

[Home](#) > [Provisions for the Journey \(Mishkat\), Volume 2](#) > [Lesson 30: The Significance of Invocation of Allah, Constructive Social Interaction and the Criteria for Choosing Friends](#) > The Virtue of Sharing Food with a Believer and Abstaining from the Food of Corrupt People

---

## Lesson 30: The Significance of Invocation of Allah, Constructive Social Interaction and the Criteria for Choosing Friends

This section of the Noble Prophet's (S) advice to Abu Dharr is related to socializing and associating with other people. One of the issues which the scholars of ethics have mentioned in their books and about which there are differences, to a greater or lesser extent, is whether it is better in the viewpoint of Islam to associate and socialize with other people or seek seclusion and solitude. There are a great deal of *hadiths* in regard to the importance of socializing with other people, one of these is that Imam al-Baqir ('a) stated:

“At the time of his martyrdom, Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali ('a) called his children al-Hasan, al-Husayn, Muhammad Hanafiyah and also his younger children and pronounced his last will and testament to them; at the end of his will, he stated, ‘O my children! Associate with people in such a way that they will miss you when you are absent from them and cry for you when you die.’”<sup>1</sup>

The scholars of ethics have also made mention of a number of benefits deriving from seclusion and solitude; benefits which appear to suggest that it is distasteful to associate with other people. In contrast, they have also alluded to the rewards of socializing with people and have enumerated harms resulting from solitude.

### The Benefits of Reclusion and Solitude

Some of the benefits of seclusion and solitude which have been enumerated include the following:

a) Secluding oneself from the society helps a person find free time to worship, meditate about worldly and heavenly affairs, fall in love with invocation of Allah, conceive divine secrets and reflect about the wonders of Allah's creatures. Associating with people prevents man from procuring these superior

graces. It has been said that it was due to the invaluable role of self-reclusion in edification of the soul that Prophet Muhammad (S) used to go alone to the mountain of Hira' at the threshold of his prophetic mission and would embark upon invocation of Allah and seclude himself from the people until the light of prophethood shined upon his soul and, after that, the people no longer prevented him from Allah.

Even though he existed physically among the people, his heart was constantly with Allah and invocation and remembrance of Him was always alive in his soul. Without the divine power of the prophetic mission and without attaining the station of proximity to Allah, man cannot strike a balance between association with the people and constant supplication of Allah.

b) As a result of seclusion from the people, man extricates himself from a great deal of sins, like 1) gossip and 2) sanctimony, which usually occur on account of associating with people. The reason is that man becomes afflicted by ostentation and hypocrisy as a result of mingling with people. This occurs because the people will hurt or aggrieve a man who does not compromise with them and who makes up his mind to prevent them from ugly deeds and indecent speech. In contrast, he becomes afflicted with sanctimony once he compromises with them and quietly concedes to their ugly deeds. 3) Silence in regard to bidding good and forbidding evil; 4) not purifying the human nature and disposition from mean ethical qualities and indecent deeds which derive from ardent desire for the world. Ardent desire for the world itself is aroused on account of mixing with people.

It is natural that when a person is not self-built and has not reached a level where he can harness and control his appetitive soul and restrain it from error, he commits sin whilst in a group; and most often conversation and associating with others provides the background for becoming tainted by sin.

c) It is for the purpose of liberating oneself from quarrels and disputes, protecting one's religion and restraining one's heart from social deception (because there are no gatherings devoid of bigotry, hatred and animosity) that a person avoids groups and assemblies and becomes immune from deviations.

d) Freedom from harm from others: sometimes people aggrieve others by means of gossip. At other times they distress other people by way of being suspicious towards them, making false accusations or by means of covetousness. It is for this reason that when man abstains from the presence of other people, he becomes free from these issues, but he will not be free from the evil of their jealousies and enmity as long as he associates and socializes with people or takes part in their activities. At every moment sedition and intrigue is being plotted with the aim of striking a blow to him so as to bring him down from his rank and status.

e) Solitude and seclusion from the people results in man not coveting what other people own and in other people not begrudging what he owns. Man's tranquility and comfort is guaranteed in severing people's grudges against him because man can never please everyone's expectations. It is for this reason that embarking on edification of character is better than striving to please people.

