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Published on *Al-Islam.org* (https://www.al-islam.org)

Part One

London, England
2005 ce / 1426 ah

Dignity & Honor

Featured Themes:

Dignity; Arrogance; Hypocrites; Prayer; Hajj; Mourning

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُواْ رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الأَرْضَ فِرَاشاً وَالسَّمَآءَ بِنَآءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَآءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقاً لَّكُمْ فَلاَ تَجْعَلُواْ لِلَّهِ أَنْدَاداً وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

O mankind! Worship your Lord, who created you and those who were before you, so that you may be God conscious. He who made the earth a place of repose for you, and the sky a canopy, and He sends down water from the sky, and with it He brings forth crops for your sustenance. So do not set up equals to God, while you know. (***2:21-22***)

The essential components which distinguish the human being from an animal are three: the power to reason, free-will, and an innate sense of honor. While each of us hold the inborn potential to use these faculties to raise ourselves above the level of the angels, we also run the risk of plummeting lower than the lowest of God's creation if we neglect to use these three traits correctly.

The existence and significance of our free-will and intellect is something we recognize instantly. We are born with the ability to choose our own course in life and have been designed with outstanding powers to discover, resolve, and reason. Yet, we may not always understand our inborn sense of honor, even though God created us with honor and dignity. We are His best of creations and we far exceed any other creation in existence,

"We bestowed honor on the sons of Adam...and conferred upon them special favors, above a great part of Our creation."[1]

Thus, each and every one of us is highly valued by God and that is why when He created Adam, God asked the angels to prostrate before Adam as a sign of recognizing the honor and dignity of the human being. Therefore, we have to recognize our self-worth and uphold it in honor.

﴿...وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلآئِكَةِ اسْجُدُواْ لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُواْ﴾

Certainly We created you, then We formed you, then We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam." So they* [*all*] *prostrated... (***7:11***)

This is not to say that acknowledging our self-honor is a form of arrogance, because arrogance is a form of abomination. However, we need to be extremely cautious not to showcase ourselves above others, as this is a form of arrogance which must be avoided. Arrogance is the illusion that we are the only ones of value, as evinced by Satan, the founder of arrogance.

﴿ قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلاَّ تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ﴾

Said God, "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***)

Stressing the value of the human, over 1,400 years ago Islam prohibited infanticide. In the pre-Islamic era, people used to kill their children out of fear of poverty and deprivation.

﴿ وَلاَ تَقْتُلُواْ أَوْلاَدَكُمْ مِّنْ إِمْلاَقٍ نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُكُمْ وَإِيَّاهُمْ﴾

...you shall not kill your children due to penury - We will provide for you and for them... (***6:151***)

Anthropologists summarize that infanticide has been seen in various forms and in many civilizations from the Greeks to the Persians, from the Indians to the Chinese and the Europeans. The Arabs in the pre-Islamic era had seen their share of child infanticide, especially if it was a female. Muslim historians cite various reasons; however, the prime factor was related to poverty or to prevent dishonoring the reputation of the family. Thankfully, prohibition of female infanticide was eradicated by Islam.

In the verse just cited, God reminds us that it is He who sustains and provides for our livelihood. In fact, God indicates something even deeper - He provides sustenance for the parents because of their children!

A story has been mentioned in which a man complained to the sixth Imam, Jafar as-Sadiq that he was poor. The Imam instructed him to get married. The man thought that perhaps the Imam did not understand that the reason why he was not married was because he was poor. However, the Imam

understood his complaint the first time and again instructed the man to get married. The Imam was indicating to the man that God would provide him a better life for the sake of his wife and children if he gets married!

In a misguided attempt to prove their worth, many people chase after wealth and power – this is a wrong approach. Acquiring masses of wealth will not give you dignity. Even in society, those who amass great riches but do not know how to use it are mocked; seeking accolade through material means only results in derision.

True honor emanates from one source and that is the Creator. The closer we align ourselves with the source of dignity, the more we are transformed by it. Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba advises us, "If you seek honor without kinsmen or awe without power then take yourself away from the humiliation of disobeying God to the honor of obeying Him."[2]

Training our souls to be what God wants us to be will bring us honor, and through following His commands, we will avoid the lower actions that bring about disrespect, and by working to please the Creator, we will free ourselves from the need to lower ourselves in order to seek acceptance from the created; and finally, it goes without saying that He will grant His honor as a gift to His true servants.

﴿...وَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

Honor belongs to God and His Apostle, and the faithful... (***63:8***)

In contrast, many people, particularly today, try to fulfill their need for social acceptance through their physical appearance. Especially in the West, we find an extreme emphasis on physique, youthful appearance, clothing, and material goods. The commercial tendency of society has conditioned a great number of people into believing that one's value lies in their appearance and possessions. Only if you purchase more will your life then improve. Unfortunately, this sort of thinking is a fallacy and a trap designed to exploit the vulnerable. However, while this trend has spun out of control today, it is nothing new as it was also rampant among the hypocrites who claimed Islam but secretly fought the Prophet.

﴿...وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ تُعْجِبُكَ أَجْسَامُهُمْ وَإِنْ يَقُولُوا تَسْمَعْ لِقَوْلِهِمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ خُشُبٌ مُسَنَّدَةٌ﴾

When you look at them, their exteriors please you; and when they speak, you listen to their words. They are as (***worthless as hollow***) ***pieces of timber propped up*** (***unable to stand on their own***). (***63:4***)

These hypocrites looked impressive. They had burgeoning muscles and intimidating physiques, but they devalued all of those gifts by using them to oppose the truth. Despite knowing that the moral character of the Prophet was flawless, still his enemies made it their life's mission to destroy his cause, and in doing

so, they sank beneath the level of animals.

لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لاَّ يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لاَّ يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ آذَانٌ لاَّ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا أُوْلَـئِكَ كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ أُوْلَـئِكَ هُمُ الْغَافِلُونَ

...they have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, they have ears with which they do not hear. They are like cattle; rather they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless. (***7:179***)

Animals do not think, reason, or believe like humans, they also do not fight the natural order of their existence; they live according to their nature. Those who opposed the Prophet not only neglected their natural faculties of reason, but they intentionally plotted against the progress of their own societies as well. They harbored in mindless, self-indulgence, thus denying their human potential - the potential that led the Prophet to declare, "A single believer is dearer to God than the Ka'bah."[3] Had people understood their true worth, they would have never fought against the Prophet.

The manner in which the opponents of the Prophet devalued themselves was similar to what was described by Sharif al-Radhi, the compiler of *Nahjul Balaghah* (*Peak of Eloquence*) in a discussion between himself and an atheist during the Abbasid era. The atheist was maintaining that severing the fingers of a thief encroached upon his human value. Sharif al-Radhi replied that the value of a human was in his soul and not in his hands. As long as a person used his hands for honest deeds, they were invaluable. However, once he used them to steal (out of greed, not need) then they became worthless - the soul was what gave them their value.

We can learn from such impostors that recognizing our own sense of honor is paramount to our human development. When we respect ourselves, we will consider it beneath our honor to do any wrong actions. When we lack self-respect then nothing can restrain us from committing immoral action.

Consider the state of the Muslim nation under the Umayyad rule.[4] Although, many people recognized the immoral position taken by the regime in opposing the grandson of the Prophet, Imam Husayn, still they yielded and allowed themselves to be bought for a paltry sum. They imagined the wealth and honor that the Umayyad rulers were promising them would bring them true honor. However, it was not so. True honor lies with God; therefore, in rising up to oppose the grandson of the Prophet, they disgraced themselves for all of eternity.

We must recognize our own worth in order to prevent ourselves from being used or misguided. In addition, we also have to recognize our worth in order to worship God the way that He wants us to. A hadith says, "Whoever knows himself will then know his Lord."[5] True humility does not come from an abased servant who has failed in his pursuit of the illusions of this world; rather, it comes from an esteemed servant who knows his worth and is willing to submit himself to God. After all, we need to

recognize our own worth before we can submit to God.

Many of our forms of worship are two-dimensional. If they are done for anyone other than God then they bring nothing but derision. However, if they are done solely for the pleasure of God then they earn praise, not only from the Creator but even from others. Prayer (*salat*) is a prime example of this. It is beneath human dignity to put our face on the ground for anyone except our Creator. If we were to prostrate ourselves for anyone other than to God, then we would find nothing but scorn within society. Yet we find peace when we put our face on the ground for God, and in turn, others respect that gesture as well. An act which in other situations would be considered as degrading is seen as honorable.

If our intentions are not genuine and sincere then our efforts will be futile. Take for example the people who murdered Imam Husayn. These were people who prayed but without sincerity. Umar b. Sa'd was the commanding officer of the armed forces of the Umayyad dynasty whose army murdered Imam Husayn and his close companions on the day of Ashura[6] (Muharram 10, 61 ah), they were an unfortunate example of the hadith that reads, "If someone prays and his prayers do not keep him away from evil or shameful deeds, then his prayers will only distance him from God."[7]

The men in the army were not intoxicated when they killed the grandson of the Prophet, they were people who prayed, but the lack of sincerity in their prayers was what damned them.

﴿ فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ . الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلاَتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ ﴾ الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ﴾

Woe to them who pray, those who are heedless of their prayers, those who show off... (***107:4-7***)

Pilgrimage is similar. When a person makes the pilgrimage of Hajj they are stripped of all ordinary accruements and are subjected to difficult conditions. A person is wrapped in two small pieces of coarse cloth. They have to eat and sleep in the desert with millions of devotees. They are exposed and tried by the sheer volume of the crowd, all clustered and pressured to move together from one ritual act to the other.

Under normal circumstances people would avoid such an experience. However, because it is for the sake of God, the faithful rush towards it. Rather than degrading them, and despite all of its difficulties, the Hajj uplifts people. Practitioners of other religions envy Muslims and wish that they had a similar practice themselves. The scenes of white-clad pilgrims worshipping in unison add to Islam's dignity in the human eyes.

It is hard to believe that only fifty years after the Prophet's death a select few were able to devalue the message of God and turn it into a game to be used for political gain. Imam Husayn rose up to change that - he was the human embodiment of dignity for humanity.

The responsibility of Imam Husayn to preserve Islam is similar to the responsibility given to Amir al-

Mumineen Imam Ali b. Abi Talib. In the final revelation, God completed Islam by saying, “Today, I have perfected your religion for you.”[8] God would not have commanded the Prophet to deliver this verse had Imam Ali not been capable of carrying out that trust. Imam Husayn also bore the same responsibility. Without him, Islam would have become a worthless set of rituals.

Before leaving for his final journey, Imam Husayn made his intentions very clear. He declared that, “They have given me two options – fighting or humiliation; and I would never choose humiliation.”[9] His honor lay in upholding the message of God, even if that meant being martyred. Therefore, he pronounced, “I see death as nothing but happiness and living under tyrants as nothing but affliction.”[10] He knew that death would be more dignified than to live a life of humiliation because in death, the soul remains, but humiliation extinguishes both – a dignified life and it obliterates the soul after death.

