it was not uncommon to see books with drawings of an Arab riding his horse with sword in the one hand & the Qur’ān in the other.

So let us see how Islām spread in the world: by sword or by conversion?

The Qur’ān’s Perspective

The Qur’ān is very clear that there is no compulsion in becoming a Muslim:

﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ
اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

There is no compulsion in religion; guidance has become clear from error. So whosoever rejects the idol and believes in Allāh, he has laid hold onto the most firm rope which will not break; Allāh is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:256

It makes perfect sense that there can be no force in accepting Islām; Islām wants sincere believers, not hypocrites. By forced conversion, you only increase the numbers of hypocrites, not the number of true believers.

Rasulullāh (s) is also mentioned in the Qur’ān as a “reminder only” - not as a person who forces Islām upon others:

﴿فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُسَيْطِرٍ﴾

Therefore, remind, for you are only a reminder; you are not a watcher over them.

- Surah al-Ghāshiyah, 88:21-22

The Prophet (s)’s Example

The mission of Rasulullāh (s) may be divided into two parts: (a) first thirteen years of preaching Islām in Makkah, and (b) the last eleven years of preaching Islām in Madina.

During the First Phase of Rasulullāh (s)’s mission that lasted 13 years (i.e. the Makkah era), the Muslims were in minority, always oppressed and being hunted by the Quraysh. So the use of force was out of question. Most of the followers of Rasulullāh (s) were the downtrodden and the weak who were being oppressed by the polytheist Quraysh.

During the Second Phase of Rasulullāh (s)’s mission that lasted 11 years (i.e. the Madinan era):

- 1st to 6th year AH: The Muslims were busy defending themselves against the aggression of the Makkah forces and their allies.
- 7th to 11th year AH: Islām was propagated through delegations sent to different rulers in different parts of Arabia and the result of this outreach programme is that almost the entire Arabian Peninsula embraced Islām.

To elaborate on this further:

We have said that in Makkah, the Muslims were too few and weak to have used force to convert anyone. When Rasulullāh (s) and these early Muslims were forced to migrate to Madina, the majority of the Madina Arabs were from the tribes of Aws and Khazraj who invited Rasulullāh (s) to guide them and bring peace between their warring tribes. And in fact the Aws and Khazraj accepted Islām even before Rasulullāh (s) entered Madina, so there was no question of forced conversion.

The other minority residents of Madina were the Jews who were not inclined to accepting Islām. Rasulullāh (s) met with them along with the Muslims and signed a

peace treaty to ensure everyone's rights were secure. The treaty conditions included:

- The Jews who enter into this treaty shall be protected from all insults and harm; they shall have an equal right as the Muslims in being supported.
- The Jews and Muslims shall protect Madina together against any attack from the Makkah enemies.
- The Jews shall practice their religion as freely as the Muslims.
- The allies of the Jews in Madina shall enjoy the same security and freedom.

The Jews were later expelled from Madina because they violated the treaty and plotted with the Makkah and other external Jewish tribes to betray the Muslims in Madina [in the Battle of Ahzāb (Khandaq)]. But they were not forced to become Muslims.

This clearly shows that Rasulullāh (s) did not force people to accept Islām (even though Islām was powerful enough to do that if it wished); rather he promoted peaceful coexistence with followers of other faiths.

The Wars During the Prophet (s)'s Life

Let us briefly look at the major battles in the life of Rasulullāh (s):

2 AH - The Battle of Badr:

Muslims confronted the Makkah forces at Badr - 80 miles from Madina but 200 miles from Makkah. The distance of Badr from Makkah makes it obvious that the Makkans were the aggressors. The Muslims were 313 ill-equipped men and the Makkans were 1000 heavily-armed men.

3 AH - The Battle of Uhud:

Named after a mountain just outside Madina. Makkans came to take revenge for their defeat in Badr. The Muslims were 1000 men the Makkans were 3000.

5 AH - The Battle of Ahzāb (or Khandaq):

The Makkah polytheists, in alliance with the Jews of northern Arabia, surrounded Madina and came to attack the Muslims.

6 AH - The Peace-Treaty of Hudaibiyya:

The polytheists of Makkah agreed to a 10 year peace treaty with the Muslims. They broke this treaty in 3 years by attacking some of the allies of the Muslims. During the 3 year peace, Muslims organized themselves and began sending out delegations (wufud) to different parts of Arabia to invite the tribes and rulers to Islām – all without the use of the sword! The 9th year AH in particular is known as the Year of Delegations ('Aam al-Wufud). In some cases delegations came to Madina to find out

about Islām, such as the Christian delegation from Najrān that led to the incident of Mubāhala and the treaty with the Christians.

7 AH – The Battle of Khaybar:

The Jewish tribes expelled from Madina for their betrayal during the battle of Ahzāb, went to Khaybar where seven Jewish fortresses stood. From there they plotted an attack on Madina. Rasulullāh (s) confronted them before they could attack Madina and Imām Ali (‘a) played an important role in conquering the fortresses. After the Jews were defeated, they were not forced to accept Islām.

9 AH - The Conquest of Makkah:

When the Makkans broke the peace treaty, the Muslims marched to Makkah and the Makkans surrendered the city without any bloodshed. For all the suffering that the Makkans had afflicted on Rasulullāh (s), this was the time to take revenge but none was taken and Rasulullāh (s) forgave everyone. He got rid of all idol worship as this was the central message of Islām – to worship none by Allāh. Because the Makkans were idol worshippers, they embraced Islām. Even then, the idol-worshippers of Makkah were given a four months grace period to stay and study Islām. If they were still not convinced of Islām’s message, then they were to be asked to leave the holy territory of Makkah but not forced to become Muslims:

In all such cases, we see that neither the sword nor force was used to convert people to Islām. After the demise of Rasulullāh (s), the Muslim rulers gradually conquered Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iran and beyond. But there is a very important point to keep in mind:

It is true that Muslims conquered these neighbouring lands and countries but their aim was not to spread Islām. Their aim was to expand the Arab Empire. All historic accounts of the rulers (especially starting with the Banu Umayya and Banu Abbās onwards) suggest that the Caliphs saw themselves as kings and acted as tyrants. This confirms that the aim of the rulers was to dominate rather than convert. Anyone who converted to Islām did so voluntarily.

Why did these rulers prefer people not to convert to Islām? There was a reason: those who did not become Muslims had to sign a treaty that compelled them to pay an annual tax (called *jizya*) as revenue to the Muslim rulers. Therefore the less people converted, the more wealth they acquired!

In the majority of cities, the inhabitants continued to follow their own religions. The Muslim conquerors signed treaties guaranteeing to the conquered people the freedom to practice their religion as long as they paid the required *jizya* tax to the caliph’s treasury. The Caliphs were not in the business of promoting or spreading the Islāmic faith. They were simply interested in conquering land and ruling over people just like the Roman and Persian Empires before them.

So How did Islām Spread?

Islām spread around the world mostly through the efforts of individual scholars and pious ascetics who travelled to different regions of the world to share the message of Islām. To this day, history records of early Muslim settlers or ‘travelling Sufi saints’ who went to regions as far as the Himalaya mountains of India and China and the Caribbean Islands and South America.

Consider the following examples:

India: Muslims ruled India for about 800 years, but there never was a Muslim majority in that country. The numbers themselves show that force was not part of the spread of Islām in that region.

Far East: No Muslim army or navy ever landed in Malaysia or Indonesia. Yet even today, Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world. Islām spread there only through Muslim traders and missionaries. It was the value of Islām to the common people rather than the elite, which caused it to spread in the Far East.

Similar situations in the spread of Islām are recorded for the African continent.

The Ottoman Empire: It was ruled by a Turkish caliph over a complex multi-religious, multi-cultural society. The Ottoman Empire dominated vast region of Christian land in Eastern Europe but it never forced its Christian citizens to convert to Islām; they were given the right to govern their own lives according to their own religious traditions. Greece, a neighbour of Turkey, was colonized by Muslim Turks for about 500 years, but there is not even a sizeable minority of Muslims among the Greeks today and there never was even in the past. In fact, according to some historians, when Greece became independent, many Greeks migrated into the Ottoman Empire because they found them to be better rulers than their own Greek masters.

Syria & Egypt: When Syria was conquered by the Muslims, the Christians had the choice to migrate to other Christian territories. They chose to remain in Syria. This shows there was no compulsion on them to accept Islām. Similarly after the conquests of Egypt, the Muslims allowed the non-Muslims complete liberty in the practice of their religion. In fact, the conversion of countries like Syria, Egypt and Persia to Islām was gradual and spread over more than a century. If Islām had spread through the sword, the conversions to Islām should have followed immediately after the conquests of these regions.

Spain: The Muslims ruled over Spain for some several hundred years. If the sword had been used to spread Islām, all the people of Spain would have been converted to Muslims; this was not the case. Furthermore, the Muslims were eventually expelled from Spain. If everyone in Spain has been forced to accept Islām by the sword, then over the centuries there would have been no Muslims to expel because everyone there would have been a Muslim!

Russia: The Muslims were the dominant power in Russia for over two hundred years. If they had used the sword to convert the people to Islām, there would be no non-Muslim in Russia today. The very fact that the Muslims lost Russia shows that no attempt was made to spread Islām through the sword.

The Mongols: When the Mongols dismantled the Abbāsīd Caliphate and occupied the Muslim lands, they held the swords over the heads of the Muslims. Their original aim had been to destroy Islām but they ended up converting to Islām themselves. Although Christianity tried its best to convert the Mongols, they failed and the Mongols accepted Islām. This was not out of any compulsion, but because they were convinced Islām was a superior faith.

Today Islām faces an enemy in form of the biased media. Yet amazingly, in spite of all these hurdles, Islām is still the fastest growing religion in the world. Muslims also have a strong presence in European nations such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany. This speaks volumes about how this religion has spread and is spreading even now.

If the majority of Muslims had followed the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) and their teachings then today most people in the world would have no problem accepting Islām. If the Shi’ah have been in minority throughout history, it is not because they are a breakaway sect or wrong but because they have always been suppressed by the non-Shi’ah Muslim rulers of all ages and the true message of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) has not been allowed to reveal itself freely. And sadly, this continues to this day.

Lesson 5

Misconceptions about Islām in History (cont'd)

2. Jihād in Islām

Ever since the 9/11 attacks in the USA, Islām has been criticized in the Western media for promoting violence. The attempts have been to convince the public that Islām support terrorism and that 'jihād' is all about killing non-Muslims in the name of Allāh, very similar perhaps to the Crusades when the Pope ordered Christians to attack the Muslim 'infidels' and take over Jerusalem in the name of Jesus.

In order to understand the matter and to be able to defend Islām as our faith, we must first understand what the Qur'ān really says about jihād and Islām's perspective on dealing with non-Muslims. We must also look at the āyāt of Qur'ān that are commonly misquoted by others to 'prove' Islām supports terrorism.

Islām is the Religion of Peace

Islām is primarily a religion of peace. Its name "Islām" comes from "*silm*" which means two things: one is "submitting to God" and the second is "peace". Both meanings are intertwined.

Whenever Muslims meet one another, they use the greeting of peace: "*as-salāmu 'alaykum* — peace be upon you", and the other person responds by saying "*'alaykum as-salām* — upon you be peace."

Peace and Justice in Qur'ān & Hadith

Even when dealing with war enemies, Islām always showed its preference for peace over war.

The Qur'ān commands the Muslims when dealing with their enemies:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَا نُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

O you who believe, be maintainers of justice (and bearer of) witness for (the sake of) Allāh. Let not hatred of a people incite you to act unjustly; be just - this is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allāh surely Allāh is aware of what you do.

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:8

And as far as maintaining a friendship with the non-Muslims is concerned, the Qur'ān commands:

﴿لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ. إِنَّمَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ وَظَاهَرُوا عَلَىٰ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَنْ تَوَلَّوهُمْ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾

*Allāh does **not** forbid you in regard to those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes; **that you deal with them with kindness and justice**. Indeed Allāh loves the just. Allāh forbids you **only in regard to those who made war against you** on account of religion and expelled you from your homes and supported [others] in your expulsion, that you make friends with them, and whoever makes friends with them - it is they who are the wrongdoers*
- Surah al-Mumtahana, 60:8-9

The very first battle in Islām took place 2 years after Rasulullāh (s) migrated to Madina (i.e. 2 AH) when the Muslims were allowed to take up arms to defend themselves. Even though they were outnumbered and ill-equipped, the Muslims defeated the Makkans and took seventy prisoners of war. The norm among all societies at that time was to either kill the Prisoners-of-War (POWs) or make them slaves. But Rasulullāh (s) instructed the Muslims to treat the POWs humanely; they were brought back safely to Madina and given decent lodging in the houses of the people who had taken them prisoners. The Qur'ān decreed that the POWs must not be ill-treated in any way.

According to a Western biographer of Rasulullāh (s), Sir William Muir, "In pursuance of Mahomet's commands, the citizens of Madina received the prisoners and treated them with much consideration. 'Blessings be on the men of Madina', said one of the prisoners in later days, 'they made us ride, while they themselves walked, they gave us wheaten bread to eat when there was little of it; contenting themselves with dates.'"

The method in which Rasulullāh (s) dealt with the prisoners was revolutionary. The prisoners that were poor were released free; those who came from affluent families of Makkah were returned for a specified ransom. But the most interesting case was of those prisoners who were literate – Rasulullāh (s) made a deal with them that they could go free if they could teach ten Muslim children how to read and write.

Even during battle, the Muslims were given strict rules to abide by:

- Do not kill anyone who is not fighting you in battle, especially those that are elderly and women and children.
- Do not cut down a tree unnecessarily, especially a fruit-bearing tree.

- Do not destroy any crops or burn down any palm-trees.
- Do not poison any water.
- Do not mutilate the bodies of your enemy.
- If the person facing you in battle drops his weapon and turns to flee, do not run after him to kill him.
- Do not harm or kill anyone who surrenders while fighting.

All this was a part of Islām 1400 years ago; long, long before the Geneva Convention.

Islām therefore holds human life as sacred, regardless of whether it is the life of a Muslim or non-Muslim. Muslims may dislike the values, culture or behaviour of the non-Muslims but they are not to hate another human being just because he or she is not a Muslim.

To kill an innocent person is a great crime in Islām, regardless of whether the individual is a Muslim or not. After narrating the story of the two sons of Nabi Adam ('a) and how Qābil killed his brother Hābil, the Qur'ān says:

﴿... مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا...﴾

Whosoever kills a person without any reason, it is as though he has killed all the people. And whosoever saves a single life, it is as though he has saved all the people.

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:32

Islām does not also allow a Muslim to justify killing an innocent person in any way. For example, some Muslim extremists will kidnap and kill innocent civilians and say, 'this is in revenge for what the non-Muslim armies or governments did to our fellow Muslims in such-and-such a land.' But this is not Islām. You cannot kill an innocent non-Muslim just because some other non-Muslims killed an innocent Muslim.

Similarly, suicide bombings against civilians are absolutely forbidden and those who commit it are not martyrs – they will burn in Hellfire for killing the innocent.

The matter of taking someone's life is very serious in Islām. It is only legislated for certain crimes and that too when it is proven beyond doubt in a legal court of law and the criminal is unrepentant. Besides that, going to war is only permissible if it is in defence of Islām or Muslim lands and property and it must be ordered by a legal and lawful Imām or his representative. No one can take the law in their hands.

So What About Jihād?

Many ignorant and malicious enemies of Islām claiming to be 'experts' in Islām try and 'prove' that Rasullāh (s) was, God forbid, 'a terrorist' and that Islām teaches

violence and hatred through the Qur’ān. So let us look at the meaning of jihād in Islām and these verses of Qur’ān that they love to misquote.

The Concept of Jihād

The word *jihād* does not mean “holy war”. This is a Western term of a broader concept in Islāmic teaching and it has been coined by the Western media to resemble the Roman Catholic ‘holy war’ or Crusades against the Muslims in the 11th-13th centuries.

In Arabic the word jihād literally means ‘striving’, ‘struggling’ or ‘working hard’. A ‘mujtahid’ for example, is one who ‘struggles’ to find the correct laws in Islām and so he practises ‘*ijtihad*’ (a word that shares the same Arabic root verb as jihād). From hadith therefore, we are told that jihād is a religious duty for Muslims and it is of two kinds: minor jihād (*jihād al-asghar*) and major jihād (*jihād al-akbar*).

Minor jihād is a just and legitimate armed struggle that is fought in defence. It does not mean violence, taking the laws in one’s hands or a war of aggression that is fought only to occupy the lands of others or take over their resources.

Major jihād is the spiritual struggle that a Muslim undertakes to purify his or her self and it is a battle of the soul and body. It includes fighting the temptation for sin as well as fighting the love for the world and its pleasures (i.e. materialism). Islām expects Muslims to prefer their souls over their bodies and to prefer the life of the Hereafter over this temporary world.