If man wants to discharge all of the people's rights such as burying the dead, visiting the sick and taking

part in various ceremonies, he will spend much of his time and not fulfill his more important duties and if he decides to discharge some of his social duties and neglect others, those people whose functions he did not attend to will complain and not accept whatever excuses he has to offer. Thus, he feels indebted to people and this in itself is cause of enmity and ill-feeling. However, a person who completely secludes himself from these issues is less likely to be entangled by them.

f) A person who lives in reclusion and solitude is liberated from witnessing proud, stubborn and foolish people, all of whom cause irritation. A certain man was asked, “Why do you look sad?” He responded, “Because I was looking at the rich and the proud.” Therefore, from the worldly perspective, witnessing the rich and the proud affects man in an undesirable manner and from the point of view of the hereafter, man does not hesitate to talk about them in their absence once he has been vexed by them. In addition to that, once man has been hurt by other people’s gossip, false accusation and jealousies, he does not hesitate to retaliate and all these result in the corruption of man’s religion and faith; it is for this reason that a man who secludes himself from people remains safe from all these calamities.

## **The Benefits of Association and Coexistence with Others**

A great deal of religious as well as worldly goals and needs are attained with the help of other people and cannot be achieved without association and coexistence with other human beings. Therefore, that which is attained by associating with other people is lost by reclusion and seclusion and it is natural that losing those benefits is one of the detriments of reclusion. With regard to what has been mentioned, some of the benefits of associating with people must thus be enumerated:

### **a) Teaching and learning from other people**

The importance of teaching and learning from other people is very clear to everyone and is one of the superior forms of worship which cannot be attained except by mixing and associating with others. A person who chooses to live in reclusion and solitude is inhibited from the important duties of acquisition of knowledge and its dissemination and without the least doubt man is afflicted by irreparable losses and privations if he lags behind in religious and secular knowledge as a result of living in seclusion from knowledgeable people and does not learn the divine laws.

### **b) Deriving benefit from other people and helping other people**

It is natural that deriving benefit from other people can only be attained by associating, affiliating and conversing with them and this is not feasible except by mixing with others and a person who wants to derive benefit from other people cannot be a recluse and must have relations with people through coexistence with others. Of course, one’s endeavors and deeds have to be carried out in the way of Allah’s pleasure.

Helping other people or acting in their interests implies that an individual must do so by means of his

property, through his actions and through his advice to solve the problems of others. In truth, rising to help other people has a lot of divine rewards and these divine rewards cannot be attained except by mixing and associating with other people. A person who can help other people bear their loads and solve their problems has attained great virtue and this cannot be achieved in solitude. A person who is in seclusion can only manage to perform personal worship like recommendable prayers and other individual duties.

### **c) Training and educating other people as well as self-edification**

Self-edification and refinement of the soul denote endeavor and struggle to cure diseases of the heart and bearing with patience the bad habits of people and the harm they inflict for the sake of repressing the soul and controlling its carnal desires and appetites. This matter can only be achieved under the auspices of coexisting with other human beings. Constructive association with people is better than seclusion and reclusion for a person who has not yet embarked on edification of character and refinement of the soul and who cannot control the passions by observing divine injunctions.

Educating and training other people implies warning them about the consequences of ill deeds and restraining them from sinning in the same way that a teacher behaves with his student. The fruits of reclusion have to be compared with the results of associating with people before the best way of life can be selected.

### **d) Friendship and affection with other people**

This important issue is achieved by attending gatherings, socializing and fraternizing with other people. Of course, we ought to abstain from friendship and affection which results in doing prohibited deeds and make friendships on the basis of Allah's desires and the injunctions of divine law.

We should make friends with those who increase our perfection and knowledge, not those who cause us to waste time on vain pursuits and squander our material and spiritual aptitudes. Most often, a friend and companion play an important role in the attainment of prosperity and perfection or misfortune and villainy. It is for this reason that one must take the utmost caution and care.

The Noble Prophet (S) states:

“A person plays a vital role in his friend's religion. Therefore, every one of you ought to be cautious with whom he becomes friends.”<sup>2</sup>

In regard to the importance of companionship with divine scholars, Luqman, the Wise, thus told his son:

“O my son! Associate with divine scholars and be humble towards them. Verily hearts become lively under the auspices of wisdom, in the same way that raindrops bring the earth to life.”<sup>3</sup>

### **e) To derive and bring divine reward**

Another benefit of associating with other people is that man derives divine reward from being at their service and other human beings too gain divine reward from being at the service of man. Deriving divine reward is attained by taking part in the burial rites of the dead, visiting the sick in hospitals, going to the homes of acquaintances and friends and taking part in their sorrows and joys.