Like Prophet Muhammad, Imam Husayn was a man of peace, however when circumstances forced him to take defense, he was the first to stand for what was right and sacrificed himself and his kinsmen in the process. He recognized that death was just a transition, an exodus from one state of being to another. He knew that suffering for the sake of God in this world would bring nothing but divine grace, whereas succumbing to worldly fears would lead to nothing but loss in this world and in the next.

﴿تِلْكَ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ نَجْعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوًّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فَسَادًا وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

This is the abode of the Hereafter which We shall grant to those who do not desire to domineer in the earth nor to cause corruption, and the outcome will be in favor of the God-conscious. (***28:83***)

Unlike Umar b. Sa’d and the others, Imam Husayn was not blinded into thinking that the temporary gains of this world would give him honor. He stood on the principle of Prophet Muhammad in that true honor comes from sacrificing yourself for God; and this is what distinguished him from his enemies.

Imam Husayn gave his life for clear-cut reasons – to revive the Muslims and bring them back to their true religion. Even today, his sacrifice resurrects our souls, not by absolving us of sin, but by awakening us into reflection. That is why the followers of Imam Husayn hold dearly the first ten days of Muharram – they are the days of reflection and revolution, not just mourning.

Although crying can be one of the highest forms of the manifestation of human emotion, still some people criticize the lovers of Imam Husayn because of their excessive mourning for him. Tears are a natural reflection for any person when tragedy hits. Despite their infallibility, prophets and imams (the twelve successors to the Prophet) were no exception to this rule, in fact, our tears pale in comparison to theirs.

When the Prophet had to follow the funeral procession for his young son Abraham, he turned to one of the mountains in Madinah and said, “O mountain, if you had to bear my suffering, you would have shattered to pieces.”[11] Despite the fact that his heart was filled with tranquility and the remembrance of

God and a poignant awareness of His will, he was still human. Through the ways of the Prophet, we are assured that when there is a cause to mourn, it is a natural and accepted human concept.

﴿ لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ ﴾

In the Apostle of God there is certainly for you a beautiful pattern of conduct… (***33:21***)

At least three times in recorded history, it has been narrated that the Prophet wept for Imam Husayn. The first time was when he was born and the Prophet took the newborn from the midwife, Um al-Fadhl Bint al-Harith, kissed him and wept. Um al-Fadhl asked if anything was wrong with the baby to which he replied, "Nothing, he is perfect. However, a portion of my community will murder him and still hope for my intercession!"[12]

The collector of Prophetic sayings, al-Bukhari narrates from Abu Hurayrah that several years later Abu Hurayrah and some companions were walking through the alleyways of Madinah with the Prophet when they saw Husayn playing with a group of children. The Prophet went to catch him and Husayn playfully ran away. The Prophet left his companions and continued to chase Husayn. When he finally caught him, he kissed him and said crying, "Husayn is from me, and I am from Husayn. May God love whoever loves Husayn."[13] That was the second time he cried for Husayn though Husayn was still very young.

The third episode was narrated by Um Salamah, the wife of the Prophet and she reports that while the Prophet was lying on his deathbed:

I opened the door and found Husayn sitting on his grandfather's chest. The Prophet was holding a piece of clay in his hand and weeping. When I entered, the Prophet turned to me and said, "Um Salamah, here is some soil from Karbala so keep it with you. I have just received it from Gabriel. He gave it to me and told me, 'Verily, this is your son that will be murdered.' Keep it in a bottle, and when you see it turn to blood, then you will know what has happened."[14]

Muslims are following the practice of the Noble Prophet when they mourn for Imam Husayn. They are also following the practice of the imams who used to invite poets to recite poetry to express their grief for the Imam. Once, a famous poet went to visit Imam Ali al-Ridha at his house and he narrated that:

When I arrived there, I saw that the Imam appeared very saddened. He was flanked by his companions and disciples in a heartrending gathering. When I looked at the Imam questioningly, he said, "Do you not know what days these are? They are the days of mourning and sadness for us but of joy and happiness for our enemies. These are the days of Ashura and Muharram. Whoever cries or heartens others to mourn for Husayn will be fully rewarded by God. So I ask you to recite some poetry lamenting on my grandfather Imam Husayn."[15]

So he began to recite some of his famous Arabic poetry, which has survived until the present day.

May God allow us to be among those who follow the Sunnah of the Prophet and remember Imam Husayn. May we be given the opportunity to recall the sacrifices he made to preserve the integrity of the message of the Noble Prophet and the Islamic teachings.

The Tactics of Satan

Featured Themes:

Character of Satan; Innovation; Prayer; Music; Consolation

أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَابَنِي آدَمَ أَنْ لاَ تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ . وَأَنِ اعْبُدُونِي هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ . وَلَقَدْ أَضَلَّ مِنْكُمْ جِبِلاًّ كَثِيرًا أَفَلَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْقِلُونَ

Did I not exhort you, O children of Adam, saying, "Do not worship Satan. He is indeed your manifest enemy. Worship Me. That is a straight path? Certainly he has led astray many of your generations. Did you not use to apply reason?" (***36:60-62***)

God affirms that Satan is an avowed enemy of mankind and even worse, that his strategies are enigmatic – people cannot detect his assaults because they are very subtle. "Satan flows through the veins of the son of Adam like blood,"[16] the Prophet warned. Just as we do not feel the blood running through our veins, we also do not recognize Satan's presence in our souls until he has completed his work and impelled us to act on his evil desires. Therefore, it is imperative for us to become aware of his tactics in order to combat them.

It is worth asking, why did God create Satan in the first place if he is so evil? To begin with, we must understand that Satan was not created evil. Satan comes from the *jinn*[17] creation and he worshipped God in Heaven for many years. Through this devotion, Satan permeated into the ranks of the angels. However, when he was tried with the smallest test, he crumbled and plummeted to ignominy.

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلآئِكَةِ اسْجُدُواْ لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُواْ إِلاَّ إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُنْ مِّنَ السَّاجِدِينَ

Certainly We created you, then We formed you, then We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam." So they [***all***] ***prostrated, except Iblis***[18]***: he was not among those who prostrated.*** (***7:11***)

In that fateful moment, Satan committed three irredeemable crimes – arrogance, envy, and rebellion. Interrelated, these three crimes became the mother of all evils on earth, beginning with the murder of Abel (by his own brother Cain), and these became the first tools that Satan used to carry out his promise to mislead humanity.

Had Satan not felt that he was superior to Adam, he would not have rebelled against God. Therefore,

arrogance was the first – but not the last of his crimes.

﴿قَالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَن تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا فَاخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ﴾

"Get down from it!" God said. "It is not for you to be arrogant therein. Be gone! You are indeed among the degraded ones." (***7:13***)

Arrogance is deadly – in the heavens, on earth, and most importantly, inside us. The Prophet warned that, "Whoever has the smallest speck of arrogance in his heart will never enter Paradise."[19] No one can calculate the misery caused by those who consider their race or culture superior, such a view has produced untold suffering and injustice. Racism continues to be a pernicious evil globally, and even in the most advanced and prosperous countries, they have yet to root out the scourge of racism from their societies.

On another front, the Prophet has been quoted to have said that, "Pride causes depression."[20] Although pride may seem initially exhilarating but it is really a delusion. No one truly enjoys being proud because people that are full of pride are usually alone and isolated. A proud person cannot appreciate others and it blinds them of self-reflection and recognition of error. It is a destructive weapon wielded by Satan.

Out of arrogance came Satan's second offense which was envy. Since he thought that he was superior, he could not accept to see the angels bow to someone else (other than him) and jealousy consumed him until he rebelled against God. A tradition from the Prophet says, "Envy eats up your good deeds the same way that fire burns wood,"[21] and in another Prophetic saying we are told, "Envy is the worst disease."[22]

Left unchecked, envy can destroy a person. Therefore, we need to learn from Satan's example and guard ourselves against it; but if we cannot, then at least we have to guard ourselves from acting upon it. We have to control envy and not allow it to control us until we can purge it from our hearts, otherwise arrogance and envy will lead to Satan's third sin – rebellion against God.

Interestingly, God does not just say that Satan "did not bow" but adds that "he refused to be of those who bow down."[23] There is a tremendous lesson for us to learn by this statement. From time to time we may commit a sin by procrastinating in regards to our religious duties, such as the prayers or fasting, but far worse would be if we adamantly refuse or despise to do the prayers, for this mirrors Satan's rebellious act against God. God does not want us to rebel against Him, and ultimately if we rebel against God we are in essence rebelling against our own selves.

Not only are the acts of neglect and rebellion against God a sin but to mock those who obey God is also a serious sin. This was something which was seen evident during the time of Prophet Muhammad when the Muslims began to practice their faith, and this is still evident in today's time.

For example, one can see the same dynamics with hijab (Muslim women attire). There are many Muslim women who do not wear hijab but acknowledge that they should and ask God for courage to do so. However, there are some Muslim women, even men, who know that hijab is an act of faith but they not only refuse to practice it, but they also despise it, and even worse, they resent others who practice it.

A young Muslim woman once came to the mosque and told me that she decided to embrace the hijab. I congratulated her and she went home. Sometime later, she came back to the mosque in tears. Her mother had refused to let her inside the house until she removed her hijab. The mother said that hijab represented backwardness and narrow-mindedness. The action of this mother is an example of a person who not only refuses God's orders but also ridicules others for following it, and the chastisement for such deeds is severe, as it is much worse than simply lacking the strength or inclination to wear hijab – it is the act of trying to prevent someone else from following the obligations laid down by God.

That was Satan's problem. Not only did he not want to bow, but he also did not want to be part of those who bow down to God. Although he had worshipped God for a long period, his faith was not secure because he betrayed the foremost ordination of faith which was submission to the Creator, thus he became the most despicable creature in existence.

In contrast, true faith comes when we submit unconditionally to the decree of God. It does not come from just praying, fasting, or occasional acts of charity. It comes when we dedicate our entire life to God, as Prophet Abraham said:

﴿ 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***)

Prophet Abraham dedicated his entire life to God, not one hour a day, not eight hours a day, but 24 hours a day. Therefore, everything we do: working, eating, sleeping, and communicating needs to be dedicated to God and only then can we reach the level of true faith.

In fact, even our own emotions need to be for the sake of God alone. Although Satan, filled with arrogance and envy, failed that test miserably, we have the capacity to do better and implement the teaching of the Prophet which says that, "True faith rests on loving and hating for the sake of God."[24] We need to love those whom God loves and hate those whom God hates. Therefore, not only our actions, but even our emotions need to be for Him.