The two terms - major and minor jihād - came about because of an incident when a group of soldiers returned to Madina after an expedition and Rasulullāh (s) said to them, ‘welcome back to a group that has returned from the minor jihād and now what awaits them is the major jihād.’ The soldiers were surprised and thinking a great battle awaited them asked, ‘and what is the major jihād, O Messenger of Allāh?’ and he replied, ‘jihād against your own selves.’

Jihād in the Qur’ān

The first battle fought by Rasulullāh (s) – the Battle of Badr - was a war of defence. On this occasion, the Qur’ān permitted the Muslims to engage in armed struggle but clearly explained the reason:

﴿أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلَمُوا... الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ...﴾

Permission is granted to those who are fighting because they have been oppressed...those who have been expelled from their homes without any just cause...

- Surah al-Hajj, 22:39-40

Again, referring to the polytheists of Makkah who waged war after war against Rasullāh (s) and the Muslims in Madina, the Qur’ān states:

﴿وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ﴾

Fight in the way of God those who are fighting against you; and do not exceed (the limits). Verily Allāh does not love those who exceed (the limits)."

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:190

It is clear from these verses that the permission to fight is about responding to a war by defending oneself. There is no talk of initiating aggression at all. Even in the defensive mode of struggle, Allāh warns the Muslims that they should not “exceed” beyond the proper limits.

Islām teaches that Muslims should be strong in order to defend themselves, but that does not mean they have to become aggressive and unjust. This general guideline is given in the following verse:

﴿وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ
وَأَخْرَيْنَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ...﴾

Prepare against them (i.e., the enemy) with whatever force and trained horses you can in order to frighten thereby Allāh’s enemy, your enemy, and others besides them who you do not know but Allāh knows them....

- Surah al-Anfāl, 8:60

After giving this general guideline of being strong and prepared to defend themselves, immediately the Qur’ān reminds the Muslims in the next verse:

﴿وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلْمِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ...﴾

But if they (the enemies) incline to peace, then you (also) incline to it, and put your trust in Allāh...

- Surah al-Anfāl, 8:61

Reading the Qur’ān Out of Context

To read something ‘out of context’ means to purposely read only part of it because it suits a person’s goal to misguide others.

For example, we can take isolated parts of the Bible and show that the Bible preaches ‘violence and hate’. Here are examples:

“Take all the leader of these people, kill them.” (Numbers 25:7)

“Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.” (Numbers 31:17-18)

“Kill every male and every woman who is not a virgin.” (Judges 21:11)

You can see from the above examples how easy it is to misquote the Bible and ‘prove’ that it preaches terrorism. Yet no decent person will accept such out-of-context presentation of the Biblical verses. Surprisingly, we even see some Christian priests and missionaries do exactly the same with the Qur’ān and without any hesitation.

Here are some examples of Qur’ān verses often misquoted and read out of context. Your teacher may give only one example and ask you to read the rest as homework:

First Example:

﴿وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ...﴾

Kill them wherever you find them....

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:191

To understand the full context of this verse, let us read verses 190 to 193 together:

﴿وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ. وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ وَأَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَخْرَجُوكُمْ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا تَقَاتِلُوهُمْ عِنْدَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ حَتَّى يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِيهِ فَإِنْ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوهُمْ كَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ. فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ. وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

*“And fight in the way of God **those who are fighting against you, and do not exceed the limits**, surely God does not love those who exceed the limits. And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them **out from whence they drove you out** – persecution is severer than slaughter. And **do not fight them** at the Sacred Mosque [in Makkah] **until they fight with you** in it; but **if they do fight you, then fight them**; such is the recompense of the unbelievers. **But if they hold back, then surely Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful**. And fight them until there is no persecution and religion should be only for Allāh; **but if they hold back, then there should be no hostility except against the oppressors.**”*

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:190-193

When we now read the same words in context, it becomes clear that verse 191 is only allowing the Muslims of Madina to defend themselves against the aggression of

the polytheists of Makkah who expelled them from their homes. It surely does not say that Muslims should go around the world killing any non-Muslim that they find!

Second Example:

﴿فَلْيُقَاتِلْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يَشْرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ وَمَنْ يُقَاتِلْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
فَيُقْتَلْ أَوْ يَغْلِبْ فَسَوْفَ نُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا﴾

So let those fight in the way of Allāh who are willing to sell this world's life for the Hereafter; and whoever fights in the way of Allāh, then be he slain or be he victorious, We shall grant him a mighty reward.

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:74

Those who quote this verse, conveniently leave out the next verse (āyah. 75) that explains the purpose and justification for the minor jihād:

﴿وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانَ
الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَهْلُهَا وَاجْعَل لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا
وَاجْعَل لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ نَصِيرًا﴾

*And what is the matter with you that you do not fight in the way of God **for [the sake of] the oppressed men, women, and children** who pray, 'Our Lord, take us out of this town whose people are oppressors, and appoint for us from Thee a guardian and give us from Thee a helper.'*

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:75

These two verses are clearly urging the Muslim to stand up for *the oppressed men, women and children* and should be read together. Should not divine religions defend the oppressed men, women and children?

Third Example:

﴿...فَقَاتِلُوا أئِمَّةَ الْكُفْرِ...﴾

Fight the leaders of unbelief.

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:12

The words above are just part of the whole passage where Allāh talks about the Muslims in Madina and their peace treaty with the polytheists of Makkah. Now look at the whole context:

﴿وَإِنْ نَكَثُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ عَهْدِهِمْ وَطَعَنُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ فَقَاتِلُوا أُمَّةَ الْكُفْرِ إِنَّهُمْ لَا
 أَيْمَانَ لَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَنْتَهُونَ. أَلَا تُقَاتِلُونَ قَوْمًا نَكَثُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ وَهَمُّوا بِإِخْرَاجِ الرَّسُولِ
 وَهُمْ بَدَءُوكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ أَتَخْشَوْنَ اللَّهَ فَاللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَخْشَوْهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ. قَاتِلُوهُمْ
 يُعَذِّبُهُمُ اللَّهُ بِأَيْدِيكُمْ وَيُخْزِهِمْ وَيَنْصُرْكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَيَشْفِ صُدُورَ قَوْمٍ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

*And if they break their oaths after their agreement and revile your religion, then fight the leaders of unbelief – surely their oaths are of no value – so that they may desist. What is the matter with you that you do not fight a people who broke their oaths **and aimed at the expulsion of the Prophet [from Makkah], and they attacked you first?** Do you fear them? But Allāh is most deserving that you should fear Him, if you are believers. “Fight them; Allāh will punish them by your hands and bring them to disgrace, and assist you against them, heal the hearts of a believing people, remove the rage of their hearts, and Allāh turns (mercifully) to whom He pleases, and Allāh is Knowing, Wise.*

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:12-14

The context clearly gives the right of defence to the Muslim but, in no way, does it promote aggression.

Fourth Example:

﴿... وَقَاتِلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ كَافَّةً ...﴾

Fight the polytheists all together.

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:36

In reality, this sentence is part of an entire verse in which God talks about the sacredness of four of the twelve months in which fighting is forbidden. Then it says:

﴿... وَقَاتِلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ كَافَّةً كَمَا يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ كَافَّةً وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

*And fight the polytheists all together **as they fight you all together**; and know that God is with those who guard (evil).*

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:36

Of course those who love to misquote the Qur’ān, conveniently miss out the part “as they fight you all together”. As you see, this verse is also responding to the aggression started by the polytheists against the Muslims; it does not talk about initiating a war.

Conclusion

From these examples, it is quite clear that Islām is not talking about the minor jihād for the sake of aggression; rather it is allowing the Muslims to physically defend their lives, properties, and lands against any aggression, and also to fight for ending tyranny against the oppressed men, women and children.

Some Christians argue that ‘Jesus taught that when someone slaps you, turn the other cheek’ and therefore we should not fight those who fight us. But this is not realistic at all. Islām deals with a realistic human society and not with an idealistic society. In the words of Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Muslims view the Christian ethics as being too sublime for ordinary human beings to follow; it seems that the injunction to turn the other cheek was being meant only for saints. Christian people over the centuries have not shown any more restraint in war than have non-Christians. The ideal preached and the practice followed has often little to do with each other.”⁴⁰

Misuse of “Jihād”

It is also important to note that just because the term “jihād” is misused by the media and some politicians, Muslims should not be ashamed to say that fighting in the way of Allāh can be necessary and valid at times. We neither need to abandon this noble concept of our faith nor be ashamed or apologetic about it.

While talking to non-Muslims about jihād, many Muslims will only describe the major (spiritual) jihād and shy away from mentioning the minor jihād in the sense of armed struggle for defence. As Muslims, we must stand by the teachings of Islām. Some misguided people may have hijacked the term but we must not reject even the minor Jihād in principle. Instead we should distinguish it by explaining when it is applicable (i.e. defence) as opposed to aggression and acts of terrorism.

The hijack of the term ‘jihād’ has not just been done by al-Qaida and the Talibān. Even governments like the United States have misused it for their own political interests. For example, during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, the U.S. Agency for International Development spent millions of dollars to supply Afghan school children with textbooks filled with violent images and “militant Islāmic” teachings. Published in the dominant Afghan languages of Dari and Pashtu, these textbooks were developed in the early 1980s under an ‘Aid grant’ to the University of Nebraska-Omaha and its Centre for Afghanistan Studies. The agency spent \$51 million dollars on the university’s education programs in Afghanistan from 1984 to 1994.

The books, which were filled with talk of jihād and featured drawings of guns, bullets, soldiers and mines, have served since then as the Afghan school system’s

⁴⁰ Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Peace & Jihād in Islām*, p. 9.

core curriculum. Unlike the children in the rest of the world whose math textbooks have pictures of apples and oranges, the Afghan children were taught to count with illustrations showing tanks, missiles and land mines.⁴¹

And so when it suited its strategic interests, the United States of America promoted the culture of jihād among the Afghan children in the 1980s (so that they would fight the Soviets) and President Reagan even welcomed the Afghan “mujāhideen” in the White House. Now that that culture of violence has come to haunt it, the US administration is absolutely against the idea of jihād and expects Muslims to abandon that concept in totality.

Muslims cannot be expected to change their views on the noble concept of jihād just because of some misguided Muslims or some world powers misuse the term. Muslims should strongly condemn the misuse of jihād and confidently affirm the concept of jihād as explained in the Qur’ān and the noble examples of Prophet Muhammad (s).

Media & Stereotyping the Muslims

Time and again we hear in the news of a Muslim who committed an act of terrorism. How should we respond to this? Our response is that the individual or group who committed it should be condemned without highlighting his or their religion. Targeting the Muslims or the Arabs based on guilt-by-association is absolutely wrong.

There is also a double standard in the media: When a bomb exploded in early days of September 2001 in Northern Ireland near a Catholic school in a Protestant neighbourhood, no one in the media blamed the entire Protestant community as “terrorists and murderers” even though it was in the same month as the 9/11 attacks. When the IRA committed acts of terror in Northern Ireland or United Kingdom, no one in the Western media labelled the Catholic faith “as the religion of terrorism”. When Dr. Goldstein, a Jewish settler in Israel, entered the mosque in Hebron a few years ago and gunned down Palestinian worshippers, no one said that all Jewish people are “terrorists”. When Serbians brutally massacred Muslims in Bosnia, the media never blamed the Serbian Orthodox Church for it even though some priests of that church used to bless the Serbian militia before they embarked on executing the Muslim prisoners. Yet we see that when a few Arabs or Muslims commit acts of terror, all the Muslims and all the Arabs are automatically branded as “terrorists and murderers.” This is of course unfair.

⁴¹ Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Peace & Jihād in Islām*, p. 10-11.

Lesson 6

Misconceptions about Islām in History (cont'd)

3. The Marriages of Rasulullāh (s)

One of the most common myths against Islām is regarding Rasulullāh (s)'s many wives.

Polygamy in History

Rasulullāh (s) did not invent the system of polygamy. It existed long before the Qur'ān was revealed. The Bible says that Lamech, the grandson of Adam, "took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah."⁴² So polygamy has existed from the earliest days of human history.

Many holy personalities of the Bible had many wives at the same time. Abraham (Nabi Ibrāhim ('a)) had Sarah and Hajar. Abraham was first blessed with a son through Hajar whom he named Ishmael (Nabi Ismā'il ('a)), and then he was blessed with another son through Sarah whom he named Isaac (Nabi Ishāq ('a)).

Jacob (Nabi Ya'qub ('a)) had four wives: Leah and Rachel (both were Jacob's cousins), and he also had Bilhah and Zilpah (both were servant-girls given to Jacob by his wives). It is from these four ladies that Jacob had twelve sons who became ancestors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

David (Nabi Dāwud ('a)) had at least eight wives whose names are known, he had many others whose names have not been recorded. The Second Book of Samuel (in the Bible) talks about "the wives" of David in Hebron and also in Jerusalem.⁴³ [\[4\]](#)

When Rasulullāh (s) began preaching Islām, polygamy was a way of life. It wasn't about pleasure but a part of the social structure. People depended on having many children to help them on their farms and other responsibilities; having more than one wife, each with several children, was common.

Islām did however observe that often men who were wealthy would marry very many wives and then treat them unjustly or compete to have many wives simply as a show of power. It therefore modified and reformed the system, limiting the number of wives a man could have to only four.

⁴² The Book of Genesis, 4:19

⁴³ 2 Samuel 3:2-5, 13-16; 5:13-16.

Thereafter Islām also put strict conditions on a man who wanted to marry more than one wife: he must be able to provide and maintain the family, and also deal with all his wives with justice and fairness. He cannot neglect any of them or show preference for one over the other. The Qur’ān therefore cautions men:

﴿...فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً...﴾

...but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one...

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:3

The only exceptions to this rule were the prophets and messengers of Allāh. They were permitted to marry even more than four wives and in the case of Rasulullāh (s) we shall explain why he did this, for each one of his wives.

There are several psychological and social reasons that Islāmic scholars have discussed to explain why Islām has permitted polygamy and why it is a more natural solution to problems in society and less damaging to families than having nightclubs, massage parlours, prostitution, and married men having affairs, and so on. These scholars have also discussed why Islām has not permitted polygamy for women but of course this is all a lengthy discussion and a digression from our subject i.e. the marriages of Rasulullāh (s). Anyone interested in the concept of polygamy in Islām can find lots of resources on the internet.

The Prophet’s Marriages

The accusation by the enemies of Islām that Rasulullāh (s) had many wives only for pleasure and power is not new. In fact, if we read the Bible carefully we will see that no prophet was ever spared from some accusation or the other. According to the Bible, Nabi Lut (‘a)’s daughters got him drunk and then committed incest with him (*wal iyādhu billāh – we seek refuge with Allāh from such blasphemy*). The Bible also talks of Nabi Isa (‘a) converting water into wine for people to drink at a party (*wal iyādhu billāh*). These are all lies that were brought into scriptures in order to damage the reputation of the Prophets of Allāh, peace be on them. And therefore the accusations against Rasulullāh (s) as being a ‘terrorist’ or ‘womanizer’ (*wal iyādhu billāh*) should not surprise us.

If any sincere person takes the time to study the life of Rasulullāh (s) carefully, they will see that he was a man of the highest character even long before he started preaching Islām.

At the age of twenty-five, Rasulullāh (s) married a famous and a highly respected lady of Makkah, by the name of Khadija bint Khuwaylid, who was either the same age as Rasulullāh (s) or just two years older than him. Some writers have falsely

suggested that she was 15 years older than Rasulullāh (s) i.e. 40 years old while he was 25, but this has been proven wrong by Muslim researchers.⁴⁴

What is important for our discussion is that Rasulullāh (s) remained married to one wife only - Sayyida Khadija ('a) - for twenty-five years until she passed away in Makkah. Two years after her demise, Rasulullāh (s) migrated from Makkah to Madina.

So until the age of 52, Rasulullāh (s) had only one wife, Sayyida Khadija, whom he loved dearly and who was one of the strongest pillars of support in promoting his cause. It was only during the last 11 years of his life that he married other wives. To summarize:

- From birth to age 25: single.
- From age 25 to age 52: married to one wife, Sayyida Khadija ('a).
- From age 52 to age 63: married ten wives.

The Other Wives

During the last eleven years of his life, Rasulullāh (s) married ten wives. This has become an easy target for anti-Muslim writers and speakers who would like to tarnish the image of Rasulullāh (s) and portray him as someone who was driven by desires.

If Rasulullāh (s) was a man of uncontrollable desires, then why did he not marry any other woman when he was young and wealthy and lived in a society that accepted unlimited polygamous relationships (i.e. before he began preaching Islām)? Why did he not marry any other woman as long as Sayyida Khadija ('a) was alive even though it was the prime time of his youth and it was acceptable in society?

We must therefore realize that there must have been good reasons behind the other marriages of Rasulullāh (s) during the last eleven years of his life. And indeed, there were very good reasons as we shall explain below.

We can categorize Rasulullāh (s)'s marriages in Madina into different reasons, keeping in mind that some marriages could fall under more than one reason.

First Reason: To Provide Protection & Dignity to Widows so that Others May Follow That Example.