Most often, these issues result in strong brotherly ties and making the hearts of Muslims cheerful and this in itself has a lot of divine reward. However, doing good deeds towards others even takes place when one's door is open to other people so that they may come to his home in times of hardship and loss to express their condolences and congratulate him at times of joy and celebration. All these things make other people derive divine benefit. In the same way, the people derive divine benefit if a religious scholar opens his door to them so that they can visit him.

### **f) Humility and modesty**

The superior quality of humility and modesty arises in man as a result of associating with other people and in all truthfulness this is one of the highest stations which man can attain and doubtless that it cannot be attained in solitude and seclusion because sometimes the result of seclusion is self-pride. A story has been narrated that there once lived a wise scholar who had authored three hundred and sixty philosophical works. As a result, he conjectured that he had attained a very high position in the eyes of Allah.

Allah inspired the prophet of his time to tell that wise man that he had filled the earth with hypocrisy and sorrow and that Allah was not pleased with his literary works. After hearing this, the scholar chose to live in solitude and seclusion and distanced himself from the people and went to live in a hole underground and said to himself, "Now Allah has become pleased with me."

Allah once again inspired His prophet to tell that scholar that He was still not pleased with him. Allah would only be pleased with him once he associated with the people and bore their injuries with patience. Thereafter, that wise man attached himself to the people and mixed with them in the streets and the bazaar and would associate with them and eat food with them until Allah finally inspired his prophet to tell that wise man that now He was pleased with him.

There are many people who have chosen to remain at home and seclude themselves from others and this same seclusion from people becomes a cause of pride. Again, this pride becomes a cause of their not attending social functions because they conceive themselves to be higher than the rest of the people.

### **g) Acquisition of experience**

Experience is attained by associating with others because man becomes aware of the states, thoughts

and deeds of people after becoming acquainted with their actions and the leaps and lapses which they have in the courses of their lives. As a result of this, he chooses the provisions he needs in order to traverse the correct path in life. With all certainty, innate intellect is not enough to comprehend the advisable or expedient things of religion and the world on its own and experience helps it in this direction and someone who has not had enough experience cannot derive benefit from solitude and reclusion.

It has become clear from the previous discussion that solitude and reclusion cannot be denied in totality and associating with people at all times cannot be said to be entirely advisable, but the ruling or decision is dependent on the spirit and states of every individual and the spirit of his companions and the motive for friendship and companionship. In short, seclusion from people causes enmity and hatred and excessive mixture with them can result in bad deeds; therefore, man ought to observe moderation between solitude and association with others.

## **Fondness and Brotherhood, Blessings of Allah**

Without the least doubt, whatever Allah, the Exalted, has created—ranging from the mountains, the valleys and the seas to man and the animals—all are blessings. In technical terms, this cosmos has a coordinated order and its components are in relation and harmony with each other. In truth, a perfect order rules over the universe and everything is exactly where it must be and all creatures derive benefit from one another as a result of the close relationships which exist among them.

According to this principle, human beings have to be useful to one another and help one another to move in the direction of the aim for which Allah, the Exalted, has created them; and that goal is termed 'perfection'. From another perspective, although Allah, the Exalted, has principally created human beings to be blessings to one another so that they can traverse the course of perfection, man is able to change these blessings of Allah into calamities and villainy because he is a free-willed agent. As Allah states:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ بَدَّلُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ كُفْرًا وَأَحَلُّوا قَوْمَهُمْ دَارَ الْبَوَارِ

***“Have you not regarded those who have changed Allah’s blessings with ingratitude, and landed their people in the house of ruin?”<sup>4</sup>***

With regard to what has been mentioned, people can make themselves a blessing for other human beings in order for others to derive benefit from them or they can become a cause of trouble and problems for other people. Association, brotherhood and fraternity are among the greatest divine blessings in which Allah has placed particular grace; as He has stated:

...وَأَذْكُرُوا لِلَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا ...

***“...And remember Allah’s blessings upon you when you were enemies. Then He brought your hearts together, so you became brothers with His blessing...”<sup>5</sup>***

Therefore, the value of brotherly love and affection, which is a blessing of Allah, must be understood and also steps must be taken to strengthen this intimacy and a Muslim must try to be a helper, confidant and sympathizer of his Muslim brother and not to be the cause of his displeasure or become an oppressor to him.

Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) states:

“A Muslim is the brother of his fellow Muslim; he is his brother’s eyes, mirror and guide. A Muslim neither betrays a fellow Muslim nor does he oppress him. A Muslim does not lie to his brother and does not gossip about him.”<sup>6</sup>

However, it cannot be asserted that association and social intercourse with all human beings is beneficial, and in contrast it cannot be said that socializing with people is entirely harmful so that man must not associate with anyone; therefore, certain criteria have to be taken into consideration by means of which constructive and productive socialization will be separated from unproductive and harmful fraternization. Man has to know with whom to associate in order to be helped in attaining divine and spiritual goals—man needs to distinguish with which people he ought to socialize in order to procure spiritual perfection as well as to be successful in carrying out his duties.

Man has to discern with which people to associate so as to be able to positively influence and constructively impress them because productive guidance of other human beings gives fruit to human perfection. A person himself achieves prosperity once he realizes his responsibility to help other human beings—whether materially or spiritually, and of course spiritual help is more valuable than material help—and undertakes the encouragement of others to perform their duties and guides them to pursue the path of bliss and prosperity because he has worshipped Allah by means of discharging his responsibilities and consequently has become more complete.

In reality in this world, whatever service we do for other human beings, especially if that assistance is done with a correct and sincere intention as well as according to divine legal criteria, we have actually done service to ourselves; that is to say, we have worshipped Allah and its reward will be granted to us. Therefore, social intercourse is invaluable for human beings if it becomes the cause of aiding others and/or deriving spiritual good from them and thereby becoming more focused on one’s goals. Without doubt, socialization is beneficial if as a result of it man’s knowledge increases and his soul grows more complete.

In contrast, social intercourse with people who not only do not remind man about Allah but also lead him towards negligence and invite him by means of their words and deeds towards spiritual collapse, moral decline and all sorts of deviation is neither desirable nor constructive. It is for this reason that not just any person should be chosen for friendship and intimacy. High qualities and valuable attributes have to

be the criteria for selecting friends and companions and of course the prominent qualities of a friend and companion have the most beneficial effects. Sometimes perhaps there are worldly and material benefits such as wealth and position to be derived from friends, but the best rewards to be derived from friendship are religious blessings.

## The Criteria for Choosing Friends and Associates

In regard to the hardships of selecting suitable friends and the positive and negative influences of good and bad friends, Islamic sources have topics specially dedicated to explaining the criteria of choosing companions, and the saints [awliya'] of Allah have enumerated the attributes and qualities of suitable friends. One of the instances where the qualities of a suitable friend were expounded was when the Noble Prophet (S) was asked in regard to who the best associate was. He responded:

“The best friend is a person whom looking at reminds you about Allah, whose words increase your knowledge and whose deeds remind you about the hereafter.”<sup>7</sup>

Or when the companions of Prophet Jesus (‘a) asked him with which people to associate, he responded:

“Associate with a person whom looking at reminds you about Allah, whose deeds make you desirous of the hereafter and whose knowledge increase your logic and intelligence.” Then he also commanded them, “Become close to Allah by abstaining from sinners and become friends with Allah by making enmity with evil-doers and please Allah by annoying the iniquitous.”<sup>8</sup>

The Gracious Qur’an quotes a man who met with calamity as a result of deviating from the right path and the way of the prophets of Allah and thus oppressed himself and on this account became caught up in the fire of divine wrath and bit his fingers in regret and sorrow, saying:

يَا وَيْلَتَى لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فُلَانًا خَلِيلًا \* لَقَدْ أَضَلَّنِي عَنِ الذِّكْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَنِي وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِلْإِنْسَانِ خَذُولًا

***“Woe to me! I wish I had not taken such a one as a friend! Certainly he led me astray from the Reminder after it had come to me, and Satan is a deserter of man.”***<sup>9</sup>

This kind of verse denotes the fact that one of the causes of becoming misled is unsuitable friends and companionship with those who are misled; therefore, a believer ought to abstain from unsuitable friendships and refrain from unhealthy gatherings. Of course, people are not the same: some individuals are so built and have such strong wills that they do not fall under the influence of other people no matter what the circumstances but instead influence those around them, but there are others who are influenced by whoever they associate with as a result of weak determination and shaky faith and are easily impressed by the conduct and morals of those around them. Therefore, man has to be cautious with whom he associates and who influences him. Those who are stronger, even if they are not

influenced by other people, have to observe from whom they derive more benefit and set priorities in their social intercourse.

