

Part Two

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Our Responsibilities

Featured Themes:

Vicegerent; Intellect; Soul; Marriage; Mourning

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ ﴿٤﴾ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَوَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ ﴿٥﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْوَارِثُونَ ﴿٦﴾ الَّذِينَ يَرِثُونَ ﴿٧﴾
الْفِرْدَوْسَ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٨﴾

And those who are keepers of their trusts and their covenant, and those who keep a guard on their prayers; these are they who are the heirs, who shall inherit the Paradise; they shall abide therein. (23:8–11)

After god created the universe, he tested all of his creations and offered them a profound responsibility – to be the caretakers of Earth. Most of His creations refrained from it. They all refused the responsibility except for one, and that was the human being.

﴿٩﴾... إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ ﴿١٠﴾

Indeed We presented the Trust to the heavens and Earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were apprehensive of it; but man undertook it... (33:72)

The human being agreed to undertake this enormous responsibility, and “we” agreed that we would maintain and sustain Earth; “we” agreed that we would develop righteousness within our souls; “we” promised to establish social justice and equality upon the earth; therefore, God granted us this trust (*amanah*) to be His vicegerent on earth.

Running parallel to that responsibility, we were also given the opportunity to reach the stage of true humanity – *insaaniyah*. *Insaaniyah* (becoming true human beings) is nothing other than attaining human perfection, and since a true human being is not just flesh and blood, he must strive to fulfill this Divine challenge and reach the highest stage of human excellence.

In exchange for being God’s vicegerent, and in order to assist us while on this journey and struggle, God endowed us with a tremendous ability which is the mind (*aqf*). Our intellectual facility is the most important gift that God has given us, such that when God created the intellect, He told it, “By My Honor and Glory, I have not created anything more beloved to Me than you. Through you, I reward, and through you, I punish.”¹

Islam places such an emphasis on reasoning and the intellect that it is no wonder why the first verse to descend on the Prophet ordered him to “read.” One of the over-arching themes of the Holy Qur’an is about reflection, meditation, contemplation, and thinking. For those who refused to use their intellect, God rebuked them, even after the fact that He had sent prophets to enlighten them, but still chose to blindly follow their traditions rather than to think for themselves.

﴿إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِم مُّقْتَدُونَ﴾

“We found our fathers following a creed and we are indeed following in their footsteps.” (43:23)

Although the average weight of an adult brain is nearly three pounds, which is about 2% of one’s total body weight, it is the most complicated system created by God. Nevertheless, how many individuals make full use of their reasoning power? Most people probably take the intellect for granted. Honestly, how many of us really challenge our thoughts, ponder on life, try to make discoveries, or find solutions to different conflicts?

﴿وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يَتَمَتَّعُونَ وَيَأْكُلُونَ كَمَا تَأْكُلُ الْأَنْعَامُ وَالنَّارُ مَثْوًى لَّهُمْ﴾

As for the faithless, they enjoy and eat just like the cattle eat, and the Fire will be their [final] abode. (47: 12)

Have you ever watched cattle? They spend the entire day grazing and ignore everything else around them. In many ways, some people are like that as well. Those who do not use their reasoning think that life is only about what they are going to eat, how much money they can make, and what sort of fun is in store for them. They do not reflect nor ask themselves why they are here, what purpose were they created for, or what is their objective in life is.

Today, the vast majority of Muslims world-wide follow a belief system simply because they are born into it. Their conviction is not an intellectual choice; but rather, an emotional or sentimental attachment. They

are born into a Muslim family, so they are Muslim. If their family is Shia, they become Shia; if their family is Sunni, they become Sunni; if their family is Salafi, they become Salafi. They do not question what they are told. They do not even ask why they follow what they follow.

During Ali b. Abi Talib's reign as the fourth caliph, a large group of devout but ignorant worshippers called the Kharijites (Khawarij, the Seceders) fought against him. In one of his sermons, Ali b. Abi Talib explained how he felt about them saying, "Two groups tired me out: the immoral scholars and the ignorant worshippers."² Although they knew better, the first group used religion for their own personal benefit and did not have the fear of God in their hearts; whereas the second group wanted to worship God but were extreme in their ways; they set out to worship God but ended up following Satan.

The Kharijites fell into the second category, and in our time, a group known as the *takfiris* resembles them because they are the ones who are killing innocent Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere. These people are ignorant and none of their acts of worship will benefit them in the least. Indeed, God instructs us to worship Him in the way which He has taught us, we are not supposed to worship Him in "our own ways." Deviating from His path will do nothing except distance us away from Him.

After equipping us with intellect (*aqf*), God gave us a soul (*nafs*) to facilitate our success in fulfilling our duties as vicegerent on earth.

﴿قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا﴾

One who purifies it (the soul) is certainly felicitous. (91:9)

The soul is extremely vulnerable and volatile, and if it is not handled with extreme care then the soul can become the most deviating factor of the human being. If one can refine, polish, nurture, protect, and purify the soul then one will definitely succeed in this life.

One day, a student who had just graduated from a religious seminary asked his mentor for some advice that he could reflect on for the rest of his life. The graduate was expecting a long detailed lecture, but the scholar simply said, "My son, I have one thing to tell you, and I want you to remember this forever: do not offend (or do injustice to) the closest thing to you." The graduate asked what the closest thing to a person is and the teacher replied, "Your soul." Therefore, do not offend your soul – take care of your soul – be careful and watchful over it.

Sometimes our soul seduces us.

﴿إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ﴾

...for the [carnal] soul indeed prompts [men] to evil... (12:53)

We do not always need Satan to lead us down the wrong path – sometimes our own soul does that. The soul can become prone to evil unless God protects it; otherwise, if we listen to the whims of our soul then we will indeed be spiritually lost.

﴿إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾

...except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy. Indeed my Lord is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful. (12:53)

Prophet Muhammad explained, “The first step to committing a sin is the assent of the soul.”³

One does not wake up in the morning and decide that they will commit a sin; rather, sinning is a gradual process and if we follow certain paths, then we will end up committing sins. For example, the Qur’an does not say “do not commit fornication,” rather it says, “do not even *approach* fornication.”⁴ The Qur’an gives us warning signals. It is saying that at the end of that road there is a great sin, so do not even tread down that road.

Another dangerous path is improper socializing with people of the opposite gender, such as flirting. We also should pay close attention to the chatting that takes place online for hours on end. Do not say I know myself, no one can seduce me. You need to be very careful and do not even allow for that door to open – just slam it shut! However, if you have the intention of marriage and are looking for a spouse to establish a family, then search for a partner properly.

God has entrusted us with many things and one of these things is a family, not just our immediate family, but also our extended Muslim family. Your Muslim sister who walks down the street is also a part of your family, and therefore, you need to protect her as well. A tradition tells us that, “A Muslim is a brother (or sister) to another Muslim.”⁵ You should not lie to her, betray her, mislead her, or take advantage of her. Do not tell her that you want to get married, and then a few months later say that you were not serious. A girl should not be an easy target for you just because she is not your relative – she is part of your extended Muslim family.

Above that, we have an even bigger family, they are the human family. Ali b. Abi Talib wrote in a letter addressed to Malik al-Ashtar (his governor of Egypt) saying that, “Human beings are of two types: either your brethren in faith or your counterpart in creation.”⁶ Even if somebody is not a Muslim and does not want to acknowledge that we are a human family, then we as Muslims must still recognize them as family. Therefore, we need to treat each other as family and not take advantage of each other, or hurt them in any way.

Today, there are some individuals who say that they do not need to get married, they say, “We trust each other, so we do not need to have a religious contract,” however what they have forgotten is that

there is a third party between them. Marriage is not just an agreement between two people; rather it is a solemn covenant between three parties – the husband, the wife, and God Almighty. It is a holy contract and thus we must all fulfill our covenant.

﴿وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ﴾

And those who keep their trusts and covenants. (23:8)

Among people there are some who did not honor the trusts of God, such as the Bani Umayyad. As it is has been stated, “They appropriated the wealth of the nation and enslaved the people.”⁷ Instead of allowing the Muslim minds to think and ponder freely, they sedated the people and silenced their intellect, and unfortunately no one could stop them. The masses were in need of a Divinely-sent leader. They needed a man like Imam Husayn to revive the corrupted and degenerated nation.

Muharram is the season of the renaissance. Not only do we mourn, but we celebrate as well. We celebrate the birth of Husayn and the rebirth of Islam. The Bani Umayyad attempted to murder Islam, the Qur’an, and the spirit of the people, and it was Imam Husayn who rose up to revive them all.

For over 1,400 years, many Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists, and lost Muslims were guided to the light and glory of God through the commemorations of Imam Husayn. Think of Wahab b. Kalbi who was a Christian. A few days after he chose to embrace Islam, he gave his life for the Imam. He did not wait until he had made the pilgrimage (Hajj); he did not wait until he had been reciting his prayers for years. He was the first martyr on the side of Imam Husayn to face the enemy.

The commemorations of Imam Husayn also provide an outlet for emotional sharing and spiritual strength. When we hear about the tragedy of Ashura, we cannot hold back our tears due to the sadness of the narrative. Crying is a natural and healthy reaction for a saddened heart and is an admirable thing; it is neither appalling nor shameful. God has informed us about many great prophets who shed tears and showed sorrow.

﴿إِذَا تُلِيٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُ الرَّحْمٰنِ خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَّكَبِيًّا﴾

When the signs of the All-Beneficent were recited to them, they would fall down weeping in prostration. (19:58)

A tradition says, “A single teardrop can extinguish oceans of God’s wrath.” We do not need to dial 911 when we have an emergency; we have the power inside each and every one of us and we need to tap into that. Shedding tears in the middle of the night can calm and subdue God’s anger and bring his mercy. When we cry for Imam Husayn, we are actually bringing ourselves closer to God and we are sympathizing with all of the prophets.

Every year in the beginning of the month of Muharram, our infallible imams would invite poets to recite the story of Imam Husayn; and when we hold gatherings every year during Muharram, we are following their practice. When we hear about Imam Husayn, we come closer to God and we return to ourselves. We reflect on how we have lived our lives, and ask what we should do to make our lives more enriching in the future.

One of the things which we need to do from the first night of Muharram is to ask ourselves whether God is really happy with us or not? Please remember that life is short; the days, if not years, are passing by very quickly. Do not say, “I do not need to pray now; I’ll pray later. One day I’ll read the Qur’an. One day I’ll listen to my parents. One day I’ll be a good Muslim.” Do not say *one day*. That one day you are referring to must be today and we must try very hard to change ourselves for the better.

Islamic sources tell us that mourning for a long period of time is not recommended (*makruh*), except if one is mourning for Imam Husayn and the tragedies which he went through. Mourning for him never ends. It continues eternally. Even if we lose a loved one, it is not recommended to mourn excessively. Again, the only exception to this rule is for Imam Husayn, not so much as an individual, rather as a great cause who revived humanity.

Imam al-Mahdi, the 12th Imam who is still living and is the awaited savior of humanity says, “I will mourn for you morning and evening, and instead of tears, I will weep blood.”⁸

If the imams mourn like this, then it cannot be something negative, it must be a recommended act for all of us to follow.

Prophet Muhammad said, “If a Muslim scholar dies, then the sky weeps for him for 40 days.” Even if a scholar dies a natural death, the sky will still weep out of grief for his death. When the people asked the Prophet how the sky weeps, he said that during sunrise and sunset a distinctive redness will appear. If this is something which holds true for an ordinary scholar, just imagine how the sky would be if an infallible Imam was brutally murdered along with 72 of his closest family and followers?

[The Threat of Radicalism](#)

Featured Themes

Fanaticism; Fundamentalism; The Effects of Muawiyah; Takfiri; Wahhabism; Salafi

﴿وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِّمَّنْ دَعَا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَقَالَ إِنَّنِي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ﴾

Who has a better call than him who summons to God and acts righteously and says, “Indeed I am one of the muslims.” (41:33)

Today, Islam is facing a formidable challenge; however, the danger is not only external, it is also internal. Our ummah (Muslim nation) is suffering from internal bleeding as the teachings of “extremism” and “fanaticism” has infiltrated the Islamic thought. A few over-zealous and puritanical Muslims have grossly misunderstood the Qur’an, and such people through their misunderstanding of the Qur’an, have acted heinously and put the entire world in danger. Their results have been seen in London, Madrid, New York City, Baghdad and other regions. A select few have turned Islam into a religion that seems to glorify violence and fear, thus making people afraid of Islam and Muslims.

How did this happen?

Despite the current propaganda against Muslims, Islam is not a militant religion. In fact, not only is Islam a religion of peace, but the Prophet and the twelve imams – the successors of Prophet Muhammad – were all peaceful individuals. Even when the enemy forces of the Bani Umayyad mobilized around Imam Husayn in Karbala, his companions urged him to attack the enemies but he refused saying, “I hate to be the one who starts a war.” He was never a warmonger or an instigator. Up until the last moment of his life, the Imam attempted to make peace with Umar b. Sa’d, the leader of the Umayyad army. He even held a private meeting with him in his tent, but it became quite clear to him that Umar b. Sa’d did not want to accept any solution except for war.

Imam Husayn learned his peaceful methods through the tradition (Sunnah) carried forth from his grandfather Prophet Muhammad. When the Prophet came home dripping with blood after his enemies had thrown stones at him, his wife Khadijah asked him, “O Messenger of God, why don’t you invoke the curse of God upon them?” To this innocent question, he replied, “I was not sent as a curse. I was sent as a mercy to mankind.”⁹

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ﴾

We did not send you but as a mercy to all of the nations. (21: 107)

The Prophet was not a militant minded person, and although he had to lead the Muslims in defensive battles, he preferred and inclined more to peaceful solutions.

Today, a small number of fanatical “Muslims” have deviated from the Prophet’s tradition and have threatened the world.

What is their rationale?

They argue that we are living in a world inherently hostile to Islam and religion in general; they argue that we live in a world dominated by modern secularism in which Islam has been reduced to mere rituals in which the spirit of Islam has disappeared, and therefore they feel that they need to fight to revive Islam and return it to its “past glory.”

However, this is a completely fallacious argument. Perhaps some of the points are correct, in that we live in a predominately secular world and the spirit of religion is starting to fade, however the conclusion and the manner in which they are carrying out their message is warped.

During the time of Ali b. Abi Talib's caliphate, the Kharijites used to chant, "There is no authority except with God!" in order to reject Imam Ali's leadership and authority. The Kharijites were not chanting their slogan to praise God and they knew that Ali b. Abi Talib never denied the true authority of God, but they were chanting it to bring down Imam Ali, thus their intent was malicious.

The *takfiris* do the same thing today. In particular, the *takfiris* will brand you as an infidel (*kafir*) if you disagree with their ideology. If you do not believe in everything that they say then you become an apostate, a heretic, and a rejecter in their eyes – even if you say, "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God." Even if they find you in the heart of Mecca praying five times a day, they will still label you an infidel, and once you are an infidel your blood is lawful – this is exactly what is happening today in the region.

Unfortunately, the *takfiri* movement is spreading. What started out as a phenomenon contained to the Middle East has now reached the shores of Europe and America.

I was in Seattle, Washington visiting a mosque in which I gave a brief speech about the necessity of Muslim unity. After I finished a man came up to me and objected saying, "Unity is very important, but there is one group that we cannot unite with." I asked who that was and he said, "*The Shia*." I pointed out that I was Shia to which he replied that he knew that, and thus he could never be united with me. I asked him why, to which his blatant reply was that we (the Shia) have a different Qur'an. When I told him that we do not have a different Qur'an and that the Qur'an I use was printed in Saudi Arabia, he insisted that I was lying and asked me to leave the mosque. This incident did not occur in some far off or impoverished country – it happened in America!

However, this problem is not limited only to the Muslims as every religion has its own violent fanatics. There are Jews who gun down worshippers in holy places; Christians who bomb abortion clinics and people of other faiths who commit other atrocious acts. Nevertheless, what makes Muslims different is that we end up paying the price of the actions of a select few disconcerted people. Not all of the Jews are ostracized because of the actions of a few Jews; not all Christians are branded evil because of a few Christian terrorists; however, all Muslims bear the burden of the sins of a few wicked people.

It must be understood though that the bombing and killing of innocent people is explicitly against the teachings of Islam and murder is actually an assault on the entire human race.

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَٰلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَن قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا ۖ وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا ۗ

That is why We decreed for the Children of Israil that whoever kills a soul, without [its being guilty of] manslaughter or corruption on the earth, is as though he has killed all of mankind, and whoever saves a life it is as though he has saved all of mankind. (5:32)

﴿وَمَنْ يَقْتُلْ مُؤْمِنًا مُتَعَمِّدًا فَجَزَاؤُهُ جَهَنَّمُ خَالِدًا فِيهَا وَغَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَلَعَنَهُ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُ عَذَابًا عَظِيمًا﴾

Should anyone kill a believer intentionally, his requital shall be Hell, to remain in it [forever]; God will be wrathful at him and curse him and He will prepare for him a great punishment. (4:93)

The Qur'an is very adamant about taking the life of innocent people. Whoever kills another person unjustly will be deprived of God's mercy. He will never be forgiven and will suffer eternal torment and bear the wrath of God. In fact, Prophet Muhammad said, "The destruction of the cosmos is less painful to God than the blood of a single person who is slain unjustly." [10](#) This is what the essence of Islam is, yet we hear about "Islamic fundamentalism" every day.

It is worth noting that fundamentalism is not an inherently Islamic term. It was coined in the early 20th century America by strict Protestants who wanted to distinguish themselves from the more liberal Christians. They wanted to go back to the basics of religion, so they called themselves "fundamentalists." Thus, the negative connotations which go with the term "fundamentalism" have nothing to do with Islam.

With that said, do we as Muslims have "fundamentalism" as part of our belief system?

Indeed we do.

Fundamentalism or *usuliyyah* means going back to the basics – the basics of Islam, the teachings of the Qur'an and the ways of Prophet Muhammad. Islamic fundamentalism calls for openness, religious tolerance, diversity, forgiveness, respect for human life and dignity.

For example, we see the fundamentals of Islam in its early history when a delegation of Christians came from Najran (in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula) to meet with the Prophet for the first time. When they arrived, he opened the mosque for them, which he had built with his own hands.

Islam is not anti-Christianity; Islam is not anti-Judaism; Islam is not anti-humanity.

﴿قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا ۚ ﴿١﴾﴾
﴿أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

Say, "O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but God, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each

other as lords besides God.” But if they turn away, (then) say, “Be witnesses that we are muslims (those who submit).” (3:64)

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
الْمُقْسِطِينَ

God does not forbid you in regards 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 God loves the just ones. (60:8)

Kindness and justice are the main characteristics of Islam, and right from the beginning, Islam called for mutual understanding between Muslims and other human beings.

In sharp contrast, Christian history reveals that until few centuries ago, one of their slogans was “killing non-Christians pleases God.”

Although the West considers itself the source of religious tolerance, the fact is that religious tolerance only entered Western thought recently, and in fact, one of the main aims of the early American Christian missionaries was to convert the ingenious natives to Christianity.

Anyone who equates “Islamic fundamentalism” with “terrorism” has misunderstood the true teachings of the Prophet. Unfortunately, however, there are some who have misunderstood this concept.

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِن مَّاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَى أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَمَن يَنْقَلِبْ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ فَلَنَ
يُضُرَّ اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ

Muhammad is but an apostle; [other] apostles have passed before him. If he dies or is slain, will you then turn back on your heels? Anyone who turns back on his heels will not harm God in any way, and God will reward the grateful ones. (3: 144)

The Prophet had foretold that by the time the last Imam reappears, Islam will have become so tainted that when he (the Imam) brings back the authentic Islam, people will say that he is bringing about a new religion.

Part of what we are witnessing today is that tainted “fundamentalism” – violence, intolerance, and hatred. Although this trend has never reflected in the majority of Muslims, it did begin early on during the time of the Prophet. Muslim history teaches how a select few (not the Prophet or his true companions or relatives) began a campaign of intolerance and rejection.

One prime example is this: Why do Muslims gather to remember Imam Husayn? Why was he

murdered? What excuse did they have for killing the grandson of the Prophet when many of them saw the Prophet with their own eyes holding Husayn and saying, “Husayn is from me, and I am from Husayn. May God love one who loves Husayn.” How did the situation deteriorate to such a point that he had no one to help him except for 72 relatives and companions? What happened to the Muslim ummah?

When some people discuss the tragic events of Ashura, they say, “Both sides were with God. Husayn was with God and Yazid was with God, and God will judge between them.” Sadly enough, some Muslims actually believe this. When you try to discuss and critique the history of Islam after the Prophet’s death, they object saying, “Don’t do this! You are not allowed to do this!” Why aren’t we allowed to do that? What possible reason is there not to become aware about our own history? What are we afraid of? Those who do not know their own history are doomed to repeat it. We need to know who was right and who was wrong so we can avoid making the same mistakes in the future. God does not want the believers to be naïve, and therefore, we need to understand why we are doing what we are doing.