It is important to remember that 1400 years ago, women never went out of their homes to earn a living. They were completely dependent on a male family member to look after them. That is why as soon as a woman was divorced or widowed, she

⁴⁴ For references that prove this, see: Sayyid Rizvi, *Polygamy and Marriages of the Prophet*, p. 5.

would marry another man so that she had someone to provide her shelter and the necessities of life.

Another point to remember is that 1400 years ago people were not protected by a government but rather by their tribes. And if someone married a woman from another tribe, the “in-law tribe” would treat him like family and also offer him protection or at least not fight him without good reason.

Examples of such widows whom Rasulullāh (s) married were:

1. Sawdah bint Zam’ah: A Muslim lady whose husband had died in Abyssinia. When she returned to Makkah, she was a widow and her father and brother were polytheists and also enemies of Islām. She could not seek shelter with them. They were so opposed to Islām that they were willing to even torture her to death for accepting Islām. Rasulullāh (s), now a widower himself, married Sawdah in order to provide protection to her as well as to forge an important link of kinship with his opponents.
2. Zaynab bint Khuzaymah: a widow for the second time when her second husband ‘Abd Allāh b. Jahsh was martyred in the Battle of Uhud. She was known for her generosity, and was famous as “Umm al-Masākīn” (Mother of the Poor). Now she herself faced hard times. Rasulullāh (s) wanted to maintain her prestige, and so he married her in the 3rd year AH. She died less than a year after this marriage.
3. Umm Salamah. She was first married to ‘Abd Allāh Abu Salamah. She migrated to Abyssinia with her husband. She was known for her piety and wisdom. When she became a widow and had orphan children, Rasulullāh (s) married her in the 4th year AH. She was also the sister of the chief of Makhzum - a powerful Makkan tribe. This marriage had the element of forging the link of kinship with his opponents in Makkah.

Second Reason: To Set the Slaves Free

4. Juwayriyyah bint al-Hārith. After the Battle of Banu Mustaliq in the 5th year AH, the Muslims took two hundred families of that tribe as captives. By law, since they were not Muslims and had fought the Muslims in aggression, they would become slaves to the Muslims. Juwayriyyah, the daughter of the chief of that tribe, had become a widow. Rasulullāh (s) set her free and married her. Why? Because the Muslims, who had made the two hundred families of Banu Mustaliq their slaves, realized that by Juwayriyyah’s marriage to Rasulullāh (s), all these two hundred families were now related to Rasulullāh (s) by marriage. Out of courtesy to Rasulullāh (s), the Muslims set them all free so that the ‘in-laws’ of Rasulullāh (s) would not be slaves. Impressed by this nobility, the whole tribe of Banu Mustaliq became Muslim. By this marriage, Rasulullāh (s) was able to transform a hostile tribe into an ally.

Third Reason: To Forge Friendly Relations for the Sake of Islām

5. ‘Āisha bint Abi Bakr. She was the daughter of Abu Bakr, who later became the first caliph of the Muslims. Although the engagement was done in Makkah, she came into the household of Rasulullāh (s) after his migration to Madina. She was the youngest wife of Rasulullāh (s). The media likes to say that the Prophet (s) married a young child of 9 years old. That is not true. ‘Āisha was between the age of 16 and 19, an age when one is considered to be an adult in many cultures even today.⁴⁵ The engagement of Rasulullāh (s) to ‘Āisha in Makkah sealed the alliance with her father Abu Bakr so that he would be on the side of Muslims during the confrontation against the idol-worshippers of Makkah.
6. Hafsa bint ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb. She was the daughter of ‘Umar who later became the second caliph of the Muslims. She became a widow after her husband was killed in the Battle of Badr. Rasulullāh (s) married her in the 4th year AH on the request of her father. This marriage was also to seal Rasulullāh (s)’s alliance with ‘Umar.
7. Umm Habiba, daughter of Abu Sufyān. She was married to ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Jahsh and had migrated to Abyssinia. He became a Christian; while she continued the Islāmic faith and separated from him. Her father Abu Sufyān was the leader of the polytheist Quraysh tribe that ruled Makkah and he was a bitter enemy of Islām and constantly fought against Muslims. When she returned to Madina, Rasulullāh (s) married her in order to provide protection for her and also to soften the heart of Abu Sufyān. However, this marriage did not have the desired effect on Abu Sufyān.
8. Safiyya bint Huyaiy b. Akhtab. She was the daughter of the chief of Banu Nadhir, a Jewish tribe of Khaybar. She became a widow when her husband was killed in the Battle of Khaybar. She was taken as a captive by the Muslim forces. Rasulullāh (s) married her in the 7th year AH to maintain her noble status and also to establish marriage ties with her Jewish tribe.

Fourth Reason: The Desire to be Related to Rasulullāh (s)

9. Maymuna bint al-Hārith al-Hilāliyyah. Her second husband died in 7 AH. She came to Rasulullāh (s) and offered herself to him in marriage if he would accept her. She only desired the honour of being called “the wife of Rasulullāh (s)”. Rasulullāh (s) (based on verse 33:50 of the Qur’ān) accepted her as his wife.

Fifth Reason: To Break a Taboo & Set an Example

⁴⁵ For proofs on the age of ‘Aisha, see Sayyid Rizvi, *Polygamy and Marriages of the Prophet*, p. 8.

10. Zaynab bint Jahsh. She was a cousin of Rasulullāh (s); and she was a widow and a divorcee. The circumstance of her marriage to Rasulullāh (s) was very unusual. To show that Islām treated all humans equally and a white Arab had no greater distinction before Allāh than a black slave, except on the basis of piety, Rasulullāh (s) had originally arranged for Zaynab bint Jahsh to marry Zayd b. Hāritha, who was a freed slave and raised by Rasulullāh (s) as his adopted son.

The marriage of Zaynab to Zayd did not last however and in time, they broke up and had a divorce.

At the same time, because Zayd was raised by Rasulullāh (s) as an adopted child, people used to call him 'Zayd b. Muhammad'. Allāh revealed verses 4 and 5 of Surah 33 (Surah al-Ahzāb) to say that an adopted child is not like a biological child and should not be called by the name of the adopted father but by his own biological father's name. This was to ensure that matters related to marriage and inheritance do not become mixed up.

Thereafter, to ensure that the prevailing system of adoption was removed and to emphasize that Islām does not recognize an adopted child to be exactly the same as a biological child, Allāh commanded Rasulullāh (s) to marry Zaynab bint Jahsh.

Zayd was now called Zayd b. Hāritha i.e. by the name of his biological father and the marriage of Rasulullāh (s) to Zaynab bint Jahsh left a clear example for Muslims that Islām does not recognize adoptions in the sense that other cultures do because otherwise it would have been forbidden for Rasulullāh (s) to marry his "daughter-in-law".

Of course Islām highly encourages looking after orphans but without assuming them to be related like a blood relationship that affects marriage, inheritance, mahram and non-mahram, etc.

Conclusion

When Rasulullāh (s) was young and wealthy, he had only one wife. But in the last eleven years of his life when he was over fifty, he married different wives. With the exception of one ('Ā'isha), they were all widows and old.

It is also an established fact that even when Rasulullāh (s) had these other wives, his love for his first wife, Sayyida Khadija ('a), never diminished. Al-Bukhāri, quotes the youngest of his wives, 'Ā'isha as saying the following:

“I did not feel jealous of any of the wives of Rasulullāh (s) as much as I did of Khadīja...⁴⁶ because Rasulullāh (s) used to (remember and) mention her very often. And whenever he slaughtered a sheep, he would send (the choicest parts) to Khadīja’s family. When I sometimes said to him, ‘It appears that Khadīja was the only woman in the world,’ Rasulullāh (s) would say, ‘Khadīja was such-and-such, and from her I had children.’”⁴⁷

In another narration, according to al-Bukhāri, ‘Ā’isha reports: “Once Hālah, the sister of Khadīja, asked permission to enter the house.” Upon hearing Hālah’s voice, which sounded very similar to that of Khadīja, Rasulullāh (s) remembered her beloved wife.” ‘Ā’isha says, “I became jealous and said, ‘What makes you remember an old woman amongst the old women of Quraysh, an old toothless woman who died long ago, while God has given you somebody better than her?’”

Rasulullāh (s) became visibly upset, and he said, “By Allāh, I do not have anyone better than Khadīja. She believed in me when others were covered with disbelief. She testified to my truth when other rejected my claim. She helped me with her wealth when others deprived me. And Allāh gave me children by her.”⁴⁸

These sentiments of Rasulullāh (s), expressed to the youngest of his wives, clearly show that for him, Sayyida Khadīja was still the First Lady of Islām. All the other marriages had some social, political or religious reasons behind them. These marriages were not based on lust and passion, as many enemies of Islām would like the world to believe.

⁴⁶ Who passed away well before ‘Ā’isha came to the house of Rasulullāh (s).

⁴⁷ Bukhāri, *Sahih*, v. 5 p. 104.

⁴⁸ Ibid; Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad*, v. 6 p. 117-118, 150; *Sahih* Tirmidhi; Ibn Kathir.

Lesson 7

Misconceptions about Islām in History (cont'd)

4. Slavery & Islām

Slavery is one of the oldest evils of society and has existed since the time of ancient civilizations. As we shall see in this lesson, not only is it untrue that Islām encouraged slavery but in fact, Islām is the only faith that was able to attack the very foundations of this evil. Yet it is ironic that the same people who nourished slavery, supported it, and derived benefit from it, later became champions of its abolition and accused Muslims and Arabs of engaging in slave trade.

Slavery in Ancient Times

Some of the earliest civilizations that practised slavery were the Greeks, the Persians, the Romans and the Jews, and later even the Christians.

During the time of the Romans, a slave was the personal property of his master who could do as he pleased with the slave and had full power over the slave's life and even death.

In Persia the palace of the Emperor had twelve thousand female slaves. When the Byzantine Emperor sat on the throne, thousands of slaves remained in attendance with full attention and hundreds of them bowed when he bent to put on his shoes. In Greece, the number of slaves was far greater than the number of free men, although Greece had produced great advocates of humanity and justice. Every army that won a battle would take its prisoners and their families as slaves and personal property.

At the time when Rasulullāh (s) was preaching Islām (in 7th century CE) slavery was rampant throughout India, Persia, Rome, the Arabian Peninsula, Romania and Greece. The elite and educated class of these countries did not regard the slaves eligible even for basic human rights. A slave was regarded as a commodity not worthier than cattle. Often he was sold cheaper than sheep and goat. On special social occasions the distinguished citizens of the State used to get together with the Head of the State to watch the gladiator-like games in which the slaves were made to fight with swords and spears just as in shows of animal-fights. The people cheered until one of the fighters was killed. The audience would then applaud the winner heartily.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, v. 3 p. 397 (New York, 1950).

Christianity and Slavery

Though slavery was an ancient practice, it is safe to say that this trade reached its peak through the Christian nations of Europe and America who, as is their nature, turned it into a meticulously organized commerce and started capturing slaves by thousands to be used as manpower in their newly acquired colonies.

It is well known that when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, it did not condemn slavery and in fact the churches participated in slave-trade. In the name of Almighty God, their priests blessed the ships carrying human cargo to faraway lands and admonished the slaves to be obedient, but never urged the masters to be kind. As late as August 1970, the Roman Catholics purchased 1500 Indian girls at a price ranging from 250-300 British Pounds each, to be kept in convents because European girls did not like to live as nuns. When there was much outcry and the Vatican was asked to investigate this, they condemned the newspaper that published the article. Though, a Vatican spokesman admitted there was an “element of truth” to the report.⁵⁰

The following quotation graphically shows the attitude of early Islām and Christianity on the subject of slavery and race:

“Take away the Negro! I can have no discussion with him,” exclaimed the Christian Archbishop Cyrus when the Arab conquerors had sent a deputation of their ablest men to discuss terms of surrender of the capital of Egypt, headed by a ‘negro’ (i.e. black man) ‘Ubaydah as the ablest of them all. To the sacred Archbishop’s astonishment, he was told that this man was commissioned by General ‘Amr; that the Moslems held black men and white men in equal respect judging a man by his character and not by his colour.⁵¹

Islām Attacks Slavery

Before Islām came to Arabia, the Arabs were as bad offenders as their neighbours. Slaves were a commercial commodity, and slavery was an established institution. It was a source of livelihood for thousands and a source of labour for tens of thousands. To the elite, the number of slaves in the household was a symbol of status.

Slavery offended the spirit of Islām as much as idolatry did. But while the latter had its roots in spiritualism and hence could be countered by reason, slavery had its roots in commerce, in social structure, and in agriculture undertakings; and reason alone was a weak weapon against something so deeply rooted. How was Islām going to eradicate slavery?

⁵⁰ *Sunday Times* (London) as quoted in the *East African Standard* Newspaper (Nairobi, Kenya, August, 25, 1970).

⁵¹ Leeder, S.S., *Veiled Mysteries of Egypt* p.332 (London, 1912).

The ill-informed may suggest that Rasulullāh (s) could have used force. But the ineffectiveness of force is well recognised by any intelligent student of sociology and history. Force may achieve submission but in the end it only achieves hostility. Sometimes the hostility is even more evil than what was removed. A good example of this is the plight of the blacks in America who, even after the 'emancipation of slaves' in 1862, found the attitude of their former white masters towards them had not changed. To this day, the blacks in America complain that they are denied full human rights and opportunities as the white Americans in some States of the US.

Islām's war against slavery aimed at changing the *attitude and mentality* of the whole society, so that after emancipation, slaves would become full-fledged members of society without any need of demonstrations, strikes, civil disobedience and racial riots. And Islām achieved this seemingly impossible objective without any war. To say that Islām waged no war against slavery would not be a true statement. A war it waged, but a war in which neither sword was resorted to, nor was blood spilled.

Islām used three approaches to fight slavery.

Firstly, Islām placed restrictions on acquiring slaves. Prior to Islām, slavery was practised freely. If you couldn't pay your debt, you were made a slave to the Creditor. War captives were either killed or made slaves. In weaker nations, people were hunted like animals, killed or captured and reduced to slavery. Islām, very clearly forbade its followers to enslave people on any excuse. The only exception was a polytheist enemy captured in a war that was fought either in self-defence or with the permission of the Prophet (s) or his rightful successors (but not wars of aggression, such as to capture land or overcome weaker nations for more power). This exception was, in words of Ameer Ali, "in order to serve as guarantee for the preservation of the lives of the captives."⁵²

Thereafter, even for the slaves captured in a just war, the Qur'ān encouraged letting them go by saying, "*to let the captives go free, either with or without any ransom*" (Qur'ān 47:4). In the battles forced upon the Muslims, Rasulullāh (s) ordered very humane treatment of the prisoners who fell into Muslim hands. They could purchase their freedom on payment of small sums of money, and some of them were left off without any payment. The captives of the very first Islāmic battle, Badr, were freed on ransom (in form of money or work like teaching ten Muslim children how to read and write), while those of the tribe of Tay were freed without any ransom.

Other conditions were set: even when it was allowed to take someone as a slave, a mother was not to be separated from her child or brother from brother nor husband from wife or one member of a clan from his clan. The Prophet (s) and the first Imām, Ali bin Abi Tālib ('a) prescribed severe penalties for anyone who took a free man into slavery.

⁵² Ameer Ali, *Muhammadan Law*, vol.2, p.31.

Slavery by purchase was unknown even after Rasulullāh (s) until the Banu Umayya came to power and Mu'āwiya b. Abu Sufyān declared himself the first 'King' in Islām and introduced the practice of acquiring slaves by purchase again. During the reign of the early Banu Abbās caliphs, Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) is known to have preached against slavery, and his views were adopted by the Mu'tazilites. Thus we see that the earnest attempt of Islām to stop its followers from acquiring new slaves was foiled by the Banu Umayya.

The second approach Islām used to fight slavery was to actively campaign the freeing of slaves. Many hadith tell us that freeing a slave brings forgiveness for sins. In some cases, the kaffāra (expiation or 'punishment') for some sins was to free a slave. For example, if a man breaks his fast in the month of Ramadan intentionally, his kaffāra was to free a slave for each day of missed fast. If a person makes a vow (nadhr) and then does not fulfill it, they had to free a slave. If a woman tears her clothes out of grief and rage, she had to make up for it by freeing a slave. If a person killed someone by accident (manslaughter) the kaffāra was to free a slave.

All these examples show us that Islām wanted to free slaves on any excuse it could find. Our books of hadith have laws about freeing slaves (such as the above examples) but there are no āyāt of Qur'ān or ahādith on the recommendation or even rules of purchasing slaves!

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) taught that if a slave is a Muslim and has worked for seven years then he should be set free. Forcing him to work after seven years is not permissible. It is because of this tradition (*hadith*) that the religious scholars are of the opinion that freeing the slave after seven years is a highly recommended deed.

To set an example for others, Imām Ali purchased and freed one thousand slaves, from his own money. The seventh Imām, Musa al-Kādhim ('a) freed the same number. The fourth Imām, Ali bin al-Husayn Zayn al-Abidin ('a) used to free every slave in his house on the eve of 'Eid. The result was that when people imitated the Imāms and freed slaves by their own freewill, there was no hostility against the slaves because it was not imposed and forced on them by the State (as in the case of the slaves in America).