Therefore, in whatever condition, if we are in a group of people who remind us more about Allah and the hereafter, increase our knowledge, encourage us to do more good deeds, act in the service of other people, and we easily find ourselves traversing the right path as a result of their help, such association is certainly correct and productive; however, in other than this case association with people could produce undesirable and bad results. Therefore, it cannot be asserted that all assemblies are definitely good and man has to go into every gathering and associate with every person on the pretext that amiability and amicability are good; in reality man deceives himself with such fanciful thoughts.

Association with every person is not beneficial—most often a person initially enters a gathering with a pure intention and thereafter comprehends that association at that place is not in his interests because the people present are gossiping, lying, talking vanity, making obscene jokes and encouraging him to be a mammon, or their conduct is such that it attracts a person to the world and makes him heedless of the hereafter. In this case, one ought not to take part in the gathering on the pretext of amicability and amiability unless he has such spiritual strength that he can influence the others and unless despite knowing that their conduct is indecent, he still is sure that he can guide them with advice and admonition. Such association, which is an instance of bidding the good and forbidding the evil and encouraging others towards what is right, enjoys special importance in the divine law of Islam, is desirable and productive.

In a certain *hadith*, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Be cautious with whom you talk, because a man’s friends are brought together and embodied before him once he dies; if they were good people, he is placed in the group of the good ones and if they were bad individuals, he is put in the group of bad people.”[10](#)

Therefore, if the question is asked about what is advisable according to the Islamic point of view, whether socialization with people or seclusion from them is preferable, the response would be thus: it is not true that keeping company with people is advisable in all instances nor that solitude and reclusion are undesirable, but secluding oneself from a person who encourages man to sin and causes one to deviate from the right path, separation from a person who causes man’s faith to become weak, dissociation from a person who incites polytheism and doubt in man’s inner soul is very proper and necessary.

On the other hand, abstaining from socialization and adopting solitude deprives man of social issues and graces which Allah has allotted to man in the different arenas of man’s social life and prevents man from discharging his communal duties. In reality, the negative effects of solitude are that it becomes a cause of leaving aside a great deal of incumbent duties. Man is held back from acquiring knowledge and other perfections which can only be attained under the auspices of social life. He becomes dispossessed of

healthy ethics and habits as well as the material and spiritual help of other human beings which are beneficial for him in this world and the hereafter. If it were a basic principle that every person ought to live in solitude and busy oneself with worship in seclusion and not associate with other people, a lot of the social laws of Islam would be suspended and abandoned. It is for this reason that both solitude and socialization are advisable in their proper instances.

Living in reclusion is not automatically advisable, except for the sake of performing acts of worship with the intention of keeping aloof from sanctimony and for the sake of having more attention and concentration and so that day to day encumbrances and association with the people do not become an impediment for worship which must be done either in solitude or at night because the night is a suitable opportunity for worship and invocation of Allah since man finds time to meditate about himself after being relieved from daily duties and dedicate his heart to the remembrance and invocation of Allah. Allah states:

إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْأً وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلاً \* إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا

***“Indeed the rising by night is the firmest way to tread and the best corrective of speech, for indeed during the day you have drawn out engagements.”<sup>11</sup>***

Man ought not to pick up the rosary during the day and sit in a secluded corner busy glorifying the Lord, but he has to be engaged in the social functions of people and discharge his duties alongside them. There will not be teaching and learning as well as no preaching and admonishing if we avoid socialization and association with the people by sitting alone in a room at home or spending all our time alone in a mosque; likewise, calling towards righteousness and helping of the poor and needy will not be feasible by living in seclusion from the people.

Even worse, political duties on the local and international arena and helping the rest of the Muslims who live in other Muslim countries will not be discharged. On the other hand, man ought not to think that because these good blessings and virtues are found in socialization with the people, every gathering and mixing with every person in any form imaginable is advisable; such thoughts result in the deviation and misguidance of man. As has previously been explained, man has to try to observe divine expediencies and the legal aspects of socialization so as not to be prevented from his main goal of eternal bliss.