﴿وَلَا تَرْكَنُوا إِلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا فَتَمَسَّكُمُ النَّارُ وَمَا لَكُم مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ مِن أَوْلِيَاءَ تُمْ لَا تُنصَرُونَ﴾

And do not incline toward the wrongdoers; lest the Fire should touch you, and you will not have any friend besides God, then you will not be helped. (11:113)

God wants us to follow the truth with our eyes wide open.

It has been related that in Paradise we will be graded according to our understanding of the faith; it is through the intellect that God will reward or punish us. Imam Husayn said, “Good (*ma’rouf*) is in proportion to understanding (*ma’rifah*).”¹¹ The more confident you are in what you do, the higher you will ascend in Paradise. Paradise is not a one-story building; rather, God has fashioned it with many levels because people will be put into different grades according to their level of understanding.

In the early period of Islam, after the time of the Prophet, a few prominent Muslims continued to intensify their campaign of bigotry and bloodshed until it reached the peak during the time of Muawiyah b. Abi Sufyan.

﴿قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِّنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِن نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِن طِينٍ﴾

Said He, “What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?” “I am better than him,” he said. “You created me from fire and You created him from clay.” (7:12)

Islam forbids discrimination, nepotism, and favoritism of any kind, and although the Prophet spent a great deal of his ministry abolishing racial prejudice and discrimination amongst the early Muslim community, at the onslaught of his reign, Muawiyah divided the Muslims into Arabs and non-Arabs

(*mawali*).

Even though the non-Arabs were Muslims, they were treated as non-Muslims, and thus, had to pay extra taxes to the government which ended up in Muawiyah's pocket. Muawiyah inclined to free the state and society of some of the noblest companions of the Prophet, thus many of the companions of the Prophet were tortured, imprisoned, and executed. Even Imam Ali did not escape the persecution. Just mentioning the name of Ali was enough to bring down an official punishment upon someone; no one during Muawiyah's rule dared utter his name. If they wanted to refer to Ali, they had to call him "Abu Zaynab," despite the fact that the Prophet declared, "O Ali! You are with the truth, and the truth revolves around you wherever you go."¹²

Every Friday, which is the holiest day in Islam, the Friday preacher would mount the pulpit and curse Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn. What did these holy personalities do to merit this treatment?

In a tradition noted by Al-Bukhari, it says, "God is happy with whoever makes Fatima happy and angry with whoever makes her angry."¹³

Fatima al-Zahra was a pure and honorable woman, but the preachers would still deliver cursing words toward her and her children while the masses held their tongues and called Muawiyah, "Amir al-Mumineen (the Commander of the Believers)," even though this was a title which was exclusive for Imam Ali b. Abi Talib.

That was the first wave of extremism.

The second wave of extremism began 700 years ago with Ahmad b. Taymiyyah al-Harrani al-Hanbali. He wrote a book (*Minhaj al-Sunnah*) to defame the Ahlul-Bayt. Contrary to the vast majority of Muslim scholars, he asserts that God has a physical body (*tajseem*) and that some people can see Him! Even worse, he degrades the status of the Prophet and claims that Abu Hurayrah came to the Prophet and said, "I want you to pray for God to guide my mother."

Thus the Prophet raised his hands and prayed for her. God guided her and she became a good Muslim. Abu Hurayrah returned to the Prophet and said, "I want you to pray for God to guide my clan." Thus the Prophet raised his hands and prayed for his clan. God guided them and they became good Muslims. Finally, he says that the Prophet then prayed for his own mother, Aminah b. Wahhab, but the Prophet said, "I asked God to let me pray for my mother, but God refused!"

Isn't it very odd that the Prophet can pray for Abu Hurayrah's mother, but God would not allow the Prophet to mention a prayer for his own mother?

Ibn Taymiyyah is the mastermind of Islamic extremism, and strangely enough, he continues to be a model that inspires so many extremists even up until today. The title of one of his thesis says it all, *A License to Kill the Rejecters (Jawazu Qital al-Rafidhah)*. In this book, he applauds the Kharijites for

assassinating Imam Ali and refers to the Shia as “rejecters,” since they rejected the leadership of the first three caliphs. Furthermore, he asserts that the blood of the Shia is lawful since they are not Muslims; thus, in his opinion, even killing them is permitted. Unfortunately, his influence persists in the sectarian violence that plagues Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

About 300 years ago, another man rose up in Najd, Arabia by the name of Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab al-Najdi, he is the founder of the modern-day Wahhabism. Inspired by Ibn Taymiyyah, he continued his tradition and declared that whoever did not accept his personal ideas of Islam was a non-Muslim – an infidel (*kafir*) or a rejecter. That word is ascribed to every person they deem as unconventional to their ideology. The Prophet himself said that no one has the right to call a person who declares the profession of faith (*La ilaha illallah Muhammadan rasulullah*) as an infidel and he said that, “Whoever calls another Muslim a disbeliever has himself disbelieved.”¹⁴

Despite the Prophet’s warning, the Wahhabi movement considers everyone (including Muslims) who does not follow their ideology as an infidel.

After Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab published his treatise, his own brother, Sulayman b. Abd al-Wahhab wrote another treatise refuting it. Hundreds of Muslim scholars, of all persuasions, joined Sulayman in countering Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab’s ideas.

In fact, Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab caused a giant schism in Islam, and just like his predecessor Ibn Taymiyyah, he denigrated the status of the Prophet. One day while giving a speech, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab raised his cane and insulted the Prophet by proclaiming, “My cane is much more useful than Muhammad because today Muhammad is dead and useless while I can use my cane.”¹⁵

Until today, the Wahhabis continue to fight to keep the teachings and moral guidance of the Ahlul-Bayt away from the masses. They do not recognize them, let alone mention them. When a Muslim visits the holy lands of Mecca and Madinah, the first thing that the Wahhabi establishment does is inundate them with literature attacking the Shia Islam. They know that millions of people are on their way to visit the Mosque of the Prophet and the cemetery of Al-Baqi and so they attempt to brainwash the people into believing that it is polytheism (*shirk*) to pay your respect to the deceased, despite the fact that the Prophet said, “Whoever performs Hajj and does not visit me, he did a disservice to me.”¹⁶

It is these immaculate beings who lead us to the true understanding of the Qur’an and the hadith, and this is why the legacy of the Prophet was two-fold, “I am leaving behind two weighty things: the book of God and my progeny.” We are doomed to failure if we hold to only one of them and leave the other.

God himself asserts in the Qur’an that some of His verses are indistinct (*mutashabihat*) and that is why we need someone to explain them to us. However, He Himself chose the interpreters; He did not leave that choice to us.

In order to understand the true message of the Noble Qur’an, we need the Ahlul-Bayt, for they are the

speaking Qur'an, and that is why the Prophet told Imam Ali, "Whoever loves my Ahlul-Bayt has grasped hold of the firmest handhold." [17](#)

﴿فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

...has held fast to the firmest handle for which there is no breaking; and God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (2:256)

Unfortunately, the *takfiris* and the anti-Ahlul-Bayt groups blindly disregard the duty to take care of the progeny of the Prophet, and much worse than this is that they seek to destroy their credibility and even silence their followers.

People often love the friends and family of a person whom they love and respect, and it is for this reason that I do not understand how someone can say that they love someone but do not love his immediate family. How can they attack the family of the Prophet when God instructed the Prophet to say to the people:

﴿قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ﴾

Say, "I do not ask from you any reward for it (for the conveyance of the message of Islam) except the affection for [my] relatives." (42:23)

Sahih Al-Bukhari narrates how the Prophet emphasized the position of the Ahlul-Bayt to him, "Some Muslims asked, 'O Messenger of God, we know how to greet you; but teach us how to send prayers upon you.'"

The Prophet replied, "Say, O God! bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as You have blessed Abraham and the family of Abraham; verily, You are Praiseworthy and Honorable (*Allahumma, salli ala Muhammadin wa Aali Muhammad kama sallayta ala Ibraheema wa Aali Ibraheem innaka Hameedun Majeed*)."

Then he added, "Do not send me an incomplete praise."

They asked, "O Messenger of God, what is an 'incomplete praise'?"

He replied, "When you send prayers upon me and omit my family." [18](#)

Almost 80 years ago, the Wahhabis destroyed the holy shrines in the Al-Baqi Cemetery. [19](#) Since the cemetery is only a few hundred meters from the Mosque of the Prophet, one will instantly notice a sharp contrast. On one side, you see the glorious Mosque of the Prophet bustling with visitors, well kept and well lit. Across the way, just on the other side of the marble floor, you will see a dark, deserted, and

forbidden cemetery.

If you inquire as to who is resting in that cemetery, they will say 10,000 companions of the Prophet, but they will make no mention of the four infallible imams – the direct descendants of the Prophet– who are also buried there. Their graves are unmarked and partitioned off. They do not even allow you to approach their graves, let alone offer your respect to them.

Another contrast observed in Madinah, visitors are allowed to pay their respect and offer their prayers at the gravesites of Abu Bakr and Umar b. al-Khattab. At the Great Mosque of the Prophet, two signs flank the resting place of the Prophet. One reads, “Greet the Prophet here,” and the other reads, “Greet Abu Bakr and Umar, may God be pleased with them, here.” They put up signs so that you know where to pay your respect. However, if you want to stand by the grave of the grandsons of the Prophet they accuse you of heresy. It is heresy to say, “Peace be upon you, O Son of the Messenger of God.”

The opponents of the Ahul-Bayt thought that by demolishing the cemetery of Al-Baqi they would destroy the love for the Ahlul-Bayt in the hearts of the people, however they were dead wrong!

One should question, what brings millions of people around the world to gather at the local mosques, *hussayniyyahs* (Islamic centers), and homes during the season of Muharram? They gather only for the love of God, His Apostle, and the Ahlul-Bayt.

While the shrines are very important, it is not paramount to us whether or not the physical shrines are present or not because the love for the Ahlul-Bayt runs through our veins and we are always with them. A tradition says that even if you are with a small stone in this life then you will be joined with it on the Day of Judgment, and therefore, whoever associates with the Ahlul-Bayt in this world, they will definitely be with them in the next life.

Gender Equality

Featured Themes:

Gender Equality; Women’s Rights; Lady Khadijah; Marriage;

Motherhood; Dress & Behavior

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ
[۹] وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

But the faithful men and women are comrades of one another: they bid what is right and forbid what is wrong and maintain the prayer, give the charity, and obey God and His Apostle. It is they to whom God will soon grant His mercy. Indeed God is All-Mighty, All-Wise. (9:71)

God created men and women equal – but not identical. God did not create Eve out of the remnants of Adam. She was not a by-product of his creation; rather they were both created at the same time, from the same substance and the same matter. They were made to complement each other, and this is why the Prophet referred to women as the “siblings” of men. This means that both genders are part of each other and they are equal in creation. God says most eloquently about the relationship between women and men in the Holy Qur’an:

﴿ هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَهُنَّ ﴾

They are a garment for you and you are a garment for them. (2: 187)

Our clothing protects us from the outside bad elements, adorns us, covers up our defects, and gives us status. By describing men and women as garments of each other, God is showing mankind how having a spouse protects and beautifies us and helps us to recognize our value. Just as our clothes provide shelter for us, as well as protection, warmth, comfort, and accompanies us throughout our lives, our spouses should also provide the same qualities for us. This is why God uses the example of a garment because men and women are necessary and complimentary to each other.

Nowhere in the Holy Qur’an or in the tradition of the Prophet will you find the notion that one gender is superior to the other. The good of society – not men or women is emphasized. Nonetheless, one may question then what is it meant in the following verse:

﴿ أَلرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ﴾

Men are the maintainers of women (qawamun ala an-nisa) because God has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property. (4:34)

Qawamun does not mean “superiority” of the male over the female; nor does it imply that God prefers men to women. It means that men are supposed to bear an extra degree of responsibility towards their family in regards to their maintenance.

Some people use such verses to show that Islam discriminates against women; however to combat these arguments, we must learn and comprehend certain basic facts about men and women in the Qur’an and compare them to what other major faiths hold, so that we are able to answer concerns from other people in regards to the issue of gender equality.

First and foremost, the Qur’an describes men and women as being created equal. The Old Testament maintains that God created the man first and then created the woman from his rib. Furthermore, it forewarns that the nature of women is warped because she was made from a crooked piece. In Islam the first verse of *Surah al-Nisa* (the Women) disproves this notion:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۚ ﴾

O mankind! Be wary of your Lord who created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it, and from the two of them, scattered numerous men and women. (4: 1)

Therefore, no gender can claim superiority over the other. Spirituality is devoid of gender or race. “Verily, God does not look at your faces or features but He looks at your hearts.”²⁰ He will judge us according to our intentions and conduct, not our gender or race.

The Qur’an also holds men and women at the same moral standard, and treats them as a pair. In contrast, some other religions assign the burden of moral responsibility towards the women, such that they describe Eve as the temptress. They teach that Satan approached her first, and after he corrupted her weak spirit, then she went to her husband and did Satan’s job for him. However, the Qur’an teaches otherwise. It puts the responsibility for what happened on Adam and simply says, “Adam disobeyed his Lord.”²¹

Nowhere does it suggest that Eve herself was to blame for misleading Adam, or that women throughout the ages have to bear the divine perpetual curse and punishment of childbirth for her error. Other religions teach that the Divine gift of having children is actually a primordial curse, and in order to prevent women from committing more mischief, men must dominate them and guard themselves against women’s guiles. However, in Islam the Prophet promised a renewal on life when a woman gives birth. A woman is forgiven for all of her past sins when she delivers a child into this world. Pregnancy and delivery is viewed with compassion, forgiveness, and love – not retribution.

Islam also asserts that no society can function without the active participation of women. If a society marginalizes women, it will not prosper, for surely women must play an integral role in society. Take the example of Prophet Muhammad, his mission would have never succeeded had it not been for his wife Khadijah for she was inseparable from his life and mission; she supported him emotionally, spiritually, and financially.

For 29 years, the Prophet lived with Khadijah, and had no other wives except for her, and when she died, the Prophet continued to remember and love her. One of his later wives asked him, “O Messenger of God, do you still feel sad about losing Khadijah? God has given you many other younger and prettier wives.” The Prophet replied that God did not replace Khadijah with a better wife. He said, “She believed in me when others disbelieved in me, trusted me when others rejected me, provided for me when others denied me, and she showered her wealth on Islam when others withheld their help from me.”²²

Khadijah was a very unique lady. When she first married the Prophet, she was the richest woman in Mecca, but when she passed away, she could not even afford a shroud for herself. She offered all of her wealth in the way of Islam to the point that the Prophet had to shroud her dead body with his own robe. This was pure nobility and loyalty. This is why scholars say “Islam would not have risen without the

courage of Ali and the wealth of Khadijah.”²³

With examples such as these, how can anyone claim that women have no role in Islamic society?

The Holy Qur’an provided women with remarkable rights at a time when they were only considered as mere property. Islam gave women rights and options that they did not have in previous times.

During the time of the Prophet, girls were considered a liability to the family, and infanticide of a female baby was unfortunately witnessed, to the extent where they would bury them alive. Islam adamantly denounced such a practice.

The Prophet also taught that women need to be educated; and he reiterated that, “Seeking knowledge is a duty for every Muslim man and woman.”²⁴ One day, a group of women complained to the Prophet that they could not learn from him because men always surrounded him. He responded by designating a day specifically for teaching women. Education is a religious obligation that should not be neglected.

Islam also gave women the right to own their own property and dispose of it freely without the involvement of a male guardian.

Similarly, it gave them the absolute right to accept or refuse marriage offers. In Islam, parents must ask their daughters before promising them in marriage to someone else. Even the Prophet, “who has a greater claim on the faithful than they have on themselves”²⁵ went to ask his daughter Fatima if she wished to marry Imam Ali.

When Imam Ali came to ask for Fatima’s hand, he told him that he had to obtain Fatima’s permission first. This is a lesson for all parents, particularly in some cultures who give away their daughters without asking them first, for that is an un-Islamic practice. No father can accept a marriage proposal on his daughter’s behalf without first getting her approval in the matter.

Islam also gave women the right to vote by granting them the right to pay allegiance (*bayah*) on their own behalf.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتُ يُبَايِعْنَكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ لَا يُشْرِكْنَ بِاللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَسْرِقْنَ وَلَا يَزْنِينَ وَلَا يَقْتُلْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ وَلَا
يَأْتِينَ بِبُهْتَانٍ يَفْتَرِينَهُ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِنَّ وَأَرْجُلِهِنَّ وَلَا يَعْصِبْنَ فِي مَعْرُوفٍ فَبَايِعْنَهُنَّ وَأَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُنَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

O Prophet! when believing women come to you giving you a pledge that they will not associate aught with God, and will not steal, and will not commit fornication, and will not kill their children, and will not bring a calumny which they have forged of themselves, and will not disobey you in what is good, then accept their pledge, and ask forgiveness for them from God; surely God is Forgiving, Merciful. (60: 12)

Paying allegiance at that time is akin to voting today. Islam extended suffrage to women long before

Western democracy existed. If today women are denied the right to vote in certain Muslim countries, that does not mean that Islam does not give them the right to vote because denying them the right to vote does not come from the teachings of the Qur'an. Rather, women have the right to participate fully in politics.

Women also have the right to economic contribution. No career is closed to women unless it threatens her dignity, or her Islamic obligations cannot be upheld.

After discussing women, we come to the subject of marriage. God created everything in the universe in pairs, including human beings.

﴿وَمِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَا زَوْجَيْنِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ﴾

And of everything We have created pairs that you may be mindful. (51:49)

﴿سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا مِمَّا تُنْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ وَمِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَمِمَّا لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

Glory be to Him Who created pairs of all things, of what the earth grows, and of their kind and of what they do not know. (36:36)

Marriage is a necessity, not just a luxury. A woman once came to the 6th Imam, as-Sadiq and said to him, "I have decided to remain single my entire life." He asked her why, and she said it was so that she can be closer to God if she stayed untouched. The Imam replied that if it was purer to remain single then his grandmother Lady Fatima al-Zahra would have been the first woman never to marry. God created us to get married and to have a family. Human beings are gregarious creatures, they are not meant to live a hermetic life. We need the interaction, acceptance, love, communication, and companionship of our spouses. We need to share our lives and experiences, to grow, to protect, and to better ourselves with our partners and families.

In a family, the role of the mother is not just to tidy the home and prepare the meals. Her role is very critical, even more so than that of the father. She must provide spiritual nourishment for the family and stand as a model of proper and moral conduct for her children to live by. Children should find love, tenderness, and compassion within the heart of a mother. Without these important qualities, we as human beings will miss out on the most important ingredients to make this world a better place to live in.

Despite its importance, respect, and admiration for the institute of motherhood, at present it has significantly diminished. Women are distancing themselves from being called a "mother," and find it degrading. However, being called a mother is an honor and every mother should take pride in being a mother; for they are the ones who nurture and foster successful leaders, innovators, scientists, physicians; and even grown men became good husbands and fathers because of their mothers. Mothers

bear a giant responsibility and it is the great mothers who produce great children and future leaders.

Similarly, look at the people who went down the wrong path. If the cases are deeply analyzed, then one will find that those people came from troubled homes; many of them were deprived of love and compassion from their mothers. The first few years in a child's life are very critical for their development. It is worth reconsidering to serve others in an office while your children are deprived of your love and tenderness, for once gone, those priceless years will never come back.

The mother's role in a family is central. If you do not want to chase your future children through the streets or in the police stations, then find a good woman to marry; one who will make a great mother, one who will nurture and sustain your children out of her love and belief. If you want to get married, then look at your prospective wife as being the mother of your children.

Search for a woman with faith and commitment. A wife needs to be educated in Islam in order for her to raise the children rightfully. Otherwise, do not expect your children to mature properly. A mother is the child's first teacher; children will open their eyes and heart to her first.

Most of the youth who attend the mosque and listen to the Islamic sermons do so because of their mothers. Mothers warmly remind and request their children to stay close to God. They constantly want to feed their children with the spirit of Islam because they know it is the only protection and savior both in this world and in the next.

A man was once asked why he loved Imam Ali so much. He said that 30 years ago his mother blended the love of Ali b. Abi Talib into his milk. Mothers do not just give children physical food; they also give them the food of life, love, and spirituality.

Raising one child who believes in God is better than raising many children without faith; hence, we have to prepare our daughters for the great task that is awaiting them. Becoming a good mother does not happen overnight, it begins way before she becomes a mother – she must especially pay attention to what she says, does and how she behaves.

When God decreed that the Prophet would have a daughter called Fatima who would be unmatched with other women in the world, he sent the Angel Gabriel to inform the Prophet that God, the Exalted greets him and instructs him to abstain from his wife for 40 days. After 40 days, He sent exceptional food for the Prophet from Heaven and then commanded that he should approach his wife. Therefore, we can see that food has an enormous effect. Prepare your body and your mind so that you can be a good mother.