The Imāms also set an example to others by ensuring that the slaves who were in their home were treated like their own family members and when they were freed, they were given sufficient means to earn their livelihood respectably. Often times, because of the kind treatment of slaves, even when they were freed, the slaves did not want to leave their masters and requested to continue living in their homes as family members.

The third approach that Islām used to fight slavery was to restore the dignity of a slave as a human being and even enhanced their social status. Islām made no distinction between a slave and a free man, and all were treated with equality. Even when they stood in prayer, a slave and his master stood side-by-side, shoulder to shoulder. It was this fact that always attracted slaves to Islām. We saw in the

previous lesson how Rasulullāh (s) married his freed slave Zayd to his cousin Zaynab bint Jahsh.

This is something for Muslims to be proud of because to this day there are countries and religions where people are placed in 'classes' and the 'lower class' are not allowed to mingle with the 'upper class'. In Book 11 we saw that one of the reasons that the Quraysh did not want Imām Ali ('a) to be the Caliph was because he treated the Persians and other non-Arabs as equals to the Arabs and he gave credit and positions of authority to people only on the basis of taqwa (God-consciousness). May of the Muslim rulers after Rasulullāh (s) unfortunately had the pre-Islāmic mentality of the Quraysh, that the Arabs were superior to the rest of mankind even if they were Muslims.

Islām recognises no distinction of race or colour, black or white, citizens or soldiers, rulers or subjects, male or female; they are perfectly equal, not in theory only, but in practice. The first *mu'adhdhin* of Islām, a devoted follower of Rasulullāh (s), was a black slave – Bilāl al-Habashi (the Ethiopian).

The Qur'ān lays down the measure of superiority in Islām:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾

O humankind! We have created you of a male and a female, and then We made you (into different) races and tribes so that you may get to know each other. Surely the most honourable of you with Allāh is the one who is most pious among you; surely Allāh is All-Knowing and Aware.

- Surah al-Hujurāt, 49:13

In other words, the only one criterion of superiority or honour of one human being over another is that of taqwa (God-consciousness), which is shown by complete obedience to Allāh. All other man-made distinctions of race and colour have no recognition and place in Islām.

In his famous sermon in 'Arafah, on 9th Dhul Hijjah 9 AH, during his last pilgrimage, Rasulullāh (s) said, "...and your slaves, see that you feed them such food as you eat yourselves and dress him with what you yourself dress. And if they commit a mistake which you are not inclined to forgive then give them away, for they are the servants of Allāh and are not to be tormented..."

Another distinction in Islām is that the established practice in all nations was that a slave who committed a crime was punished more severely than his master. In Islām, the legal punishment (*hudúd*) for a slave was always half of the punishment of a free man.

Rasulullāh (s) always asked his followers to treat their slaves like family-members and his own household set this example first. Fātima, the Prophet (s)'s daughter, had a slave maid called Fidda. Sayyida Fātima ('a) would share all the housework with her such that she would work one day while Fidda rested and Fidda would work the next day and she would rest.

Imām Ali ('a) had a slave named Qanbar. He once took him shopping and bought two shirts, a cheap coarse one and an expensive one. Then he gave the expensive one to Qanbar. When Qanbar expressed shock at this and asked Imām Ali ('a) why he gave him the expensive shirt, Imām Ali ('a) did not make him feel inferior by saying, 'you are my slave and I wanted to be kind to you.' Instead he said to him, 'no, Qanbar, you are a young man and I am old. It is more right that the young should dress better.' There is no example of such kindness to slaves in the history of mankind!

All the Imāms insisted that when they sat to eat, all the slaves and maids in the house would sit with them and eat together at the same table. Incidents of this are well recorded from their lives where other strangers would even protest at this and the Imāms would refuse to eat without the slaves because, they upheld, 'before God, we are all equal.'⁵³

Muslims were forbidden to call their slaves by degrading names. Instead Muslims would call their male slaves 'young man' (*ghulām*) and the female slaves 'young lady' (*jāriya*).

Some of the most famous companions of Rasulullāh (s) who were once slaves and then freed include: Salmān al-Fārisi, Zayd b. Hāritha (adopted son of Rasulullāh (s)), Ammār Yāsir, Maytham at-Tammār and Bilāl al-Habashi.

This is the end of the Lesson. The notes below are for the student's personal reading and may be given as homework followed by an assignment to write an essay. Much of this lesson on slavery has been taken from the book by Sayyid Akhtar Rizvi, "Slavery from Islāmic and Christian Perspectives" (<http://www.al-Islām.org/slavery/>).

Additional Review Material on the History of Slavery

The Origins of Black Slavery

After Columbus discovered the "New World" in 1492, England, France, Holland and other European nations began claiming the new lands as their own colonies and as they discovered rich resources like cotton, tobacco and sugar in these lands of Africa

⁵³ As in the case of Imām Ali b. Musa ar-Ridā ('a) when he was being taken from Madina to Khorāsān and he would insist that the slaves sit and eat with them during the journey.

and India, they began realizing they needed manpower to work on the plantations to labour for them and produce these resources for their consumption.

The slave trade in West Africa was totally dominated by the Christians while the slave trade in East Africa was carried out with support and help from some Muslim Arab merchants, who unfortunately ignored the teachings of Islām and worked for the European masters for profit. But there were no Muslim Imāms or Shaykhs to encourage or bless this trade. What is most ironic is that when Western historians write about the Christian slave trade, they refer to it as the 'West Africa' or 'Atlantic' slave trade but when they refer to the slave trade in East Africa, they call it the 'Arab' or 'Muslim' slave trade. We saw this hypocrisy in a previous lesson as well when discussing terrorism and the attempts of the media to associate it to Islām when a Muslim commits violence.

The British in particular had colonized India, parts of the Caribbean and parts of Africa. They captured large number of slaves from Africa and shipped them to the Caribbean to labour on their tobacco and sugar plantations. This slave trade was 'booming business' in the 16th and 17th centuries. In time, as the British and French came to the Americas, slaves were brought to North, Central and South America to work in gold and silver mines as well as other plantations there. This notorious commerce in human beings lasted altogether for more than four hundred years, with the Atlantic slave-trade continuing until the late 1870's.

When the slaves were captured, they were forcibly separated from their families, shackled with chains and packed like sardines on the ships that took them across the Atlantic to work in a land they had never seen and to live amongst people whose language and culture they didn't understand. In other words, they lost everything and became tormented slaves overnight. Any resistance was met with severe brutality and oppression. Those who could not survive the whips and died were simply tossed overboard into the ocean.

From the time of the arrival of the Christian Europeans to Africa until 1600, about one million Africans were carried away in slave-ships. At one period, the Portuguese were the chief slave-traders in West Africa. They either took Africans to Brazil, which they had colonized, or they sold them to the Spanish settlers in Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean Islands. In the 17th century, some seven to eight million West Africans found their way across the Atlantic. The Dutch joined the Portuguese as the leading slave-traders in the 17th century, and in the following century the British were the biggest slave-traders. By the time the Atlantic slave-trade was at its height in the 18th century, British ships were carrying more than half of the total of slaves, leaving the rest to be divided up between the Dutch, the French, the Portuguese and the Danes.

By the 19th century, there was another change of the people who took the leading role in exploiting Africa. It was not European countries themselves but the Europeans who had settled in North America (i.e. the 'Americans') who were the ones who organized a large part of the trade. The Americans had recently gained

their independence from Britain and they played the biggest part in the last fifty years of the Atlantic slave-trade, taking away slaves at a greater rate than ever before.

The Christian priests knew about the suffering that was inflicted on people in Africa, on the slave-ships and on the slave-plantations of the Americas, but they remained silent. Many priests themselves carried on slave-trading, especially in Angola, and many others owned slaves in the Americas. The reason the Catholic Church justified slavery was because it gave them the opportunity to “save African souls” by baptising the slaves into Christianity. This was also similar to what the priests did with the Native Americans in Canada and the USA. According to one writer on the subject, Rodney, Walter, “there is no part of the history of the Christian Church which was more disgraceful than its support of the Atlantic slave-trade.”⁵⁴

It is true that there were a few individuals who protested against the Atlantic slave-trade but governments and traders paid no attention to them during the 15-17th centuries. It was not until the late 18th century that serious attempts were made to put a stop to this trade.

East African Slave-Trade

Like West Africa, the slave-trade in East Africa became prominent and was firmly established with the advance and endeavour of the Christian Europe. But this was not prominent until the 18th century when the Portuguese used the help of the Arabs to exploit the slave-trade in East Africa.

There was a lot of competition amongst the European nations in West Africa so the trade expanded to East Africa. Attempts have been made to blame the Arabs for the East Africa slave trade and to this day, on the island of Zanzibar (off the coast of Tanzania, East Africa), there is a Church that shows tourists the dungeons where the ‘Muslim Arabs’ kept slaves in pitiful conditions. What they conveniently forget to mention is that these slaves were held as cargo to be shipped to the Christian Europeans and that these greedy Arabs were only middlemen serving their well-paying masters.

The Sufferings of Slaves

We have already seen what Islām did to alleviate the plight of the slaves and how, for the first and last time in human history, slaves were regarded as human beings having rights. Now let us see how the Europeans captured and treated their slaves from Africa.

⁵⁴ Walter Rodney, *West African and the Atlantic Slave-Trade* (1967), p. 22.

The poor natives of Africa were captured in the cruellest of ways, separated from their families, carried away and treated worse than animals. The methods used by the slave hunters were crude and wasteful, because they were robbers, not warriors. Their practice was to surround some villages that they have marked down for their prey, and approach it silently at night. The village was usually a collection of primitive mud huts thatched with bamboo's and palm leaves, all highly inflammable, which they set alight without any guilt, generally at dawn. As the inhabitants woke to the crackling of flames and struggled into the open, they were rounded up and made prisoners.

Any of them who resisted were cut down, as the slave hunters had no mercy for them. They had no use for the old or infirm or for babies who were all killed on the spot, and only men and women in their prime and young boys and girls were spared, to be carried off into slavery, leaving behind the dead bodies and dying ashes, where once there had been happy homes and flourishing settlements. The waste was out of all proportion, from its first moments to the last.

Those captured far inland were less fortunate, for they had to march to the coast on their feet over many miles of thick forest and rough desert. They walked almost naked, with no protection against sharp thorns, and jagged stones. To prevent escape, they had heavy forked poles fastened round their necks; their hands, if they were troublesome, might be secured through holes in a rough wooden board, and they were fettered with chains on their ankles. Linked together by ropes, the long lines known as coffles, they trudged miserably on towards their terrifying fate. Their captors drove them relentlessly forward, ignoring wounds and whipping them if necessary. If any succumbed, he was thrown on one side; if any of them became too ill, they were left to die or more mercifully knocked on the head.⁵⁵

The slave's work on the plantation was really very hard. From the slave's point of view this was skilled work: he had to cultivate a crop unknown to him - for the most part sugar in the West Indies, cotton or tobacco in America. All was new and strange to him; he had, therefore, to be broken in; he had to be taught his new duties; he had to be 'seasoned' as the saying was. 'Seasoning' was the harsh discipline that every slave underwent.⁵⁶

The slaves were sold at auctions, being bought in stark naked, men and women, alike, and mounted on a chair, where the bidders handled and prodded them and felt their muscles and examined their teeth and made them jump and flex their arms, to satisfy themselves that they were not diseased or disabled. As the slaves were bought single, it followed that often husband and wife, children and parents went to different owners; and the loss of family and all that the slaves held dear was added to the loss of liberty. So the slave left the auction room, bereaved of everything, to begin a new life of 'abject, hopeless and crushing servitude'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Sherrard, *Freedom from Fear* (London, 1959), p. 61-62.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67

Why was Slavery Abolished

Someone may point out: Was it not Christian Britain which finally abolished the slavery? Well, if someone practices tyranny isn't he the one who has to give up that practice?

The truth of the matter is that Britain was the biggest slave-trader and when it called for abolishing slave-trade, the reason were not humane or moral – it was economic.

The movement against slavery was not spear-headed by Churches; it was led by a handful of moralists whose cries remained unheeded till the economic necessity compelled the British Parliament to pass a bill in 1807 against slave-trade. After 26 years, another bill was passed to abolish slavery itself in British-held countries in 1833.

As Professor D W Brogan writes in the introduction of Dr. Eric Williams' magnificent book *Capitalism and Slavery*, "the abolition of the slave-trade and later the abolition of slavery, were not merely the results of a rising standard of political ethics in Britain but were a form of cutting of losses. The West Indies sugar monopoly became intolerable to a booming industrial society..." To summarise, in the words of Prof. Brogan, the slave system was "tolerated, defended, praised as long as it was profitable."

What had happened is that the French at one point were able to produce more sugar than the English in West Indies. Up until then, there was a convenient "triangular trade" between Africa, the Caribbean and England. Slaves were taken from West Africa to the Caribbean to work the on the plantations. Sugar, tobacco, coffee and cotton were produced in the Caribbean and taken to England for processing. Utensils, guns, handcuffs and fetters were taken from England to Africa. The British had a monopoly on all this.⁵⁸

Between 1783 and 1789 the progress of the French sugar islands, of Saint Domingue especially, was the most amazing phenomenon in colonial development. The fertility of the French soil was decisive and French sugar cost one-fifth less than Britain.⁵⁹

The British had to stop the French and the only way to do so was to stop the slave trade. Of course the British had colonized India as well. If they could end the Atlantic slave trade to the West Indies and the Caribbean, they could still produce sugar for themselves in India.

Gaston-Martin, the well-known French historian of the slave-trade and the Caribbean colonies, has rightly accused the then British Prime Minister Pitt of his propaganda to free the slaves 'in the name, no doubt of humanity, but also to ruin French commerce.'

⁵⁸ Dr. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 65.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122

Hypocrisy of The Abolitionists

“Ironically enough,” says Dr. Williams, “it was the former slave owners of the West Indies (i.e. the British) who now held the humanitarian torch. Those who, in 1807, were predicting that abolition of the British slave-trade would ‘diminish commerce, diminish revenue and diminish navigation; and in the end... totally remove the great cornerstone of British prosperity,’ were, after 1807, the very men who protested against ‘a system of man-stealing against a poor and inoffensive people.’”⁶⁰

A great mass movement for abolition of the slave-trade developed in Jamaica in 1849. Overnight parties and sects were united on the question of justice to Africa. They denounced the slave-trade and slavery as “opposed to humanity - productive of the worst evils to Africa - degrading to all engaged in the traffic.”

And the worth of all such high-sounding phrases may be judged from the fact that the British capitalism, even after destroying West Indian slavery, “continued to thrive on Brazilian, Cuban and American slavery.”⁶¹ This was because the use of slave-produced sugar in the West Indies was bad for the British economy but no one proposed to stop the use of the slave-produced cotton from the United States. In fact, no one proposed seriously to stop the use of the slave-produced sugar from Brazil or Cuba. It was money - not a passion to be good - that was the deciding factor.

This hypocrisy is seen even today when a ‘superpower’ will condemn the nations it sees as its enemy for an act against democracy, the freedom of others and ‘human rights’ but it will turn a blind eye when its own ally does exact the same or even worse, support and aid it. The idea of unjust nations is always to use propaganda (i.e. the media) to mislead and confuse the masses.

The taking of slaves continued for at least another 25 years even after 1833.

Was the American Civil War to Emancipate the Slaves?

As the Europeans began opposing slavery in the guise of being humanitarian, the use of slaves continued to rage in America. Here lies another myth: Most North Americans believe that the 19th century American Civil War was fought to free the slaves and they give credit for this to Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States.

In those days, America was divided into ‘the Union’ and ‘the Confederacy’ and the Civil War was between the two parties. The Union (or “the North”) was led by Abraham Lincoln and was made up of 20 free States to the North and 5 border slave states and the Confederacy (or “the South”) was made up of 11 States to the South

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 175-6.

⁶¹ Ibid.

that still practised and upheld slavery.⁶² The South still practised slavery because that was where all the plantations were. The Northern States (closer to the Canadian border) were too cold to have slave plantations around the year anyway. Many slaves dreamt of and attempted escaping from the South to the North.

Did Lincoln really champion the fight to free the slaves? Let us see.

The famous author Dale Carnegie wrote in his book *Lincoln, the Unknown*:⁶³

‘Ask the average American citizen today why the Civil War was fought, and the chances are that he will reply, ‘To free the slaves’. Here is a sentence taken from Lincoln’s first inaugural address: “I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it now exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so...”’

Carnegie also quotes Lincoln as saying, “My objective in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving the others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the coloured race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause; and I shall do more whenever I believe doing more will help the cause.”⁶⁴

Lincoln himself married into a slave-owning family. Part of the money that his wife received from the settlement of her father’s estate had come from the sale of slaves. And the only really intimate friend that Lincoln ever had, Joshua Speed, was a member of a slave-owning family.