Clearly, no one has the right to argue with God. We are reminded of this point when He commanded the growing Muslim community during the Prophet's time by saying:

﴿ فَلاَ وَرَبِّكَ لاَ يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّى يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لاَ يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِمَّا 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***)

By extension, it is also not proper to argue with the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet. Of course, we can question why certain religious injunctions are the way they are, but we cannot offer our own interpretation.

Both Sunni and Shia Muslims maintain that they are following the Prophet; one through the Companions, and the other through the Ahlul–Bayt (family of the Prophet). Although, the perception of some schools of thought have maligned the Shia as "innovators," when in fact they contend that it is the absolute submission to the Qur'an and Prophet that characterizes the Shia school of thought. Case in point, other traditions, in the process of legislation, permit *istihsan*, which is legislating something because it is pleasing to some.

This form of legislation permitted "reforms" to religious injunctions made by some of the caliphs after the Prophet Muhammad. Cases of human reasoning against divine injunction exemplifies human tendency to put their preferences over God. Satan convinces some people that they know better than what the Prophet knew. Thus devotees, have to avoid incorporating into religion what they favor, otherwise they will be following their own religion and not God's. Nevertheless, some people, particularly today, succumb to this temptation presented by Satan and pick and choose what they like of the religion of God.

A select few people are truly fortunate as they have reached the level where Satan can no longer influence them.

﴿إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ إِلاَّ مَنِ اتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ الْغَاوِينَ﴾

Indeed, as for My servants you do not have any authority over them, except the perverse who follow you. (***15:42***)

However, Satan approaches the rest of us in a very clear manner.

﴿وَاسْتَفْزِزْ مَنِ اسْتَطَعْتَ مِنْهُمْ بِصَوْتِكَ وَأَجْلِبْ عَلَيْهِمْ بِخَيْلِكَ وَرَجِلِكَ وَشَارِكْهُمْ فِي الأَمْوالِ وَالأَولاَدِ وَعِدْهُمْ وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ إِلاَّ غُرُورًا ﴾

"Instigate whomever of them you can with your voice; and rally against them your cavalry and your infantry, and share with them in wealth and children, and make promises to them!" But

Satan promises them nothing but delusion. (***17:64***)

This verse outlines his four primary methods of attack: his voice, his cavalry, wealth and children, and his false promises.

Satan speaks to all of us and some of us heed to his call. In addition to his ordinary whispers, commentators ascribe two more meanings to the phrase "Satan's voice" and they are music (songs) and seductive speech.

God, in the Our'an purports to the prohibition of music (songs) that are immorally enticing, provocative, or aimless by using the phrases "avoiding false speech (*qawl al–zur*)" and "avoiding vain talk (*laghw*)":

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ لاَ يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِرَامًا ﴾

Those who witness no falsehood (***zur***)***, and if they pass by futility, they pass by it with honorable*** (***avoidance***)***.*** (***25:72***)

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴾

[***The believers are those***] ***who avoid vain talk*** (***laghw***)***.*** (***23:3***)

Some scholars today exempt certain types of music from these verses, but maintain that any music (song) which alludes to immoral, indecent, or violent thoughts would be considered as "vain talk." Many music, especially today are futile, they do not carry a social or positive message, instead they mainly propagate unrealistic romantic fantasies, and even more, many popular lyrics are full of vulgarity and indecency. Some people would never think of saying such words in their day to day talk, but they have no problem listening to them in a song. When you listen to musical lyrics, the brain is lulled into blindly absorbing them. They become a part of you, whether you like it or not; and without you even realizing it, they impose on the sanctity of your heart and mind.

If unconsciously your heart becomes filled with something impure, it may interfere with your ability to remember God. As a person of faith, it is a daily struggle to be in a state of purity, thus vigilance is needed. Try not to be naïve by thinking that negative music will not have an effect on you. I once heard someone say, "I can't get that song out of my head. I keep singing it all day long!" You may think nothing of it when you are listening to a certain song but when it comes time to focus, your mind will be elsewhere and you may not be able to concentrate, especially when the time comes to stand before God and offer Him your sincere prayers. As human beings, we do not have a switch to turn these influences on and off at will.

Therefore, in order to mend yourself, you need to try to remember God (not only during prayers) all the

time, and one should try to avoid distractions because the sanctity of the heart cannot be restored in a matter of seconds. If you really need to listen to something, then listen to the words of your Creator, which is the Noble Qur'an. It brings peace to the soul and leads you towards what is right, and instead of harming your spirit, it will bring you inner peace and a spiritual cure.

It is clear how Satan uses songs to reach out to people, and along with that, commentators also ascribe the "seductive tone of people" to the phrase "voice of Satan."

﴿ فَلاَ تَخْضَعْنَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ وَقُلْنَ قَوْلاً مَعْرُوفًا ﴾

...do not be complaisant in your speech, lest he in whose heart is a sickness should aspire, and speak honorable words. (***33:32***)

Some people may not realize how their voices are being heard by others, and therefore one should not be too forthcoming with strangers. Even with your co-workers or classmates you should maintain a level of proper conversational demeanor (*qawlan ma'rufa*). Try not to be too complaisant in your speech or else the one who has ill intentions might act upon them. Bypass speaking freely about sensitive or private issues to others with whom you do not share a close affinity with, and even if they are close friends of the opposite gender, do not enter into matters of intimacy.

Nowadays, this aspect of Satan's work has been facilitated by the Internet and mobiles, especially through social network sites. People think Internet chatting, texting or Tweeting is purely innocent without recognizing of the possible dangers lurking. How often does a father assume that his son is doing his homework in his bedroom, but instead he is chatting with the wrong people? Satan can work just as easily online and via mobiles as he can in person.

After warning us about Satan's voice, God warns us about his infantry. When referring to "Satan's infantry," Muslim commentators give this phrase several meanings. One is violence or an unjust use of force, whether it is military might or domestic violence, it is a tool of Satan. It solves nothing and only breeds more violence.

Lastly, the Prophet said, "A woman who displays herself immodestly is a soldier of Satan."[25] Contrary to the Western ideology, a woman's body is not a show to display openly. It is a gift that should be honored, respected, and protected. What does a woman accomplish by showing herself off? Are women really adding dignity to themselves or benefiting society when they are immodestly dressed? There are some women who do not care and say that it is a man's responsibility not to stare at them, and of course this is true, but to some extent.

We should keep in mind that the Prophet said, "Cast down your eyes, and you will see wonders."[26] From this saying, we understand that God has granted those who cast down their gaze the ability to see mysteries that others cannot imagine. Men and women have a great responsibility to protect themselves

and the health of society at large.

Many times, we do not realize the ramifications of Satan's enticements. How often does he entice us to do something destructive while dangling the illusion of benefit in front of our eyes? We do not realize that his promises are false until it is too late because he is superb in his last tactic of "false promises," as mentioned in verse 17:64.

A classic example of Satan's deceit is the Bani Umayyad dynasty. Tens of thousands of Umayyad soldiers rode out against the grandson of the Prophet, Imam Husayn on the plains of Karbala. The soldiers used to pray – in fact, on the day of Ashura they performed their prayers! Still, Satan misled them with false promises of richness, and even convinced some of them that they were murdering Imam Husayn for the sake of God.

After the massacre, one of the soldiers was seen clutching the black drape of the Ka'bah and imploring, "O God, forgive me!" The soldiers of the Bani Umayyad were Muslims, but they had been possessed by Satan and his false promises. Before their martyrdom, Imam Husayn explained to his son Ali al-Akbar what had happened to the soldiers on the opposing side, "Satan encircled and engulfed these people until they forgot the remembrance of God."[27]

Since over a thousand years have elapsed since Imam Husyan was murdered, some people question as to why we continue to shed tears for him. They say, would we not honor his memory better simply by holding only lectures? Most definitely, the lectures do provide a way to spread the knowledge of Islam and awareness of what happened to him; however, the memorial sessions allow us to rediscover and keep alive who he was and what he sacrificed. Thus, when we cry, we share our pain with him and the other members of the Ahlul-Bayt. Crying is an expression of human empathy; and when we cry, we feel what they felt and relive their sufferings. By crying, we demonstrate and build our solidarity with the Holy Household.

In order to understand a fraction of what the Prophet and the Ahlul-Bayt endured, we have to try and put ourselves in their position. If you are not affected by their sacrifice then it might be hard to fully understand what it means to be a follower of Islam. Demonstrating our loyalty towards Ahlul-Bayt by mourning is invaluable and the rewards for it are inconceivable.

There is nothing wrong with one expressing their grief; the prophets of God expressed their grief by crying. We see it in the story of Prophet Jacob when he lost his son Joseph. For years, Prophet Jacob cried of the separation from his son even though he had 11 other sons.

وَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسَفَى عَلَى يُوسُفَ وَابْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ . قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ تَفْتَأُ تَذْكُرُ يُوسُفَ حَتَّى
تَكُونَ حَرَضًا أَوْ تَكُونَ مِنَ الْـهَالِكِينَ

And he turned away from them and said, "Alas for Joseph!" His eyes had turned white with grief,

and he choked with suppressed agony. They said, "By God! You will go on remembering Joseph until you wreck your health or perish." (***12:84-85***)

From the story of Joseph and other such Qur'anic narratives we see that it was in the nature of the prophets to express their love and connection to God thru tears.

أُولَـٰئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ ٱلنَّبِيِّيْنَ مِن ذُرِّيَّةِ ءادَمَ وَمِمَّنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْرَائِيلَ وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا وَٱجْتَبَيْنَآ إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُ ٱلرَّحْمَـٰنِ خَرُّواْ سُجَّداً وَبُكِيّاً

They are the ones whom God has blessed from among the prophets of Adam's progeny, and from [***the progeny of***] ***those We carried with Noah, and from among the progeny of Abraham and Israil, and from among those We guided and chose. When the signs of the All-Beneficent were recited to them, they would fall down weeping in prostration.*** (***19:58***)

The prophets also conveyed their love for Imam Husayn by crying. The first to ever cry over the tragedy of Imam Husayn was the Prophet Muhammad. Imam Ali b. Husayn Zain al-Abideen narrates that the Prophet cried for Husayn several times, when Husayn was born and lastly before the Prophet left this world.

Many prominent historians narrate that the companions were sitting in the Mosque of the Prophet when the Prophet entered with tears in his eyes. They asked him, "O Prophet of God, what happened?" The Prophet replied, "Gabriel was with me a few moments ago and told me how I will lose my son."[28] This event happened 50 years before the martyrdom of Imam Husayn!

The Ahlul-Bayt also mourned for him and we are told in the books of history that for 35 years, Imam Ali b. Husayn Zain al-Abideen cried continuously. When he ate, tears would mix with his food. One day, one of his disciples, Abu Hamzah (Thabit b. Dinar) was sympathizing with him and asked, "O son of the Messenger of God, why don't you stop crying? It has been a long time. Remember that your family is reputed to being murdered. Your family has been honored with martyrdom."