Imam al-Baqir (‘a) thus advised one of his companions by the name of Salih:

“Follow a person who makes you cry and gives you instructional advice, and do not follow one who makes you laugh and deceives you; verily soon you will meet Allah and you will be aware of your deeds.”<sup>12</sup>

## The Greatness of Invocation of Allah while among the Heedless

If man unfortunately finds himself in a group of people who are negligent of the hereafter and inattentive to Allah, what ought he to do in order to remain safe from being contaminated by sin? If he leaves the group, they will not react decently towards him, and most often they wrongly conceive that he fancies himself as being purer and higher than they are.

According to Islamic ethics, man ought not to perceive himself as better than other people and his deeds too ought not to leave such an impression on others. As the Noble Prophet (S) stated to Abu Dharr in one of his pieces of advice which has previously been discussed:

“Man does not attain the level of religious scholarship unless he conceives all human beings vis-à-vis Allah, the Exalted, as camels devoid of comprehension and thereafter look at himself and perceive himself as lower than the rest of the people.”

Even a righteous man ought not to conceive himself as higher than a corrupt human being; all too often it occurs that a corrupt man repents and his sins become forgiven while that believing man remains self-contented with his acts of worship thus becoming afflicted by pride and self-conceit which cause his perdition!

Therefore, sometimes there exist conditions which necessitate that a person ought not to seclude himself from the community in order that he may not react negatively and so that he may not bear ill thoughts in regard to others. In addition to that, sometimes it is necessary to remain in a group of sinners and evil-doers in order to enjoin the good and forbid the evil as well as to warn them about the ill consequences of their deeds; for this reason, presence among them is a means of bidding righteousness and forbidding sin.

However, things do not always happen in this way. That is to say, sometimes a group of people are not doers of good and benevolence, but they are negligent and speak vanity; nonetheless, they do not commit sin and do not do forbidden deeds. They act in such a way that admonishing them is not incumbent. In regard to this group of people, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! A person who invokes Allah among the negligent is like a person who continues to fight after everyone has run away from the jihad.”

In the case that man is in the midst of negligent people from whom he does not derive benefit and reward, he ought to try to make his heart attentive to Allah, the Exalted, in order to be like a person who remains alone on the battlefield fighting and resisting the enemy after everyone has fled from the *jihad*. It has previously been said that Allah boasts to the angels and takes pride in a person who remains alone on the battleground fighting and resisting the enemy after everyone has taken flight.

Likewise, Allah, the Exalted, takes pride in a believer whose heart is permanently attentive to Allah whilst

in a group that is negligent of Him and preoccupied by mean worldly affairs which are not pleasing to Allah.

## Man's Responsibilities regarding His Speech

“O Abu Dharr! A good companion is better than solitude and solitude is better than a bad associate and good words are better than silence and silence is better than evil words.”

Naturally, the conditions for discussion are prepared when one associates with other people. What is better in this case—silence or speech? As we have already stated in regard to the principle of socialization and solitude, the criteria are various. Sometimes socialization is advisable and at other times solitude is better. In regard to silence and talking as well, we do not have a stable measure. We ought to observe with what motive we speak. Talking is beneficial and good when it is done with a divine motive and for the sake of benefiting other human beings as well as reminding them about Allah or for instruction of divine laws and issues.

In any case, good speech is that which is made for the purpose of guiding and leading other people towards desirable perfection, whether it is directly in relation to spiritual perfection and to the hereafter or it is a prerequisite for attaining spiritual perfection and eternal bliss despite being related to worldly affairs because the intention of the speaker is to make the listener aware and show him the way of spiritual growth and ascendancy by way of material means and channels for the reason that man is impelled to make use of material means while traversing the path of humanity and perfection. However, when neither he nor other human beings derive benefit from his speech, it is better for him to remain silent.

What is interesting is that the word used in this *hadith* is ‘dictation’ [*imla*], not ‘speaking’ [*takallum*]. Dictation denotes that once someone is talking, the other has to be writing and noting down what the speaker is saying. Whatever man says is not dictation, because he does not always speak in order for the others to write down what he says. Therefore, why did the Noble Prophet (S) not say good talk is better than silence? There are two points which can be mentioned for using the term dictation:

**The first point:** When man speaks, his words become recorded in the mind of the listener and it becomes one of the stockpiles of the listener’s brain. Therefore, we have to be cautious what we record in the mind of the listener and the effects that remain in his mind. We have to mind that speaking does not only mean that we expel and utter words from our mouths, but that speech is the source of an effect and it can be said that when a person talks, the listeners are writing and noting down that which is being said in their minds. For this reason, man must be cautious in regard to what effects he produces in the hearts and souls of other human beings. If what he says is good, then his speech is proper and it leaves a good effect but if his speech is not good, why should he cause objectionable things to be recorded in the minds of other people?!