As the battle between the Union and Confederacy continued, there was a risk that both France and England were on the verge of recognising the Confederacy and not the Union. France was ruled by Napoleon III who believed that if the Confederates won they would favour his new empire. In fact the South offered to give Napoleon III twelve million dollars worth of cotton if he would recognize the Confederacy and they promised to give him so many orders for import goods that it would start smoke rolling out of every factory chimney in France, night and day.

Napoleon III therefore urged Russia and England to join him in recognizing the Confederacy. The British listened eagerly to Napoleon’s plans. The United States was getting too rich and powerful to please them. They wanted to see the nation divided, the Union broken. Besides, they needed the South’s cotton. Many of England’s factories had closed, and a million people were not only idle but poor and reduced to actual paupers. Children were crying for food, hundreds of people were dying of

⁶² [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_\(American_Civil_War\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_(American_Civil_War))

⁶³ Dale Carnegie, *Lincoln the Unknown* (1948), chapter 22.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

starvation. There was one way that England could get cotton and come out of poverty and that was to join Napoleon III in recognising the Confederacy. And besides, as far as the Europeans were concerned, the fighting between the North and the South in America was a meaningless battle. They had no particular reason to support one over the other, other than the economic advantages of supporting the South.

Now if that were done, what would happen in America? The South would get guns, food, railway equipment, and a tremendous lift in confidence and morale. And what would the North get? Two new and powerful enemies. The situation, bad enough now, would be hopeless then.

Abraham Lincoln knew this and he confessed in 1862, 'we must either change our tactics now or lose the game.' Lincoln realized that for him to win, Europe's attitude towards the war must be changed, and he knew how to do it. A million people in Europe had read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* - had read it and wept and learned to hate the heartaches and injustice of slavery. So Abraham Lincoln knew that if he issued his "Proclamation of Emancipation", Europeans would see the war in a different light. It would no longer be a bloody quarrel over the preservation of a Union that meant nothing to them. Instead, it would be respected as a holy crusade to destroy slavery. European Governments would then not dare recognise the South. Public opinion wouldn't tolerate aiding people who engaged in human slavery.

Finally, therefore, in July 1862 Lincoln decided to issue his Proclamation of Emancipation (i.e. the proclamation to free the slaves). His advisers however told him the timing was not good because their army had recently suffered humiliating defeats to the South. So Lincoln waited. Two months later, they gained some victory and so finally, the Proclamation of Emancipation was published in September 1862, which was to be effective on 1st January 1863.

As Carnegie put it, Lincoln may have been a humanitarian and perhaps he, from the depth of heart, was against slavery. 'But it does not mean that we should glorify him by false propaganda. The reality was that he did not fight the Civil War to emancipate the slaves; rather he emancipated the slaves to win the Civil War and save the Union.'⁶⁵

Territorial Slavery

So far we have discussed one type of slavery i.e., household slavery. There was a second type of slavery called Territorial Slavery or subjugation of one nation by another.

Though household slavery is now supposedly abolished, territorial slavery is still very much alive. In the past we had nations that were 'British Colonies' or 'French

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Colonies' and later these nations were given their flag independence. The Europeans used to take raw material from Africa and India and other places they colonized back to their own countries for processing and production. So when they gave these colonies their independence, the nations were left with no infrastructure. The result is that to this day, poor African nations will sell their raw material as cheap exports to the richer nations and then import back products made from their own raw material at higher prices. Often the goods sold to African nations are expired or 'old stock'.

Another form of Territorial Slavery can be seen in the Americas and places like Australia. The Native Indians who were the original inhabitants of "the New World" (including places like Canada) were hunted like buffaloes and gradually pushed out from their own lands and have now been forced to live in colder or less fertile lands called "Reserves". The Aborigines of Australia were subjected to the same treatment.

Dr. Eric Williams quotes a story of the Native Indian Chief Hatuey who, doomed to die for resisting the invaders, staunchly refused to accept the Christian faith as the gateway to salvation when he learned that his executioners, too, hope to get to Heaven.⁶⁶

Even more tragic was the fate of the Africans in Southern Africa. The Portuguese, armed with the Pope's decree to "reduce the infidels to servitude" until the recent past continued to keep Angola and Mozambique under the yoke of Territorial Slavery. Pope Paul VI would often issue statements on political problems of the world but never advised Portugal about its "subjects" in Africa. The Popes maintained special relations with Portugal and Spain, the two Roman Catholic nations that stubbornly refused to free their African colonies. In July 1970, Pope Paul VI received some leaders of freedom fighters of Portuguese African colonies. This meeting enraged Portugal, which issued a protest and the Vatican nervously issued an explanation. On July 11 1970, the *Standard* newspaper (in Kenya) published a news article, "Pope's note comforts Portugal" explaining that the Vatican had said that the Pope had received them (i.e., the leaders of liberation movements of Africa under Portuguese rule) as Catholics and Christians, without reference to their political functions. He reminded them to the Church's teaching that peaceful means should always be used even in seeking what one considers to be one's right.

Subsequently, a black Roman Catholic wrote a sarcastic letter that was published in the same newspaper to say, "The earlier news that the Holy Father had received the said leaders had perturbed me much. Now this clarification has put my anxiety to rest.... It was the Roman Catholic Church which established Western colonialism by dividing all the newly discovered lands and countries into two halves: giving the Spaniards the Western half (like Americas), and granting Portugal the Eastern half (like Africa and India). ...according to our beliefs of the Papal infallibility, Pope Paul VI is bound to carry on and justify whatever was decreed by his Holy predecessors.

⁶⁶ Dr. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 8.

Therefore, according to my thinking he should not have encouraged those leaders. Now his clarification has comforted me a lot spiritually. Now I may sleep in peace with a sure knowledge that my Church has not condemned itself by implying that previous Popes were wrong in establishing and supporting the 'enlightenment' of this black continent under Portuguese Imperialism."⁶⁷

What is interesting is that the Pope advised those seeking freedom from their colonial masters to always seek "peaceful means" even for what was their right but there was no advice to the Portuguese colonialists. This was similar to the Catholic priests during the Atlantic slave-trade who would, at the time of sailings of the slave-ships, pray to the Almighty to ensure the safety of the ships and always admonish the black slaves to behave gently and obediently but never thought it necessary to advise the masters of the slaves to think of them as human beings.

And the same can be seen today where a wealthy or powerful nation will invade other countries when it feels its right is at stake; but when unarmed civilians want to free themselves from their oppressive rulers (who are puppets of the rich nation), the rich nation will 'urge' them to resort to 'dialogue' and 'ensure there is a peaceful transition.' There is therefore always hypocrisy with the nations that have power and weapons. They will speak of democracy and humanitarian rights when it serves them well but they will ignore it and turn a blind eye when it is in their political or economic interests.

The Middle East is another example of Territorial Slavery: the plight of the Palestinians enslaved by the Israelis (who are backed by the USA). Most Middle East nations are ruled by monarchies and there is no freedom of speech or election. Iran is always condemned because it is not submissive to the Western powers but the brutal treatment of civilians and the lack of women's rights in the other nations like Saudi Arabia are never mentioned because they are 'friends' and 'allies' to the hypocritical Western nations.

South Africa's Apartheid system or racial segregation that lasted from 1948 to 1993 is another example. There were clear signs and boundaries where only 'the white man' was allowed and 'blacks and dogs' were not permitted. The whole world condemned South Africa but the United States and the United Kingdom refused to impose any sanctions on South Africa. The Church did not condemn it either until much later when other African nations gained independence and it was politically the right thing to do. Rhodesia had the same fate as South Africa until its independence in 1980 when it became Zimbabwe. The common joke amongst the Africans is that of an African telling a European, "When you came, you had the Bible and we had the land. Now we have the Bible and you have the land."

Territorial slavery can therefore be direct (when a land is colonized or invaded) or it can be indirect, such as when a nation supports tyrannical rulers by supplying them with arms and using the media to favour them, even though the people of that land

⁶⁷ Akhtar Rizvi, *Islāmic and Christian Perspectives on Slavery*.

do not support or want these tyrannical rulers. Territorial slavery continues to thrive to this day by means of bribes and threats to control weaker nations.

After the Second World War, the United Nations was formed so that every nation in the world could be a member and have a platform to voice its concerns and demand justice. But some nations were given special “veto” powers. These five nations are America, Britain, China, Russia and France. This gives them special powers to ‘block’ any resolution or decision made by the rest of the world. In other words, the United Nations has become a ‘legal’ way to control the rest of the world by a few rich nations. If, for example, any nation speaks of the oppression of Israel at the United Nations, the United States will immediately ‘veto’ any proposal to condemn Israel.

Islām holds the last hope for humanity to free itself from all injustices and oppression of others. This hope is the return of Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs) who will fill the earth with justice and equity as it is filled with injustice and tyranny. Amen.

﴿وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا﴾

And say, ‘The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Indeed falsehood is bound to vanish.’

- Surah Isrā, 17:81

AKHLAQ **(Ethics)**

Lesson 1

Development of Akhlāq & the Faculties of the Soul

Humans have a soul and a physical body, each with its own pleasures and diseases. What harms the body is sickness and what gives it pleasure is health, well being and being in harmony with nature. The science of medicine deals with the health and maladies of the body.

The diseases of the soul consist of evil habits and addictions such as submission to lusts that degrade a human soul and lowers it to the level of beasts. The pleasures of the soul are moral and ethical values, which elevate humans to move them closer to perfection and Allāh. The science that deals with such matters is called the science of ethics (*'ilm al-akhlāq*).

Those who say humans are no different from animals in how they eat, sleep, reproduce, defecate, etc. are comparing the human *body* with that of animals. They are either assuming humans have no soul or that the real essence of a human being is the body.

The soul of a human being who has surrendered to Allāh is a mirror through which Allāh reflects His beautiful Names and Attributes in this world. The human soul is also indestructible and permanent. The body on the other hand is temporary, prone to breaking down and only able to survive in this world. It is a just a vehicle and a 'clothing' for the soul for a short while before the soul moves on to another, better and more perfect plane of existence.

A faithful (*mu'min*) stays healthy and protects his or her body not because the life of this world is better or that they fear death or would rather be here instead of the next world but because they see this life as a gift from Allāh to use to build their permanent abode. The longer they are able to stay in this body, the more they can prepare for the next world, such as in worshipping Allāh or earning a lawful living and helping others, or using their time and strength to help others. As the body is used to serve Allāh, the soul is nurtured and built stronger.

What prevents humans from building the soul is addictions. Addiction is a slavish habit of doing something that the mind believes will bring it happiness but it is engaged in it only for the pleasure with no purpose or meaningful reason. Some addictions are *harām* such as substance use (drugs, alcohol), gambling and pornography. Others are not labelled *harām* in fiqh but nonetheless prevent or slow the soul's growth, such as addiction to tea, coffee, smoking, shopping, the internet, food, sleep, games, etc.

The human mind, through its attempt to survive what it perceives as conflict, creates from infancy an illusory (mind-made) 'self' (that we call the 'ego') and that it refers to as 'I'. By the time most humans grow up, they forget their soul and don't 'listen' to it anymore, which is the voice of their real 'self'. They are busy trying to protect this illusory ego through constant seeking of pleasure and fulfilling of desires and through conflict like blaming, jealousy, anger, backbiting, fighting, accusing, etc. that the mind believes will resolve its pain and remove its fears. The mind believes that if this ego is compromised or diminished it will cease to exist (because 'I' will die).

Spiritual growth and realization of who a human really is comes from learning to let go of the ego or at least realizing the games that the mind plays and being aware every time the mind is using conflict or seeking addictions to stay alive. This realization in turn allows a human to 'connect' with nature and all of existence. And since Allāh permeates the very fabric of all existence, it allows a human to connect with Allāh and truly become Allāh's representative.

One of the philosophies of fasting in the month of Ramadan is to give a human being the chance to break away from addictions and see how it feels to be free and not enslaved by the mind's desires.



Whenever you feel obsessed by a hobby or anything in life, think about this. You will realize the 'real me' is asleep and it is the mind in the driver's seat using the obsession to promote and strengthen its own mind-made false 'self'. This state of the real self being asleep – what Imām Ali ('a) eludes too in the hadith, '*the people of this world are asleep, they wake up when they die*' – is called heedlessness or *ghaflah*. Waking up from *ghaflah* can be done periodically but to be awake permanently, one must let the false self or ego die. That is the meaning of true surrender to Allāh – surrendering the mind's own self-will. Hence the hadith of Rasullāh (s) – '*die before you die*'. Meaning, let the ego die (that you can control and allow to die) before your body's physical death (that you have no control over).

Jannah is an abode of perfection. It is not that Allāh wants some to enter it and others not to. All are welcome. But only a perfect soul can survive and live in such a perfect place. Consider a person who is addicted to fear, worry, anxiety and blame. Even if you try and force them away from this habit, they will resist it and fight you because they equate giving up the habit to death. The mind believes it would rather die than give this up. But the person who is free from this habit can see how much pain and suffering the person addicted is in. Yet only the person suffering can help himself or herself by first acknowledging his or her malady and choosing to heal. Similarly, people cannot be forced into Jannah. They must choose it themselves. If they become creatures that can only live with pain, they would resist going to Jannah because they cannot relate to it.

The secret to not failing in life is to ask yourself about everything that you become passionate about and make a goal and important part of your life: why am I doing this? How does it affect my hereafter? Is it a need of my soul or an addiction through which the mind seeks to find illusory happiness?

The Immaterial Soul

We have said that unlike the body, the soul is everlasting and is therefore independent of the body. The soul survives even after the body can no longer support it and falls apart, forcing the soul to leave and move on to another existence. Seeing yourself primarily as the soul and not the body is the first step to realizing the importance of *akhlāq*, the importance of preparing for eternal existence and the importance of development (or purification) of the soul (*tazkiyat an-nafs*).

Lesson 2

Akhlāq & the Faculties of the Soul (cont'd)

Meaning and Origin of Akhlāq

The word *akhlāq* is the plural of *khulq* that means 'nature' as in the nature of someone. It can also be translated as disposition or characteristic.

Every soul has a character or nature that comes about through repetitive practice of an action by the physical body that is tightly integrated to the soul. When an action is done repeatedly, it becomes a habit or trait (called a *malakah* in Arabic) that is impressed upon the soul. A soul then is chiselled or formed into a being – beautiful or ugly – through a multitude of *malakāt*. And this real form is what emerges on the Day of Judgement and takes residence in the infinite levels of Jannah or Jahannam, where it fits most. It 'floats' up or down to where it just rightly belongs. Sometimes a *malakah* can be helped by a person's nature and tendency but through practice and effort, weak tendencies can also be strengthened and made into a *malakah* (trait).

We could therefore say, a particular disposition (*malakah*) may appear in a human being because of one of three reasons:

1. Nature and physical makeup: Some people are naturally patient while others are touchy, moody, sensitive or hasty. Some are easily disturbed and saddened while others show greater resistance and resilience at difficulties.
2. Habit: This is formed because of unconscious continual repetition of certain acts until it emerges as a certain disposition (*malakah*).
3. Practice and conscious effort: If continued long enough it can eventually lead to the formation of a *malakah*.

Even though people have different natures, it is by no means true that humans have no choice and are compelled to act in a certain way. Training the soul does not mean killing the needs of the physical body or not using the mind at all. If the body and mind are seen and accepted as vehicles that support the soul's existence and operation in this world, then of course their needs must be fulfilled. But what is key is to train them so that they serve our soul and not the other way around where the soul is enslaved by them.

Just as a seed grows into a tree through proper care and a wild horse can be tamed to serve its master or a dog is trained to be a lifelong friend and help to a man, so can a human soul attain perfection and wisdom through self-discipline and spiritual practices even if it is 'wild' and untamed initially. Desires can be compared to an unruly beast or a tamed horse. Anger can be like a rabid dog or a loyal one; and the

intellect and imagination can be likened to a strong tree providing shade and fruits or a weak sapling blowing one way or the other with every passing 'gust of wind' (i.e. false idea or doubt planted in the mind).

Perfection is not one final stage. It has infinite levels. The more self-discipline and effort, the higher the level of perfection attained. There is a scale where the lowest level is demonic and even below beasts and the highest level surpasses even the angels. The movement of the human soul between these two extremes until it settles at one place on the scale is what *'ilm al-akhlāq* is all about. The goal of the science of *akhlāq* is to take a human soul as far up the scale of perfection as possible.

After knowing all this, of course the key thing is to practice what one knows. Knowledge is very important as a signpost towards perfection but it is only a *means* and not the *end*. In ignorance we remain heedless (i.e. in *ghaflah*) and are never motivated to act and grow because we don't even know its importance or the potential of the soul. However constant gaining of knowledge without acting on it will not help either. When a person is only concerned with the theoretical knowledge of spirituality, it becomes an addiction itself - to satisfy and gratify the mind with knowledge. That is why it has been said by some that 'knowledge is the thickest of veils' (that obstruct us from knowing Allāh).