"May God reward you," the Imam replied. "My father and grandfather and all the imams from my descendants will be murdered. But whenever I look at my aunts and sisters, I remember them on the afternoon of Ashura running from tent to tent as the enemies shouted, 'Burn the tents of the oppressors!'"

The Prophet Muhammad has been quoted as saying, "Lengthy mourning is not recommended, except for Imam Husayn."[29] When God takes one of our loved ones, we must be content within ourselves with His decree. Of course, it is natural to cry, but our mourning should not go on excessively, for a hadith says, "Whoever is not pleased with My decree and is not patient with My trials should find another Lord other than Me."[30] However, the Prophet made one exception - Imam Husayn.

He will continue to be remembered until the end of time, for in the words of the Prophet, “A special love for Husayn is rooted in the hearts of the believers.” In addition he said, “In the hearts of the believers, the heat of sorrow and pain over the martyrdom of Imam Husayn will never be diminished.” These are the words of the Prophet. These feelings are eternal, and the remembrance of Imam Husayn will continue forever.

Death and Dying

Featured Themes:

The Angel of Death; The Eternal Life

وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْمَوْتِ بِالْحَقِّ ذَٰلِكَ مَا كُنْتَ مِنْهُ تَحِيدُ . وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ ذَٰلِكَ يَوْمُ الْوَعِيدِ . وَجَاءَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَعَهَا
سَائِقٌ وَشَهِيدٌ . لَقَدْ كُنْتَ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِنْ هَٰذَا فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ

Then the agony of death brings the truth: “This is what you used to shun!” Then the Trumpet will be blown: “This is the promised day.” Then every soul will come accompanied by a driver and a witness: “You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today.” (***50:19-22***)

Life may seem permanent, but we were not created to remain here. The Qur’an tells us,

“Everything shall perish except for the face of God,” (***28:88***)

And

“Every soul shall taste death.” (***29:57***)

Young or old, we will all face the reality of death.

وَمَا هَٰذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life, had they known! (***29:64***)

We were not created to live in this world, but rather to be transformed to the Hereafter. The worldly life is finite; even the universe is limited. Every day, millions of people arrive and millions of others depart from this world. We are trapped here and our only route out is the one that God has prescribed which is the separation of the soul from our body. Although unnerving, we must undergo that journey, for without it, we will never reach our final destination.

Our worldly life only forms a fraction of our total existence. Before we came into this world, we lived in the spiritual world.

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِن بَنِي آدَمَ مِن ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُواْ بَلَى شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ

When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them bear witness over themselves, [***He said to them,***] ***"Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes indeed! We bear witness."*** [***This***] ***lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Indeed we were unaware of this."*** (***7:172***)

Although we did not have physical bodies, our souls made a covenant with God. Then, He sent us to be physically born, and this is where we are now. We live in this world, then we will die, and our souls will be sent to the "in-between world" called *alam al-Barzakh*, and finally, we will face Him and reach our ultimate home.

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنتُمْ أَمْوَاتًا فَأَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

How can you be unfaithful to God, [***seeing that***] ***you were lifeless and He gave you life, then He will make you die, and then He shall bring you to life, and then you will be brought back to Him?*** (***2:28***)

The Prophet said that in this life people are asleep, and once we die, we will wake up. Life after death will be a completely new experience. It is told by the Prophet that the dead hear so clearly that the tapping of footwear on the graves reaches their ears. For this reason, after the Battle of Badr the Prophet walked among the dead ones of Quraysh, looking at them and calling out to them by name, "O Utbah! O Shaybah! O Waleed!" Curious, one of his disciples asked him if he was talking to the dead. He replied, "By God, your hearing is not more powerful than theirs. If God had permitted them, they would have answered as well."[31]

If only death was the end of our journey; and if death was nothing but annihilation, then we would have no reason to fear the grave. However, we fear the grave because we are uneasy of what is to come. In *Dua Abu Hamzah al-Thumali*, narrated by Imam Zain al-Abideen, we read, "I cry over the removal of my soul. I cry over the tightness of my grave. I cry over the interrogation of the grave." What we may face in the grave is real, and since every person will succumb to death, we should prepare ourselves for it. It is written in *Nahjul Balaghah* that Imam Ali cautioned:

If you could experience what those who died before you are experiencing now, you would be shocked and confused. You would listen and obey God's commands much more. However, it is hidden from you;

but soon, the curtain will be lifted from you.

At the moment of death, the first thing that we will experience is *sakrat al-mawt* which is known as the "intoxication of death."

﴿وَجَاءتْ سَكْرَةُ الْمَوْتِ بِالْحَقِّ ذَلِكَ مَا كُنتَ مِنْهُ تَحِيدُ﴾

Then the agony of death brings the truth: "This is what you used to shun!" (***50: 19***)

Shock may paralyze some of us as we behold the Angel of Death. Our bodies will no longer be able to respond to our commands but we will continue to sense what happens around us. We may try to cry out for help but to no avail; our tongues will no longer move. We will be fully conscious as our soul is taken out from our body. We will be in pain and unable to express it. We will be completely incapacitated. This could be the distressful moment of our existence, according to Imam Zain al-Abideen. The Prophet said:

If you could hear what the deceased were saying (to the person washing the dead body then), you would never agree to wash their bodies again because as they are being washed, they are pleading, "O the one who is washing my body, be kind to me, for by God, as I was dying, whenever my soul would leave one of my limbs, it felt as if that limb was being amputated. So, please I cannot bear any more pain; have mercy on me!"

Everyone will experience that moment, even the believers. A hadith *al-Qudsi* (God's saying) reads:

If I decide to forgive a guilty person and admit him to Paradise, then I need to purify him in his (or her) lifetime. So sometimes, I test him with health and sometimes with poverty; sometimes with the loss of a friend or relative. If he averts these, then I test him at the time of death and make it as such that when he dies, he dies pure and immaculate. Then, I can forgive him and admit him into Paradise.

A man, whose brother was in such a situation, dying a slow, agonizing death, came to Imam al-Sadiq to plead for help. His brother had been near death for three days and was in severe pain, but his soul was still clinging to his body. He was unable to pass beyond the extraction of the soul at the larynx, so Imam al-Sadiq advised him to move his brother to his prayer mat in the same place that he used to offer his prayers, and to recite *Surah Ya Seen* and *Surah al-Saaffaat* next to him. By doing this, it would alleviate his pain and ease the process of death.

Through all of this fright shines a huge ray of hope. Prophet Muhammad promised, "Whoever's last words are *la ilaha illa Allah* (there is no god except the (one true) God) enters Paradise."[32] Of course, these words need to be the full embodiment of one's practice and life, and not just mere words. However, some cannot even utter these last words no matter how hard they try.

Therefore, we should remind a dying person about God's mercy, blessings, and forgiveness as to ease

the agony and fear of death by reciting the *talqeen,*[33] the dictation before death, part of which is a reminder for us as well, in which the dying person is but a forerunner and we shall soon follow the same journey. Right before the burial, we need to recite a second *talqeen* to assist the dead person with the questioning by the two angels.

Some of you may be thinking that you are too young to worry about death, but death knows no age. Walk through any cemetery and you will see the graves of many young people who died in their teens. The Angel of Death does not discriminate against age. When our time comes, we need to be ready, even at a tender age.

It is said that once the Angel of Death transformed himself into a human being in order to visit Prophet Solomon in Jerusalem. Prophet Solomon had a man over as a guest at the time in his home. The Angel of Death instantly recognized the man because he was scheduled to take the man's soul the following day – but in India. After the angel left, the man became startled and sensed who he was.

The man pleaded with Prophet Solomon to use his power to help him escape from there. Since God had subjugated the wind to Prophet Solomon, he felt obliged to aide him and sent the man to a far away land. The next day, when the Angel of Death returned, Prophet Solomon asked him what had happened. "O Prophet of God," the Angel of Death replied, "I was scheduled to take that man's soul today but in India. When I saw him with you in Jerusalem, I was shocked because he was supposed to be in India!" Even though the man was attempting to flee from death he met up with his fate in India as decreed by God.

﴿ أَيْنَمَا تَكُونُواْ يُدْرِككُّمُ الْمَوْتُ وَلَوْ كُنتُمْ فِي بُرُوجٍ مُّشَيَّدَةٍ﴾

Wherever you may be, death shall overtake you, even if you were in fortified towers. (***4:78***)

However, if you are prepared, you would not fear your last moments. "Whoever loves God will love to meet God,"[34] the Prophet said. If you truly love God, He will give you a glimpse of your place in Paradise, and despite the anxiety of death, He will shower you with much mercy at the time of death that you will be eager to leave this world.

﴿ يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ﴾ ارْجِعِي إِلَى رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً ﴾ فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي ﴾ وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي﴾

"O soul at peace! Return to your Lord, pleased, pleasing! Then enter among My servants! And enter My Paradise!" (***89:27–30***)

There are a select few people whose level of spirituality is greatly distinguished that await for death, because they understand it as a transitional stage from this lower world to the permanent abode. Ali b. Abi Talib once said, "I don't care whether death comes to me or I go to death; I welcome it. I am

yearning for death (meeting my Lord) more than a baby yearns for its mother's breast."[35]

Imam Husayn expressed the same thought. In Mecca, he proclaimed, "Death has been decreed for the son of Adam. It encircles him the same way that a necklace encircles a woman's neck. I long to see my forefathers the same way Jacob longed to see his beloved son, Joseph."[36] He was waiting to be reunited with the Messenger of God and the rest of his family. God offered him martyrdom and he yearned to the calling of his Lord will full submission.

Challenges for Muslims in the West

Featured Themes:

Friendship; Marriage; Social Life

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاهُمْ هُدًى . وَرَبَطْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ إِذْ قَامُوا فَقَالُوا رَبُّنَا رَبُّ
السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَنْ نَدْعُوَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَهًا لَقَدْ قُلْنَا إِذًا شَطَطًا

We relate to you their account in truth. They were indeed youths who had faith in their Lord, and We had enhanced them in guidance, and fortified their hearts when they stood up and said, "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. We will never invoke any god besides Him, for then we shall certainly have said an atrocious lie." (***18: 13-14***)

Maintaining our muslim faith and identity in the west is a constant challenge for us. The invitation to prohibited acts summons us from every direction, and if we try to live a morally upright life, then we usually end up becoming a minority within a minority. Although upholding the tenets of any religion within a secular society is difficult, Muslims face the additional challenge of living not only in a non-Islamic society, but one which is continuously becoming more and more secular.

Unfortunately, some Muslims succumb to the pressures around them and eliminate all outward aspects of their religion. A woman stops wearing hijab; a man stops praying; another person begins to drink alcohol, and so on. Therefore, Muslims need to continuously guard themselves to prevent this loss of faith. Our spiritual survival depends upon preserving our Islamic values in the face of challenges.