Although Islam maintains that men and women have equal status, we have to address the fact that unfortunately gender discrimination still exists amongst Muslims even today. Many Muslim women feel marginalized and alienated, and even in the West we see gender discrimination between Muslims. Most of the time, our sisters play a secondary role in the Islamic community. Increasingly, they are

complaining about their seclusion in the mosques. Regrettably, the Muslim community is not the perfect equal opportunity community.

While the Qur'an maintains that believing men and women are guardians of each other, in practice, Muslim women are marginalized. Everywhere, men enter and sit in the best area of the mosque and have exclusive access to the speakers. Nowadays, we have relegated women to the dark corners of the mosque or secluded them to cramped, isolated rooms.

They are not permitted to come into the main hall to listen, engage, and feel the spiritual fellowship of faithful believers. During the time of the Prophet, women used to sit in the Prophet's mosque and question him while he was speaking. They were free to question him wherever they wanted, even inside the mosque. They participated fully in public debate. Of course, the Islamic hijab and moral etiquettes have to be observed to the fullest in such circumstances.

Why is it that we have few female Muslim speakers, writers, professors, or activists? Who is to blame? Is it the men or the women, or both of them? We have exceptional male preachers, but believe me, bring one woman to deliver a dynamic lecture and she will put the best of the male speakers aside. Every Islamic program should include sessions that are run by the sisters for the sisters. We need to encourage women and provide them with the opportunity to speak, and they too should also make an effort to come forward.

One time, after the death of the Prophet, Umar b. al-Khattab announced that he was going to set a limit for the amount of a woman's *mahr* (marriage gift), a lady stood up in front of the crowd and objected, "Are you doing that, or is it God?" He replied, "A woman said the right and Umar erred."²⁶ She questioned him openly. We need female activists and speakers. Muslim men cannot always be the ones defending the rights of Muslim women. I cannot stand up in a Western university and talk about the rights of women in Islam. They will tell me that I am a man and that my wife or daughter should speak for themselves. Women need to take up this responsibility.

Next, there is the issue of hijab. And this does not only apply to the women. Although we usually limit the discussion of hijab to women, it applies to both men and women. A man's hijab begins in the heart, as well as his appearance.

﴿قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ﴾

Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; surely God is Aware of what they do. (24:30)

Men have to be especially careful in society, and should not bring about a sin by staring at the opposite gender. Imam Ali was sitting with some men when a beautiful woman passed by. They all began to stare at her. He told them not to stare because their eyes were being covetous and she was a woman like

their wives. Hence, Islam instructs men (as well as women) to lower their gaze – meaning that they should not entertain their thoughts with sinful images when they look at a woman.

Many problems begin with the first sinful glance. They become an arrow from the arrows of Satan. He whispers in your ears and tells you this is an attractive woman, don't miss out. God created this beauty for you to look at. The Prophet said that if you cast your eyes down from this artificial beauty, then God will reveal to you the real beauty which is the mysteries of the universe. However, one cannot have both.

If you want to experience the beauty of God, then you have to have self-restraint, and self-restraint begins with the eyes. Even if you marry the most beautiful woman in the world and you have wandering eyes, you will still want to stare at other women. It will become a habit and will affect your family life tomorrow; therefore, we must learn to control our glances.

We live in a society where your look proclaims your identity. You are what you reveal. Whether you like it or not, society will judge you by your appearance. One's hairstyle, clothing, jewelry, and body piercing speak volumes on the type of person that one is. When you are young, you do not realize the future consequence of the choices that you make now, but they will affect you. Your body is not a canvas for dot-to-dot tattoos or a puncture board filled with numerous holes to dangle your jewelry.

You have been gifted with an incredible body, shaped and created by God, therefore one must not abuse this magnificent work of art with one's own design. Besides, these add-on "attractions" are not really doing you any justice. Brothers, do not think that morally decent, intelligent, and aspiring sisters will ever give you the time of day if your hair is color-spiked, arms are painted with tattoos, jewelry is clicking all over your body, or your pants are dangling – they laugh at such guys.

Your value is not in your hairstyle, but it is in your heart. It is in your personality and attitude, not your outer appearance. If you want to touch the heart of a girl, do it through your honesty, sincerity, kindness, intelligence, faith, and manners. Do not say that you pray and fast, but your hairstyle is not important because it is. You have to look like those who are humble, sincere, people of faith, not those who are on the wrong path. Your appearance screams out to the world what you represent.

Similarly for sisters, hijab is an honorable way to live by. In the West, they call it a "veil," but hijab is not a veil. The term "veiling" has a very negative connotation. It somehow implies that you have no identity and no presence in the society. However, introducing the phrase "hijab" into the English language will give Muslim women an honorable identity.

Hijab is a privilege, not a curse. You may not realize it now, but when you are mature and become a mother you will then understand how important it truly is.

Islam always sides with those who are vulnerable or who have the propensity to be taken advantage; therefore, Islam puts the barrier of hijab from the advancements of men. Hijab protects you from the dangers around you, therefore do not underestimate it. It forces men to focus on your interior character,

not your exterior physique. It directs them to focus on your values and personality, not at your looks.

A man who is only attracted to your face, hair, or body is in reality disrespecting you. He has no respect for your intelligence, honor, or the beauty that is inside of your heart. Your inner beauty is unparalleled and unmatched. Through it, you can create miracles in this life. Anyone can make themselves beautiful on the outside. Anyone can have cosmetic surgery, but the inner beauty is what is important and that cannot be forged or made up beautified.

True hijab begins in the heart. Spiritual hijab is much more important than the physical hijab. The physical hijab is just a piece of cloth. Hijab begins with how you carry yourself. If your behavior is an un-Islamic one, then being covered from head to toe will not help. You have to resemble Lady Fatima al-Zahra and Lady Zaynab al-Kubra. They are our real role models. Do not be taken in by the women on the magazine covers, for they are not our real role models in life.

One day, the Prophet asked, “My daughter Fatima, what is the best thing for a woman?” Although she was still young, she replied, “The best thing is for a strange man not to see her and for her not to see a strange man.”²⁷ The theme behind this message is that Islam does not want any circumstances to arise that could jeopardize the chastity of a woman. Chastity is one of the noblest traits for a woman. Thus, live by the sentiments of Fatima al-Zahra – for she is our true role model.

Unfortunately, for some Muslim women in America, hijab has become somewhat of a fashion and social trend. An emphasis is placed on the social aspect of hijab, but the spiritual aspect is forgotten. It is disheartening to see hijab lose its spiritual value the way that God had intended it in the Qur’an:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِّأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذٰلِكَ اَدْنٰى اَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ
اَللّٰهُ غَفُوْرًا رَّحِيْمًا

O Prophet! say to your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers that they let down upon them their over-garments; this will be more proper, that they may be known, and thus they will not be given trouble; and God is Forgiving, Merciful. (33:59)

Certainly, God wants us to be beautiful, but for who? Certainly, not for men who are outsiders, for they are not worthy of our attention. They want to take advantage of a woman’s body and then discard them. They will not even have the courtesy to return your phone calls or ask about you. Some men are merciless, and thus women have to guard themselves. One cannot expect that a stranger will look out for your best interest. A woman complained that once she goes out with Muslim men they are no longer interested in her after the first date. Perhaps she was being too accommodating. When a woman is too generous with herself, then men will lose interest in them. God Himself tells women to be on their guard from the men and not to be too complaisant with them:

يَا نِسَاءَ النَّبِيِّ لَسْتُنَّ كَأَحَدٍ مِّنَ النِّسَاءِ إِنِ اتَّقَيْتُنَّ فَلَا تَخْضَعْنَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ وَقُلْنَ قَوْلًا مَّعْرُوفًا

O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the other women; If you will be on your guard, then be not soft in (your) speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease yearn; and speak a good word. (33:32)

We must follow Lady Zaynab, the partner of Imam Husayn in his sacrifice. Everyone agrees that if it were not for Zaynab's stand in the aftermath of Ashura, then Imam Husayn's message would have been silenced. She was the one who made all of us, and millions of others worldwide, commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.

Journey of Life

Featured Themes

Dying; The Last Moments of Life

مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ وَفِيهَا نُعِيدُكُمْ وَمِنْهَا نُخْرِجُكُمْ تَارَةً أُخْرَى

From it We created you and into it We shall send you back and from it will We raise you a second time. (20:55)

When we plan for the vacation of a “lifetime,” we prepare ourselves for it way in advance. Our main reason to take a vacation is to relax and have fun. Certainly, no one invests in a vacation that is going to be chaotic or disturbing. We want a destination that is peaceful and scenic; and we plan our retreats with a step-by-step itinerary. We research the places of interest and read about the featured attractions. We pack for the weather accordingly and take the necessary precautions. We check over our list and then anticipate the arrival of our great trip. Islam tells us that we should plan in the same way for our final destination in the Hereafter.

Although the Qur'an and the traditions mention what we will experience in the next world, most of what will happen at the moment of death and the life after death still remains a mystery to us, yet this journey is imminent. Whether we are rich or poor, young or old, educated or illiterate, we will all be compelled to undertake this journey. We need to understand that whatever awaits us there depends on what we do here, in our present lives. The Prophet explained that two options await us at death, “Either the grave will be a garden from the gardens of Paradise or it will be a hole from the pits of Hell.”²⁸ Which way we want to go depends upon us, and our actions in this world.

Despite the fact that the Prophet witnessed horrific battles and the torturing of his companions, he still

claimed that, “I have not seen anything more terrifying than what will happen in the grave.”²⁹ God gave him the ability to hear and see clearly the events of the grave. When we look at a gravesite, we see nothing but dirt and a deep hole. However, a day will come when the veil will be lifted from our eyes and we will see the reality of the grave. We will see what the Prophet saw, but then at that time it will be too late.

Our true mother is the earth. “O son of Adam!” the earth is narrated as saying every day, “You are stepping on my back, but soon you will reside in my womb.”³⁰ Our brief life span pales in comparison to the age of Earth, which scientists place, along with the solar system, at about 4.9 billion years. They date the universe itself to be between 15 to 20 billion years, and theorize that space and matter came into being by a sudden expansion of an infinitesimal singularity, known as the “Big Bang theory.”

﴿أَوَلَمْ يَرِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ﴾

Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before we clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe? (21:30)

Perhaps this verse refers to that primal explosion after which most of the galaxies were formed, including our home galaxy. Our planet is the only one known so far to support life, and this is our home.

We can approximate with reasonable precision how long the universe has been in existence. Scientist have even forewarned that life on Earth and our solar system will one day come to an end. However, no one can give the precise number of years of our lives; some people may live to be over 100 years old and some may only live for a few hours. A skeptic person once asked the Prophet when the final Hour (Day of Judgment) would come. Instead of answering his question, the Prophet asked him, “And what have you done to get ready for it?” It does not matter when the Hour will come. It could come in a million years or it could come tomorrow. What matters is whether you are prepared for it or not.

Do not assume that you have forever just because you are young. A young vibrant man had just finished medical school and for his graduation he was planning a ski trip. Just before he left, he told his mother that he was looking forward to the vacation because he had worked so hard at school and accomplished his goal in becoming a doctor. On his way driving through the mountains he had a terrible car accident and died instantly. He was at the prime of his life, he had labored in his studies and graduated medical school, his future looked prosperous, he was going to be saving the lives of others, but within a second he was gone. Death put an end to everything. Therefore, we never know what will happen to us.

God tells us beforehand to prepare ourselves for death. He even gives us two combined instructions to follow that would assist us when we are buried and alone in the grave:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ﴾

As for those who say, “Our Lord is God,” and then pursue steadfastly the right way – the angels descend on them (from time to time and say): “Fear you not! (they suggest), nor grieve! but receive the Glad Tidings of the Garden (of Bliss), that which you were promised!” (41:30)

First, we need to have solid belief in God “as for those who say, ‘Our Lord is God’, followed by “pursue steadfastly the right way,” meaning that we not only have to believe in God, but we also have to adhere to all of His commandments. Hence, belief alone will not save you; it must be matched with practice.

﴿وَالْعَصْرَ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ﴾

I swear by the time, most surely man is in loss, except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience. (103: 1-3)

The Prophet advised, “A Muslim is someone whose hand and tongue other Muslims are safe from.”³¹ Your faith reflects in how you treat others around you. Putting pictures of Mecca and Madinah on your walls does not make you a good Muslim. Growing a long beard or reciting the *tasbeeh* (prayer beads) does not give one certainty. However, treating people with good manners (*akhlaq*) is.

﴿وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

And the life of this world is nothing but a sport and a play; and as for the next abode, that most surely is the life – did they but know! (29:64)

We have been highly advised to visit the cemetery, for it is the world’s largest museum. It teaches us about our reality. Witness the burial of a person and remember that one day the same thing will be done to you.

If your parents have passed, make a special effort to visit their graves, for they are waiting for you. God will forgive the sins of whoever visits his parents’ graves. Visit the graves of your loved ones, for they are thirsty for a few verses of the Qur’an to be recited and dedicated to them. The Prophet said, “If someone sits by his brother’s grave and recites the Qur’an, then the deceased will feel solace and delight.”³² Even if the gravesite is in another country, still recite verses from the Qur’an on their behalf, and the reward of it will reach them wherever they are. We all know someone who has left this world, so while we are alive, we should try and dedicate some verses to ease their souls, and hopefully, when we pass away someone will ease our souls with a few verses. It is interesting to note that in the last *takbeer* of *Salat al-Mayyit* (prayer for the deceased) we say, “We will not remain after you except for a short time.”

The Prophet has given us a slight depiction of the grave. We will no longer have any connection with the outer world. No one will be able to hear us or help us there; it will be dark and constrictive. From time to time, we will hear the moans of the other deceased people. The angels will come and question us, and we will not be able to find any way out of their questioning except by speaking the truth. Only once in a while will a kind believer who is still among the living ones send us a gift by reciting the Qur'an or prayers on our behalf.

Nonetheless, there is hope; we can act now to illuminate the darkness in our graves. “*Tahajud* (the Night Prayer) will become a light in our graves,” the Prophet assured. We will all desperately need that light. The Prophet also said, “No soul knows what delight for the eyes is hidden in *Tahajud*,”³³ and Imam as-Sadiq told us that God has specified His reward for every good act, except for *Tahajud*. Even in this life every prayer has innumerable benefits. You will never know unless you experience it. God has told the Prophet that one of the ways to ascend to true spiritual heights is through *Tahajud* prayer.

﴿وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَّكَ عَسَىٰ أَن يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامًا مَّحْمُودًا﴾

And during a part of the night, pray Tahajud [optional mid-night prayers] (which is) beyond what is incumbent upon you; maybe your Lord will raise you to a position of great glory. (17:79)

If you do not already perform it, then make a sincere effort, for it takes just half an hour to say these prayers. If one can spend all night watching a sporting match or movies then one should be able to perform the *Tahajud*. We are young and energetic now, and we may not have the time or energy when we get older. One will see that when we perform that prayer, our lives will change for the best in many different areas.

*Salat al-Wahsha*³⁴ also sends light into the grave. When your loved one passes away, it is recommended to pray *Salat al-Wahsha* for them on the first night after their burial, for that is the time when the deceased one is in a great trial. This prayer offers a form of assurance, calmness, and ease for the dead person. Reciting this prayer will help them adjust to the grave because this transition is not an easy one. Not only do they have to get used to being in a confined space, but the angels, Munkar and Nakeer will immediately come to question them. Only genuine believers will be able to greet the angels as “Mubashir”³⁵ and “Bashir”³⁶ instead of Munkar and Nakeer.

In order to help the deceased one at the moment of death, we recite the *talqeen* for them before they are buried; once when they are dying and then once before they are put in the grave. We sit by their head at their deathbed and remind them to say, “There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Prophet of God, Ali is the guardian of God (*La ilaaha illa Allah, Muhammadun Rasulullah, Aliyan waliullah*).” Our last words before we leave this world should be professing the faith (*shahadah*), for the Prophet has said, “Whoever’s last words are *la ilaaha illa Allah* will enter into Paradise.” Many people try to utter these words at the moment of death but are not able to due to some circumstances. We beg God for that

opportunity to be amongst those who recite it before we die.

Just before we bury the dead, we repeat the *talqeen* again. We say to them, “*Isma, ifham, ya fulan ibne fulan, idha ja akaal malikanal muqarraban mabuthayni min qiballahi taala...*” (See index for full text)

The angels will come right after the burial and there will be no respite. The first thing that they will ask the person is, “Who is your Lord? Who is your Prophet? Who is your Imam? What is your book? What is your faith? What is your *qiblah* (direction of prayer)?” Do not fear them, rather reply to them by saying, “God is my Lord, Muhammad is my Prophet, Ali is my Imam,” and mention the names of the eleven imams after him, “Islam is my religion, the Qur’an is my book, and the Ka’bah is my *qiblah*.”

Do not think that you can lie, or make up the right answers. If you do not follow the Prophet here (in your lifetime) it will be impossible to pretend that you do when you are put into your grave.

It is narrated that when the Prophet buried Fatima bint Asad, the mother of Imam Ali, who was also the Prophet’s aunt and foster mother, in Al-Baqi Cemetery, he went down into her grave and lay beside her body for a few moments before covering her with his robe and then climbing out again. When his companions asked why he did that, he replied:

One day, I was telling her about death, about the sadness and the fear of the grave. She said, “I cannot bear that!” I told her not to worry. I decided that I would lie beside her body for a little while and cover her with my robe to take away some of the fear.

When I listened to the angels questioning her, she answered the questions: “Who is your Lord? Who is your Prophet? What is your Book? What is your faith?” Then she was silent when they asked, “Who is your Imam?” So I told her to say, “Your son, your son Ali.” She replied, “My son Ali.”^{[37](#)}

Although she had passed away during the time of the Prophet, before Imam Ali had succeeded him as the Imam, she was still asked about who was her Imam, even though it was her own son.

After the angels are finished with the person, then they will face the torment of the grave, about which the Prophet says, “Only a few survive the torment of the grave.” It will begin with the squeezing. Your sins will be squeezed out of your body with pressure proportional to the level of your misdeeds. The vast majority of people are unable to bear this torment, but they will have no choice. The crushing of the grave threatens all of us.

We want to think that we will be safe in the next world, but only God knows. When one of the companions of the Prophet, Sa’d b. Ma’adh was fatally wounded in the Battle of Uhud, he survived until he returned to Madinah. There he passed away and the Prophet buried him in Al-Baqi Cemetery. As the Prophet was burying him, his mother said warmly, “Congratulations Sa’d, you have attained Paradise.” The Prophet turned to her and cautioned, “Wait, Um Sa’d, do not put it on God to grant him Paradise yet. Right now, his grave is crushing the joints of his bones.”^{[38](#)}

The Prophet could see what she could not see. Commentators believe that Sa'd did not treat his family well and the punishment in the grave was in line with what the Prophet had said that, "Most of the punishment of the grave will be for a man's bad temper." If you disrespect your mother, father, husband, wife, or children, then be aware of the torment of the grave. If you do not appreciate what they do, or you go home and raise your voice at your mother or wife for not having the food ready – as if she is your servant – then you are increasing your punishment in the grave. Be extremely careful of how you treat others. You may not see the repercussions here, but you will definitely have to face them there.

In addition, those who take their prayers lightly will also have to endure the crushing of the grave. The Prophet says, "If a person takes his prayers lightly, his grave will be completely dark. He will have to endure the squeezing of the grave."

All of the prayers are important, but God emphasizes the morning prayers in the Qur'an:

﴿أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ وَقُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ إِنَّ قُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ كَانَ مَشْهُودًا﴾

Keep up prayer from the declining of the sun until the darkness of the night and the morning recitation; surely the morning recitation is witnessed. (17:78)

Do not ever miss the morning prayers. If someone told you they had a delicious breakfast ready for you at dawn or a special gift waiting for you, then you would be right there in anticipation of it. You have to wake up for the prayer and stand before God, for He pays special attention to these prayers.

Other people have no problem saying the morning prayers, but when the time comes for the noon or afternoon prayers they are careless about it because they are eating their lunch, watching TV, or chatting, and then five minutes before sunset they remember they forgot to pray. This is what the Prophet meant by "taking the prayers lightly." Taking your prayers lightly is dangerous just as Imam as-Sadiq warned the believers that, "Our intercession on the Day of Judgment will not reach those people who take their prayers lightly."³⁹

Take care of your prayers and pay special attention to them. Make sure that you are doing *wudhu* (ablution) properly, and that you are saying your prayers correctly, and perform them on time.