How Spirituality Becomes Accessible

Some falsely imagine that when a person has purified himself or herself *then* Allāh will grant such a person special abilities and spiritual hidden knowledge. In reality all the spirituality we will even need is already accessible and readily present in abundance all around us. What stops our souls from taking this grace of Allāh is the lack of purity in our souls, too much sin and attachment to the ego and its addictions. It is like beautiful jewels all around us blocked by dirty clothes. When self-purification is complete and a soul has gotten rid of all evil habits of thought, speech and action, then the soul is ready to receive Allāh's knowledge. In fact it begins as soon as self-purification starts until it is complete.

And this is in fact the purpose and reason why Allāh created humans – to know Allāh. Keep in mind, psychic abilities such as telepathy, levitation, dream interpretation, traversing the earth in short spans, prophesizing the future, seeing others in their 'real form' and even 'walking on water' are not a sign of one's spirituality. They may come as a result of meditation or extreme psychic exercises and they may even show themselves in a person as 'side effects' of self-purification. But in reality they are not the goal of self-purification and if they enthrall a person, he or she actually stops his or her spiritual growth.

True spirituality is indicated by one thing only: how much realization (*ma'rifah*) of Allāh a person has. To the degree that a person knows Allāh, to that degree they are spiritual and enlightened. Again, when we say 'knows' Allāh we do not mean it in the sense of rational knowing with the mind. We mean knowing through surrender and

realization with one's entire being. Such a perfect person is called an *'ārif* (a realized being) or one who truly 'knows' Allāh. The feminine is *'ārifā* and the plural is *'urafā*.

A human soul is unique in its ability to know its own Creator intelligently and to surrender in such a manner that it allows Allāh to take over and shine His attributes through the human being. Hence the hadith – *takhallaqu bi akhlāqillah* – 'make your akhlāq the akhlāq of Allāh'. We mentioned in Lesson 1 that a perfect human soul acts like a mirror to Allāh in which Allāh witnesses the reflection of His own attributes such as the divine attributes of love, knowledge, power, generosity, and all other such beautiful Names.

A soul that is enslaved and driven by desires is like a dog driven mindlessly. This could be the spiritual meaning of the Prophetic hadith *'angels do not enter a house in which there is a dog.'* (And of course the hadith has a literal meaning as well since a dog is *najis al-'ayn*.)

But if angels – who are pure beings of light – cannot mix with dogs, how can the rays of Allāh's grace and Divine illumination enter a heart that is filled to the brim with immoral, selfish and bestial desires?

One hadith says, *'The heart of a mu'min is the throne of the Merciful Lord'* and in a hadith *al-qudsi* Allāh says, *'The heavens and the earth cannot contain Me but the heart of My mu'min servant encompasses Me.'* And also, *'The heart of a mu'min is between My two fingers. I turn it as I please.'* We see therefore that the heart is also the central source of purity and the measure of how well we are using the body to purify the soul. Hence the hadith of Rasulullāh (s), *'I was sent to perfect good manners (makārim al-akhlāq).'* Also, the hadith of Rasulullāh (s), *'My religion is based on cleanliness (tahārah)'* does not refer to outward cleanliness alone. If anything, it eludes to inner purity of the soul.

When the soul is not pure, good advice has no effect on it. Not even the Qur'ān helps it. In fact the more Qur'ān such an impure soul encounters, the more it denies and mocks the truth. The Qur'ān also says about itself, *'None can touch it except the purified'* (Surah al-Wāqī'ah, 56:79). The outer meaning of course is to touch the Qur'ān with wudu. But the inner meaning is to 'touch' the meaning of the Qur'ān. Its hidden realities cannot be fathomed except by those who are 'purified' of heart.

To attain ultimate and final perfection, it is necessary to walk the path of struggle against selfish lusts and immoral tendencies which may exist within the soul, and thus to prepare the soul to receive the grace of Allāh. If a person sets foot on the path of self-purification, Allāh shall come to his or her aid and guide them along, as He promises: *'And (as for) those who struggle in Our cause, surely We guide them on to our ways.'* (Surah al-Ankabut, 29:69).

Lesson 3

Akhlāq & the Faculties of the Soul (cont'd)

Faculties of the Soul

Just like the body has five faculties (the power of speech, sight, hearing, touch and taste), experts of akhlāq like to divide the faculties of the soul into four:

1. The power of intellectual thought (*al-quwwat al-'aqliyya*)
2. The power of imagination (*al-quwwat al-wahmiyya*)
3. The power of anger (*al-quwwat al-gadabiyya*)
4. The power of desire (*al-quwwat ash-shahwiya*)

Each one of these powers or faculties has a very important role to play in a human's spiritual journey. But they need to be tamed, controlled and used in moderation. In either extreme, they become a spiritual disease.

For example, when the intellectual power is too weak, a human cannot distinguish good from evil and is easily misled. When it is too extreme, then everything is sought through the mind only and often leads to atheism and doubt in God.

If the power of imagination is too weak, a person loses all creativity and the ability to nurture the gifts that Allāh has blessed him or her with; and if it is too strong it leads to demonic ideas, satanic plots, sinful fantasies and so on.

If the power of anger is too weak, a human cannot defend himself or stand up to fight for the truth, verbally or physically. When it is excessive, a person will not forgive or stop to think but will unleash anger that may destroy himself and those around him in a fit of rage.

When the power of desire is too weak, a person may lose interest in life and in healthy socializing with others. When it is too extreme and untrained it leads to promiscuity and immorality (such as adultery) and love for the world in general (wealth, power, comfort, pleasure, etc.).

The relationship of the four powers of the soul has been compared to a traveller riding a strong fast horse accompanied with a dog and also having a spy for him that looks out for him against highway bandits. The traveller is the power of reason. The horse is the power of desires. The dog represents anger and the spy employed by the rider is the power of imagination.

If the traveller can control all three – the mount, the dog and the spy, it all works in his favour and he arrives to his final destination safely. But if not, they destroy him.

The horse (desires) may throw the traveller (reason) off its back, the dog (anger) might start attacking everything around and even harm the traveller (reason) and the spy (imagination) might start giving false information to the traveller (reason) creating all kinds of false ideas and fears in the traveller. On the other hand, if the traveller knows when to trust the spy and what to use him for, how to stay on top of and in control of the horse and ensure the dog always listens to him and hunts or attacks only when his master orders it, then all is well.

Every spiritual disease is simply a deficiency or excess of one of these four faculties of the soul (or a combination of them). When found in moderation, it becomes a spiritual virtue instead of a disease. Here are some examples:

Faculty of the Soul	Deficiency (Tafreet)	Moderation (I'tidāl)	Excess (Ifrāt)
Intellect	Stupidity	Wisdom	Slyness and Craftiness
Anger	Cowardice	Courage and Bravery	Foolhardiness
Desire	Lethargy	Chastity and Modesty	Voraciousness and Insatiable Greed
Intellect & Imagination	Submissiveness	Justice	Tyranny

Jihād al-Akbar

By now you are already familiar with the term Jihād al-Akbar (the Greater Jihād) that refers to the struggle and striving against one's self.

We have already described how the mind and instinctive physical needs of a human being seek to dominate themselves and it is only the spiritual dimension of people that truly make them 'human' instead of just a glorified socio-political animal.

The eleventh century scholar al-Ghazāli remarked that before the process of self-purification begins, man is just 'envious like an ox, greedy like a pig, bites like a dog, eats like a camel, takes revenge like a leopard, is cunning like a fox, and clever like a devil.'

We therefore have two existences. When we look at our physical existence only, we seem to be very weak and humble creatures no different from animals that are constantly and only occupied with eating, drinking, seeking shelter, procreating, and all that is related to the body. It is only when we start focusing on the intellectual, moral, emotional and spiritual aspects of our life that we see our other, more important and everlasting existence. That is where we find the goals and aspirations that differentiates us from other animals and elevates us over them. That is where we move from being selfish to selfless, from simply

fighting for survival to being willing to sacrifice our lives for a greater, eternal good. That is where we realize we are different because of our soul and that even though we share the same planet as animals, this is not our home.

It is as if we came from Jannah and we are aliens here trying to go back home. In fact, we are not physical beings who undergo spiritual experiences. Rather we are spiritual beings undergoing physical experiences for a while so that we may learn from it and perfect our spirits or souls.

The ultimate purpose and philosophy of all Islāmic laws (*ahkām*) is therefore the refining of the character and soul of individuals. And success in this world and the hereafter will only come to us if we are concerned with *tazkiyat an-nafs*. Otherwise life will appear to have no purpose or meaning to us.

As we begin with a firm resolution to focus on our souls and to perfect it and liberate it from identification with the ego, we must remember that *tazkiyat an-nafs* operates at all levels of human activity: thought, emotions and action. It is not only purity in our actions that we must strive for, but even purity in our thoughts, consciousness and our very existence at all times.

Soft Comics
كلمة في آية

THE BLIND ASTRONOMER

PSST! THERE SITS THE MOST WISEST MAN IN THE CITY

HMM... I SHOULD MEET HIM

SALAAM!

WALAIKUM SALAAAM

OH HE'S BLIND!

SIR, SINCE WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN BLIND?

SINCE BIRTH

I'M AN ASTRONOMER

YOU'RE A BLIND ASTRONOMER?!

... AND WHAT PATH OF WISDOM DO YOU FOLLOW?

I WATCH ALL THESE SUNS, MOONS AND STARS

YOU THINK YOU ARE NOTHING BUT A TINY ENTITY, YET WRAPPED UP INSIDE YOU IS THE **GREATEST UNIVERSE**
~ IMAM ALI

WWW.VAKIL.ORG

Lesson 4

Dealing with Balá

The word '*balā*' can mean many things: trials, tribulations, sufferings, afflictions, and so on. Some Muslims assume that *balā* only befalls the evil as a punishment for their sins and disobedience to Allāh. But this is not true. *Balā* is reserved for the most elite amongst the faithful. It serves as a test of faith whilst helping the pious purifying themselves of attachment to the world and elevating them to higher levels of spirituality.

Balā may come in the form of illness, poverty, imprisonment, mistreatment by others, loss of loved ones (including children), and practically anything that we can imagine as unpleasant and hard to endure.

Those who are evil and deserving of punishment in this world may also experience similar unpleasantness but their experiences are because of very different reasons and therefore referred to as '*adhāb* (punishment) or '*iqāb* (chastisement).

How can a person tell if what they suffer in life is a punishment ('*adhāb*) or a trial (*balā*)? Their reaction to the experience will tell them. If it brings them closer to Allāh and elevates their faith, then it is *balā*. If it drives them further away from Allāh and increases their doubt in Him then it is a form of punishment. This is because Allāh never tries a *mu'min(a)* to shake his or her faith. He only tries them to the capacity that they can endure so that they grow further in their spirituality. He also never punishes a person in a manner that would shake their faith unless all excuses have been exhausted and the person has chosen to sell his or her hereafter for this world.

Islām has a unique perspective on *balā*. Because humans by nature will flee from suffering and Islām does not ask them to desire what is unnatural, Muslims are told not to pray or wish for *balā*. Yet if they are tested, then they are asked to show patience and even give thanks for being chosen for the test. And thereafter they are encouraged to ask Allāh to help them pass the test and to relieve them of the suffering.

All prophets, Imāms and people of Allāh suffered in life as an example that what humans see as good is not reserved for the faithful and what humans consider as bad is not a sign of being evil. And because the prophets and Imāms have greater endurance to suffering and more conviction and trust in Allāh, they bore the most suffering in human history.

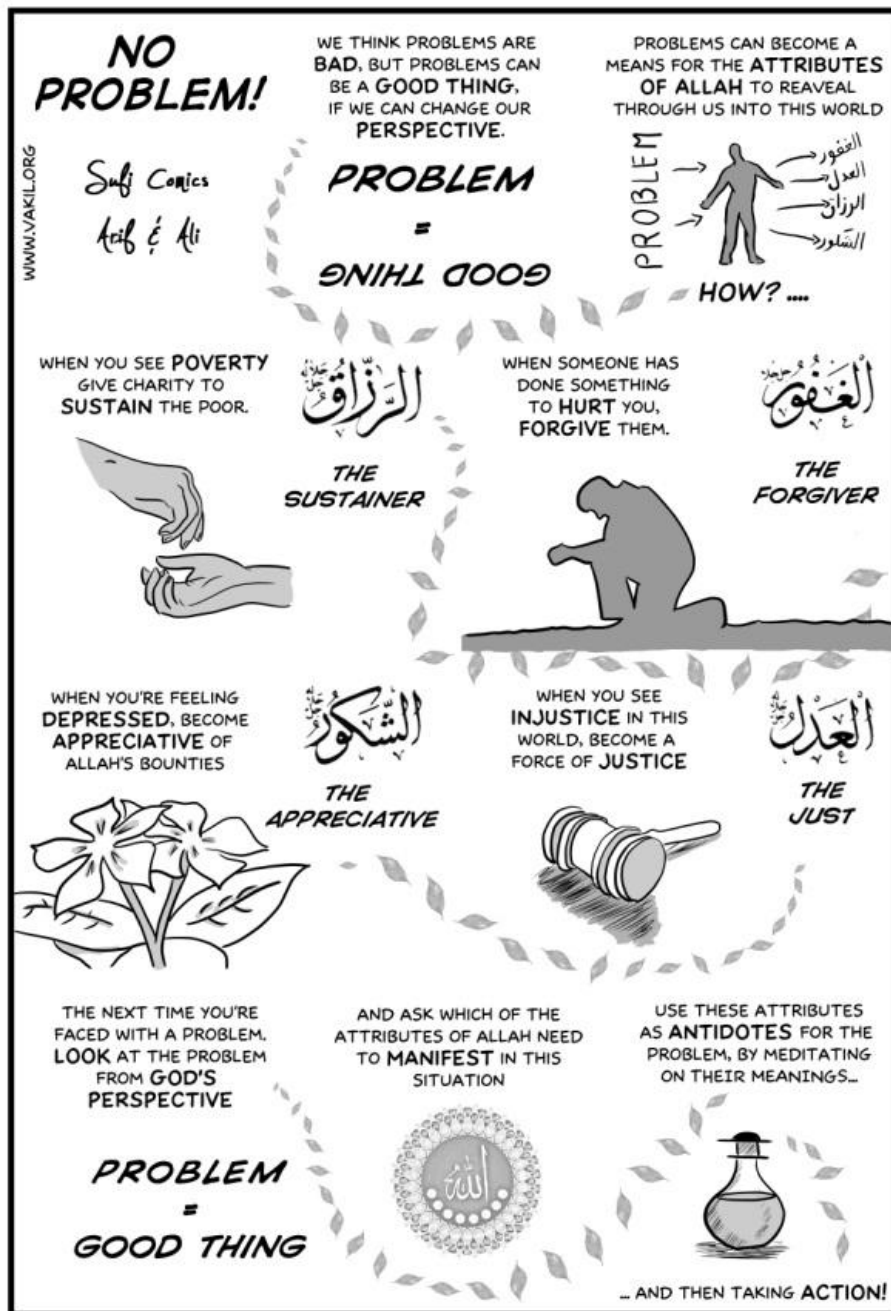
Suffering and trials are like a black cloud with a silver lining. Even natural disasters that seem meaningless have wisdom behind them that only becomes apparent after many years. The key is to trust Allāh's wisdom and not to assume good and bad as being absolute. Everything is relative. If an experience brings you closer to Allāh, it is

good even if it appears to be unpleasant. And if an experience distances you from Allāh, it is bad even if it appears pleasant. Hence Allāh says:

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

Yet it may be that you dislike something while it is good for you, and it may be that you love something while it is bad for you, and Allāh knows and you do not know.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:216



The Qur'ān on Balā

﴿أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تُدْخَلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مَسَّتْهُمُ الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَّاءُ وَزُلْزَلُوا حَتَّى يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَى نَصُرُ اللَّهُ أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ﴾

Do you suppose that you shall enter paradise though there has not yet come to you the like of [what befell] those who went before you? Stress and distress befell them and they were convulsed until the apostle and the faithful who were with him said, 'When will Allāh's help [come]?' Look! Allāh's help is indeed near!

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:214

﴿...وَلِيَبْتَلِيَ اللَّهُ مَا فِي صُدُورِكُمْ وَلِيُمَحَّصَ مَا فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ﴾

...so that Allāh may test what is in your breasts, and that He may purge what is in your hearts, and Allāh knows best what is in the breasts.

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:154

﴿أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تُتْرَكُوا وَلَمَّا يَعْلَمِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا مِنْكُمْ وَلَمْ يَتَّخِذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَا رَسُولِهِ وَلَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلِجَنَّةٍ وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

Do you suppose that you will be let off while Allāh has not yet ascertained those of you who struggle (lit. do jihād) amongst you and those who do not take, besides Allāh and His Apostle and the faithful, anyone as [their] confidant? Allāh is well aware of what you do.

- Surah Tawbah, 9:16

﴿أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ﴾

Do the people suppose that they will be let off because they say, 'We have faith,' and they will not be tested? Certainly We tested those who were before them. So Allāh shall surely ascertain those who are truthful, and He shall surely ascertain the liars.