One of the greatest challenges for the Muslims in the West is social integration, such that it does not compromise our Muslim identity.

Without a doubt, it is normal to want to make friends with classmates, co-workers and neighbors, even if they do not share the same belief system. Nonetheless, some may try to argue that Islam does not permit the befriending of non-Muslims and some even extend this to include Christians and Jews. They cite the following verse to support their argument:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لاَ تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَى أَوْلِيَآءَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَآءُ بَعْضٍ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنَّهُ مِنْهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لاَ يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

O you who have faith! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends: they are friends of each other. Any of you who take them as friends is indeed one of them. Indeed God does not guide the wrongdoing folk. (***5:51***)

When reading this verse out of context it may seem that God is instructing the Muslims not to befriend the Jews and Christians, however if we carefully study the contextual and historical aspect of this verse, we see that this is not the case at all. In this verse, God is directly speaking to the Muslims living in Madinah during the time of the Prophet not to associate with some of the Jews and Christians that were fighting against them (the Prophet and the Muslim community).

When it comes to causing strife, God even instructs us to avoid our parents and children if they oppose our faith.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ لاَ تَتَّخِذُواْ آبَآءَكُمْ وَإِخْوَانَكُمْ أَوْلِيَآءَ إِنِ ٱسْتَحَبُّواْ ٱلْكُفْرَ عَلَى ٱلإِيمَانِ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِّنكُمْ فَأُوْلَـٰئِكَ هُمُ ٱلظَّالِمُونَ

O you who have faith! Do not befriend your fathers and brothers if they prefer faithlessness to faith. Those of you who befriend them – it is they who are the wrongdoers. (***9:23***)

Similarly we read in the Bible, in Matthew 10:35–36, “For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter–in–law against her mother–in–law. A man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”

Clearly, Islam (under normal circumstances) encourages interfaith relations.

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

God does not forbid you in regard to those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes that you deal with them with kindness and justice. Indeed God loves the just. (***60:8***)

As long as people are not fighting against you – either physically or ideologically – you can befriend them. However, if they taunt you for wearing hijab or mock you for praying, then they are not your true friends. Surely, true friends will try and share their traditions and culture with you, but will not try to manipulate or impose their beliefs upon you – true friends will respect you for who you are.

Unfortunately, during our life journey, we may encounter some people whose mission is to convert others. They seek friendship merely to win you to their side, and in fact, some evangelical groups systematically target Muslims and even invite their children to camps to persuade them to leave their religious beliefs – such people must be avoided at all cost! They may seem friendly, however time and experience has shown that they do not have your best interest at heart.

Incidentally, these cautions hold just as true for some Muslim friends. Regardless of what religion our friends profess, first and foremost, we need to ensure that they exert a moral influence upon us.

Both modern psychologists and religious sources confirm a fundamental principle which states that friends have an influence on you – an influence which is sometimes more profound than that which our families can exert upon us. Imam Ali has said, "A person follows the religion of his friend, so be aware of who you befriend."[37]

We understand that negative peer–pressure is a dangerous threat at any age, and indeed even the most intelligent and independent person cannot help but become influenced by others. The acceptance of such forms of peer–pressure is actually a part of human nature; therefore, we must be extremely selective in choosing our friends – do not choose friends randomly. On this quest for seeking out good friends, one should look for those who exhibit positive social and moral traits and avoid all of the others.

وَاصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ وَلاَ تَعْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَلاَ تُطِعْ مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرُطًا

Content yourself with the company of those who supplicate their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face, and do not lose sight of them, desiring the glitter of the life of this world. And do not obey him whose heart We have made oblivious to Our remembrance, and who follows his own desires, and whose conduct is [***mere***] ***profligacy.*** (***18:28***)

Someone who is heedless of God's remembrance; someone who follows his or her own lower desires; and someone who is immoral is indeed a dangerous friend. These characteristics will rub off on us and thus we must follow the advice of the Qur'an and avoid becoming friends with people who display such traits.

The qualities which a potential friend possesses are so critical that Prophet Muhammad was once asked for advice on whom to befriend and he replied, "Do not sit with the dead." When he was asked who "the dead" were, he replied, "Every wealthy person who lives extravagantly without concern for others."[38] Such people are lost and are wasting their lives, and the more time that one spends with such people, the more dangerous it can become for that person and they may end up destroying their life as well. Instead, we need to seek out friends who understand what is important in life, since the short life of this temporal world is full of challenges, we must spend our time with people who can help us create a

positive perspective.

The brief enjoyments of this life are fast fleeing and that is why the Prophet advised, “Save pleasure for Paradise and sleep for the grave.” Islamic sources constantly advises us to avoid people who seek only to enjoy the “false things” of life, and that we need to spend our time with those who understand the deeper meanings of our existence.

وَمَا هَٰذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلاَّ لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life, had they known! (***29:64***)

Beyond mere friendship, there are some Muslims that want to marry outside the faith of Islam. You must remember that any differences – educational, cultural, and most importantly, religion could become a tremendous source of marital conflict. Such differences may remain dormant in the first few years after marriage, however once children arrive, such ideological differences are bound to surface. The father will want to take his children to the mosque while the mother wants to take them to a different house of worship. The father wants his daughter to be chaste, but the mother may think that she should be allowed to date. The children themselves will not know what to think and “who to be” and will consider themselves part–Muslim and part–non–Muslim. There is no such thing as “half” a belief. One must either believe that Muhammad was a prophet or not; and that either Jesus is God or not – there can be no compromise on such beliefs.

Many times, children who grow up in such households are forced to assimilate into two contradictory ideas because they think and are taught that both parents “are right.” Therefore, we need to realize that children must be our primary concern in life as they are our most important responsibility and the ones who will carry forth our legacy.

We also need to remember that we need to take care of ourselves spiritually. Developing our spirituality is a lifelong challenge even in the best of circumstances, and even more so when we live in a non–Islamic society. Thus, if we come home to a non–Muslim spouse, then we seriously run the risk of limiting our religion and its influence on our lives.

وَلاَ تَنكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكَاتِ حَتَّى يُؤْمِنَّ وَلَأَمَةٌ مُؤْمِنَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ مُشْرِكَةٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَتْكُمْ وَلاَ تُنكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَتَّى يُؤْمِنُوا وَلَعَبْدٌ مُؤْمِنٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ مُشْرِكٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكُمْ أُوْلَئِكَ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُو إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ وَالْمَغْفِرَةِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيُبَيِّنُ آيَاتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

Do not marry idolatresses until they embrace faith. A faithful slave girl is better than an idolatress, though she should impress you. And do not marry [***your daughters***] ***to idolaters until***

they embrace faith. A faithful slave is better than an idolater, though he should impress you. Those invite* [*others*] *to the Fire, but God invites to Paradise and pardon, by His will, and He clarifies His signs for the people so that they may take admonition. (***2:221***)

A believing partner will invite his or her spouse to God and help them lead a peaceful life, and the exact opposite would happen if a person marries a disbelieving partner. If we cannot avoid being influenced by our friends (whom we see for a few hours every day at school, at work, or in a social environment), then certainly we cannot avoid being influenced by our spouse (whom we are around on a regular basis). Therefore, trying to maintain our belief in such a marriage will become a constant battle, especially if one's spouse does not respect Islam. Eventually one partner will end up giving up their belief system altogether.

The issue of compatibility in marriage is something that must be taken seriously (even Muslim marriages). It is vital for a believer to marry someone who gives the same amount of importance to religion that you do. Sometimes the husband is practicing but his wife is not or vice versa; the wife wants to wear hijab but her husband refuses; sometimes the wife wants to attend a humanitarian function but her husband wants her home to serve him. Sometimes, one spouse is a follower of one school of thought while the other is of another, and in this specific situation, there may not be broadmindedness for the other belief system.

In such circumstances, differences may increase hence we should try to weed out the sources of potential conflict before the marriage – not during it. That is why it is critical to examine the level of compatibility during the time of spouse selection. This provides a much better chance of having a harmonious marriage which in turn will lead to having stable children and a loving home as well.

Nowadays, religion is given little importance in society. For some, religion has become a once a week activity. A non–Muslim preacher once visited our Islamic center and made the following observation, "You Muslims may have small centers while we have large ones; however your work seems more fruitful than ours. Spirituality is absent in our centers, people come merely for amusement."

Many people who live in the West do not have time for spirituality because they are either too busy in the pursuit of money or preoccupy their time with trivial entertainment, and interestingly enough this is actually one of the reasons why more and more people are coming into the faith of Islam. Many reverts to Islam say they felt empty inside; they had attained the "American dream" – a good job and "everything" that comes with it – a house, car and other material possessions, however they still felt as if something was missing. When they came into the fold of Islam and became a Muslim, that void was filled by an encompassing remembrance of God.

الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُم بِذِكْرِ اللّهِ أَلاَ بِذِكْرِ اللّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

Those who have faith, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of God. Look! The hearts find rest in God's remembrance! (***13:28***)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنتُمُ الْفُقَرَآءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of God, and God – He is the All-Sufficient, the All-Laudable. (***35:15***)

Without a doubt, spirituality is essential for everyone – whether one recognizes its importance or not. Modernity lures us into the danger of thinking that we do not need God; when we have a beautiful home, a huge savings account, and an abundance of friends and family – why do we need God in our lives? Why do we need prophets and imams in our lives when we live in "modernity" and can study contemporary psychology or philosophy at the universities?

The answer is that we need them because no matter how advanced or "modern" our world may seem, we must remember that its very existence is tenuous – we are clinging to a rapidly spinning, fragile world. Eventually, one day this world will come to an end, in fact, it would only take one single natural disaster to render all of our technology and knowledge useless. Therefore, as human beings, we need God in our lives in order to progress and advance forward. That is not to say that science and technology are not valuable, rather on the contrary they are, however they cannot help us through our spiritual difficulties. We need the guidance of God to help us through difficult times and to show us how He wants us to grow, for surely we were meant to live with God and if we expel Him from our lives, then we will never find true and everlasting happiness.

It is said that one day, Prophet Jesus and his disciples passed by a leper who had become blind and paralyzed. His people had abandoned him, and he had no food or shelter. When Prophet Jesus asked him how he was, he replied that he was doing well and that was because his heart and tongue had never ceased to remember God. Prophet Jesus told his disciples that this was true faith.

Therefore, it does not matter how much money you have, or the size of your house, or your zip code address, rather what matters is the size of your heart. A hadith *al-Qudsi* reads, "My heavens and My earth cannot contain Me, but the heart of My believing servant can (hold Me)."[39] Therefore, when you have God in your heart, you have everything.

"O God! One who did not recognize You achieved nothing! But one who recognizes You has achieved everything,"[40] Imam Husayn recited these words on the day of Arafat (the 9th of the Islamic month of Dhul Hijjah). These powerful words carry a message for us even today – over 1,300 years after he uttered them! We must not be deceived by material goods, for in all honesty, if success was measured in riches then all of the prophets sent by God would have been utter failures.