﴿إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَّوْقُوتًا﴾

Surely prayer is a timed ordinance for the believers. (4: 103)

Read *Surah al-Muminoon* (the Believers), and see how God describes the believers in that chapter, He begins and ends His description with the importance that they give to their prayers:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ﴾

And those who keep a guard on their prayers. (23:9)

Recognizing that the quickest way to God is through the prayers, believers make their daily prayers a priority. No matter how successful they may be, they know that they always need God. We need Him at school; we need Him at home; we need Him at work; we need Him when we are single; we need Him when we are married; we need Him when we have children. Therefore, we must always be with Him. God says that if you take one step towards Him, He will come running towards you. He has promised this, but He needs to see the first gesture come from you, “And You do not conceal Yourself from Your creation, except that their deeds hide them from You.”⁴⁰

Have no doubt that God is always there. If you look hard enough, you will see Him. A man once asked Imam Ali, “Have you seen your Lord?” Imam Ali replied, “Would I worship a Lord that I could not see?”⁴¹ One cannot see God with their physical eyes, but we see Him with the vision of (our) hearts. The souls of the prophets and the imams are pure. They could see God, Paradise, Hell, and the life after death with their inner eyes. We limit ourselves, and thus we draw a curtain between God and ourselves. When we stand before Him, what do we think about? Are our hearts and minds with Him, or do they wander somewhere else?

Although, mistreating the family and taking prayers lightly increase the pressure in the grave; nonetheless, there is hope and mercy from the torments of the grave.

﴿يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ. إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ﴾

The day on which property will not avail, nor sons except him who comes to God with a heart free (from evil). (26:88-89)

The Prophet left for us some ways to help us from the punishment in the grave.

First, he instructed that God would lessen the torment for one who performs a special prayer of two units (*rakah*) regularly on Thursday nights. In each unit (*rakah*), after *Surah al-Fatiha* (the Opening), recite *Surah al-Qadr* (the Destiny) 15 times. It takes no more than about 15 minutes to recite it.

The second thing is to perform Hajj. The Prophet said, “Pilgrims are divided into several groups. The best ones are forgiven of all of their past and future sins, and the punishment of the grave is lifted from them.” Try to go for Hajj. Even if you are students, try to save your money. You do not need to buy new clothes for every occasion. Your value is in your heart and mind, not in your clothes.

Do not put off the Hajj until you get older. Would you send someone on vacation to Disneyland in a wheelchair? Of course not! Hajj too needs vitality, energy, youth, and minds that are eager to search and

inquire. You will never enjoy its richness at an old age. Enjoy Hajj while you are still young, and when you can walk on your own two feet and appreciate the meaning of the rituals. If you go for the first time when you are in your seventies or eighties, then you will be confused and worried because you do not know what you are doing or why you are performing those acts. Most importantly, you need God beside you now – during your youthful age – when you are beginning to map out your future.

You need Him next to you guiding you through your life. By going for Hajj you are renewing your commitment to Him. You are in essence saying that you need Him to help you get into that good university, pass those heavy exams, secure a good job, find the best wife or husband, and raise a prosperous family. By the time you are old it is too late to ask for these things.

People view Hajj as a way to repent for their past sins. After accumulating a lifetime of mistakes, they then go for Hajj. That is not how it should be. Hajj is supposed to immunize us against committing sins. When you gaze at the Ka'bah and millions of people who are circling it, then you will be forced to ask yourself why you were created. What is your goal in life? The Prophet advised, “Those who are in the graves wish they could exchange the world and everything that is in it for just one Hajj.”⁴² The effect of it is inconceivable so try to go. Say, “Oh God, I don't have the money now, but I am going to start saving money from today, and if You so will, next year I will perform my Hajj.” Transform your life through going for Hajj.

Family Values

Featured Themes

Marriage; Divorce; Abortion; Family; Fatherhood; Parents; Muslim b. Aqeel & his sons

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۖ
الَّذِي تَتَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالرَّحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا ۖ

O mankind! Be wary of your Lord who created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it, and from the two of them, scattered numerous men and women. Be wary of God, in whose Name you adjure one another, and the wombs. Indeed God is watchful over you. (4: 1)

There is nothing more dearer to God than the institute of marriage, so if you want to please God, then you must get married. In the eyes of God, marriage is one of the most honorable acts, and family is the most sacrosanct institution. Families form the building blocks of a sound society; and when families prosper then society prospers as well and vice versa. Virtually everyone agrees that the family structure today, in particular to, but not exclusive to the West, is definitely breaking down.

The ideal Muslim family is one that provides love, security, respect, and happiness. Love and

compassion form the essence of the Islamic family. A Muslim home should be the place where one seeks shelter, recognition, and refuge from the chaotic world that we live in. The Muslim home is not built on material possession. It is not about the area which one lives in or the type of car that one drives. Rather, it is about caring, sharing, forgiveness, compassion, and sacrifice.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

And among His signs is that He created for you mates from your own selves that you may take comfort in them, and He ordained affection and mercy between you. There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect. (30:21)

However, for some people, the family has unfortunately become a danger zone. Statistically speaking, people nowadays are much more likely to be physically and emotionally abused by their own relatives than by strangers. In the world's most modern democracy, namely the United States, researchers say that a woman is beaten by her husband or partner every 12 seconds. Who knows what the statistics are for the Islamic world. The home, which should be a safe haven, in some cases has become a source of pain and danger.

In past years, several generations used to live together under one roof. Ask your father or grandfather how many family members lived with them. They all learned how to get along. Today, two individuals cannot even live under the same roof; and if they do live together, then more often than not, they live emotionally distant lives from one another; they are physically united but spiritually and emotionally away. As a result, the divorce rate has reached 50% or even higher in some countries.

Divorce is not just a problem in the west; in fact, divorce trend cuts across all sectors. It is even on the rise in Muslim countries as well.

Why has this become the case today? What is leading to so many separations in the world?

Sociologists blame lack of education, lack of responsibility, ethnicity, poverty, feminism, and more.

Traditionally, and Islamically, men are viewed as the breadwinners, but today, women all over the world work, and sometimes they even earn more money than their husbands do. If the duty of a husband is merely to bring home money, then what does a woman need a man for? Thus, some women question why they should get married. Is not money the number one reason why a man postpones marriage? Mostly everyone thinks that marriage is contingent on money. However, this is not what God has said – He bases marriage on something completely different.

If only we were to deeply reflect on the spirit of marriage then perhaps we would not see such a rise in the divorce rate around the world.

In verse 30:21, God describes marriage as a source of emotional and psychological shelter, not financial support. You do not need someone to cook for you or to give you a credit card. You need a spouse to grow with morally, emotionally, spiritually, socially, and intellectually. This is why marriage is very vital; and why the Prophet said, "Marriage is from my tradition (Sunnah), and whoever turns away from my Sunnah is not from me."⁴³ Thus we see that marriage is not optional; it is not a luxury; rather it is a necessity. One will never progress in life, nor reach full potential if one remains single. One will never be at peace. It is not about money; but rather, it is about being a true human.

The divorce factors that sociologists mention may or may not play a role, but one factor they generally neglect to mention, and in my opinion is the real cause of the upswing in divorce is the moral decline in society – specifically, promiscuity. We are surrounded by it everywhere. Everyday men and women are interacting in close proximity with others, either at work or at school. All of their energy, communication, contribution, and sense of humor are spent with their co-workers or classmates.

By the time they return home, they are too exhausted to spend time with their spouse or family. Half the time, they do not even have the time to talk to each other at home. If they do have time, what usually happens? One watches TV and the other is on the phone or the Internet. They communicate with everyone else except with one another. Someone once told me that when his wife calls, he will talk to her for a maximum of 60 seconds, but if any other female friend calls he will talk to her for at least 60 minutes. What kind of marriage is this? Unfortunately, however this is the social reality that we are living in.

Some people get married out of convenience. They treat marriage as a bed and breakfast. One wife confided that she wished her husband would treat the home as a "bed and breakfast" because he looks at it as a *bread* and breakfast – she only saw him when there was food on the table; he hardly came home at night. Setting aside the humor, such problems do exist and they are very serious. If the husband does not come home at night or stays out very late, then this is a serious problem. A marriage like this will not last.

Everyone suffers from a divorce – the couple, the children, the extended family, and the society at large. Even if the marriage is horrible, divorce is still a traumatic experience. Sadly, the children pay the highest price. They say that in the United States, over a million children every year are involved in a new divorce. Today, 25% of American children live in a single parent family because of divorce.

The percentage of children born to unwed parents, especially teenagers is also on the rise. Some schools have had to provide a nursery room to accommodate the number of teenage mothers. The odd thing is that there are no fathers to show for it. The fathers are absent – they have abandoned the babies and their mothers. Would another male figure, such as a boyfriend or stepfather ever compensate for the role of the biological father?

Even worse in the U.S. is that about one million teenagers get abortions every year and this number is

on the rise. Abortion is forbidden in Islam, for it is murder. However, there are rare exceptions, such as when the life of a mother is at risk and others.

The Prophet was once asked, “O Messenger of God, tell me the best way to remain safe from committing sins.” He replied, “Before you decide to do something, think about its consequences.” At that moment, everything may seem good. Maybe you erred and got intoxicated, or went dancing, or watched an adult movie. Satan is always present and he whispers into your ears; he pushes you to do what he wants, but you need to then stop and ask yourself, how will you feel tomorrow? Will you be happy with yourself about what you did? Will you be ashamed? If so, you must control yourself. Always think about the future. A few reckless moments can destroy your life forever.

It should be noted that children of absentee parents do not necessarily come from a single parent home. Some fathers are physically present at home, but are emotionally absent from their children. They neglect to nurture and foster the emotional aspects of their offspring. Even worse, some fathers are not even physically present because they spend their time traveling or living somewhere else. Some men get married without recognizing the immense responsibility of married life. They father several children, but do not nurture them emotionally or spiritually. This is a major problem, for parental neglect will scar children forever. Children need both parents to raise them rightfully.

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

O you who have faith! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones. (66:6)

Look at the example of the prophets. Prophet Abraham prayed to God:

﴿رَبِّ اجْعَلْنِي مُقِيمَ الصَّلَاةِ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي رَبَّنَا وَتَقَبَّلْ دُعَاءِ﴾

Lord! Make me a maintainer of the prayer, and my descendants [too]. Our Lord, accept my supplication. (14:40)

He did not want to worship God alone. He wanted his children to stand with him. The ideal Muslim family stays together in this life and in the next. This life is too short; and if you cannot unify your family together here, then how will you keep them together there?

Supporting your family financially is not enough. An increasing number of Muslim mothers complain that their husbands ignore the family. A wife does not only need the husband’s money, especially today. They need love and attention from their husband. She wants a soul mate, not a fancy house. An expensive mansion will not provide any good if the people inside the home are unhappy. One builds a home with love and affection – not by remodeling it.

Society today encourages divorce by presenting it as the primary solution to marital problems. When spouses quarrel, someone suggests divorce. We must avoid this habit! When one argues, and keep in mind that *everyone* argues, do not bring up the issue of divorce as a scapegoat. Take a step back; do not rush into divorce. Divorce should be the last option, not the first, especially if there are children involved.

Marriage is a test and no one ever said that it would be easy. No one ever said that life is easy. Try to find solutions to your problems. Encourage and observe patience and try to work out your problems. Your children will learn from you how to try to resolve life's difficulties. This is your struggle (*jihad*). No one wants to suffer the feelings of desperation, remorse, guilt, low self-esteem, loneliness, depression, and rejection that come with divorce. There is a reason why divorce is the most hated of all of the lawful actions in Islam. Try to hold your marriage together for the sake of God.

﴿أَقُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

Say, "Indeed my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are for the sake of God, Lord of all the worlds." (6: 162)

It is true that sometimes divorce is unavoidable. Although hated, divorce is permissible because God does not want people to suffer unbearably. He made marriage to be a blessing, not a curse. Islamic law does not force two people to stay together if they feel that there is absolutely no love or compassion, or feel despair that their relationship will never improve. Without harmony or unity, marriage is a failure. If you are suffering in your marriage, God knows about it. He does not want you to suffer, but He did not intend for people to rush into a hasty divorce either. Take time for reconciliation and forgiveness. The door to divorce will always be open later as a last resort if need be.

﴿وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ شِقَاقَ بَيْنِهِمَا فَابْعَثُوا حَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهِ وَحَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا إِنْ يُرِيدَا إِصْلَاحًا يُوَفِّقِ اللَّهُ بَيْنَهُمَا إِنْ اللَّهُ كَانَ عَلِيمًا خَبِيرًا﴾

And if you fear a split between the two of them, then appoint an arbiter from his relatives and an arbiter from her relatives. If they desire reconciliation, God shall reconcile them. Indeed God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (4:35)

It is mandatory for husbands and wives to seek arbitration, whether through family members, friends, scholars, professionals, or other sincere people before initiating divorce. If you are having problems with your marriage and cannot seem to resolve your issues, then ask for help. If you and your partner are sincere, then God will bring you back together. He is the One who puts love and harmony between peoples' hearts. We cannot do that ourselves. The closer you become to God, the closer you will become to your spouse. The more your faith will grow, the better your relationship will be.

Marriage is extremely important, but while maintaining a strong marriage be sure that you do not neglect other family ties.

﴿وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا﴾

Be wary of God, in whose Name you adjure one another, and the wombs. Indeed God is watchful over you. (4: 1)

The Arabic word, ‘*arhaam*’ are your kinsmen, your family, and your relatives; and the closest relatives that you have are your parents.

﴿وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا إِمَّا يَبُلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا ﴿٤٤﴾ تَنْهَرُهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا﴾

Your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship anyone except Him, and [He has enjoined] kindness to parents. Should they reach old age at your side – one of them or both – do not say to them, “Fie!” And do not chide them, but speak to them noble words. (17:23)

God has made your parents’ pleasure tantamount to His pleasure. Once a man asked the Prophet, “What is my father’s right upon me?” He replied, “His right is that you respect and obey him as long as he lives,” given of course, that he is obeying God. If he wants you to attend a wedding reception, where unlawful (*haram*) activities are taking place, then gently tell him that you love him and respect him, but you cannot go there because your Creator has forbidden this. Otherwise, try to do what he wants as long as it does not violate the commands of God.

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حُسْنًا وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ لِتُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا ﴿٤٥﴾ كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

We have enjoined man to be good to his parents. But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as a partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. To Me will be your return, whereat I will inform you concerning that which you used to do. (29:8)

Next, the man asked what his mother’s right upon him was. The Prophet replied, “Oh–no, there is no answer.”⁴⁴ Even if you serve her for twenty–four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year for the rest of your life, you will not have paid her back for one day in her womb. This is your mother’s right upon you.

One is very fortunate if their parents are still alive. Ask those who have lost them. Take care of them while you have them; respect them; be a good son or daughter; and be humble before them. Be the

jewel of your family. No matter how much wealthier or smarter you are than your mother or father, you would not be here without them. God wanted them to be the cause of your existence, and they deserve the utmost of respect.

“Maintaining family ties purifies the wealth, extends one’s lifespan, repels tragedies, and eases the judgment of one’s deeds,”⁴⁵ is according to a Muslim tradition. Staying connected with your immediate and extended family brings you many blessings. It brings you love and respect in the community. Everyone likes to see people who are close with their families. If you have a difficult relationship with your parents, then go to them today and try to set things right with them. Even if they are in the wrong, take the first step and be the one who is generous and forgiving.

ادْفَعِ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ السَّبِيَّةِ ﴿٤٥﴾

Repel ill [conduct] with that which is the best. (23:96)

Forgiveness and reconciliation are the way of the prophets. Humility does not mean defeat, rather it is an honor. Go back to your parents and tell them, “I am at your service. I am your son (or daughter); I belong to you. I want to make up for the wrongs I did and to respect you.”

The story of Imam Husayn and his companion touches our hearts so much, in part because of their family loyalty. Even under severe hardships, they demonstrated unwavering fealty to their relatives. We cannot help but to be moved by how Abbas refused to drink water before his brother, or how Qasim insisted on defending his uncle. Their examples are etched in our hearts, and we should try to imitate and cultivate their actions into our own lives.

Imam of our Time

Featured Themes

Imamah; Khalifah; Imam al-Mahdi

﴿ إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ ﴾

Your guardian is only God, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down [in the state of ruku]. (5:55)

The doctrine of imamah (or khalifah; leadership/successor) holds paramount importance in Islamic theology. Without the belief in Imamah, faith will be incomplete and salvation will remain impossible. Numerous Sunni and Shia narrators, including Ahmad b. Hanbal transmit the following tradition, “Whoever dies without recognizing the leader (imam) of his time dies the death of paganism

(*jahiliyyah*).”⁴⁶ Succession to the Prophet is closely linked to the canon of monotheism (*tawhid*) because obeying the Prophet⁴⁷ is obeying the higher order of God. Thus, in order for faith to be complete, *Imamah* is necessary.

Our relationship with our imam does not exist only in this sphere of life he will be our imam on the Day of Reckoning as well.

﴿يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ فَمَنْ أُوْتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ يَقْرَءُونَ كِتَابَهُمْ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا﴾

That day We will summon every group of people with their imam, then whoever is given his book in his right hand – they will read it, and they will not be wronged so much as a single date-thread. (17:71)

When the Prophet conveyed this verse (*ayah*), he explained that on the Day of Judgment people will line up behind the person who they sincerely followed in this world. Those who truly followed Prophet Moses will line up behind him; those who truly followed Prophet Jesus will line up behind him; and those who truly followed Prophet Muhammad will line up behind him. Similarly, those who deep down, followed the tyrants will line up behind them as well. People will be compelled to join whoever inspired them in this transient life. The curtains of hypocrisy will be cast aside on that day; everyone will be forced to admit the bare truth, even against themselves. Therefore, if you have hope of joining God’s true leaders then you first need to know who they are.

Whoever questions the necessity of following God’s leader should know that God intimately links obedience to Himself with the obedience to His chosen leaders.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ فَإِن تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ﴾
﴿إِن كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا﴾

O you who have faith! Obey God and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you. And if you dispute concerning anything, then refer it to God and the Apostle, if you have faith in God and the Last Day. That is better and more favorable in outcome. (4:59)

If you choose to ignore the leader that God has chosen for you then you are disregarding the command of God. He instructed us to approach Him through His gate; for surely not all roads lead to God. He has set out the path to reach Him, and that trail lies in obeying His Messenger, and his true successors.

﴿مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ وَمَنْ تَوَلَّى فَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِيظًا﴾

Whoever obeys the Apostle certainly obeys God; and as for those who turn their backs [on you],

We have not sent you to keep watch over them. (4:80)

Without *Imamate*, the road to monotheism (*tawhid*) is lost. For this reason, God declared, “We have completed your religion for you,” only after the Prophet had given the final incontestable declaration at Ghadir Khum that Imam Ali was to succeed him. Although he had mentioned this succession many times before, but at Ghadir Khum the masses gave public allegiance to Imam Ali and this was 70 days before the Prophet left this world. He had established the prayers, the fast, and the Hajj, but before ensuring the leadership (*khalifah*), Islam was still incomplete until this final revelation:

﴿ الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا ﴾

Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion. (5:3)

People cannot choose their imam. God chooses the imam. The leadership (*Imamate*) did not begin with Imam Ali. God appointed many leaders throughout history, in each case saying, “He made (*ja'ala*) this person an imam.”

﴿ يَا دَاوُدُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ ﴾

“O David! Indeed We have made you a vicegerent on the earth.” (38:26)

﴿ وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ وَكَانُوا لَنَا عَابِدِينَ ﴾

We made them imams, guiding by Our command, and We revealed to them the performance of good deeds, the maintenance of prayers, and the giving of zakat, and they used to worship Us. (21:73)

It is up to God to decide who He wants to appoint to rule on the earth. He delegates His authority to whomsoever He wills, and we have no option in this matter.

﴿ وَرَبُّكَ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيَخْتَارُ مَا كَانَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ ﴾

Your Lord creates whatever He wishes and chooses. They have no choice. (28:68)

The imams were not selected to be imams during their lifetime any more than the prophets were chosen to be prophets after they were born. They were born into that position; they were predestined. According to the Prophet, the position of himself and Ali with God went back before the creation of man, when he

and Ali were “two lights between the hands of God even before the creation of Adam.”⁴⁸

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ﴿٤٠﴾

When your Lord said to the angels, “Indeed I am going to set a vicegerent on earth.” (2:30)

Khalifah holds two meanings here, one is general and the other is specific. In general, khalifah here refers to humanity as a whole, since God created all human beings to carry out His will on earth. However, specifically speaking, khalifah also refers to an imam chosen by God. This imam must declare the will of God; and no one can do this except for him. If anyone else tries, then they will err.

Many Muslims are confused about who should lead them. Many assume that whoever sits on the Prophet’s pulpit or leads the prayers at the Sacred Mosque represents Islam; however, this is definitely not the case. Representing God’s ordination is no easy task. The most prominent person is not necessarily the best guided. Fame or political power plays no part. People should scrutinize a leader to determine whether or not he is the right person to lead. One should do this not only for the chosen Imam whom we follow (Imam Mahdi), but even for the temporal leaders. Learn from Imam Ali’s words in the Battle of Jamal when a confused man came to him in the heat of the combat and asked, “O Amir al-Mumineen, I am shocked because so many companions of the Prophet, like Talha, Zubayr, and the wife of the Prophet are fighting us. Should we be fighting them?”