- Surah al-Ankabut, 29:2-3

﴿وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ حَتَّىٰ نَعْلَمَ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ مِنكُمْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَتَبْلُوَ أَخْبَارَكُمْ﴾

We will surely test you until We ascertain those of you who struggle (do jihād) and those who are patient, and We shall appraise your record.

- Surah Muhammad, 47:31

In all these āyāt, when Allāh says, ‘until We ascertain’ (meaning ‘until We prove’) the test is not because Allāh does not know but it is to let a person see for himself or herself how true he or she is to what he or she claims and for people to pass and fail tests so that they are granted a place in Paradise or Hellfire accordingly.

Hadith on Balā

1. Rasulullāh (s), ‘You are not a *mu’min* until you count *balā* as a blessing (*ni’mah*) and comfort as a trial. This is because the suffering of this world is the blessing of the hereafter and the comfort of this world is a trial in the next world.’
2. Rasulullāh (s), ‘Allāh nourishes his *mu’min* (faithful) servant with trials just like a mother nourishes her baby with milk.’
3. Rasulullāh (s), ‘When Allāh intends good for a community, He tries them.’
4. *Balā* is a sign of Allāh’s love. Rasulullāh (s), ‘When Allāh loves a person, He tries him. When this love reaches a climax, He annihilates him.’ He was asked, ‘what does ‘*annihilates him*’ mean?’ He said, ‘He does not leave him with any wealth nor any children.’
5. Imām Ali (‘a), ‘Trials for an oppressor is to discipline him. For a *mu’min* it is to test him and for a prophet it is to elevate his status.’
6. Imām Ali (‘a), ‘All praise is to Allāh who made the purging of the sins of our Shī’ah in this world through their trials so as to secure their obedience and so that they may become deserving of its reward.’
7. Imām Ali (‘a), ‘*Balā* comes faster to a pure *mu’min* than rain runs down into a valley.’
8. Imām Ali (‘a), ‘Do not rejoice at wealth and comfort and do not grieve at poverty and *balā*. For gold is purified with fire and a *mu’min* is purified with tests (*balā*).’
9. Imām Ali (‘a) said the severest trials for a believer are three: to give out his money to help others, to be just and fair even when it is against himself and to remember Allāh excessively. Then he clarified that when he says remembering Allāh excessively he doesn’t mean saying, ‘*subhān Allāh wal*

hamdu lillāh' but he means remembering Allāh with regards to what Allāh has made *halāl* and *harām* for him. i.e. at the time of temptation to sin.

10. Imām Zayn al-Abidin ('a), 'I dislike that a person should always be healthy and well in the world and never be tried with some affliction.'
11. Imām al-Bāqir ('a), 'A man is tried according to the measure of his love.'
12. Imām al-Bāqir ('a), 'A *mu'min* suffers every kind of affliction and dies every kind of death except that he never commits suicide.'
13. Imām al-Bāqir ('a) and Imām as-Sādiq ('a) were asked at separate occasions whether a *mu'min* suffers and undergoes tribulations and they answered, 'Is *balā* for anyone but a *mu'min*?'
14. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'The world is a prison for the faithful. From what prison is good expected?'
15. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'A *mu'min* is like two sides of a scale. Every time his *imān* (faith) increases, so do his trials.'
16. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'Allāh sends his *mu'min* servant with a variety of trials just like a man who is away from home sends his family gifts.'
17. Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'In paradise there is a level that a person can never attain except by being tried in his health.'
18. It is said that Abu Dhar once said, 'People hate three things while I love them. I love death, I love poverty and I love trials.' Imām as-Sādiq ('a) said, 'May Allāh bless Abu Dhar! But the correct thing is to say: 'death in obedience to Allāh is better than life in disobedience to Allāh. Poverty in obedience to Allāh is better than wealth in disobedience to Allāh. Trials in obedience to Allāh is better than health in disobedience to Allāh.'
19. Imām al-Askari ('a), 'There is no suffering except that Allāh has in it a blessing that overcomes it.'

Istidrāj

Just as Allāh gives trials and suffering in this world to those He loves, He also gives comfort, pleasure, wealth and what we think of as 'good' to those who disbelieve in Him. This is because too much 'good' in this world makes a person forgetful of Allāh, of the Hereafter and even of his or her own soul and its purification. So a person who turns away from Allāh attracts more worldly pleasures to himself or herself. It is as if the worldly pleasures become his or her reward and then they have nothing in the hereafter. As Allāh puts it:

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تَمُوتَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ كِتَابًا مُؤَجَّلًا وَمَنْ يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ الدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَمَنْ يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ الْآخِرَةِ نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَسَنَجْزِي الشَّاكِرِينَ﴾

No soul may die except by Allāh's leave, at an appointed time. Whoever desires the reward of this world, We will give him of it; and whoever desires the reward of the Hereafter, We will give him of it; and soon We will reward the grateful.

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:145

And also:

﴿مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ الْآخِرَةِ نَزِدْ لَهُ فِي حَرْثِهِ وَمَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ الدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ نَصِيبٍ﴾

Whoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter, We will increase for him his harvest, and whoever desires the harvest of the world, We will give it to him, but he will have no share in the Hereafter.

- Surah ash-Shura, 42:20

The 'ulama of *akhlāq* and spirituality have a special term for when Allāh punishes a person and destroys him not by what we think of as 'bad' but by what we think of as 'good' such as too much wealth, too many children, too much luxury and comfort, very good health, and so on. The term is called '*istidrāj*'. It literally means taking someone or something gradually. This is because when a person is punished through *istidrāj*, it is so subtle and slow that he or she never realizes what is happening and also the fact that it is a punishment disguised as a blessing.

One of the qualities of *istidrāj* is the fact that it is gradual, meaning Allāh gives the person a lot of time (or what is called 'respite'). And Allāh actually describes this in the Qur'ān as well:

﴿وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ مَّا نُمَلِّئُهُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّأَنفُسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نُمَلِّئُهُمْ لِيُزِدُوا إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ مَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَذَرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَىٰ مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ حَتَّىٰ يَمِيزَ الْخَبِيثَ مِنَ الطَّيِّبِ ...﴾

Let the faithless not suppose that the respite that 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. Allāh will not leave the faithful in your present state, until He has separated the bad ones from the good...

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:178-179

The idea that the world is not a place of comfort and rest for the faithful is so clear in Islām that Allāh tells us in the Qur'ān that if it was not for the fact that some of the

Muslims with weak faith would stop believing, Allāh would in fact shower the good of this world on the faithless and the faithful would not have a share in it. He says:

﴿وَلَوْلَا أَنْ يَكُونَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً لَجَعَلْنَا لِمَنْ يَكْفُرُ بِالرَّحْمَانِ لِبُيُوتِهِمْ سُقْفًا مِنْ
فِضَّةٍ وَمَعَارِجَ عَلَيْهَا يَظْهَرُونَ وَلِبُيُوتِهِمْ أَبْوَابًا وَسُرُورًا عَلَيْهَا يَتَكَبَّرُونَ وَزُخْرَفًا وَإِنْ كُلُّ
ذَلِكَ لَمَّا مَتَاعَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةُ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

Were it not [for the danger] that mankind would be one community,⁶⁸ We would have surely made for those who defy the All-beneficent, silver roofs for their houses and [silver] stairways by which they ascend; and [silver] doors for their houses and [silver] couches on which they recline; and ornaments of gold;⁶⁹ yet all that would be nothing but the wares of the life of this world, and the Hereafter near your Lord is for the Godway.

- Surah az-Zukhruf, 43:33-35

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) commented on the āyah above and said, 'If Allāh were to do that then no one would have remained a believer.'

The origin of the word *istidrāj* comes from the Qur'ān itself:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ وَأُمْلِي لَهُمْ إِنَّ كَيْدِي
مَتِينٌ﴾

As for those who deny Our signs, We will draw them imperceptibly [into ruin] (nastadrijuhum), whence they do not know. And I will grant them respite, for My devising is indeed sure.

- Surah al-Arif, 7:182-183

﴿فَذَرْنِي وَمَنْ يُكَذِّبُ بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ وَأُمْلِي لَهُمْ
إِنَّ كَيْدِي مَتِينٌ﴾

So leave Me with those who deny this discourse. We will draw them imperceptibly [into ruin], whence they do not know. I will grant them respite, for My devising is indeed sure.

- Surah al-Qalam, 68:44

Obviously the question that comes to mind is: when I am healthy or earning a lot of money or blessed with children and happiness or succeeding in life, how do I know if

⁶⁸ That is, a monolithic community of people without faith.

⁶⁹ Or 'houses embellished with gold.'

it is truly a blessing from Allāh or if it is *istidrāj* and I am being set up for destruction in the hereafter?

The answer is the same as the previous question on how do we know if a suffering is a test (*balā*) or a punishment (*'adhāb*). It will depend on our reaction. If we find we are obeying Allāh and the more He blesses us the more we remember Him, thank Him and share our blessings with others, then it is truly a blessing. If we find that the more He blesses us, the more we disobey Him, forget Him, stop praying, stop going to the masjid, and we begin to hoard and become miserly, then it is *istidrāj*.

That is why Imām Ali ('a) said, 'When you see your Lord sending you trials (while you obey Him) then thank Him. When you see your Lord sending you only blessings consecutively while you continue to disobey Him, then beware!'

What to do During Trials and Suffering

﴿وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ
وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ أُوْلَئِكَ
عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ﴾

We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient — those who, when an affliction visits them, say, 'Indeed we belong to Allāh, and to Him do we indeed return.' It is they who receive the blessings of their Lord and [His] mercy, and it is they who are the [rightly] guided.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:155-157

Allāh revealed to Nabi Musa ('a), 'O Musa, during difficulties, make Me your shield and fort, to resolve your issues.' i.e. turn to Me for help.

Imām Ali ('a), 'When in difficulty, say, '*la hawla wa lā quwwata illa billāhi al-'alliyi al-adheem*', you will be released from it.

Imām ar-Rida ('a), 'I saw my father in a dream and he said to me, 'my son, when you are in difficulty then say often, '*Yā Ra'ufu Yā Raheem*' (O Compassionate, O Merciful).' Then Imām ar-Rida ('a) said, 'And one whom we see in a dream, it is the same as if we saw him whilst awake.'

How to Behave when Others Suffer

Rasulullāh (s), 'When you see people in suffering then say '*Al-hamdulillah*' but let them not hear you for that will grieve them.'

Imām al-Bāqir (‘a), ‘when you see someone suffering, then say three times without the person hearing you, *‘Alhamdu lillāhi ladhi ‘āfāni mimma ibtalāk bihi wa law shā’a fa’al.’* (‘All praise is to Allāh who protected me from what you are afflicted with and had He wished, He could have afflicted me too.’) Then he said, ‘whoever does that will never suffer from that *balā.*’

Imām as-Sādiq (‘a), said, ‘When you see a man suffering and Allāh has blessed you from it, then say ‘O Allāh, I neither laugh nor boast but I thank You over how great Your blessing is on me.’ (*Allāhumma inni lā askharu wa lā afkharu wa lākin ahmaduka ‘ala ‘adhimi ni’māika ‘allaya).*

Imām Ali (‘a) has also said that the person who is not afflicted is not in any less need of praying to Allāh for help and safety than the person who is already afflicted. This teaches us that we must ask Allāh for His protection even when we are healthy and in ease. And that one of the key reactions to suffering is to turn to Allāh for help and use it as a means to come closer to Him and to surrender to His Will and His Wisdom.

Sabr (Patience)

Sabr or patience, are of two types: Sabr over difficulties (what pains you) and sabr over temptation (what pleases you). And Sabr over temptation is greater in reward. This is because when you are in pain, you don’t have much of a choice except to bear patience over your suffering. But when you are tempted with sinful desires, you have a choice of giving in and doing *harām* or bearing patience and avoiding it. It therefore requires a stronger willpower and more courage.

Rasulullāh (s), ‘I am amazed at a faithful (*mu’min*) and his complaining when sick. If he knew how much reward he gets in the illness, he would wish never to stop being sick until he meets his Lord, the Mighty and Glorious.’

Imām Ali (‘a), ‘Patience is a form of courage.’

Imām al-Bāqir (‘a), ‘If a *mu’min* knew what reward he gets for suffering afflictions, he would wish he could be cut up into pieces with scissors.’

Imām as-Sādiq (‘a), ‘Patience is to faith (*imān*) what the head is to the body. Just as without the head the body is lost and useless, so without patience, faith is lost and useless.’

Nabi Isa (‘a), ‘You will never reach what you love until you are patient over what you hate.’

AL-HAMDU-LILLAH
Sufi Comics
Arif & Ali

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IT'S 10TH CENTURY BAGHDAD, SHAYKH ABDUL QADIR TAKES A CLASS IN A MADRESSA. SOMEONE EXCLAIMS...

O SHAYKH! YOUR SHIP CARRYING GOODS ACROSS SEA HAS SUNK. NOTHING HAS REMAINED !!

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ

O SHAYKH, I BRING GOOD NEWS THAT YOUR SHIP IS SAFE!

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ

* AL-HAMDU-LILLAH (ALL PRAISE BELONGS TO GOD)

WE UNDERSTOOD WHY YOU PRAISED GOD WHEN YOU HEARD THE GOOD NEWS, BUT WHAT IS THE REASON FOR PRAISING GOD WHEN YOU HEARD YOUR SHIP SUNK?

WHEN I HEARD MY SHIP HAD SUNK, I SEARCHED IN MYSELF IF I FELT **GRIEVED** BECAUSE OF THE NEWS. I PRAISED GOD, THAT I WAS NOT.

WHEN I HEARD THAT MY SHIP WAS SAFE, I SEARCHED IN MYSELF IF I WAS **OVER JOYED**.

AND I PRAISED GOD THAT I WAS NOT

لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ

SO THAT YOU MAY NOT GRIEVE FOR WHAT HAS ESCAPED YOU, NOR BE EXULTANT AT WHAT HE HAS GIVEN YOU (QURAN 57:23)



Lesson 5

Introduction to Nahj al-Balāgha

The phrase *Nahj al-Balāgha* means ‘The Peak of Eloquence’. It is a collection of 241 sermons, 79 letters and 489 short sayings (aphorisms) of Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib (‘a). It was compiled by Sayyid ar-Radi, a student of Shaykh al-Mufid.

Sayyid ar-Radi did not compile *all* of Imām Ali (‘a)’s words but only the ones that he wanted to use to show as examples of Amir al-Mumineen (‘a)’s eloquence. Nahj al-Balāgha is regarded to be highly reliable and one of the most important texts in Islām after the Qur’ān.

In this and the next lesson, we want to gain some appreciation of this valuable text so that you become very familiar with it. You will find that, along with the Qur’ān, Nahj al-Balāgha can be a great source of inspiration and also a source of comfort in all the ups and downs that you will experience in life. It is a book you must own and keep by your bedside and read every once in a while.

Some of the main themes in Nahj al-Balāgha are:

1. Theology: Knowing Allāh, the Attributes of Allāh, the Prophets and Messengers of Allāh.
2. Theology: Death, the Resurrection, Day of Judgement, Paradise and Hellfire. All such topics are usually referred to as ‘Eschatology’.
3. Spirituality: Asceticism (*zuhd*) and abstinence from the World.
4. Knowledge and Piety.
5. History: The Khilāfah, Imām Ali (‘a)’s right to It.
6. Politics & Warfare: Imām Ali (‘a)’s philosophy in battle, his correspondence with Mu’āwiya and others.
7. Justice & Government: How to govern over people.
8. Topics that Need Explanation: Some words of Imām Ali (‘a) have been misunderstood and need to be explained based on the Imām’s holistic view of the topics. The words that are misunderstood are because of looking at them in isolation or out of context e.g. his strong criticism of the world, his comments on women and their qualities, etc.

In order to get you very familiar with Nahj al-Balāgha, only the sermon, letter or saying numbers will be given here. You must bring a copy of the text with you in class to review this and the next lesson. The text can also be borrowed from the madrasah library. The sermon, letter and aphorism references here are based on the English translation edited and published by the Ahlul Bayt Assembly of America (1996) and the reference numbers in other translations/editions may vary slightly.

The teacher does not have to read the entire sermon or passage for each but simply highlight them for the students so as to make them aware of its content.

1. Theology: Knowing Allāh, the Attributes of Allāh, the Prophets and Messengers of Allāh.

Sermon 1: The opening paragraphs that praise and describe Allāh and define what “deen” is. (*‘awwalu deen ma’rifatuhu’*).

Sermon 40: On the Kharijites slogan, “The Verdict is Only Allāh’s”.

Sermon 49: On Allāh’s Magnificence and Uniqueness.

Sermon 65: On the attributes of Allāh.

Sermons 104 and 160: His words on Rasullāh (s), his character, and his role in bringing forth mankind from darkness.

Sermon 112: His words on the angel of death being beyond description – how then can the Creator be described?

Aphorism 125: His definition of ‘Islām’.

2. Theology: Death, the Resurrection, Day of Judgement, Paradise and Hellfire. All such topics are usually referred to as ‘Eschatology’.