**The second point:** There are two angels recording whatever man says and that is why the term

dictation has been employed. Allah, the Exalted, states:

إِذْ يَتَلَقَّى الْمُتَلَقِّيَانِ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ قَعِيدٌ \* مَا يَلْفِظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ

***“When the twin recorders record [his deeds], seated on the right hand and on the left—he says no word but that there is a ready observer beside him.”***<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere, Allah states:

كَلَّا بَلْ تُكذِّبُونَ بِالذِّينِ \* وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ لَحَافِظِينَ \* كِرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ \* يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ

***“No indeed! Rather you deny the Retribution. Indeed, there are over you watchers, noble writers; they are aware of what you do.”***<sup>14</sup>

## **The Virtue of Sharing Food with a Believer and Abstaining from the Food of Corrupt People**

“O Abu Dharr! Do not befriend save a man of faith, nor share your food save with a believing man, nor eat the food of the corrupt.”

In this section of the *hadith*, the Noble Prophet (S) initially mentions the issue of socialization and after that hints at some of its necessities. One of the necessities and effects of socialization mentioned was speaking with one another, now he mentions eating together with other people. The reason is that under the auspices of socializing with other people, man is obliged to eat with his associates. The Noble Prophet (S) states that man ought not to associate and eat with anyone except believers.

The first effect of eating the food of a corrupt man is being indebted and obliged to him. When a person is a guest of the iniquitous and he eats their food, in return, the sinful person also makes illicit demands which he expects the believer to fulfill. He expects the believer to grant him certain improper favors.

In contrast, when a person does not have any relationship with the corrupt and does not partake of their food, he does not become indebted to them and they cannot have any expectations from him. If one does not have any ties with the iniquitous, he rejects their illicit requests with utmost courage because he conceives their requests as lying beyond the realm of his duties. From another point of view, there is no certainty that the food of the sinner is *halal* (permissible by divine law).

There is no certainty whether the money with which he buys his food is *halal* or not because he is not committed and devoted to the divine laws of Islam. There is no surety as to whether he has acquired that money by means of bribery or not. Man can have complete trust in a believer that he has earned his

income in a lawful manner but he cannot have the same confidence in a sinner. Most often man partakes of the sinner's food and later finds out that it was not acquired in a legitimate manner.

In addition to what has been mentioned, and as can be derived from certain *hadith*, dubious food leaves negative effects in the soul of a person even if the person that eats it is not aware that the food he has eaten was not *halal*. In this regard, prominent scholars have narrated surprising stories. It is said that one of the scholars told his wife that he felt as if he was eating the rotten meat of an animal which had died on its own. His wife became surprised at her husband's words. She embarked upon investigation and found out that an animal had fallen in the well from which they used to draw water in Najaf during those days and they were drinking water from that well unaware that it was impure and contaminated. That great scholar felt the natural effects of that water on his soul!

Some of the great scholars never used to accept certain invitations to social gatherings and did not have a habit of eating whatever was offered to them. There is a famous story in regard to a man called Karbala'i Kazim who miraculously and by the special grace of Allah had memorized the Noble Qur'an. During the early days of religious studentship, he used to come to the Madrasah we were residing in as boarders called Hujjatiyyah.

There the religious students used to test him in order to see whether he had truly memorized the Qur'an or not. Karbala'i Kazim was a very surprising memorizer of the Qur'an. He could even recite the Qur'an in reverse order, from the end to the beginning. He even used to know the number of full stops in the Qur'an. This man would not attend just any social gathering he was invited to; however, he would attend some invitations and refuse others. He used to say that after attending some social gatherings, he would feel a heaviness and darkness in his heart that was not there before attending those gatherings. (This story is doubtless beyond our conception, but it is true).

The late Ayatullah Haj Aqa Murtada Ha'iri, may Allah be pleased with him, narrates that he had placed a book mixed with verses of the Qur'an and non-Qur'anic words in front of Karbala'i Kazim. Karbala'i Kazim was an illiterate man who could not tell the difference between one letter of the alphabet and the other, but he used to place a finger over the words and tell which one was a verse of the Qur'an and which one was not. Aqa Ha'iri said to him, "How do you manage to distinguish the verses of the Qur'an despite being unlearned?" He responded, "The verses of the Qur'an have the light and I distinguish them by means of that light." Yes, such realities exist and we cannot deny them just because of our incapacity to perceive them.