Ali b. Abi Talib gave a superb response, “You must know that right and wrong cannot be identified by personalities. Know and acquaint yourself with what is right, then you will recognize who is right; know and acquaint yourself with what is wrong, then you will recognize who is wrong.”⁴⁹ Truth stands independent of falsehood. Thus, we must apply the *truth* onto people to find out who they truly are.

Nonetheless, in order to find who the imam is of our time, one must inquire from the experts of religious sciences – the scholars. They are able to provide you with the necessary guidelines and directions.

The seat of *Imamah* is not hinged on whether or not the imam is active and leading the masses, or if he is patiently waiting. Many prophets were exiled from their homelands, unable to preach their message, thus did that make them any less of a prophet? Of course not.

The primary requirements for any Islamic leader are founded on two heavy principles – justice and righteousness.

الَّذِينَ إِنْ مَكَّنَّا لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَلِلَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ ﴿٤١﴾

Those who, if We granted them power in the land – maintain the prayer, give the zakat, and bid what is right and forbid what is wrong. And with God rests the outcome of all matters. (22:41)

﴿ لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ ﴾

Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice. (57:25)

﴿ يَا دَاوُدُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوَى فَيُضِلَّكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَأْتُونَكَ بِالنَّفْسِ الْبَاطِلَةِ يُضِلُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ بِمَا نَسُوا يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ ﴾

“O David! Indeed We have made you a vicegerent on the earth. So judge between the people with justice, and do not follow the lower desires, or they will lead you astray from the way of God. Indeed those who stray away from the way of God – there is a severe punishment for them because of their forgetting the Day of Reckoning.” (38:26)

Leadership in short is piety and justice. Imam Ali advised his chief justice on the fundamentals of ruling:

Do not sit turned towards one party or another, nor face one party or another, nor look at one of them more than another, so that your relative realizes that you will not favor him, and your enemy realizes that you will not discriminate against him.

If only Muslim judiciaries would heed to the advice given by Imam Ali; under Imam Ali’s rule, there was neither favoritism nor nepotism. Whether someone had personally offended him or favored him, Imam Ali was impartial. No one can deny the justice of Ali, even his enemies. After his death, one of his companions, Dhirar b. Dhamrah al-Kanani was summoned unwillingly by Muawiyah and asked to describe Imam Ali. Although, to no avail, he tried to be excused from the task, he then commenced a long, moving eulogy, part of which read, “The strong did not intimidate him, and the weak did not despair of his justice.”⁵⁰ No one in history could ever blackmail Imam Ali; the disenfranchised found justice in his court.

One must really question – where is this justice in the Muslim countries today?

Islamically, a leader must be the servant of his people. Imam Ali neither rested during the day nor the night. When his aides advised him to take a break he replied, “If I sleep during the day, I neglect my responsibilities; and if I sleep during the night, I neglect my soul.”⁵¹ All of his time was spent for the people. Unlike today’s leaders, he had no guards or entourage and his home was modest. Oftentimes, when he walked through the streets, people had no idea that he was the leader of the Muslim ummah.

Contrast how he ruled with today’s political leaders. While Imam Ali walked humbly through the streets, today’s rulers live entirely in seclusion. You only see them in the newspaper or on the television. Many contemporary rulers rule for power’s sake and maintain their hegemony through bribery, intimidation, and corruption. What is the difference between them and Muawiyah? This is why the entire world is

going forward while the Muslims are going backward because of their political and economic corruption.

We need to follow the advice that Imam Ali gave to his governor, Malik al-Ashtar, “Let the people feel your mercy and kindness towards them, for they fall into two groups: either they are your brothers in religion or your partners in creation.”⁵²

All Muslims agree that Imam al-Mahdi will reappear at the end of time. Sunni scholars maintain that he has not been born yet, while the Shia believe that he is already born and is still living. Points to note, whenever the Prophet spoke of Imam Mahdi, he used the phrase “will *reappear* (*sa-yazhar*),” not “will be born.” One famous Sunni tradition transmitter, Muhammad b. Yusuf al-Kanji al-Shafi, compiled 1,000 hadiths about the reappearance (and not the birth) of Imam Mahdi in his book, *Al-Bayan fi Akhbar-i-Sahib-iz-Zaman*. Some of these traditions also appear in *Al-Bukhari*. In one famous tradition, the Prophet asked his companions, “What will it be like for you when the Messiah, the son of Mariam, descends upon you and your Imam is (already) among you?”⁵³

Our Imam is already alive and exists in the world. He is an integral part of our lives whether we accept or reject him. We need to build our relationship with him. We need to remind ourselves that we have a leader. We need to try and catch his attention by remembering him.

Make the prayer for his reappearance, “*allahumma kun li-waliyyika al-hujjat ibnil Hasan,*” part of your lives.

اللَّهُمَّ كُنْ لَوْلِيِّكَ الْحُجَّةِ بْنِ الْحَسَنِ، صَلَوَاتِكَ عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى آبَائِهِ، فِي هَذِهِ السَّاعَةِ وَفِي كُلِّ سَاعَةٍ، وَلِيًّا وَحَافِظًا وَقَائِدًا
وَنَاصِرًا وَدَلِيلًا وَعَيْنًا حَتَّى تُسْكِنَهُ أَرْضَكَ طَوْعًا وَتُمَتِّعَهُ فِيهَا طَوِيلًا

O’ God, be for Your deputy, al-Hujjah ibnil Hasan, may Your Blessings be upon him and his forefathers, now and at all times, the Master, Protector, Guide, Helper, Proof and Guard until he resides peacefully on Your earth and let him enjoy (the blessings of this life) for a long time.

God is All-Merciful, and He would never leave us without guidance. He has assured us, repeatedly, in the Holy Qur’an that creation (*khalq*) comes hand in hand with guidance (*hidayah*). It is for this reason that God would not leave the world empty-handed without a representative guiding the people toward salvation. The words are there, in the Qur’an, but one has to read deeply in order to understand the message:

سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى. الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى. وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى ﴿٤﴾

Celebrate the Name of your Lord, the Most Exalted, Who created and proportioned, who determined and guided... (87: 1-3)

﴿قَالَ فَمَنْ رَبُّكُمَا يَا مُوسَىٰ. قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ﴾

He said, “Who is your Lord, Moses?” He said, “Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it.” (20:49–50)

﴿أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ. وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ. وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ﴾

Have We not made for him two eyes, a tongue, and two lips, and shown him the two paths [of good and evil]? (90:8–10)

Prophet Abraham put guidance before the other basic necessities, such as food and water. Prophet Abraham explained:

﴿الَّذِي خَلَقَنِي فَهُوَ يَهْدِينِ. وَالَّذِي هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِي وَيَسْقِينِ. وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ﴾

Who created me, it is He who guides me, and provides me with food and drink, and when I get sick, it is He who cures me. (26:78–80)

In reality, guidance far outweighs creation. God did not create us as mere physical shells; rather He created our bodies only for our souls. Unfortunately, how many people display exquisite physiques but rotten consciences?

﴿أَمْ تَحْسَبُ أَنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ أَوْ يَعْقِلُونَ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا﴾

Do you suppose that most of them listen or apply reason? They are just like cattle; rather they are further astray from the way. (25:44)

At the beginning of time, when only four people lived on earth (Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel), God appointed one of them as a divine guide. Now that we have surpassed 6 billion people, would He leave us without the guidance of a divinely appointed leader?

Muslims are not the only people who agree that they need guidance. Do parents send their children to school so that they can be taught and guided by someone who is not a professional in the field of teaching? Children can read books. They have eyes, ears and brains. Nevertheless, they need a guide to give them instructions, clarity, and a direction in life. Not only do young children need a guide, but even graduate students require assistance. True that there are millions of books, but we also need someone to show us the way. Every day, even the most independent people submit to their need for guidance. Why then, when it comes to religion, do some people reject this basic principle?

Once, I was sitting next to a Muslim cleric (*sheikh*) at an Islamic conference in America. A man asked him whether Imam Mahdi existed or not and he said no. The man asked him why, and he said because no one has ever seen Imam Mahdi. I asked the cleric (*sheikh*) if he had seen God or the Prophet, and he said that of course he had not. He had not seen God, the Prophet, Heaven, or Hell, but he still believed in them. Part of one's faith is to believe in the unseen.

We believe that the Qur'an is the Word of God, therefore we believe that whatever this Book says is true. Since the Qur'an tells us about Muhammad, we believe that Muhammad existed. Since the Qur'an tells us about Jesus, we believe that Jesus existed. Although no one has seen them for over a thousand years, we know and accept that they are not fiction. It is the same with Imam Mahdi. Since we trust the Prophet, we believe in what he said. He told us that the Imam is said to be among us; thus, he is alive and living amongst us.

We need prophets and the imams to guide us and that is why our Imam still lives amongst us today. Of course, believing that he has been alive for 1,200 years is another story. If we read that Prophet Noah lived for 1,600 years, of which 950 he spent preaching the message, and that Prophet Jesus is still alive, then it is not hard to believe that our Imam could continue to thrive after so many years. We know that miracles and unusual occurrences happen by the will of God, so why is it hard to believe in this?

وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَّبُوهُ وَلَكِنَّ شُبُهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ ۖ
لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا

And for their saying, “We killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the apostle of God” – though they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but so it was made to appear to them. Indeed those who differ concerning him are surely in doubt about him: they do not have any knowledge of that beyond following conjectures, and certainly they did not kill him. (4: 157)

One may subsequently question that when will the Imam return? He will return when God wills it for him to reappear. God will determine him to return when we have demonstrated our willingness to accept and help him in his mission to establish peace and justice in the world. We are the ones who contribute to this decision to some extent:

ۚذٰلِكَ بِاَنَّ اللّٰهَ لَمْ يَكُ مُغَيِّرًا نِّعْمَةً اَنْعَمَهَا عَلٰى قَوْمٍ حَتّٰى يُغَيِّرُوْا مَا بِاَنْفُسِهِمْ وَاَنَّ اللّٰهَ سَمِيْعٌ عَلِيْمٌ

That is because God never changes a blessing that He has bestowed on a people unless they change what is in their own souls, and God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (8:53)

God is waiting for us, He is patient, but He is outside of time. However, are we ready to receive the Imam? Will we accept the ultimate justice that he will enforce? What if he comes to your house today?

Would he be happy with what he sees – the posters, the movies, the music, your family, your friends, your clothes, or your life? Are we encouraging him to come back or are we pushing him away? The Imam is here and can see what we do by the power given to him by God. God can make him appear on earth in the fraction of a second or He can wait for millions of years until we are ready to receive him. We have to prepare ourselves for his return.

Preparation does not just come in the form of a supplication (*dua*). *Dua* is invaluable, but even more so are our deeds and actions. We must transform ourselves. The nights of Muharram are one of the best opportunities for us to do that. They are only ten nights; but they give us a chance to pledge to God and Imam al-Zaman that we will be their servants. We will change ourselves to be better for them. We will conduct ourselves in such a way that we will be proud to stand before our Imam. We will make him happy with us, until he is able to return to earth.

We need to look at the immortal examples of the companions of Imam Husayn to learn what the Imam wants from us. They were peerless among the other human beings. Although they knew that they would die, they never wavered; and they were honored to exchange their souls for God's satisfaction. They knew what they were in for, but they were determined to stay with the Imam until the end of their lives.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَى مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ بِأَنْ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَيَقْتُلُونَ وَيُقْتَلُونَ وَعَدًا عَلَيْهِ حَقًّا ۖ
فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ وَالْقُرْآنِ وَمَنْ أَوْفَى بِعَهْدِهِ مِنَ اللَّهِ فَاسْتَبْشِرُوا بَبَيْعِكُمُ الَّذِي بَايَعْتُمْ بِهِ وَذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

Indeed God has bought from the faithful their souls and their possessions for Paradise to be theirs: they fight in the way of God, they kill, and are killed. A promise binding upon Him in the Torah and the Evangel and the Qur'an. And who is truer to his promise than God? So rejoice in the bargain that you have made with Him, and that is the greatest success. (9:111)

Challenges Facing the Youth

Featured Themes

Generation Gap; Parents; Education; Friends; Smoking

أَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي وَهَبَ لِي عَلَى الْكِبَرِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِنَّ رَبِّي لَسَمِيعُ الدُّعَاءِ ۖ

“All praise belongs to God, who despite [my] old age, gave me Ishmael and Isaac. Indeed my Lord hears all of the supplications.” (14:39)

Life is full of challenges. Each generation and every community has been faced with trials and tribulations and our life is no different, in fact, even the prophets and the imams faced severe trials,

some even more so than any of us.

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 God shall surely ascertain those who are truthful, and He shall surely ascertain the liars. (29:2-3)

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا ۚ

Indeed We created man from the drop of a mixed (amshaji) fluid such that We may test him. So We made him endowed with hearing and sight. (76:2)

Some people pass the test, however others fail. We have been created to succeed and the word *amshaji* (“mixed”) in this verse refers to this fact. Keeping the biological meaning aside, the word *amshaji* in this verse refers to the constant struggle between right and wrong that goes on within us. We were created to undergo such a test and try to become victorious.

In addition to the trials of this life, those growing up in the West have to face their own unique challenges. Today, many young people find it difficult to relate to their immediate family, and while the “generation gap” has always existed, it has become an increasing problem for Muslims in the West, since it is not only two generations, but also two different cultures living under the same roof. If one is born to parents who immigrated, or came to the West at an early age, then chances are that he or she has developed an outlook on life that is quite different from that of their parents.

It is tempting to flout this cultural conflict by insisting that “my way is the only way,” however this is not a proper Islamic solution. Today, family members need to find common ground. We cannot just resign from our family responsibilities and spend all of our time outside of the house, expecting to be taken care of by our parents. We need to contribute towards the family in whatever way possible, however most importantly we need to be appreciative of our parents and the many sacrifices that they have made.

Just go and ask the elders of a community how the first wave of Muslim immigrants came, settled and began a new life in the West. They were poor and alone. Back then, no one even knew what Islam was. Society ostracized them. Nevertheless, they overcame the obstacles and flourished. Those early Muslim immigrants went to universities, built successful businesses and established mosques. In summary, they built the foundations and the structures that we benefit from today.

Unfortunately, many children do not appreciate what their parents have done for them because their parents spoil them. We are not saying to parents that they should throw their children out on the streets;

however, be aware that the more children are spoiled, the more they will take everything for granted – food, money, shelter, and yes, even love. Usually, children who are pampered and spoiled turn out to be irresponsible and immature adults with no understanding on how to cope with the various challenges that life entails. As parents, our duty is not only to provide the material requirements for our children, but also, to prepare them to live an independent adulthood.

A family needs to be filled with cooperation and mutual respect for one another otherwise it is not a real family; and within this structure, the youth especially need to be careful about how they treat their parents. In the Qur'an, God places kindness to the parents tantamount to obedience to Him:

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا إِمَّا يَبُلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أَفٍّ وَلَا ۗ﴿٤﴾
تَنْهَرُهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا ۗ﴿٥﴾

Your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship anyone except Him, and [He has enjoined] kindness to parents. Should they reach old age at your side – one of them or both – do not say to them, ‘Fie!’ And do not chide them, but speak to them noble words. (17:23)

Similarly, there is a hadith *al-Qudsi* tradition which says, “By My glory and honor and exalted position, I swear that if My servant carried out all of the deeds of each of the prophets (ever sent), but was undutiful to his parents and then came to Me on the Day of Judgment, I would never accept any good deed from him!”⁵⁴

Be extremely conscious about your attitude at home and be careful of what you say to your parents because to become a good person begins with being good to your parents. If you are not good to your parents, then you will not be a good friend, husband, wife, or parent. Try to be the jewel of your family and seek to be an integral part at home

As a youth, one must be particular not to waste time on insignificant or unproductive things because time is very precious. Imam Ali advised us by saying, “O mankind! You consist of a few numbered days. Every passing day takes something from your existence.”⁵⁵ Therefore, make the most of what you are given. In the Qur'an, God swears by the Time:

ۗ﴿٤﴾ وَالْعَصْرِ. إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ. إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَّصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَّصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ ۗ﴿٥﴾

By (the token of) Time! Indeed man is at a loss, except those who have faith and do righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to [follow] the truth, and enjoin one another to patience. (103:1-3)

One of the most important things which the youth need to focus on is the amount of time that they spend sleeping. It is very crucial that one does not spend too much time sleeping. If you need eight hours of sleep, then do not sleep for nine because a tradition says that, “God hates His servant who

oversleeps.”[56](#)

﴿وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا. وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا﴾

And We made the night a covering, and We made the day for livelihood. (78: 10-11)

God did not create us to stay up all night and then sleep during the day; rather, He made the night for us to sleep, and the day for us to work.

We need to begin our day early with the obligatory morning prayer. After that, we should try to recite the morning supplication (*Dua al-Sabah*). If we are not already in the habit of reciting it regularly, then we need to start reciting it right away after the morning prayer. Learn to appreciate how Imam Ali established his relationship with his Lord, “My God, if mercy from Thee does not begin with fair success for me, then who can take me to Thee upon the evident path?”[57](#) If we are feeling self-conscience or depressed, then without a doubt, such a prayer will strengthen us – just try it for a few days and you will see and feel the results.

Another area that we need to focus on is school. Despite being a good student, school brings another set of problems. Some parents are concerned about the future of their children. They are worried that sometimes, their children start college with a lot of diligence and enthusiasm, but after a while, they lose interest and ultimately drop out. What we have to know is that knowledge is vital and just being “religious” is not enough, for religion and knowledge go hand in hand. Prophet Muhammad said, “I prefer the virtue of knowledge to the virtue of worship.”[58](#) The broader our understanding is of the world, the closer we will become to God. Thus advanced schooling is critical and our children should be encouraged to finish college.

One day the Prophet came to the mosque and saw two groups of people, one was praying and engaged in acts of worship, while the other group was learning and discussing knowledge. He said both groups were doing good things, but he preferred the latter – we need to emulate the Prophet and study the different aspects of life.

Imam as-Sadiq knew the importance of knowledge so much so that he said, “Sometimes I wish I could physically discipline my disciples to make them study.”

Without a doubt, the more we know the more valuable we will be. There is a tradition which says, “If mankind knew what lies in seeking knowledge, then they would have chased after it, even if they had to swim the oceans and risk their lives.”

We are living in the West where higher education is readily available. Believe me that thousands of people in the Middle East would love to pursue higher education, but for many different reasons, they simply cannot do so. When we recently established a private university in Karbala (the first one to open

since the removal of Saddam) thousands of people flocked to the gates to register, however we had to turn some of them back because there was not enough room for all of them. Therefore, do not take this opportunity for granted; God did not bring you to the West to go to nightclubs or hang out in the cafés. Use this golden opportunity to study.

I know that many youth are eager to leave their families and go off to college abroad at age seventeen or eighteen, but as much as possible, if one can stay at home with their parents and go to school near the home, even if they have to commute, it would be better. It will not only be easier for you, but it will also be easier on them.

We all need the guidance and foundation of our parents, whether we are a boy or a girl; especially in the younger years of our lives. We may not realize it today, but only our parents can provide us with things that others simply cannot.

During the time of Prophet Muhammad, a man wanted to go away to study, however his parents had no one else but him to rely on and they were very much attached to him. This man asked the Prophet what to do and the Prophet said, “Go back to them. By the One between Whose hands the soul of Muhammad lies, spending one day and one night with them to make them happy is better than spending a year fighting in the way of God.”

In addition to this important issue, we must also be very careful about who our friends are. Some friends will have a positive influence on us and others can be negative; and parents often cannot protect a child from the influence of a bad friend. No matter how much we feel that our friends are not influencing us, the reality is that they are indeed exerting pressure upon us – we just may not see it happen immediately. We have to find good friends who will help us grow into righteous people, for surely wrong friends can destroy our lives.

Another issue to keep in mind is that having boyfriends and girlfriends causes many problems. There are good reasons to explain why these things are unlawful (haram) in Islam. When relationships fail, many young people end up in depression, while others even contemplate suicide. Remember that just because a relationship does not work out, it is not the end of the world. One might think that a person that he or she has met and has spent some time with is the best person on earth, but this is just an illusion; God has other plans for you. As we say in *Dua al-Ititah*, “Perhaps what You kept from me is better for me in Your knowledge for the long run.” Thus, only God knows – we do not know the future.

We must also realize that a boyfriend–girlfriend relationship is most likely not going to last; it is usually temporary. Such temporary relationships are usually not based on a realistic or lifetime intention. When a boy and girl start going out, they are not thinking about a permanent commitment, and therefore instead of such relationships, we must start thinking about long term commitment which is marriage and not having a boyfriend or girlfriend. One must not think that you are not old enough to get married; if one is mature, then they can handle married life. Thus, do not waste time with such temporary relationships

for they will only bring harm.

In summary, we need to protect ourselves and our souls from bad friends and unlawful (haram) relationships.