Just look at one of the greatest messengers of God, Prophet Moses and what he did when he was

hungry. Rather than indulging in lavish dinners and various types of food, he merely gathered food from the brush. His success had nothing to do with wealth, what he ate, how he dressed, or the grandeur of his home – it simply came from a deep faith and conviction in God.

As Muslims in the West, we need to be proud of our faith and must not feel that we need to hide our belief. People will respect us more for praying or wearing hijab and hold sacred our ways. Nonetheless, there will always be some ignorant people who will mock us, however they are small in number and weak in hearts. I was at the airport one time traveling to another region when the time for the prayer set in. I went and performed my prayers, and after finishing them, an American man came up to me and complimented me on my courage to pray in public after the incident of 9/11.

We really do not have to worry about what others think, as long as God appreciates us, we will be prosperous. According to a tradition, once God falls in love with us, He will then ask the angels to fall in love with us; and once the angels fall in love with us, He will then ask the devout people on earth to love us as well. Regardless of where we live, either in the East or the West, we should continue to strive to maintain who we are and what we believe in and sooner or later, we will see the blooming fields of Islam.

The Ideal Approach to God

Featured Themes:

Who are the Ahlul-Bayt; Verse 33:33; The Event of Mubahilah; The Cloak; Ghadir Khum; Traditions concerning the Ahlul-Bayt

﴿ قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴾

Say, "If you love God, then follow me; God will love you and forgive you your sins, and God is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful." (***3:31***)

one of the prime criterion in loving someone is to honor and respect their wishes, for when we truly love someone, we go to great lengths to prove our devotion to them. Therefore, obedience is actually an affirmation of love and honor. Without the emotion of love, we may not be affected or stirred to do much in life and it is these two issues which God has intertwined in His Book when He says to us that if we love God then we follow whatever He has commanded us to do.

Furthermore, if we love God we should also be ready to love the Prophet; if we love the Prophet, then we would show this love by following him, and by following the Prophet, not only do we express our love to him, but we are in turn loving and obeying God as well. Therefore, we need to instill the love of and following of the Prophet in our own hearts and in the hearts of our children, just as the Prophet has been

quoted as saying, “No one can attain true faith until I am more beloved to him than his own soul, his parents, his children, and all of mankind.”[41]

However, our responsibility does not end at that because the Noble Prophet has also told us that, “Love God and love me because you love God. Love my family because you love me.”[42] We need to love the Prophet’s family (the Ahlul-Bayt) with the same intensity that we love him and this is something which God tells the Prophet in the Qur’an to instruct the people to do, “No reward do I ask from you for this except the love of those near of my kin.”[43] It is also for this reason that the Prophet has advised, “Train your children in three things: recitation of the Qur’an, love for your Prophet, and love for his family.”[44] These three traits: love for God, love for the Prophet, and love for the Ahlul-Bayt form the essence of true Islam and are inseparable from one another.

Nevertheless, a question arises that if the Ahlul-Bayt are so important, then why are they not mentioned in the Qur’an by name? In fact, many verses were revealed about them, however we must understand the context of revelation of each of these verses in order to comprehend which verses they are. For instance, God addressed the Ahlul-Bayt specifically in this verse:

﴿ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا ﴾

***Indeed God desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household* (*Ahlul-Bayt*)*, and purify you with a thorough purification.* (*33:33*)**

The importance of this verse cannot be underestimated, for surely God here is declaring that all of the members of the Ahlul-Bayt (who are a specific group) are immune from all forms of imperfection. Therefore, it is vital to discover *who* God is referring to as the Ahlul-Bayt.

Some people believe that the Ahlul-Bayt refers to the wives of the Prophet and cite the beginning of the verse as proof; however, this view falls apart when we look at the wording of the verse in Arabic. Initially in the verse God speaks to the wives of the Prophet, He addresses them in the feminine plural, however later in the verse when He addresses the Ahlul-Bayt, He speaks to them in the masculine plural. Therefore, He is not speaking to the wives of the Prophet anymore.

In addition, it has been mentioned by numerous scholars that this verse, which describes the Ahlul-Bayt as being “purified,” cannot refer to the wives of the Prophet because the actions of some of them were not in line with the spirit of this verse and being “*tahir*” (pure of all acts of abomination), since we know that some wives of the Prophet conducted themselves in such a way that God Himself reprimanded and rebuked them. For example, in *Surah al-Tahreem*, God revealed to the Prophet:

﴿ يَاأَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ تَبْتَغِي مَرْضَاةَ أَزْوَاجِكَ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴾

O Prophet! Why do you prohibit [yourself] from what God has made lawful for you, seeking to please your wives? And God is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful. (***66:1***)

عَسَى رَبُّهُ إِنْ طَلَّقَكُنَّ أَنْ يُبْدِلَهُ أَزْوَاجًا خَيْرًا مِنْكُنَّ مُسْلِمَاتٍ مُؤْمِنَاتٍ قَانِتَاتٍ تَائِبَاتٍ عَابِدَاتٍ سَائِحَاتٍ ثَيِّبَاتٍ وَأَبْكَارًا

It may be that if he (the Prophet) divorces you, his Lord will give him in [your] place wives better than you: [such as are] muslim, faithful, obedient, penitent, devout and given to fasting, virgins and non-virgins. (***66:5***)

Al-Bukhari, in his collection of traditions from Prophet Muhammad, writes that Abdullah b. Abbas, one of the most prominent companions of the Prophet, asked Umar b. al-Khattab which wives did this verse refer to and he replied that it referred to Hafsa and Aishah.45

More notably, there is a tradition which tells us who the Prophet meant by the Ahlul-Bayt and many books of hadith, including *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih al-Muslim*, as well as various books of *tafseer*, such as those written by al-Razi and al-Zamakhshari relate a hadith known as the "Hadith of the Cloak."

According to this lengthy tradition, one day the Prophet gathered with Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn underneath a cloak in one of the rooms of the house belonging to his wife, Um Salamah. At that point in time, Gabriel came bearing this verse:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

Indeed God desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household (Ahlul-Bayt), and purify you with a thorough purification. (***33:33***)

The Prophet then related the revelation, prayed for these members of his family and declared, "O Lord, these are my Ahlul-Bayt." Hearing this Um Salamah asked the Prophet if she could be part of the Ahlul-Bayt too, but the Prophet politely refused by saying, "You too are (on the path of) good."46 From this event we understand that it was the will of God, and that the Ahlul-Bayt are limited to only these five individually - namely the Prophet, Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn.

In order to emphasize who the Ahlul-Bayt are and who this verse was in reference to, for nearly six months after its revelation, the Prophet would stop outside the house of Ali and Fatima, which was adjacent to his own house and the mosque and greet them every morning as the "Ahlul-Bayt" and he did so to reaffirm that his Ahlul-Bayt were these specific individuals and no one else.

Another event known as *Mubahilah* also clarified who falls under the category of the Ahlul-Bayt.

Although the Prophet had several wives and daughters, when he was commanded to take his sons and women to meet with the Christian monks of Najran (a region in the southern Arabian Peninsula), he only took Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn.

فَمَنْ حَاجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا نَدْعُ أَبْنَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ وَأَنْفُسَنَا وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ نَبْتَهِلْ فَنَجْعَلْ لَعْنَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَاذِبِينَ

Should anyone argue with you concerning him (referring to Prophet Jesus), after the knowledge that has come to you, say, "Come! Let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, our souls and your souls, then let us pray earnestly and call down God's curse upon the liars." (***3:61***)

Through a careful review of the books of *tafseer,* one will notice that the Qur'an *does* mention who the Ahlul-Bayt are.

In addition to revealing who the Ahlul-Bayt are, the Qur'an also praises them in several instances.

God revealed an entire chapter of the Qur'an for the occasion when Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn vowed to fast for three days out of gratitude to God. Each night, they prepared to break their fast when unexpectedly a needy person came to their door seeking assistance. On the first night, an indigent man came; the second night, an orphan; and the third night, a freed non-Muslim captive arrived at the doorstep.

The members of the household (Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn and their servant Fiddah) voluntarily gave all of their food away to those in need on all three nights - even Hasan and Husayn who were young children remained hungry for three days until the Prophet came and found the entire family extremely weak from hunger.

يُوفُونَ بِالنَّذْرِ وَيَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا كَانَ شَرُّهُ مُسْتَطِيرًا وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لاَ نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلاَ شُكُورًا إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِنْ رَبِّنَا يَوْمًا عَبُوسًا قَمْطَرِيرًا فَوَقَاهُمُ اللَّهُ شَرَّ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ وَلَقَّاهُمْ نَضْرَةً وَسُرُورًا

They fulfill their vows and fear a day whose ill will be widespread. They give food, for the love of Him, to the needy, the orphan and the prisoner, [***saying,***] ***"We feed you only for the sake of God. We do not want any reward from you, nor any thanks. Indeed we fear from our Lord a day, frowning and fateful." So God saved them from the ills of that day, and granted them freshness and joy.*** (***76:7-11***)

Most pivotally, the Qur'an also refers to the position of the Ahlul-Bayt as His successors to the Prophet.

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

***Your guardian* (*wali*) *is only God, His Apostle, and the faithful ones who maintain the prayer and give the zakat* (*alms-giving*) *while bowing down.* (*5:55*)**

There is some disagreement amongst the schools of thought about this verse 5:55, in particular to the word *"wali"* and its meaning. *"Wali"* in this context does not mean "friend," (as one of the multiple meanings that this word carries); but rather, it means "guardian." Both Sunni and Shia commentators agree that this verse refers directly to Ali b. Abi Talib who gave away his ring to a beggar while in the state of *ruku* during his prayer. However, in order to gloss over this verse, some Muslims confine the meaning of *"wali"* in this verse to "friend," and maintain that God revealed this verse just to tell us who our friends are, however for the Shia understanding, this verse is an explicit affirmation of Imam Ali's guardianship of the Muslim nation after the Prophet.

The role of Ali b. Abi Talib in being assigned as his successor and in guarding the message of Islam was extremely crucial that God Himself ordered the Prophet to convey to the masses, on a grand scale, that Ali would be his successor; in fact, God told the Prophet that if he did not inform the people, then the entire twenty-three years of revelation and the message of the religion of Islam would have been a waste.

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ بَلِّغْ مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِن رَّبِّكَ وَإِنْ لَّمْ تَفْعَلْ فَمَا بَلَّغْتَ رِسَالَتَهُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْصِمُكَ مِنَ النَّاسِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لاَ يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ﴾

***O Apostle! Communicate that which has been sent down to you from your Lord, and if you do not, then you will not have communicated His message, and God shall protect you from the people. Indeed God does not guide the faithless people.* (*5:67*)**

Although reluctant, since the Prophet knew that a few powerful figures around him would not approve, the Prophet heeded the command of God at a major event known as Ghadir Khum (which took place after Hajj, at a crossroad in the desert were the Muslims from various nations would separate from one another to make their way home), in front of thousands of Muslims, he irrevocably declared Ali as his successor. Only after Ali b. Abi Talib was appointed as the successor of the Prophet (at this final major event in the history of Islam) did God then perfect and prefer the message of Islam.