We should try to associate with and to eat with pious people as well as to use the property and accept the gifts of faithful people. Likewise, man has to try to use whatever wealth Allah grants him in the best possible manner because it is a divine blessing. If one buys food with his money, he has to give that food to a man of faith and belief in order for his deeds to be pleasing to Allah and so that, in addition to being eaten, it becomes a cause of establishing a divine connection—not so that the eating and reception become a cause of vanity.

“O Abu Dharr! Give your food to a person whom you love in the way of Allah and eat the food of a person who loves you in the way of Allah.”

People should give food to a person and also eat the food of a person with whom they enjoy a relationship of friendship and intimacy and that friendship has a divine root and source. When man gives food to someone, it is clear that he loves that person, but we should observe whether he loves that person for the sake of Allah or for other causes?

The Noble Prophet (S) advises us to hold gatherings for the sake of Allah so that we may derive the best benefit from them and strengthen divine relationships between people. So often the relationship between people becomes strengthened by means of get-togethers and as divine love grows among Allah’s servants, the ranks of the believers also grow; in contrast, if love is not divine and is instead evil, its growth becomes the cause of man’s fall.

In addition to the orders to observe the outward laws of *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (forbidden)—which are among the emphatic injunctions of divine law—the saints [*awliya*] of Allah used to observe more delicate and sensitive issues and used to recommend those same issues to their friends because discharging the *wajib* (obligatory) and abstaining from the *haram* (forbidden) is not enough for the growth and ascendancy of man and discharging these duties is only the first step (though unfortunately most of us have contented ourselves with this step). A believer has to have high ambitions and not imagine that he has arrived at the final destination by observing the *wajib* and *haram*, but has to know that the second step is observing the legal etiquettes and the recommendable acts of divine law some of which have been mentioned, amongst them the etiquette of socializing, the etiquette of speech, the etiquette of eating and amiability and abstaining from dubious acts.

After traversing this stage and taking the second step, there still remains a long way to go for one to attain human perfection. He has to scrutinize the intentions of his heart and see what things he harbors in it. What are the motives of his conduct? Even if he does a good and commendable deed, he has to observe what his intention is.

Finally, inspecting the heart and scrutinizing the soul are among the levels of man’s perfection and one whose outward deeds have not yet been purified and cleansed have not attained that level yet. The last level is that the saints [*awliya*] of Allah try to concentrate their hearts only on Allah and to make their hearts the manifestation of Allah’s love. Their hope is in Him and they fear none but Him. They live in such a way that it seems as though they have nothing to do with anyone save Allah despite the fact that they associate with everyone and talk to other human beings and attend to their social lives.

In the *Hadith al-Mi’raj*<sup>15</sup>, in regard to the soul of the believer who has been guided to the divine presence, Allah states:

“That soul will be asked, ‘How did you abstain from the world?’ It will respond, ‘O my Lord! By Your glory and Honor, I have not conceived the world since I was created but instead was always afraid of You.’”<sup>16</sup>

That believer is not aware of the world because his attention is only focused on Allah and he is unaware of issues which are not related to Allah.

We too can attain those levels if we strive hard to strengthen our determination and embark upon edification of character and purification of the soul. We ought not to content ourselves with the outward aspect of our deeds or become proud with what we have achieved and done so far but instead try to look into our hearts and souls.

- [1.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 42, p. 247.
- [2.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, p. 194.
- [3.](#) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 204.
- [4.](#) Surat Ibrahim 14:28.
- [5.](#) Surat Al 'Imran 3:103.
- [6.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 166.
- [7.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, p. 186.
- [8.](#) Ibid., p. 189, hadith 18.
- [9.](#) Surat al-Furqan 25:28-29.
- [10.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 4, p. 451.
- [11.](#) Surat al-Muzzammil 73:6-7.
- [12.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 4, p. 451.
- [13.](#) Surat Qaf 50:17-18.
- [14.](#) Surat al-Infitar 82:9-11.
- [15.](#) Asecnt of the Holy Prophet (S) to heaven.
- [16.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p. 27.

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/provisions-journey-mishkat-volume-2-muhammad-taqi-misbah-yazdi/lesson-30-significance-invocation#comment-0>