Another issue which we need to keep in mind is that: even though we are young and our bodies are at their peak, we still have to protect our health. Today, smoking *shishah* (the water pipe/*argeelah*) has become a popular fad in our community and the society as a whole. Aside from the many health related side-effects, smoking *shishah* signifies a rebellious counter culture. You do not find people smoking *shishah* at academic institutes or in the mosque. Without a doubt, the type of people who are out there smoking it in public will not be a good influence upon you. You may be a good person, but if you sit and smoke with such people, they will definitely lead you the wrong way.

Smoking cigarettes also destroys the body. Unfortunately, 30% of adults worldwide smoke; Americans spend billions of dollars every year purchasing various tobacco products. If only this money was put to better use such as for hospitals and schools.

Unfortunately, many teens start smoking to prove that they are stylish or independent and do not think about the consequences on their health, intellect, lives, or pocketbook.

Sadly, from this “innocent” starting point, some youth then begin to experiment with drugs to escape their problems, and worse – the “experiment” becomes an addiction. In reality, taking drugs will not solve your problems because after the rush fades, people feel worse than if they just tried to deal with the problem – it is a never-ending, vicious cycle of grief, and this will eventually lead to one being enslaved to the addiction. Therefore, do not try drugs even once; we have been created for much greater things in this world.

As well, many, if not all of the drugs are addictive even after one use, therefore we need to be strong when our friends ask us to try something harmful –we have to just say NO! Initially, a friend may even offer the drugs free of charge the first couple of times, but once someone is hooked, you will need to come up with the money yourself. It is not farfetched to say that drug addicts eventually have to resort to desperate measures such as stealing and prostitution in order to get money for their next fix.

Drugs can also have profound effects on the psychological, biological, and intellectual anatomy. The body can become highly addictive on drugs to the extent that the user needs it in order to function in their daily routine. You can often tell immediately when you talk to someone who takes drugs because they act differently; they show signs of paranoia and hallucination; and their I.Q. is permanently affected because the use of drugs destroys brain cells. Everything about drugs is harmful.

We have something much better than drugs, something which does not harm or destroy you, and will actually help you in all the times of your life – and that treasure is Islam. We need to turn towards God when we are depressed or confused; we need to pray to Him; we need to read the Qur’an; and in all

honesty, we need to tell God, “You created me and sustained me. Now I need Your help. You are the only One who will save me!” Do not resort to other means, for surely God will help you, and Imam Husayn and the other members of the Ahlul-Bayt will help you through the permission of God.

Marriage

Featured Themes

Spouse Qualities; Marriage Elements; Family

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا ﴿٩﴾

And those who say, “Our Lord! Grant us comfort in our spouses and our descendants, and give us the grace to lead the righteous.” (25:74-75)

One of the greatest blessings that God has given to humanity is the institution of marriage. Marriage is considered to be one of God’s greatest signs.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٩﴾

And among His signs is that He created for you mates from your own selves that you may take comfort in them, and He ordained affection and mercy between you. There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect. (30:21)

God’s intention for marriage is so that people may find tranquility, love, and protection. It is intended as a blessing, but unfortunately for some people, marriage has become a curse. The institution of marriage as a whole is suffering because people do not recognize its value and its purpose. Stripped of its sanctity, it has become relegated to mere amusement, taken lightly, or as an act to fulfill. We as Muslims need to restore it to its rightful place.

Young Muslims in the West have tremendous difficulty finding the right spouse because they are in a quagmire. The Eastern and Western cultures present them with two varying choices – either as an arranged marriage or an independent dating. On one side lies the traditional family values and ways, but on the other hand, an exclusive individual choice. Islam advocates neither, but maintains that there must be a balance between the two. Islam does not advocate blind marriage where the man or the woman knows nothing about each other; and at the same time, it does not tolerate an open, independent “dating” system. Everyone, male and female, has the right to decide what he or she wants in a spouse; but at the same time, they must safeguard their moral integrity.

Three elements of spouse selection are crucial for its success: one must inquire about the family, consult with one's parents or family, and the element of prayer. To neglect or underestimate anyone of these may hamper your chances in finding the best spouse.

One needs to take enough time when choosing a partner for life, but it is not necessary to take an entire lifetime deciding. Start looking for a husband or wife early on. Marriage is a lifetime commitment and one cannot change one's mind afterwards. It is not something that one can easily undo by a divorce. Your life and youthfulness will have been lost. Therefore, a person must be very selective and careful when seeking a partner for life; and the person you want to marry should be scrutinized. One must also keep in mind that you will never find a person who will fit *every* criterion on your list.

A man once made a list of the top five most important things that he wanted in a wife; the list consisted of beauty, wealth, intelligence, culinary skills, and able to bear children. Absent from the list were the most important qualities – was she capable of loving, being patient in adversity, holding firm to one's faith, displaying honesty and trustworthiness?

One should not marry someone in a rush just because one is desperate or lonely; nor should one's hormones be the driving force. If you marry blindly, your marriage will be on rocky footing from the very beginning.

Along the same line of thought, one must involve their families. If one is in love, it will be extremely difficult for one to see their partner objectively. According to Imam Ali, love blinds a person. Your family, particularly your parents, may see that person differently than you do. No matter how old you are, they can help you. They have more experience in life and with people than you do. They are able to see things that you may not be able to.

Ask your parents to help you find the right partner, and then request them to help you have an Islamic wedding. You do not want to curse your marriage by solemnizing it in a way that incurs the wrath of God just to please other people or to follow the culture. We all know what happens at most weddings; music, dancing, unclad attire, unlawful mixed gatherings, and some even drink alcohol. Marriage pleases God more than anything else does, but we must make sure that our actions do not turn His face away from our wedding.

While one is seeking the right partner, one must continuously ask God for help. Ask Him to guide you to the right person and make you certain about them. Marriage is the most important and critical decision you will make in your entire life. We all need His guidance. Unfortunately, some of us approach God about marriage in the wrong way. Instead of asking Him to show us the person that He knows would be best for us to marry, we tell Him who we like and ask Him to bring us together. Do not tell God what to do. He knows better than us and He wants the best for us. A person whom we like might make our lives miserable in the end.

﴿وَيَدْعُ الْإِنْسَانُ بِالشَّرِّ دُعَاءَهُ بِالْخَيْرِ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ عَجُولًا﴾

Man prays for ill as [avidly as] he prays for good, and man is overhasty. (17:11)

Although one should look for many qualities in a spouse, the foremost is faith.

﴿أَقُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

Say, "Indeed my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are for the sake of God, Lord of all of the worlds." (6:162)

Faith does not just mean being a Muslim or praying. It is much deeper than this. One should be able to see the effects of faith on a person's life. A person with true faith has good morals, a positive outlook on life, and the best character. Rituals, such as prayers are only a physical manifestation because true prayers curtail evil acts.

﴿إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ﴾

Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs, and the remembrance of God is surely greater. And God knows whatever [deeds] you do. (29:45)

Shared faith will hold a marriage together. A man once asked Imam Husayn to advise him on whom to marry his only daughter to. The Imam said, "Give her to someone who has deep faith because if he loves her, he will cherish her; and if he does not love her, then he will at least not wrong her." Faith is irreplaceable.

After faith, the next most important thing is responsibility and sacrifice. One needs to find someone who is responsible, mature, and committed to marital life and family values. The essence of marriage is responsibility and sacrificing oneself for their spouse and children.

Once you get married, you will be sharing the same room, house, food, car, and the same goals with that person for the rest of your life. That person will become your family, and you will become part of their life. One has to be ready to accept them completely. You cannot change your mind afterwards. One has to be fully prepared for the commitment.

Some men get married but then they do not spend time with their wives. They spend most of their time with their friends. A woman complained that every day when she came home from work she found her husband and his friends sitting in the living room smoking the *arghilah* (water pipe) and watching TV until two or three in the morning. The home should be a place to regain one's strength; it is supposed to be a place to find comfort and ease. This woman could not even walk freely through some parts of her home

because of her husband's inconvenience. Her husband was violating the sanctity of the home. One must be committed to one's family first and foremost.

Marriage is not just about having a physical relationship. The Prophet did not obligate us to marry by saying, "marriage is my tradition, and whoever turns away from my tradition is not from me" just for this aspect. Marriage is as emotional shelter. A wife needs love, attention, compassion, happiness, and care. These qualities are what count the most for a wife. The Prophet warned us that, "May the mercy of God be away from the man who does not take care of his family."⁵⁹

Compatibility is also vital. Two people with different mentalities, intellect, aspirations, or pecuniary upbringing cannot be united. They will not understand or appreciate each other. Although they may be physically present with each other, but emotionally they will be distant. Incompatibility in a marriage will cause a lot of suffering. This is why we have family conflicts and such a high divorce rate.

There are a few simple things that can make one's marriage happier. The Prophet said, "When a man tells his wife 'I love you' it never leaves her heart."⁶⁰ Many men complain that their wives do not care about them and do not pay attention to them. You cannot blame a wife who turns away from her husband when the husband is not involved in her life or does not interact with her.

In this aspect, you have no one to blame but yourself because if you neglect her, she will then spend her time and energy on other things instead of you. If you do not care to ask her how her day went, or care to have a simple or deep conversation with her, nor offer your support or understanding, or find ways to assist her then do not be surprised of her distance from you. The Prophet said, "May the mercy of God not be on the man who goes home and thinks only of satisfying his own physical desire without thinking about his wife."

What if one is already married? How can one sustain their marriage and minimize the conflict between spouses?

Does love expire?

Yes it does.

Does it have a refill?

It also does.

How do we keep our marital life alive?

The most important element in keeping a husband and wife together is *taqwa* or consciousness of God. Before even thinking about your partner, think of God. He is always present in our lives. He is the third party between us. A solemnized and sacred Muslim marriage exists only because God is partnered in it. The closer one is to God, the happier and more solid your marriage will be. "The more a worshipper

increases in faith, the more one will love their spouse,”[61](#) says a tradition.

Build a strong family. Have a family that can stand with you before God on the Day of Judgment. Have a family that will make the Prophet happy. The Prophet said, “There is no intercessor for a woman before her Lord better than the satisfaction of her husband.”[62](#) A religious person puts his family first. There is a tradition that says, “A believer eats whatever his family likes, and a disbeliever makes his family eat whatever he himself likes.”[63](#) So try to put your family’s desires before your own desires.

Humility and forgiveness are the best manifestation of faith. Be humble, especially towards your own family; and forgive and care for them. Do not hold grudges for past mistakes. Even in the best of marriages, spouses may often hurt each other, but one has to forgive and move on. The Prophet says, “The closest one to me on the Day of Judgment will be the person who was the best with his family.”[64](#)

Healthy Parenting

Featured Themes:

Parent; Child Relationships

﴿ وَوَصَّىٰ بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبُ يَا بَنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ لَكُمُ الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴾

Abraham enjoined this [creed] upon his children, and [so did] Jacob, [saying], “My children! God has indeed chosen this religion for you; so never die except as submitters (muslims).” (2: 132)

It is crucial that when discussing family matters both the parents and children must be addressed. According to Islam, parents and children have mutual responsibilities towards each other. While we remind children to respect their parents, we also have to remind parents to take care of their children. No sacrifice can be one-sided only. For a family to remain stable, parents and children need to work together and acknowledge their mutual duties and responsibilities.

If you neglect your children, then you will fail your duty as a parent. Even if you care for them but do not raise them on Islamic ethics and morals, then you will not have fulfilled your duty to God as a parent. Both parents and children must hold fast to the Islamic values.

Parents need to ask themselves, what does my child need from me? First and foremost, parents need to establish a close friendship with their children. Secondly, parents need to set an example of a good role model for their children. Thirdly, parents have to prepare their children for the future. All of these are equally important.

Fostering true friendship with your children preserves the family. It keeps your children with you, not against you. We all know that the generation gap between parents and children is incessantly widening.

Parents need to try to close this gap by developing a close friendship with their offspring. When someone asks your child who is your best friend, they should say, “my mom” or “my dad.” Children should be able to confide in their parents, and not feel like they have to go to others for anything. Parents need to be there emotionally and intellectually for their children, not just financially.

In order to strengthen the relationship with your children, one needs to be open and honest with them, while maintaining the honor and respect of a parent. Children need to respect their parents, but at the same time, the respect should not act as an emotional barrier. If your children are afraid to talk to you, how will you know what they are doing or going through? If you do not speak to them, how will you be able to help them? Spend time with your children, for they are a gift from God. He did not give us these gifts just to feed them; we need to instill values into their hearts, and make them into true human beings.

In particular, fathers need to spend quality time with their children. Designate a day just for your kids. Leave aside your business and other concerns to be with them. Take them to the mosque, both, the sons and the daughters. Take them to Hajj and umrah,[65](#) or camping, skiing, or to other places where they can enjoy themselves. Wouldn't you rather that they went to the mall, movies, or sporting events with you instead of someone else? Take them with you when you travel.

Let them feel like you are really their friend. This is how you can keep them close to you. We cannot monitor everything that they do. We do not have cameras to keep track of everything that they do at home, at school, in the car, and so forth. However, we can monitor them in another way, and that is by reaching out to their hearts so that they tell us what is on their minds. Do not make them confide in someone else who might mislead them or take advantage of their weakness.

If your child is trying to attain faith, then encourage and support them, even if you may not be practicing it much. It was most disheartening to hear a story about a young girl who lived in a Muslim country and asked her father to take her to umrah as a high school graduation present, but her father refused, not because it was too expensive, but because he said she was too young. Imagine, 18 years old and he says she was too young for umrah.

Instead of encouraging her to make umrah and forge a connection with God and her religion, he offered her \$6,000 for plastic surgery! This was a Muslim man. What kind of message did he give his daughter? How do you think she feels being told by her own father that her entire self-worth is in her body? If she turns against him, then he has no one to blame but himself. He is a person who brought evil and destruction to his family. Instead of leading her closer to God, he sent her in the opposite way. We are responsible not only for our own misery, but also for the misery we may cause towards others.

When you talk to your children, use modern language. Take a contemporary approach to discussing religious or social issues. They need to relate that you understand the world that they are living in. Do not use violence or harsh words and try not to be too imposing or domineering. Do not threaten them, instead encourage them. Do not be a dictator with them.

Many children are terrified of talking to their fathers and they ask others instead to speak to them. Parents need to make time for their children, talk to them, and be there for them. How many people come to the West to make money but lose their children? A man I know became temporarily unemployed when he left a very lucrative job to live next to an Islamic school. I asked him why he did that. He said that although it is not easy to find another job, but if you lose your kids, it is not easy to bring them back to the teachings of Islam. Islamic values must outweigh a few dollars.

Next, be a role model; be the best example for them. They will follow what you do rather than what you say, so show them Islam in action.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ﴾

O you who have faith! Why do you say that what you do not do? (61:2)

You cannot fool your children. They are smart and they learn from what you do. Even if they do not see everything that you do, they will still sense it and harbor those feelings. Enjoin good by doing what is right and your family will follow you. It is said that God has cursed those who enjoin good to others but do not practice it themselves and forbid others to do evil but commit evil themselves. The world has enough hypocrites.

When your children see you do the right thing, then they will feel confident that they can trust you. If they see you lie, cheat, or steal then what will happen to them? They will resent you for the rest of their lives and one day your family situation will explode. They will run away, not because of what happened today, but as a result of what happened in the past. Let us bring them back to Islam through practicing Islam and implementing our beliefs.

Finally, you have to prepare them for the future. Empower their faith by strengthening their relationship with the Qur'an, to Islam, to Prophet Muhammad and the Ahlul-Bayt. Instill the love of the Ahlul-Bayt into their hearts and minds while they are still young. You have to strengthen this connection. In the West, our youth know more about singers and musicians than they do about their own religious leaders and imams. It is very important to connect them to the Ahlul-Bayt.

Make them akin to people like the daughter of Abul Aswad al-Duwali, who was one of the disciples of Imam Ali in Kufa. Their family was very poor and could barely afford bread. One day, Abul Aswad al-Duwali came home, and found to his surprise, his young daughter eating honey. Astonished, he asked her where she got it from. She told him that a nice man had come to their house and given it to them. After asking around, he discovered that Muawiyah had sent them the honey. Bending down to his daughter, he said, "I know you are hungry, and you have never had anything sweet before, but what you are eating is poisonous. It has come from Muawiyah, and Muawiyah wants to take the love of Imam Ali away from your heart. Is that what you want?" Immediately she said, "No, of course not!" She forced

herself to throw up all of the honey. Despite her young age, she told her father that nothing could take away the love of Imam Ali from the blood that flowed through her veins. This is what we need to teach our children, and ingrain within them.

In addition to faith, your children need to be educated. Always encourage them to learn. Instead of buying them new clothes for special occasions, buy them books, but not just any books, rather ethical books that they can learn from. Support them by paying for their tuition. Make school an enjoyable experience for them; and do not criticize them for their shortfalls at school. Rather, continue to praise them for their hard work and accomplishments.

Finally, when they are old enough to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage, then persuade them to get married. They need you to encourage and help them find a good partner. Do not tell them they are not old enough. Many young men and women need and want to get married, but some parents object by saying that they are too young. You must have faith in your children. If they say that they are ready for marriage then let them prove it and help them to get married. There is nothing wrong with helping them financially.

Some parents say that they first need to stand on their own two feet, but what they are often waiting for is for them to make a fortune first. God promises us in the Qur'an that if we marry sincerely, He will provide for us, and His promise is true. If you make them wait to get married until you think that they have enough money, then you are denying God's word. You have to trust in Him, and place your full reliance on Him alone.

﴿وَأَنْكِحُوا الْأَيَامَىٰ مِنْكُمْ وَالصَّالِحِينَ مِنْ عِبَادِكُمْ وَإِمَائِكُمْ إِنْ يَكُونُوا فُقَرَاءَ يُغْنِهِمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

Marry off those who are single among you and the upright among your male and your female. If they are poor, then God will enrich them out of His grace, and God is All-Bounteous, All-Knowing. (24:32)

Sometimes, suitors come to a father to propose marriage for his daughter, but the father refuses them and does not even inform his daughter of the prospective suitor because in his mind his daughter is still young, even if she is over 25. At this age, she is not young; she knows enough and is more than ready to be a wife and a mother.

Challenge your children to show you that they appreciate the meaning of marriage and family, and then when they prove themselves support them.

The best way to protect the family and community against promiscuity and corruption is to encourage the youth to get married at a young age, provided that they respect the value of married life. Thus encourage them, for this is part of a parent's responsibility.

The points mentioned above are just some of the responsibilities that parents have towards their children. Children also have responsibilities towards their parents. Although there are plenty of obligations that they have towards their parent, three take precedence. First, respect for your parents, for they deserve it. They cared for you and raised you in the best way that they could. You can never repay them for what they did. The least that you can do is to acknowledge what they have done for you.

Respect comes in different forms. God says in the Qur'an:

وَاخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا ﴿٤٦﴾

Lower the wing of humility to them, out of mercy, and say, "My Lord! Have mercy on them, just as they reared me when I was [a] small [child]." (17:24)

Address your parents kindly and humbly, for you are the dearest person to them. You are their best friend and companion. It is all right to humor and joke with them, but never forego the respect and dignity that they represent as parents. The Prophet said, "Whoever looks at his parents mercifully receives the reward of a complete Hajj for every glance."⁶⁶ One of his companions asked that if he looks at his mother or father 500 times a day, would he receive the reward of 500 Hajjs. The Prophet replied yes. He further said that, "When a child looks at a parent, it is worship." This is one kind of respect.

Another form of respect is obedience. One must obey their parents as long as what they say is in accordance with God. Listen to them and obey them. Do well to them and help them whenever you are able to.

Secondly, strive to be a righteous son or daughter. If you do, then you will continue helping them even after they have left this world. The Prophet taught us not to limit our kindness to our parents only during their lifetime. Rather, he taught us to respect them even after they have departed from this world. Someone asked him how we can do this? He replied, "If you are a righteous son or daughter, then whenever you do something good, part of that *thawab* (credit) will go to your parents in their grave."

He also said, "When a man dies, all of the opportunities for good deeds are cut off except for three things."⁶⁷ One of those three is a righteous son or daughter. Another tradition says that when a person dies, he leaves inheritance to two groups: his family and God. His money and his property go to his relatives, but his righteous children are bequeathed to God. That is God's share of the inheritance.

There are four types of children. One helps his parents only in this world, either physically or financially, but he has no faith. He will be of no use in the after-life (*akhirah*). Then there is the one who neither helps his parents in this world, nor in the after-life, and this is the worst kind of a child. The third benefits them only in the after-life. However, the fourth, which is the best type, is the one who helps them in this life and in the next. Try to make yourself the fourth kind.

Third, give sound advice to your parents. Even though you are much younger than they are, you can still assist them. As children, we have to ensure that when our parents leave this world, they embark on a safe and easy journey (*aqibat al-khayr*), not to an evil end. Parents are not infallible, and thus they are not immune to making mistakes. If you see something wrong in the family, approach them gently. However, do not embarrass or insult them, but speak to them carefully, respectfully, and in an honorable way and advise them that what they are doing is not correct. Reassure them that you are telling them this because you love them, just like Prophet Abraham did when he advised Azar.