Sermon 20: If you could see what those who have died have seen!

Sermons 85 and 102: Description of the Day of Judgement and Paradise.

Aphorism 130: His speech to the dead at a cemetery.

3. Spirituality: Asceticism (*zuhd*) and Abstinence from the World

Sermon 28: I have never seen one who covets paradise or fears hell, asleep.

Sermon 42: Be the children of the hereafter and not the children of the world: on following pleasures and far-fetched hopes for the world.

Sermon 63: People are tested here through calamities. The world is like a shade – one moment here and then gone.

Sermon 64: Purchase yourself a place in paradise with good actions here.

Sermon 99: Keep away from the world and remember death before you sin.

Sermon 103: Know your worth and abstain from the world.

Sermon 209: The fine balance: Advice to the companion who built a large house for himself and his brother who renounced the world.

Letter 45: To his governor in Basra Uthmān b. Hunayf, who held a banquet for the rich only.

Aphorism 77: To the world – “I have divorced you thrice”.

Aphorism 119: The world is like a serpent – soft to touch but full of venom.

Aphorism 121: What a difference between a temporary sinful pleasure and a hardship whose reward remains forever!

Aphorism 131: To the man who was abusing and cursing the world.

Aphorism 237: The leftover bone of a pig in the hands of a leper.

Aphorism 465: Is there no free man to leave this world?

Conclusion: what ‘world’ is Imām Ali (‘a) condemning? Do you see the difference between the physical world that provides humans with their physical needs of life versus materialism and making the life of the world the end and objective of one’s existence?

4. The Ahl al-Bayt (‘a)

Sermon 109: Last paragraph on the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a).

Sermon 144: On the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) being the only *Rāsikhuna fi al-‘Ilm* (‘Those immersed in knowledge’).

Sermon 154: We are the doors to the House. Anyone who enters from other than the doors is called a thief!

Sermon 202: His mourning the demise of Sayyida Fātima az-Zahra (‘a), the daughter of Rasullāh (s).

Sermon 239: A description of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a).

Letter 31: Advice of a father to his son (Imām Hasan (‘a) or Muhammad al-Hanafiya).

Aphorisms 37 and 332: His dislike for the excessive veneration of the Imām.

Aphorism 109: We the Ahl al-Bayt are the measure.

Aphorism 111: If a mountain had loved me, it would crumble.

Aphorism 326: I am the leader (*ya’sub*) of the faithful.

5. The Human Being:

Aphorism 8: How wonderful is man!

Aphorism 108: The human heart and need for moderation in everything.

6. Akhlāq

Sermon 206: Urging decency and *akhlāq* to his men, even against the enemy.

Aphorism 31: Faith and Faithlessness both stand on four things.

Aphorism 150: On hypocrisy and preaching to others what you don't practice.

7. Qualities of His Shi'ah:

Sermon 12: Even those yet to be born were with me in Jamal.

Sermon 190: Last paragraph: One who dies knowing the right of Allāh, Rasullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) dies a martyr.

Sermon 193: The qualities of the truly Godwary (*Khutbat al-Mutaqin*).

Aphorism 45: Even if I strike the nose of a believer, he will never hate me.

Aphorism 299: Amir al-Mu'minin ('a)'s "brother-in-faith" and his qualities.

Aphorism 343: Qualities of a *mu'min*.

Aphorism 441: Qualities of the lovers of Allāh.

Lesson 6

Nahj al-Balāgha (Cont'd)

1. Knowledge and Piety

Sermon 5: "I have hidden knowledge".

Sermon 18: on unworthy people passing judgement when Allāh has clarified everything.

Aphorism 147: On Knowledge vs. Wealth and the truly learned.

2. History: The Khilāfah, Imām Ali ('a)'s right to It

Sermon 3: Khutbat ash-Shiqshiqiyya.

Sermon 6: "I have continually been deprived of my right".

Sermon 17: About those who sat to judge others whilst they were ignorant themselves.

Sermon 22: On being accused for the murder of Uthmān as a pretext to fight him.

Sermon 33: On leadership having less value to him than an old shoe.

Sermon 139: At the Consultative Counsel (Shura) after 'Umar.

Sermon 172: When he was accused of being greedy for the Khilāfah.

Sermon 173: On eligibility for the Khilāfah.

Letter 28: To Mu'āwiya on the rope that was tied around his neck.

3. Politics & Warfare: Imām Ali ('a)'s philosophy in battle, his correspondence with Mu'āwiya and others

Sermons 9, 56 and 66: On how to fight in battle.

Sermon 11: How to battle – advice to his son Muhammad al-Hanafiya.

Sermon 13: Condemning the people of Basra for causing the first civil war in Islām (Jamal) on the instigation of Talha, Zubayr and Aisha (with Mu'āwiya behind the scenes).

Sermon 25: Expressing his disappointment with the people of Kufa after Siffin.

Sermon 55: His reluctance to start the Battle of Siffin.

Letters 6, 7, 9, 10, 17, 30, 32, 37, 64, 73: Samples of letters to Mu'āwiya.

Conclusion: Note Imām Ali (‘a)’s refusal to start a battle – both in Jamal and Siffin. In one battle he sent a young man with a Qur’ān offering arbitration and peace but they killed the young man and tore the Qur’ān with arrows. Yet once Imām Ali (‘a) started the battle, he wouldn’t hesitate or flee. So the refusal to fight initially is not on doubt but to prevent bloodshed and to reconcile where possible. It also indicates his understand that as long as dialogue and peace is possible, violence should be avoided for it always brings more disunity, hate and harm in its aftermath.

4. Justice & Government: How to govern over human beings

Sermon 15: Restoring Justice after his predecessors.

Sermon 53: To Malik al-Ashtar when he appointed him governor of Egypt.

5. Sayings that need clarification:

Sermon 80: On the ‘deficiencies’ of ‘women’.

Aphorism 61: A woman is a ‘scorpion’.

Aphorism 235: The qualities bad in a man are good in a woman.

Aphorism 239: A woman is all evil but more evil is man’s helplessness before her.

6. The Most Famous Sermons: These are given just to make the students aware of them – they are fairly lengthy and do not need to be discussed in class. They are held in high regard by scholars because of their eloquence and content and have therefore been given titles of their own:

Khutba ash-Shiqshiqiyya (The Sermon of the Camel’s Froth): Sermon 3

Khutbat al-Gharrā (The Brilliant Sermon): Sermon 83

Khutba Ashbāh (The Sermon of the Skeletons): Sermon 91

Khutba al-Qāsiyya (The Sermon of Disparagement): Sermon 192

Khutba al-Mutaqeen (Sermon of the Godwary): Sermon 193

Lesson 7

A Profile of the Perfect Shí'ah Youth

Before defining what makes the *Perfect Muslim Youth*, let us summarize the key lessons of life that we have covered during this final Madrasah graduating year:

1. Importance of Practice

Acquiring religious knowledge is easy. Being interested in spirituality (*Irfān*), *tafsir*, etc. is easy. What is difficult is putting it into practice. Instead of practising what they already know, most people are in search of 'more knowledge' in the hope that it will somehow 'miraculously' help them evolve further. So they attend more classes, more seminars, more lectures. Knowledge is a double-edged sword. Without it, we remain ignorant and don't know how to evolve. But acquiring it and not practising it, blocks us from acquiring more real knowledge and in fact hardens our hearts. Hence the hadith of Rasullullāh (s) that say, '*One who increases in knowledge but does not increase in his/her detachment from the world, does not increase in anything except his/her distance from Allāh.*' It is therefore the 'boring' stuff and difficult matters – fasting, worshipping, reflecting, working with the poor, etc. that is required to change the theory we learn into real knowledge.

2. Importance of Being Connected to the Community

A lot of youth feel pressured to help out in their community and withdraw when they have exams or start university. The community doesn't need the youth. Middle-aged individuals (who can help themselves) usually run the community. The youth are simply given the opportunity to learn to become adults. From a youth perspective however, the community can be a life-saver – literally – especially when they start university. Everyone needs to socialize and to mingle with peers. The community gives you an alternative to being friends with those who lack Islāmic values, experiment with drugs, dabble with issues like atheism, etc. When you are attached to and involved in your local community (e.g. a youth group), it acts as a shield that protects you from being confused, lost, depressed, lonely, losing your faith, etc. To stop coming to the masjid because you now go to university is a fatal mistake. It is when you start university that you need to be part of the Muslim community the most.

3. Importance of Learning all your Life by Teaching

It would be nice to have a teacher all our lives or someone who can always be there to help answer all our questions. But at some point, we need to

become our own teacher. And it starts after you graduate from Madrasah. Nothing will give you the discipline of constant learning like being a teacher.

4. Importance of Giving Back to Society – the Meaning of Being Responsible and an Adult

The youth will often complain that their parents treat them like kids. The reason parents do that is because they don't see a sense of responsibility in you. A sense of responsibility is shown when you can do what normal adults do without being told to do it. For example, when you don't have to be reminded to clean your room or to take out the garbage. When you contribute some of what you earn to the family upkeep. When you don't spend all your free time playing computer games, chatting with friends, surfing the internet. As soon as you learn to show the concerns that an adult does and you take on the responsibility of tasks at home without being told – it may be running the washing machine, picking up things lying around, going out to get the grocery, etc. - you begin to evolve into an adult. To put it differently, a child is very selfish from birth. They assume their parents have to serve them and provide for them food, clothes, shelter, time and make their entire lives rotate around theirs. It never occurs them to thank their parents or appreciate their sacrifices except perhaps on special occasions. Your parents will only see you as an adult when you move from being entirely selfish to being selfless.

5. Life Only Gets Busier Until You Retire

A lot of people assume they will contribute to society and the community or attain all their noble and religious goals after they finish university or this and that. As we grow older, life only gets busier and our commitments multiply. We only find time when we retire at which we point we don't have the energy and zeal to make a difference.

6. Maximize your Productivity in Life before you are 60-65 – not before you die.

No one wishes to die when they are 60-65. Everyone would love to live longer. At least until their 80s or 90s. But whatever you wish to accomplish in life, do so before you are in your 60s. Don't say, I hope to do this or that 'before I die.' The point is: most people, even if they are alive after they grow old, they are not productive enough to do much. So being alive when you're old won't make that much of a difference in terms of your goals in life.

7. Don't be Ashamed of Learning and Asking Regardless of your Age or Circumstances.

8. Importance of Memorizing the Qur'ān and Ad'iyā

Memorizing the Qur'ān, hadith and *ad'iyā* (pl. of *du'a*) is not just for the spiritual rewards (*thawāb*). Often in life, when you are faced with challenges or severe difficulties, you will only find solace from the Qur'ān, *ad'iyā*, hadith of Rasullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (a) and your faith. If you know much of this by heart, you will be surprised how the appropriate passages will come to you naturally to guide you in how you react to situations.

Remember: Whatever you make an effort to memorize while you are a child or even a teenager, can stay with you for life. What you try and memorize in your 30s and 40s will be hard to retain. So make the time to memorize as much of the Qur'ān as you can before you are older.

9. The Major Decisions you Will Make in Life Include:

- Career
- Spouse
- Religious Devotion and Practice

10. The Not So Major Aspects of Life Include:

- How Rich You Are
- Where you Live
- Who your Friends Are

Of course where you live is important. It is *harām* to go and live in a place where there are no Shi'ahs or Muslims and where you will not be able to practice your faith or there is danger you will lose it. And of course it is very important who your friends are because they can influence you positively or negatively and help you succeed in the hereafter or ruin you. But what we mean is that if you make the right career choice and you make the right choice of spouse who shares your religious goals and you don't compromise on your faith and how you practice Islām (salāh on time, hijāb, going to masjid, etc.) then you don't have to live in a Muslim country or have lots of friends. You could be living in a non-Muslim country and have no friends but still lead an Islāmic life.

The Perfect Youth

BELIEF

The perfect youth understands the importance of tawhid and why it is the primary purpose for which all prophets and messengers were ever sent. The aim in life, for the perfect youth is to gain true realization (*ma'rifah*) of Allāh. He or she is deep in his/her reflection and understanding of religion and his/her faith is unshakable. The perfect youth lives by the Qur'ān and the teachings of Rasullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). He or she is very tolerant and understanding.

Because of his or her pure belief that is not mixed with culture, the perfect youth is very moderate and never over emotional about anything. He or she is never extreme or radical whether it is in what they believe or what they don't believe. The perfect youth does not doubt in Islām or its teachings only because science says so. He/she is not judgmental, harsh and intolerant of others. The perfect youth sees himself or herself as a student of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and a teacher of others.

DEVOTION & PRACTICE

The Perfect Youth is strong in faith and not ashamed of showing it. If it is a girl she does not compromise on her hijāb for example. If it is time for salāh, the perfect youth will pray even in a public park without worrying who is watching. This is because he/she is too focused on the fact that Allāh is watching.

One of the aims of the perfect youth is to memorize the Qur'ān. He/she is eager to learn Arabic.

The perfect youth loves to help the poor and the needy and is always looking for ways to help the underprivileged.

The perfect youth never misses *salāt al-layl* and loves to fast often even when it is not the month of Ramadan e.g. on Mondays and Thursdays. When the perfect youth prays, it is noticeable how long their ruku' and sujud are and how much they enjoy worshipping their Lord.

The perfect youth is greedy for religious knowledge. The perfect youth has read the Qur'ān with its meaning (translation) several times and has read Nahj al-Balāgha cover-to-cover.

The perfect youth is sincere in his/her faith. This means he or she obeys the shari'ah without ask 'why'. There is nothing more hateful to the perfect youth than committing harām. He or she will take extra precaution in obeying Allāh. The perfect youth does not listen to music or like being around a place where there is music being played.

RELATIONS

FAMILY

The perfect youth has utmost respect for his/her parents. He or she will not let his/her parents serve him/her but will always be at hand to serve them. He/she is dependable and responsible even in the eyes of his/her parents. When a parent walks into a room, the perfect youth stands up in respect for his/her parent and will not sit down until they do. He or she does not raise his/her voice above his/her parents and does not look back at them with anger. You will never see the perfect youth arguing or speaking back rudely to his/her parent.

FRIENDS

The perfect youth has a strong personality. He or she influences others positively instead of being influenced by them. The perfect youth does not have friends who do drugs or alcohol. In fact, the perfect youth does not have any friends who lead sinful lives or are disrespectful of Islām.

The perfect youth values his/her time and will not go to the mall ‘just to hang out’ or ‘kill time’. His or her friends are few and selective with similar interests. Most of the perfect youth’s friends are practising Muslims. He/she does not make fun of others especially just to make their friends laugh. When the perfect youth socializes with his/her friends he/she is never seen backbiting or lying, even if it is in jest and joking. The perfect youth sees him or herself as one waiting to serve the Imām of the Time.

WORK

The perfect youth is not lazy. Rarely will you see him/her just lying around doing nothing. They regard their time as being precious so they won’t sit in front of the TV/computer just to waste time.

The perfect youth always has more religious knowledge than anyone else around them in their family and/or friends gathering. He or she is reliable and independent. The perfect youth does not like to ask others for help when they can help themselves. He or she is neither a miser nor extravagant.

GOALS IN LIFE

The perfect youth is simple in his or her clothes and food. They see the people of the world as being foolish in how they give such importance to brand names and fashion. The perfect youth is aware of the current world political affairs and concerned about fellow Muslims and their suffering around the world.

The motto of the perfect youth is simply this: ‘My prayers and my sacrifices, my life and my death, are all only for Allāh, the Sustainer of the Universe.’ (Qur’ān, 6:162)

CHARACTER

The perfect youth is very polite and gentle yet very brave and courageous. Everyone speaks of how nice and polite he/she is. When the perfect youth is happy you will see him/her laugh lightly or smile but never laugh loudly and noisily. No one has ever heard the perfect youth swear and no one ever will.

The perfect youth is decent. He or she is never seen with their legs stretched out in front of others, even if it is just their friends. He or she is always seated respectfully in the presence of others. The perfect youth dresses modestly. Besides Hijab, he or she is never seen dressed in clothes that are tight or revealing. He/she loves to dress in comfortable but loose-fitting clothes that reflect his/her inner sense of shame and modesty. He/she is so chaste that no one will even think or dare of sharing a dirty joke or saying indecent things in their presence. And because he/she is courageous, even if someone were to act sinfully in his/her presence, he/she would walk away or show his/her displeasure. He/she won't smile or 'play along' only to please someone whilst displeasing Allāh.

The perfect youth rarely loses his/her temper. He or she does not like being praised for the good he/she does. When he/she gives charity or helps someone, he/she will always hide it. The perfect youth is not wasteful, whether in food or clothes or spending. They never buy anything impulsively and they never hoard clothes or anything that can be of help of others.

LIFESTYLE

The perfect youth is not obsessed with what others his or her age group are obsessed with e.g. computer games, internet, chatting, or the latest craze. The perfect youth is focused on the hereafter. He or she will often talk to Allāh even if it is in his or her heart. She or he is extremely sincere.