﴿ أَلْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الإِسْلاَمَ 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*)**

It is vital for us to be aware of the importance of the Ahlul-Bayt and what their role is in the preservation and protection of Islam. The Prophet of Islam has said, “By the One who holds my soul in His hands, on the Day of Resurrection, no servant of God will be able to step forward without being asked about four things: 1. How did you spend your life; 2. How did you care for and utilize your body; 3. How did you accumulate and spend your wealth?” the last of which is, “love and loyalty to us, the Ahlul-Bayt.”[47] Therefore, we will be questioned about them and we must prepare ourselves in this life to answer God in this regards.

Within the various verses of the Qur’an, God has given us the information we require to recognize and understand the significance of the Ahlul-Bayt. Nevertheless, some people refuse to accept these verses because they do not explicitly contain the names of who the Ahlul-Bayt are; however, we state with certainty that God did not need to mention their names because the job of explaining the Qur’an and elaborating on its finer points was the responsibility of the Noble Prophet.

On more than one occasion the Prophet not only mentioned who his Ahlul-Bayt were, but he even named the twelve successors after him, described their characteristics, and this is a fact which both Sunni and Shia sources attest to.

The book of God is a book of principles, not explicit details: God tells us to pray, but He does not tell us how to pray; God tells us to pay charity, but He does not tell us how much to give; God tells us to follow the Prophet’s successors, but He does not mention their names. He left these tasks to the Prophet to explain to us in detail. God tells the Prophet that He has given him the Book and it is his duty to teach it, thus He wanted us to recognize the magnitude of the Sunnah and commanded us to unconditionally follow the orders of the Prophet.

﴿وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ﴾

Take whatever the Apostle gives you, and relinquish whatever he forbids you, and be wary of God. Indeed God is severe in retribution. (***59:7***)

God also wants us to understand that the Qur’an has a deeper meaning above the apparent reading of the verses.

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُّحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلاَّ اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلاَّ أُوْلُواْ الأَلْبَابِ﴾

It is He who has sent down to you the Book. Parts of it are definitive verses, which are the mother of the Book; while others are metaphorical. As for those in whose hearts is deviance,

they pursue what is metaphorical in it, courting temptation and courting its interpretation. But no one knows its interpretation except God and those firmly grounded in knowledge; they say, "We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord." And none take admonition (***from it***) ***except those who possess intellect.*** (***3:7***)

Those who are "grounded with knowledge" and "understand the allegorical (*mutashabihat*) verses" are only the Ahlul-Bayt.

Like the Qur'an, the authentic Sunnah is perfect - everything that the Prophet said came from God and as the Word of God clearly states, the Prophet never erred.

﴿ وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْـهَوَى . إِنْ هُوَ إِلاَّ وَحْيٌ يُوحىٰ ﴾

Nor does he speak out of [***his own***] ***desire: it is just a revelation that is revealed*** [***to him***]. (***53:3-4***)

The books of history narrate that the Prophet had a companion who used to take notes of everything that he said, until one day someone told that companion to stop writing everything down because the Prophet was human and could make a mistake like anyone else. The Prophet replied that everything he said was the truth and instructed the man to continue writing his words.

Unfortunately throughout history, some people tried to suppress the Sunnah of the Prophet because they feared that it impinged on their hegemony. In particular, many of those who took over the caliphate tried to silence and remove the traditions about the merits of the Ahlul-Bayt, since they knew that such words from the Prophet threatened their power base. It is for this reason that the traditions of the Prophet went unwritten for over one hundred years after his death.[48]

Historical records show that the reason why the first and second caliph prohibited the writing of the hadith was so that people would not get confused between the words of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet. However, this is an elementary excuse because the people at that time were quite familiar with the esteemed style of the Qur'an, since they were experts in the science of poetry, and they were aware of the fact that the Qur'an had surpassed all poetic lines.

Even though the Prophet had commanded people to transcribe his sayings, the insight for recording the hadith amongst a specific sect of Muslims surfaced during the reign of Umar b. Abd al-Aziz. By that time, some hadiths had already been corrupted. In particular, two pivotal hadiths that were related to the Ahlul-Bayt were altered: "I am leaving behind two weighty things: the Qur'an and my Ahlul-Bayt,"[49] and "There will be twelve successors after me, and all of them will be from Bani Hashim." [50]

In the first narration, "Ahlul-Bayt" was changed to "Sunnah." The reason for this alteration was clear because the ruling parties wanted to diminish the emphasis and role of the Ahlul-Bayt within society. In the second tradition, "Bani Hashim" was changed to "Quraysh." This too is clear since the people in

political authority were not from the Bani Hashim and they wanted to maintain their legitimacy to rule.

If some individuals were brazen enough to alter the hadith, then they may even have attempted to tamper with the Qur'an as well, just like other previous Divinely-revealed books were altered, and thus had the Qur'an named the Ahlul-Bayt explicitly, some people may have tried to replace those names with the names of others. God did not will for His final revelation to be altered, and thus in order to protect its sanctity, He only referred to the Ahlul-Bayt by indication, and in this way He preserved the integrity of His message for the rest of history.

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

Indeed We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it (from corruption). (15:9)

Although the Qur'an does not name the Ahlul-Bayt directly, their contribution to Islam is unmatched, and their role is paramount in our lives. Therefore, we need to love and respect them the way the Prophet wanted us to, and the best way to do that is to follow the guidance which they have left behind.

قُلْ لاَ أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلاَّ الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَى

Say (O Muhammad), "I do not ask from you any reward for it (the 23 years of struggling to bring the religion of Islam) except the affection (love) for [my] relatives." (42:23)

Repentance: Turning Back to God

Featured Themes:

Mercy; Forgiveness; Repentance; Forgetfulness; The Three Major Sins

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلاَّ اللَّهُ وَلَمْ يُصِرُّوا عَلَى مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

And those who, when they commit an indecent act or wrong themselves, remember God, and plead [God's] forgiveness for their sins - and who forgives sins except God? - and who do not persist in what they have committed while they know. (3:135)

every day is a new day to turn back to god - no matter what we have done, God's mercy and forgiveness are always present. Even if we are confident of our good deeds, we should still call upon God for His forgiveness because no one could ensure direct entrance into Paradise. Even our Prophet prayed, hence we too should pray to God to deal with us through His grace, rather than His justice.

All of the prophets (despite the fact that they were all sinless) constantly pleaded for God's forgiveness. Even the final Prophet Muhammad used to stand at night and cry to his Lord until God revealed to him:

﴿ لِيَغْفِرَ لَكَ اللَّهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِكَ وَمَا تَأَخَّرَ وَيُتِمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ وَيَهْدِيَكَ صِرَاطًا مُسْتَقِيمًا ﴾

That God may forgive you what is past of your sin and what is to come, and that He may perfect His blessings upon you, and guide you on a straight path. (***48:2***)

Prophet Muhammad engaged in such prayers and shed tears despite the fact that he was free of sin. Indeed, we can learn how to seek forgiveness by following his example. Ali b. Abi Talib has also given us many exquisite prayers, such as *Dua Kumayl* and *Dua Al-Sabah* to show us how to approach God.

When we study the lives of the prophets and the imams, we see that they continuously emphasized the importance of repentance because they understood how vital it is for us to repair our relationship with God.

﴿ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴾

Turn to God in repentance all of you O faithful believers, so that you may be felicitous. (***24:31***)

Sometimes we forget how fortunate we are to live under the care of such a forgiving Lord. If our Lord was vengeful and full of anger, then we would have surely perished a long time ago. God tells us in a hadith *al-Qudsi* that He anxiously waits for wrongdoers to feel remorse and turn back to Him, and when they do repent, He then rejoices more than that person who was stranded in the middle of a desert, in the dark of the night who finally finds his companions after being all alone!

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ ﴾

Indeed God loves the penitent ones and He loves those who keep clean. (***2:222***)

Today, some religions teach that in order for a person to repent, one has to confess his sins to another human being; meaning that you have to share your guilt with a mere mortal and then only can you be forgiven of your sins. Other ideologies teach that simply believing in Jesus will save you – and one can enter Paradise just because you acknowledge him as your savior.

However, Islam teaches otherwise, if we commit a sin, we should not tell anyone about it – not our spouse, parents, friends or even a religious scholar because God wants *us* to protect our own honor. We must keep in mind that one day, our closest friends may betray us, however God Almighty will never deceive His servants, and He wants to keep our secrets to ourselves and between us and Him alone.

The only time we are permitted to mention our sin is in the case of a criminal offense, otherwise we should only share what we did with God and no one else. An example of this in our present world can be witnessed by a mother who covers up her child's weaknesses and faults in the presence of others, so as to not disgrace her child, but we believe that God will cover the sins of the believers even more so through His love and never-ending mercy.

However, we must realize that our repentance from sins must be quick because when we commit sins, it distances us away from God and since we cannot afford to remain away from Him, we must make amends immediately after sinning, otherwise this separation from God will cause us spiritual sufferings. Being cut off from God is much worse than being imprisoned in this world, for if we lose our connection with Him, then we will have nothing left.

Although we need to work very hard to avoid sinning and committing any acts against the laws of God, no matter how small they may be, but despite this reality it is part of the experience of life. Everyone, except the prophets and the imams, make mistakes. If we commit a sin using our body, then we are immediately aware of it; if we know we have used our hands to steal or our eyes to look at what is forbidden, then we know it is wrong. Knowing that we used our bodily gift, which He has conferred upon us, to disobey Him is a mistreatment of that gift, and thus we have to repent for those sins immediately.

Another category of sins which exist but are less obvious is the desire to commit a sin and this can be just as bad as committing the sin itself. Although we will not be punished for a mere thought of committing a sin; nonetheless, extreme caution must be exercised when the thought appears in our mind, lest God should test us and make the opportunity available for us to even 'attempt' to break one of His laws, and therefore we really need to try and suppress such thoughts.

The most elusive type of sin is forgetfulness or heedlessness of God – *ghaflah*. Although God is transcendent, He is also very near, but we sometimes forget His presence due to the satanic influences over our souls or our own misdeeds.

﴿ وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ ﴾

Certainly We have created man and We know to what his soul tempts him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein. (***50:16***)

In a hadith *al-Qudsi*, God shares a beautiful thought with us that states, "…the heart of a believer is God's sanctuary." Therefore, by keeping Him in our hearts we are sanctifying ourselves, and we should keep ourselves free from sin. We need to constantly remember God in our minds, and when we do, He will then reside in our hearts.