Be careful of the language that you use with them. Never use harsh words even if you are angry. If you are upset, and the whispers of Satan are telling you to go home and yell at your parents, do not go home until you calm down. Do not take out your anger on your poor mother who carried you for nine months, fed you, changed your diapers, and never complained. Your mother suffered a lot to give birth to you, but as soon as you were born, the first thing she did was kiss you. That is enough to prove that your mother loves and cares much about you.

If your parents are restricting your freedom, then it is because they are concerned about you. Freedom is not being able to go wherever you want or do whatever you want. Real freedom is to be able to restrain yourself from your desires. If you have the willpower to say no to yourself to do bad, then you are free. Imam Ali says that the most powerful ruler is the one who can control his own soul, not his kingdom or the army.

That is a person who has true power. Sometimes parents have to say no to their children because they want to protect them. You will realize this when you yourself become a father or mother. When you turn 40 or 50 years old, and if your father is still alive, you will then kiss his hand and thank him for keeping you from doing what you wanted to or going to the places that you desired to go to. You will understand why he did what he did.

Try to continue going to religious sessions. They will protect and enlighten you. They will show you the way. Do not limit yourself to just the ten nights of Muharram. Do not think that once Ashura is over your faith is complete and you do not need to go anymore to the Islamic centers. You have to go at least once a week. That is why God ordained the Friday prayer and said that one should try and attend them.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نُودِيَ لِلصَّلَاةِ مِنْ يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ فَاسْعَوْا إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَذَرُوا الْبَيْعَ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
تَعْلَمُونَ

O you who have faith! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, hurry towards the remembrance of God, and leave all business. That is better for you, should you know. (62:9)

If you are not intoxicated with wealth or worldly gain then you will realize that going to the Friday prayer will benefit you a lot. They will energize you for the whole week. If you can go to the Friday prayer, then

go to a place that takes you to God. Go to a religious center that leads you to the right path – the path of God, the Messenger of God, and the Ahlul-Bayt. That is the right path. So go at least once a week when you are able to.

Some of you say that you listen to lectures on the Internet, this is good, but the Internet is not enough. You have to be present in a session physically. One day, a blind man came to the Prophet and said, “I want to go to the mosque to pray but I have no one to guide me.” The Prophet told him, “Tie a rope between your house and the mosque and use that rope to guide you to the mosque.” The Prophet did not tell the blind man just to pray at home, instead he encouraged him to come to the mosque even if he had to tie a rope to the mosque to find it.

The mosque is not just a place of worship. It is also an environment where one can strengthen their relationship with fellow brothers and sisters in faith, especially in a country where we are the minority. Everyone can empower and comfort each other.

﴿إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ﴾

Except those who have faith and do righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to [follow] the truth, and enjoin one another to patience. (103:3)

Try to help the mosque as well, in any which way possible; whether intellectually, physically, or financially. They need everyone’s assistance; and without the help, the mosque may not have a future. If you appreciate what they are doing, then contribute towards it. Giving money or time is an investment; it will not go to waste. In fact, you benefit most from it because parting with your money cleanses the soul.

﴿خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِهَا وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلَاتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

Take charity from their possessions to cleanse them and purify them thereby, and bless them. Indeed your blessing is a comfort for them, and God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (9: 103)

Once you give your money to God, you are showing your real generosity. So help these institutions when you can, whenever they have a fundraiser or even when they put the small donation box in front of you, help them. Perhaps someone else may donate more, but when you give money yourself, you are showing them a token of respect and acknowledging that you appreciate their services.

As mentioned before, none of us are infallible. Some sins are major, but there are some sins which are “minor,” and we sometimes overlook them. However, God warns us not to underestimate any sin. A sin that we may think of as being small could be the source of God’s greatest anger. “Do not look at the smallness of a sin, but look at the greatness of the One whom you are disobeying,”⁶⁸ Imam Ali once said. Sins, whether major or minor are a violation against God. Hence, no sin is minor, for you are

violating His rights. Let us vow to God to end at least one of our bad habits today.

The Roadmap

Featured Themes

Prayer; Rebellion

فَأَمَّا مَنْ طَغَى ۖ وَآثَرَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ۖ فَإِنَّ الْجَحِيمَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ ۖ وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ۖ ۗ فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ ۖ

As for him who was rebellious and preferred the life of this world, his refuge will indeed be Hell. But as for him who is awed to stand before his Lord and forbids the soul from [following] desire, his refuge will indeed be the Paradise. (79:37-41)

Usually when people travel, they take with them a map of the area that they intend to visit. Guide maps provide the quickest direction, the best scenic routes, and roads that are pleasant and safe to take, and most importantly, they assist people from getting lost. The map of life is a lot like any ordinary map guide, but this map of life has only two roads and the roads are drastically in opposite directions. One road leads to Heaven and the other one leads to Hell.

Since life is a quick bridge that we are passing through, we need a map to guide us to what is important so we do not miss anything in these fleeting seconds. Fortunately, God who created us also gave us this map to guide us. Nothing is ambiguous in this map guide. As these verses above say, rebelling against God and living for this life will lead one to Hell, and fearing God and controlling the self will lead one to Heaven. Some people examine it and take heed, whereas others cast it aside.

There are two traits that people have that will send them towards Hell. One is *athar*, to prefer the life of this world to the hereafter; and the other is *tagha*, to transgress or rebel against the orders of God.

Satan was the first one to rebel against God. In the beginning, he was good, in fact, very good. He worshipped God in the foremost ranks of the angels. However, when God tested him and asked him to respect Adam he refused. He thought he was better than Adam was and did not want to bow down to him. Satan's fall from grace was his obstinate superiority of himself [race], a lot like the racism that we witness around the world today. He destroyed all of his work, for true faith only comes from submitting to God's every command.

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا ۖ

But no, by your Lord! They will not believe until they make you a judge in their disputes, then do

not find within their hearts any dissent to your verdict and submit in full submission. (4:65)

Every aspect of our lives needs to be for the sake of God. Even love and hate must be only for His sake. When Satan changed his priorities, he fell from God's grace.

Initially, Satan had been carrying out the external aspect of faith. His internal faith had not yet been tested. Faith has two aspects: one is interior and the other is exterior. We see the exterior every day in the way people pray, fast, give alms, and abstain from open sins. Inner faith is not visible to the naked eye. You can measure your faith by how subservient you are before God. If you acknowledge that you are completely and absolutely nothing before Him, then you have faith. This is also the meaning of love.

When you truly love someone, the first thing that you do is obey them. If they tell you to call them at 2 a.m., then you stay awake until 2 a.m. to call them. If they tell you to stand on the corner under the bitter cold rain, then you wait on the corner under the downpour. If they tell you to text message them, you text message them. You never say no. You enjoy doing whatever they want because you love them.

One day, Prophet Solomon was traveling through the desert and saw an ant carrying dust from one heap to another. Solomon, who could talk to animals, asked her why she was carrying the dust. She told him it was because someone she loved asked her to do it. Solomon warned her that there was an entire mountain of dust and she will kill herself before she had finished carrying it and not even make a dent in the pile. She said, "Solomon, dying in the line of duty for someone that I love makes me happy."

Solomon got the message; we do what we have to do for the love of God, even if we have to give our lives, still we will enjoy it. Hence, our life and death should all be for the sake of God and doing whatever He loves from us.

﴿قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

Say, "Indeed my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are for the sake of God, the Lord of all the worlds." (6: 162)

The more you submit to God, the closer you are to Him. This is why the best posture in the Muslim prayer is *sujud* (prostrating the forehead on the ground). *Sujud* exemplifies the meaning behind our prayers. When we do *sujud*, we convey to God that we surrender and humiliate ourselves before Him by putting the highest point and the most respectable part of our body (the face) on the dust for His sake.

We tell him that we accept everything that He tells us. This is why the hadith reads, "If a person praying knew how much divine grace overwhelmed him in *sujud*, he would never raise his head up from that position."⁶⁹ He would stay there forever. I am sure that everyone who takes the time to attend religious services prays, so try to extend your time in the *sujud*. If it takes 30 seconds, make it 60 seconds, especially the last prostration before you complete your prayer. Tell God in your heart that you are doing

this for Him, and that He is the source of power. Our hopes do not rest on our parents, money, college, education, or business – only on Him.

Take care of your prayers; this is the message of Imam Husayn. Since you are the guests of Imam Husayn during the nights of Muharram, ask him to help you stand before God. You will see your life change. Once you start saying your prayers sincerely, your entire life will be transformed.

In contrast, rebellion is the mother of all crimes. Rebellion does not begin with murder, fornication, or alcohol. It starts off very small. You think that whatever you are doing is nothing because everyone else is doing it. Everyone was also sharing in the same sins that caused the wrath of God to descend upon the civilizations of the past. Thus, never underestimate any sin because even the smallest sin violates God's sanctity. It is a crime against Him.

Furthermore, major sins develop over time. A murderer does not begin killing in cold blood overnight. It starts with killing insects or animals and then people. Murder takes a few moments but it leads one to eternal Hell. One is not even selling the Hereafter to enjoy the rest of their lifetime because one cannot rest after committing such a horrendous crime. Criminals do not live easy lives; they live in fear and guilt. They lose out in this world and in the next. They will be in eternal misery.

Do not think that any sin is meaningless and God will forgive it. Unless you truly seek forgiveness and really try to reform yourself, a sin will only magnify itself. A classic example is chatting on the Internet. Some people have the habit of engaging in disgraceful conversations online. They do not even realize that they are sinning or putting themselves in danger. Try not to be naïve into thinking that it is “just chatting,” it may begin with casual talk, but it will eventually lead to something you did not plan. This is how the problems begin.

Rebelling against God is the first entrance to the highway towards Hell. The next thing is to prefer the life of this world to the Hereafter. Giving into the vanities and lusts of this temporary life makes one forget the Hereafter. If one owns a painting worth millions of dollars and sells it for ten dollars, would people think that they are wise? This is what someone is like who sells the permanent afterlife for the temporary abode of this life.

﴿وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى﴾

While the Hereafter is better and more lasting. (87: 17)

Even if you buy the most luxurious car and the most extravagant house, you will still know that those things are temporary. Certainly, one day all of your material possession will be taken away from you, either before your death or afterwards by your family. However, in Paradise, no one can take the keys away from you. Even if you are driving a Lexus here, you will eventually get tired of it and replace it, but in Paradise, you will never get bored of anything. God will always create something new and exciting.

He warns us not to sell something valuable for something cheap. He also warns us not to favor this life over the next when our next life is where we will permanently reside. One day, the Prophet was walking down the street in Madinah when he came across some Muslims who were surrounding a man and mocking him. When he asked what was going on, they said, "He is crazy, and we are having fun with him." The Prophet replied, "That man is not insane, rather he is afflicted. The person who is truly insane is the one who sells the Hereafter for the life of this world."⁷⁰ On another occasion, the Prophet said, "The worst person is the one who sells his afterlife for this life."⁷¹

Those who favored this life and those who favored the next were both present on the day of Ashura. One of those who chose this life was Umar b. Sa'd, the commander of the enemy forces. Trying to avert the battle from taking place, Imam Husayn called him to a private meeting in his tent right before the fighting broke out. He advised him, "Umar, you know me and my history. You know what I represent. You know how much my grandfather the Prophet adored me and you know that he called me and my brother the 'chiefs of the youth of Paradise'. You are committing a grave crime. Take your army and go back to Kufa. Save yourself from what you are doing. You are not only committing a crime against me, but you are also committing a crime against God, humanity, Islam, and the prophets."

"If I do not arrest you," Umar replied, "then they will destroy my house in Kufa."

"I will rebuild your house," the Imam promised.

"They will confiscate my property," he said.

"I will give you property," the Imam said.

"They will kill my children," Umar objected.

The Imam asked, "Does that give you the right to harm me and my children, the children of the Noble Prophet?"

Umar b. Sa'd was traveling too fast on the highway towards Hell to be saved. In fact, he met his destination before he even died. After fulfilling his mission, he returned back to Ibn Ziyad and asked for his reward. Ibn Ziyad had promised to make him the governor of Rey (a city near Tehran) in return for killing Imam Husayn. When he came with the head of Imam Husayn in his hand, Ibn Ziyad retorted, "How can I trust you with Rey after you killed the son of the Prophet?" So he lost out in this world and in the next, he will be in eternal damnation.

On the other hand, people like Hurr chose the Hereafter. Hurr was traveling fast on the same highway as Ibn Ziyad. Just like the story of a man who was traveling south in California near the border of Mexico. He was driving so fast that he did not pay attention to the last exit sign that warns drivers to return to the USA, otherwise they will end up in Mexico. It was too late for that man, and thus, he ended up in the wrong country.

However, Hurr at the last minute turned around – he read the warning sign carefully. He was a high-ranking commander in the enemy army, and was sent to lead the onslaught against Imam Husayn, but then he saved himself. The enemies heard him say, “I see myself wavering between Heaven and the Fire. Finally, he chose Imam Husayn. The Imam did not rebuke or remind him that it was his fault that he had been forced to languish in Karbala. Instead, he assured him, “If you are sincere about repenting, God will forgive you.” Within minutes, Hurr decisively rode out to fight against the enemy, who had been his own soldiers only moments before. After he fell, Imam Husayn eulogized him with these immortal words, “Be glad, Hurr⁷², for as your mother named you, you are truly free in this world and happy in the next.” He escaped the two main entrances to Hell which are rebellion and choosing this life. He became one of those who feared God’s tribunal and hence triumphed because of it.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ﴾

O mankind! Worship your Lord, who created you and those who were before you, so that you may be conscious of God. (2:21)

Everyone will stand before the court of God and it is like no other court in this world. No one can lie or run away from it. All of our deeds will be exposed to others. Our friends and enemies will all watch the grotesque mistakes that we committed in our lifetime.

﴿يَوْمَئِذٍ تُعْرَضُونَ لَا تَخْفَى مِنْكُمْ خَافِيَةٌ﴾

That day you will be exposed: none of your secrets will remain hidden. (69: 18)

No one will have any privacy and no one will be able to hide anything from our loved ones. God will judge and His will be the final decision. That will be a day of great remorse.

﴿وَأَنْذَرْتَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْحَسْرَةِ إِذْ قُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ وَهُمْ فِي غَفْلَةٍ وَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ﴾

Warn them of the Day of Regret, when the matter will be decided, but they are [yet] heedless and do not have faith. (19:39)

Imagine how you would feel if your fiancé found you with someone else. Some people claim that they love God, but on that Day He will show them proof that they loved others or things more than Him. Ask yourself, is your mind and heart always with God during the prayer? Were you with God during the month of Ramadan? Were you doing that which He forbade you to do? You might be able to deceive your parents or other people, but you can never hide anything from God. He knows everything and will make it plain for everyone to see one day.

Fear God to save yourself. Be conscious of His presence at all times. When Cain raised his hand to kill Abel, Abel swore, “I will never stretch my hand out to kill you because I fear God, the Lord of the Worlds.”⁷³ Cain’s heart was emotionless and thus he murdered his own brother.

Do not let your desires get the better of you. A father once asked me to remind the young Muslim brothers to be careful with other people’s daughters and sisters. They are not toys for public use. Do not abuse or misuse them. Remember that whatever you do today, your own daughter will be in danger of it tomorrow. Would you want someone to do the same thing to her that you are planning to do with someone else?

When Zulaykha was chasing after Prophet Joseph through the palace trying to persuade and seduce him, she cornered him in her room, bolted the door, took off her clothes, and then stopped. Joseph thought that maybe she had changed her mind, but instead she said, “I am embarrassed in front of this statue which has been in our palace for years. I want to cover it with my dress.” Joseph asked her why she wanted to cover the statue that could not see and could not hear, yet they were both standing before God who was aware of everything that was going on. Imam Ali said, “Fear God as if you see Him, but if you do not see Him, then know that He sees you.”⁷⁴

The Qur’an beautifully puts it:

﴿أَلَمْ يَعْلَم بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَى﴾

Does one not know that God sees? (96: 14)

Let this verse echo in your mind; carry it with you; put it in your car; read it in the morning and in the evening. Whenever Satan whispers anything to you, repeat it. Remember that God always sees you whether you are in public or private.

If you have absolute certainty that God is always with you, then you will be able to restrain yourself. Your parents should not be the only ones to tell you what not to do. Since God has given you an innate sense of right and wrong, then curb your desires. Since your soul always asks you to do what it wants, try for one week to say no to it. God has given you the will power to resist the evil temptations of it. Sometimes you see two brothers, one who smokes and the other who does not.

The one who smokes cannot stop himself; he feels that if he does not smoke a cigarette then he will die. However, this is only a myth, you will not die. In fact, if you quit this bad habit, your health will get better. If you are involved in an illegitimate relationship, then resolve to end it tonight. Send her an e-mail tonight and tell her that you are going to stop this illicit relationship because you respect her, her parents, and your religion. Tell her if we can marry permanently, then we will be together, but being a boyfriend and girlfriend does not work in the eyes of God. When you slam the door in the face of Satan, he will think twice about returning to you.

Try to use the nights of Ashura and other religious times to strengthen your relationship with the Ahlul-Bayt. God takes note of even the smallest sacrifices and attempts that anyone makes. There are people who drive long distances just to come to the gatherings of Ashura. He will reward you for every penny and every moment that one spends for Imam Husayn.

Due to the fact that we emphasize Ashura so much, some people think that it took place over a long span of time. However, the battle of Ashura ended in less than six hours. It may have been the shortest battle in history, but it has had the deepest effect. It was not a battle between kings but a battle between two opposing principles – good and evil, truth and falsehood, tolerance and barbarism. This battle continues eternally and it has been immortalized. Every year hundreds of thousands of sessions go on all around the world for Imam Husayn. People gather for Imam Husayn because he represented truth, justice, and all of the good in humanity; whereas Yazid personified evil, licentiousness, and every imaginable, disgraceful evil.

Islam was suffering under the rule of Yazid. Read the Islamic history. History has written, “Nothing remained from Islam except its name.” Islam was bleeding profusely, in fact, it was nearly dead. Muslims were suffering anarchy and being misled. The only thing that saved Islam was Imam Husayn. He knew that his blood would revive this religion. We can now sit and listen to the genuine Qur’an and tradition of the Prophet because of Imam Husayn’s sacrifice.

He is the universal icon of sacrifice and revival. Even today, read how Imam Husayn inspires people of other faiths. No one can speak of him other than with reverence and respect. After the fall of Saddam, we saw millions of people walk thousands of kilometers to visit the shrine of Imam Husayn on foot. Every major newspaper in America became fascinated by what was happening. They asked what was so special about him. They were intrigued and inspired by him and his cause. Surely no one can ever extinguish the light of Husayn.

[The Timeline](#)

Featured Themes:

Imam Husayn; Propagation; Women of Ashura

﴿مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوا مَا عَاهَدُوا اللَّهَ عَلَيْهِ فَمِنْهُمْ مَن قَضَىٰ نَحْبَهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَن يَنْتَظِرُ وَمَا بَدَّلُوا تَبْدِيلًا﴾

Among the believers are men who are true to the covenant which they made with God: so of them is he who accomplished his vow, and of them is he who yet waits, and they have not changed in the least. (33:23)

One of the most rewarding acts of worship in Islam is ziyarah, visiting the resting places of the Holy

Prophet and the infallible imams. The Prophet himself even advised the believers to visit his grave; and he himself used to visit the graves of his loved ones and the Muslim martyrs. Although visiting all of the imams is meritorious, visiting the shrine of Imam Husayn is highly emphasized.

Some schools of thought within Islam consider visiting the graves of the imams (or anyone for that matter) an “innovation” (*bidah*), and brand those who do this as heretic. How can we prove that they are wrong? How can we analyze whether *ziyarah* is an unlawful innovation or if it is a true Islamic practice?

One must look to the Qur’an. In *Surah al-Kahf*, God tells a story of the Companions of the Cave who were found alive after spending 300 years in a suspended state of animation. After they returned back to life, they finally died of natural deaths, and the community disagreed over what to do with them. One group said to seal off the cave and forget about them, while another said to build a monument over them. God speaks about this as follows:

إِذْ يَتَنَازَعُونَ بَيْنَهُمْ أَمْرَهُمْ فَقَالُوا ابْنُوا عَلَيْهِم بُيُوتًا رَبُّهُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِهِمْ قَالَ الَّذِينَ غَلَبُوا عَلَىٰ أَمْرِهِمْ لَنَتَّخِذَنَّ عَلَيْهِم مَّسْجِدًا ۖ

When they disputed among themselves about their affair and said, “Erect an edifice over them” – their Lord best knows them. Those who prevailed in their affair said, “We will certainly raise a place of worship over them.” (18:21)

Some of the people realized that the Companions of the Cave were special and decided to build a place of worship at their burial site, so that it could be frequented by visitors.

From the tone of this verse, it is clear that God favored the opinion to build a mosque over the area where they were buried, and for people to visit it. If some people claim that visiting the shrine of a prophet or an imam is heresy, then they are implying that the Qur’an is wrong, since it condones building a similar shrine over the graves of the Companions of the Cave.

Other examples are also scattered throughout the Qur’an, and the last Prophet lived this principle. Frequently, he was reported to visit the grave of his mother, where he cried and made others cry. His mother was laid to rest in Mecca, and if you go there today, you will see a cemetery dedicated to the ancestors of the Prophet. He would also visit the cemetery of Al-Baqi and the graves of the martyrs who were killed in the Battle of Uhud. Therefore, it is not *unlawful* to visit the graves of the deceased, especially the graves of the righteous ones, let alone the Prophet or the imams.

The companions of the Prophet also demonstrated the attraction towards wanting to perform *ziyarah*. After the Prophet passed away, the companions used to pay tribute to him at his mosque. Whenever they wanted to leave Madinah, they would visit him, and whenever they returned, they would greet him.

The opposition to paying respect to those buried in the graves began early in our history. One day, a

companion, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari went to Madinah to visit the shrine of the Prophet during the rule of Marwan b. al-Hakam. Marwan was a person who had a long history of animosity towards the Prophet and his family, and he had rejoiced when he saw the head of Imam Husayn being carried into Damascus. He was the caliph at that time. When Abu Ayyub al-Ansari put his forehead on the grave of the Prophet (as there was no mausoleum at that time), which was bare and open, Marwan came from behind and accosted him saying, "What are you doing?" Raising his head, Abu Ayyub replied, "I am not worshipping the stones. My intention is to pay homage to the one who is buried here, the Messenger of God." Then he added, "Let me tell you, Marwan. You may consider yourself the legitimate leader, but I heard the Prophet say, 'Do not feel sorry when the right people assume the leadership of Islam. Feel sorry when you see the unqualified people assume the leadership of Islam.'" [75](#)

Thus, *ziyarah* had its opponents even before the time of Ibn Taymiyyah. I mentioned before that Ahmad b. Taymiyyah, who walked the earth 700 years ago, was one of the founding fathers of bigotry in Islam. He was a harsh anti-*ziyarah* advocate. He branded anyone who visited the grave of the Prophet as a heretic. However, this encounter with Marwan happened in 64 ah, around 3 years after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. It proves that the enemies of the Prophet and the Ahlul-Bayt have a long history of opposing *ziyarah*.

One may question that how is *ziyarah* an opportunity to renew our covenant? When you go to visit Imam Husayn or Imam Ali, you renew your vows with them. You refresh your soul and renew your allegiance. The ruling powers have always feared that. They wanted people to forget about the Prophet. This is why, even today, when one goes to Hajj, the religious establishment there discourages everyone from visiting the Prophet. They tell you to go to the mosque to perform the prayers but not to visit the Prophet. They want everyone to believe that visiting the Prophet is *bidah*, innovation. Why? They maintain that the Prophet never visited his own grave. Imagine that! The Prophet never visited his own grave, hence we should not either. What sort of logic is this?

However, the school of the Ahlul-Bayt emphasizes *ziyarah* very much, in particular, visiting Imam Husayn. For example, the imams left us traditions that recommend us to take off our shoes and walk barefoot when we go to visit Imam Husayn. No other imam has that kind of status. Or when one is about to leave the shrine of Imam Husayn, we are instructed to say, "*Wa alayka as-salam ya Rasulallah,*" to return the greeting of the Prophet, since Imam as-Sadiq told us that the Prophet sends a special greeting to whoever is leaving the courtyard of the shrine of Imam Husayn. Therefore, if the Prophet greets you, you must respond because returning a greeting is mandatory in Islam.

These sorts of narrations are not found with the other imams, only with Imam Husayn. Why? The answer is simple, because you are paying homage during the first eleven nights of Muharram. Islam teaches us that the rewards are in proportion to the sacrifice. Since Imam Husayn dedicated everything to God, God's reward to him is unlimited. Therefore, both Sunnis and Shias narrate from the Prophet that, "God has given Husayn three unique characteristics that no one else has: healing in the dust that surrounds

his grave; acceptance of the prayers made under the dome of his shrine; and that the other imams will all be from his descendants.”[76](#)

God has declared that He has put healing in certain things. First off, take the example of honey in the Qur’an:

﴿فِيهِ شِفَاءٌ لِلنَّاسِ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ﴾

In which there is healing for men; most surely there is a sign in this for a people who reflect.
(16:69)

Therefore, God may sometimes put the cure of a person in honey, sometimes in meat, sometimes in bread, and sometimes in the dust of the grave of Imam Husayn. This is a tradition, and I will say personally as well, that many times I have given the dust from his grave to a person who is sick and they recovered completely by the permission of God.

Underneath the dome and above the grave of Imam Husayn, there is a special place where you can stand next to his head and recite special prayers. God will never reject your prayers, and you have to believe that He will never turn you down either; but sometimes, the answer to your request may come in a different way. Once a person realizes this, one will not go home empty-handed.

It is narrated that one time Imam as-Sadiq fell ill in Madinah, so he hired a man to go to Karbala and pray for him beneath the dome of the shrine of Imam Husayn. As that man was leaving Madinah, he met a friend who asked him where he was going. He said that he was going to Karbala; and so the man asked him why? He said that Imam as-Sadiq wanted him to go and pray for him there. Perplexed, the man went to Imam as-Sadiq and asked him, “O son of the Messenger of God, you are the infallible Imam, God will never refuse your prayers, so why are you sending a man 1,500 kilometers from Madinah to Karbala to pray for you there?”

The Imam replied, “Don’t you know that God has special places on earth where He likes to be called upon and where He will respond? One of them is the grave of my grandfather Husayn.”

Anyone who feels uncomfortable about this has to ask why we pray in Arafat. Nothing is really special about Arafat; it is just a patch of desert. Some people during Hajj ask why we have to go and pray in Arafat. They have been hearing about it for years, but it does not look like anything special. One may not see anything unique about it with their physical eyes, but God gave this land special property and wants the worshippers to stand within its borders and pray, and not be an inch outside it. He chose this land for us to stand within its parameters, thus we have to obey His commands.

The shrine of Imam Husayn is the same, which is unique to Imam Husayn. It is well worth your time and money to travel all the way to Iraq just to say one prayer for yourself, your parents, or your community.

That was the second gift that is unique to Imam Husayn. The third is for the remaining imams to derive from his lineage. Although Imam Ali had two male children from Fatima al-Zahra, Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, the remaining nine infallible imams are all descended from Husayn. God granted him this as a gift.

A tradition reads, “Whoever visits Husayn and is aware of his status and acknowledges his virtues, then God will grant him the reward of one Hajj and one umrah for every step that he takes.”⁷⁷ Hence, it is not enough to go and visit Imam Husayn. You have to know who he is and what he represents, and then of course follow his example.

Even the text of the *ziyarah* of Imam Husayn is unique. In the most common one read by his grave we say, “Peace be upon Adam, the *sifwat* (chosen one) of God. Peace be upon Noah, the Prophet of God...” When we greet Imam Husayn, we first pay homage to all of the universal messengers: Adam, Noah, Moses, Abraham, and Jesus. This is not done to visitations of the other imams, only to Imam Husayn. We do this because Imam Husayn represented the messages of all of the prophets, which became entombed during those three to four hours in the Battle of Karbala, on the day of Ashura.

All of the prophets taught one theme; and thus Islam is nothing new. It is not an exotic philosophy or an aberration. It is a continuation of prior scriptures. It is almost identical to previous religions. This is why Imam as-Sadiq says that if a Muslim believes in all of the prophets except one, then it is as if he has disbelieved in all of the prophets.

Although Muslims respect others, others tend to mock us. While they believe that they have their own way of life, we also believe that we have our own way of life. Although we differ in some issues, we share the same principles. They may scoff at us but we are not allowed to ridicule them. Muslims address other people who have divinely revealed scriptures, namely the Jews and Christians, as “People of the Book.” even though their books have been distorted over time. If the time for prayer comes and there is no mosque, a tradition tells us to find a church or a synagogue and obtain permission to pray in it because it is a place built for prayers. It is forbidden for Muslims to harm churches or other places of worship. Although we do not share the exact belief, we still must respect other people and their religious centers, despite our religious differences.

﴿ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَهْدِمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذْكَرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا ﴾

And had there not been God’s repelling some people by others, certainly there would have been pulled down cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which God’s name is much remembered. (22:40)

This verse proves that the Qur’an intends for these places of worship to be protected. We respect all of the prophets. We love and revere Moses, Jesus, Abraham, Solomon and David as much as the Jews

and Christians do. We do not ridicule any of them. However, when it comes to how others treat Muslims, the Qur'an, and the Prophet Muhammad we see the civility of the civilized nations. Indeed, some people are fomenting this tension on purpose.

Nevertheless, I am confident that the stance of the Muslims will be victorious and that the final code of the teachings of God, as given through the Prophet Muhammad (the Qur'an and the Sunnah), will eventually dominate, but not through violence. We have the truth; and we have an excellent message. It makes sense. If we can spread it, then people will accept it. Others do not have what we have. They cannot succeed, but we will be triumphant. The Qur'an tells us how we can achieve victory:

﴿أُدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ﴾

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best. (16: 125)

﴿وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ﴾

Good and evil [conduct] are not equal. Repel [evil] with what is best. [If you do so,] behold, he between whom and you was enmity, will be as though he were a sympathetic friend. (41:34)

Violence solves nothing. Look at the terrorists in Iraq. For almost three years, they have been slaughtering innocent people. What have they accomplished? Even the Sunnis in Iraq have distanced themselves from these killers. The harder they fight, the more they sink into defeat.

Islam wants us to use logic. Why resort to the sword or the bomb when we have logic? This was the approach of the Messenger of God. This was the approach of Imam Husayn. Even though enemies surrounded him, Imam Husayn tried to negotiate until the very end. He refused to be the one who would start the battle.

On the day of Ashura, Imam Husayn was seen crying. Someone asked him if he was crying out of fear of death. He replied, "No, I do not fear death. Death is my ultimate aim. I am crying for this army who came to kill the son of the daughter of their Prophet, for they are going to kill me, and God will throw them into the Hellfire because of me." He was crying over their ignorance.

This is Imam Husayn and this is Shia Islam. We have to have compassion even for our enemies.

﴿لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ﴾

Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and

the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice... (57:25)

All of the prophets were sent to establish justice. This is what Imam Husayn stood for. When he left Madinah, he asserted, “I have not risen out of self-conceit or arrogance, nor to spread injustice and corruption. I have risen for one purpose alone, to reform my grandfather’s community.”⁷⁸ His intention was not to reform Islam, but to reform Muslims.

This is an important point. Today, America is asking us to revise the Qur’an. They promise to make it a best-seller, if only we remove the “anti-Semitic” verses. In Los Angeles, they removed the Qur’an from public schools under the premise that it is anti-Semitic. They promised to put the Qur’an back as soon as it is reprinted with no mention of the Jews or jihad.

Jihad does not mean murder; rather, it means struggle, such as to build a country or oneself. When the Prophet saw his battalion returning from a war, he said to them, “Today you have completed the minor jihad, and now have come to embark upon the major jihad.” When they asked him what he meant by the “major jihad,” he said, “fighting the ill-ways of the soul.”⁷⁹ Self-restraint is the greatest jihad that there is. It is difficult, but the best thing for me, is to be a good person to others, as well as to myself.

Imam Husayn did not seek to change the Qur’an or Islam. He knew that the Muslims had been brainwashed by Bani Umayyad. Their view of Islam had been distorted. He wanted to present Islam in its original form; and once Islam is presented in its original form, people will flock to it.

Islam is like a beautiful painting. In some art galleries, they shine light on paintings from a special angle to bring out the details in the art. If they change the lighting, they will ruin the painting. They have not only changed the direction of the light, but they have turned Islam upside down. It is intrinsically beautiful, but the way that some people have presented it is horrible. Imam Husayn said in response to this, “I came to reform my grandfather’s community. I want to enjoin good and forbid evil.”

The message of Ashura will never end, it will continue forever. Every day is Ashura, and every land is Karbala. Every day is a day of struggle and tomorrow will be no different.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدًّا فَمَا لَكَ بِالْمَعْلُوقِينَ﴾

O man! You are laboring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him. (84:6)

We cannot rest or waste time. Life is too short to accomplish what we want, and so we must try our best.

﴿وَسَارِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord; and a Garden. (3: 133)

Life is a race, and we have to run, we cannot walk. This is why God made an area between Safa and Marwah in Mecca where even the weakest person has to run. This is for us to realize how we have to live in this life – running and struggling to better ourselves.

Imam Husayn gave everything he had on the day of Ashura. Many people, even non-Muslims, have heard the tragic and horrific story. Nonetheless, we must question ourselves, what will we give back to him? Say to yourself, “I love Imam Husayn. I have listened to his story. I believe in it. I cry for him. Now what can I give in return?” He gave up his life; he gave up his children; he gave up his wealth; he gave up his companions. He gave everything for the sake of God. Now it is our turn to give back to him.

I want to remind you about what happened in America and in England. In America we had the tragedy of 9/11. This may have been the largest attack on American soil since the Civil War. In England it was 7/7 (2005). The Americans and Europeans put the blame squarely on Islam. No one can blame them. They hold Islam responsible because “Abu so-and-so,” with his turban and beard came and spoke on behalf of God and Muslims, and claimed the responsibility. You cannot tell the average person that this man does not represent Islam. He will tell you that this man is the imam of an important mosque, and so they believe him.

So how do we respond? We have a responsibility. Muslims are well educated. Most hold graduate degrees from reputable western universities. Hence, one cannot just sit idle and do nothing, for that would be an offense. Shouting and yelling in the streets will not suffice. That is not what Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn would have done. We all have to contribute and we all have a responsibility to contribute in whatever way we can. God did not create us to just eat, drink and have fun. If anyone has an 18-year-old son and all he did was eat and sleep, eventually the parent will tell him that he has to go out and do something productive.

We too have to give back to the faith. One who is in the university can do a lot. Initiate dialogue with other people. Do not conclude that they will not speak to you or discuss the matter. After the fallout of 7/7 and 9/11, we have to be the ones to approach non-Muslims. We have to tell them that we are peaceful Muslims and what is being said in the media does not represent our faith. God has endowed each person with the ability to be powerful speakers. If you are not ready for that, then at least write an article, or give them a documentary film about Islam. Designate an Islamic awareness week at your mosque or university, and invite non-Muslims to listen. We have to go after them; we cannot just sit and wait around.

Sometimes it bothers me when on Sunday mornings the doorbell rings and missionaries are at my door. One time, I told them to come back the following week, and I forgot about it, but they did not. The next week came and they were right back at my door. I felt embarrassed, but I told them I had work to finish and for them to come back the week after. They did, and believe me they were so humble when they spoke to me. They are not poor or uneducated. It is not like they do not have other things to do in life.

They are busy, but they make time for their faith. They know that I will not become a Mormon, but still they came to share their faith with me. They brought me two Bibles, one in English and the other one in Arabic. I was flabbergasted – a Bible in Arabic, in America! How many of us give the Qur'an in English to our neighbors? I am not asking that you to go door to door and annoy people, but how many Muslims have ever given the Qur'an to their immediate neighbor, if not the Qur'an, then even an article about Islam or a small book?

One day, I was invited to a Mormon church. They have built a giant temple in Orange County, California. The Mormons are the richest community in the world because they give 20% of their gross income, not their surplus, to the church. Before entering the church they asked me to take off my shoes but they had a man sitting at the door whose job was to take the shoes off for the visitors. I wonder, do we ever offer to take off our parents' shoes let alone our guests?

Contribute towards your faith at your school. You do not have to go far. Do something positive for God and for Imam Husayn in your classroom. You can also volunteer in the Islamic community. Go wherever you think that they need help. Donate some hours to God and refuse to take money for your work. God will reward you. Give your time to an Islamic center, for they all can use the help. Islam is estranged today because a few people representing Islam are evil. They are misrepresenting Islam.

Our sisters need to step forward. Why do we ostracize the sisters from Islamic activities? As I mentioned, if a Muslim woman stands up and says that hijab is not imprisonment, but rather freedom, in every sense, then her words would echo across the entire campus. They will believe her because she is a woman speaking on her own behalf, not a Muslim man speaking for her.

We are not trying to convert America or Europe to Islam. Nevertheless, what we want is to tell them that what they see does not represent true Islam. Bombing, killing, and bloodshed do not represent the message of our Prophet. The message of our Prophet is peace, love, and respect for all people. We respect all human beings regardless of their religion, gender, or race.

﴿ وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ ﴾

And surely We have honored the children of Adam. (17:70)

- [1.](#) Al-Kafi, v. 1, p. 10
- [2.](#) Nahjul Balaghah
- [3.](#) Da'aimul Islam, Al-Qadhi Al-Maghribi, v. 2, p. 352
- [4.](#) Al-Qur'an, 17:32
- [5.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 75, p. 39
- [6.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, sermon 53
- [7.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 18, p. 126
- [8.](#) Ziyarah Al-Nahiya Al-Muqaddasa
- [9.](#) Al-Ghadir, Allamah Al-Amini, v. 8, p. 252

- [10.](#) Mustadrak, v. 18, p. 209
- [11.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 44, p. 196
- [12.](#) Al-Amalee, p. 150
- [13.](#) Al-Ghadir, v. 7, p. 191
- [14.](#) A'yan Al-Shia, Sayed Muhsin Al-Ameen v. 1, p. 37
- [15.](#) Shuhada'ul Fadheelah, Ibn al-Wahhab, p.288
- [16.](#) Al-Hidayah, Sheikh Al-Sadooq, p. 67
- [17.](#) Manaqib Al Abi Talib, Ibn Shahrashoob, v. 2, p. 274
- [18.](#) Al-Sawa'iq Al-Muhriqa, Ibn Hajar, p. 87
- [19.](#) Starting in 1924, Abd al Aziz b. Saud began his occupation of the Hejaz (present day Saudi Arabia; named after the family that rules over the country) and he began his campaign to demolish the Islamic monuments, holy places, tombs and mausoleums, including the birth place of the Prophet, gravesite of Lady Khadijah, clearing the gravesites of the martyrs of the Battle of Uhud, demolishing the gravestones of the four Imams in Al-Baqi Cemetary, and many other places.
- [20.](#) Mustadrak, v. 11, p. 264
- [21.](#) Al-Qur'an, 20:121
- [22.](#) Sahih Al-Bukhari, v. 4, p. 231
- [23.](#) Shajarat Tooba, Sheikh Al-Hairi, v. 2, p. 233
- [24.](#) Al-Kafi, v. 1, p. 30
- [25.](#) Al-Qur'an, 33:6
- [26.](#) Tafseer Al-Qortobi, Al-Qortobi, v. 5, p. 99
- [27.](#) Mustadrak, v. 14, p. 183
- [28.](#) Al-Kafi, v. 3, p. 242
- [29.](#) Mizan Al-Hikmah, v. 3, p. 2478
- [30.](#) Al-Kafi, v. 3, p. 241
- [31.](#) Al-Kafi, v. 2, p. 234
- [32.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 79, p. 64
- [33.](#) See translation of Al-Qur'an, 32:17
- [34.](#) Salat al-Wahsha is a prayer that is performed for the deceased person on the first night of burial: It has two rakahs. In the first, recite Surah al-Fatihah and ayat al-Kursi (from "Allahuu laa ilaaha illa huwa..." to "... hum fihaa khaalidun"). In the second, recite Surah al-Fatihah and Surah al-Qadr ten times. When you have finished the salat, say, "Allahumma salli ala Muhammadin wa ali Muhammad wabath thawabaha ila qabri _____ (and mention here the name of the deceased and his or her father's name)."
- [35.](#) "Bearer of good news"
- [36.](#) "Glad tidings"
- [37.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 35, p. 76
- [38.](#) Mustadrak, v. 1, p. 269
- [39.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 79, p. 227
- [40.](#) Dua Abu Hamzah al-Thumali
- [41.](#) Al-Kafi, v. 1, p. 195
- [42.](#) Man La Yahdharahul Faqih, Sheikh Al-Sadooq, v. 2, p. 228
- [43.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 22, p. 180
- [44.](#) Mustadrak Al-Wasael, v. 15, p. 182
- [45.](#) Al-Kafi, v. 2, p. 156
- [46.](#) Al-Kafi, v. 1, p. 376
- [47.](#) Al-Qur'an, 4:59: "O you who have faith! Obey God and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you. And if you dispute concerning anything, refer it to God and the Apostle, if you have faith in God and the Last Day. That is better and more favorable in outcome."
- [48.](#) Shatharat Al-Thahab, v. 7, p. 270

- [49.](#) Faydh Al-Qadeer Sharh Al-Jami' Al-Sagheer, Al-Manawi, v. 1, p. 28
- [50.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 33, p. 275
- [51.](#) Tareekh Dimashq, Ibn Asakir, v. 44, p. 273
- [52.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, "Commandments of Imam Ali to Malik al-Ashtar"
- [53.](#) Sahih al-Bukhari; Musnad Ahmad, v. 2, p. 272
- [54.](#) Jami' Al-Sa'adaat, Al-Naraqji, v. 2, p. 202
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