We need to realize that being negligent of God could be perilous.

نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ

They have forgotten God, so He has forgotten them. (***9:67***)

If we forgot God, then nothing can save us and artificial prayers will be of no avail. We must be cautious not to fall into the trap of being heedless of God, and try continuously to keep His remembrance alive within us.

All sins fall into two categories: major and minor. Despite the fact that no sin is insignificant because it is still a violation of a command of the Almighty, still God has promised us in the Qur'an:

إِنْ تَجْتَنِبُوا كَبَائِرَ مَا تُنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ نُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَنُدْخِلْكُمْ مُدْخَلاً كَرِيمًا

If you avoid the major sins that are forbidden, then We will absolve you of your misdeeds, and admit you to a noble abode. (***4:31***)

As long as we avoid the major sins He will overlook the minor ones – of course, if we are not committing them intentionally.

While scholars debate about the exact number of the "major sins," God mentions three incontestable ones:

وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَدْعُونَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَـهاً آخَرَ وَلَا يَقْتُلُونَ النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا يَزْنُونَ وَمَن يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ يَلْقَ أَثَامًا

Those who do not invoke another god besides God; and do not kill a soul [***whose life***] ***God has made inviolable, except with due cause; and do not commit fornication. Whoever does these will encounter its retribution.*** (***25:68***)

Polytheism (*shirk*), murder, and fornication all merit the title of "major sin," and each one carries a severe penalty. Anyone who commits one of these three will receive a dual punishment because these sins are intertwined with some form of polytheism, which by far, is the worst sin.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لاَ يَغْفِرُ أَن يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَن يَشَاء وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ افْتَرَى إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا

Indeed God does not forgive that any partner should be ascribed to Him, but He forgives anything besides that to whomever He wishes; and whoever ascribes partners to God has indeed fabricated [***a lie***] ***in great sinfulness.*** (***4:48***)

Although most people today are not guilty of outright polytheism, still some may occasionally harbor thoughts that resemble polytheism.

﴿ وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِاللَّهِ إِلاَّ وَهُمْ مُشْرِكُونَ﴾

And most of them do not believe in God without ascribing partners to Him. (***12:106***)

For example, according to Imam as-Sadiq, if you lose your job and fear starvation, then you are committing a form of polytheism because God, not your manager is the one who sustains you. As long as we feel that our sustenance or our happiness depends on others, we are guilty of a form of polytheism, since God is the only true provider and everyone else – whether it is parents, teachers, relatives, or friends are just means for us.

﴿الَّذِي خَلَقَنِي فَهُوَ يَهْدِينِ. وَالَّذِي هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِي وَيَسْقِينِ. وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ. وَالَّذِي يُمِيتُنِي ثُمَّ يُحْيِينِ. وَالَّذِي أَطْمَعُ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ لِي خَطِيئَتِي يَوْمَ الدِّينِ﴾

(***The One***) ***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; who will make me die, then He will bring me back to life, and who I hope, will forgive me my iniquities on the Day of Retribution.*** (***26:78-82***)

After polytheism, the next most severe crime is murder.

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

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

The murderer will receive a double punishment such that he will die as a faithless person for taking the life of an innocent person, and not only will that person reside in Hell, but the curse of God (exclusion from His mercy) will descend upon him as well.

After murder, the next major sin is indulging in unlawful sexual relations. According to Prophet Muhammad, anyone who commits this sin will suffer three immediate consequences in this world and they are: the person's sustenance will be tightened, their lifespan will be shortened, and they will leave this world in disgrace. Society will not respect such a person and they will die faithless. Then, on the Day of Judgment, God will direct His wrath upon that person.

We cannot say that we have not been warned about the punishments, and even though God has promised to forgive us for our mistakes, He will also take us to account for our insincerity. He will not

allow us to insult His status by sinning knowingly and then just assuming that we will be forgiven. If we have erred, then all that we can do is repent (*tawbah*). If we are truly sincere, then He will open up a way for us to return to Him.

إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُوْلَئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا

Except those who repent, attain faith, and act righteously. For such, God will replace their misdeeds with good deeds, and God is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful. (***25:70***)

In order for our repentance to be accepted, first we need to admit our sin and seriously vow never to repeat it, for God will not accept our repentance if we just claim to be penitent. Rather, our remorse needs to come from our heart and at the last stage of repentance we need to do whatever we can to rectify our wrong doings. Although many times, we cannot compensate people for what bad we have done to them, however we have to at least try – if we stole something, we have to return it; if we slandered someone, we have to ask them for forgiveness. Most importantly, we have to do what we can to heal our own souls, for we are the first victims when we transgress against our Lord.

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِي إِذَا دَعَانِي فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

When My servants ask you about Me, [***tell them that***] ***I am indeed near. I answer the supplicant's call when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me, and let them have faith in Me, so that they may fare rightly.*** (***2:186***)

From the verses of the Qur'an and the sayings of the infallibles we are told that the best time to repent is in the middle of the night – when everyone else is asleep, we should turn to Him and acknowledge what we have done wrong. Reflect on the acts that we have committed and their consequences, and then reach out for His mercy. Speak to Him and seek His forgiveness. Make a sincere effort to perform *Tahajud* (the Night Prayer), as we have been told that every good deed has a fixed reward for it other than *Tahajud* – for its rewards are limitless. We need to reflect upon our negative actions and in the darkness of the night, we should cry over what we have done; for the Prophet of Islam has promised, "Shedding one tear in the middle of the night extinguishes oceans of God's wrath." Indeed, the night prayer is one of the best ways to approach Him.

We close with a prayer from the Prophet on forgiveness:

O God, You are my Lord; there is no god but You. You created me and I am your slave; and I am faithful to my responsibility to You and my promise to You, as best as I am able to be. I seek refuge with You from the ill of what I have done. I return to You with the blessings that You have bestowed, and I return to You with the sins that I have committed. So please forgive me, for no one forgives the sins except

You.

The Empowering Prayers

Featured Themes:

Prayers; Lawful & Unlawful Foods

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ ۝ إِلاَّ أَصْحَابَ الْيَمِينِ ۝ فِي جَنَّاتٍ يَتَسَآءَلُونَ ۝ عَنِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ۝ مَا سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرَ ۝ قَالُوا لَمْ نَكُ مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ ۝ وَلَمْ نَكُ نُطْعِمُ الْمِسْكِينَ ۝ وَكُنَّا نَخُوضُ مَعَ الْخَائِضِينَ ۝ وَكُنَّا نُكَذِّبُ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۝ حَتَّى أَتَانَا الْيَقِينُ ۝ فَمَا تَنْفَعُهُمْ شَفَاعَةُ الشَّافِعِينَ ۝

Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds. Except the Companions of the Right Hand. (They will be) in Gardens (of Delight): they will question each other, and (ask) of the Sinners, "What led you into the fire of Hell?" They will say, "We were not among those who prayed; Nor were we among those who fed the indigent; But we used to talk vanities with vain talkers; And we used to deny the Day of Judgment, until there came to us (the Hour) that is certain." Then no intercession of (any) intercessors will profit them. (74:38-48)

one of the most fundamental forms of communication between us and God is the canonical prayer (*salat*). The prayer is our time to speak with God and remember Him throughout the day; but should we lose that vital link to Him, our lives will be deeply affected. All of our good deeds risk to be wasted, for there is a tradition which states, "Prayer is a pillar of religion. If it is accepted, then everything else is accepted. However, if it is rejected, then everything else will be rejected."[51] Without the prayer, we cannot rely on anything else that we do.

Although God always listens to His servants, prayer is the most effective way to reach Him. A tradition reads, "Prayer is the ascension of a believer."[52] Through our prayer, we can elevate ourselves to the highest status before God Almighty.

Unfortunately, many people, young and old alike, do not enjoy praying. They consider their prayers a burden and just go through the motions to appease others or to lessen their guilty conscience. They pray because they have to, not because they want to and they do not see much purpose in it. The fault is not in the prayer itself but in the person – if we do not put ourselves in the right frame of mind for the prayer, then we will find it uninteresting and not uplifting the way it should be.

Therefore, in order to enjoy our prayers, one of the most important qualities we have to cultivate is humility.

الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلاَتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ۝

Those who humble themselves in their prayers. (***23:2***)

Humility is a constant state of mind; and it should not just set in at the time of prayers. If during the day, we waste time, use profanity, or behave irreverently, then we will not be able to develop the reverence of God when it is time to pray. If at night, someone flirts or chats on the Internet or phone with a stranger until dawn, then focusing on God during the morning prayer will be close to impossible. God is pure, and we can only reach Him when we have purified ourselves. If we contaminate our souls by infringing upon His limits, then we need to repent so we can reestablish our link with Him. Otherwise, there is no magic button to turn impiety into piety. Maintaining a spirit of humility is indeed a lifelong task.

In addition to guarding ourselves spiritually, we also have to guard ourselves physically and watch what we eat.

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الرُّسُلُ كُلُوا مِنْ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ﴾

O apostles! Eat of the good things and act righteously. Indeed I know best what you do. (***23:51***)

Unlawful food (not halal or forbidden) will have an effect on our souls. Some people think that when they eat at non-halal restaurants the food will only affect their bodies; but in fact, it will affect their souls as well. We are not only what we eat physically, but even spiritually. The Prophet warned the community, "A single, unlawful morsel will prevent your supplications from being answered, and your prayers from being accepted."

As much as possible, it is better to avoid eating food prepared in restaurants, fast-food places, or cafeterias. If your family provides lawful (halal) food, then try to restrict yourself to what they have prepared. Whenever you eat outside, you never know where the food has been, what has been added to it, or who has had a hand in preparing it. Every year, Muslims discover that more and more of the food claimed as being "halal" are fraudulently labeled. We should not take this chance because eating unlawful food will directly affect our relationship with God.

Food does not become unlawful just because it is slaughtered incorrectly; it also becomes unlawful if it is purchased through illegitimate income. In order to prevent your food from harming you, you need to make sure that you are acquiring it through legitimate earnings as well.

When we are able to purify our body and soul, our reverence will become tangible. It has been recorded in history that when the time for prayers used to set-in, Imam Ali b. Husayn Zain al-Abideen would become pale and start to tremble. His family would ask him what was wrong, and he would reply, "Do you not know with Whom I am about to stand before? I am about to stand before the Omnipotent Power of the heavens and earth." If we keep in mind Who we are speaking to, then we will never be tired of our prayers or feel it as a burden.

However, lack of reverence can also show its traces. One day, when Imam Ali b. Abi Talib entered a mosque, he found a fidgety man praying and playing with his beard. When he finished his prayers, The Imam informed him that if his heart and soul were devout, then his reverence would have spread to his limbs. Since his heart was not present in his prayers, his body reflected his lack of attention.

In order to truly develop humility before God, we need to understand Him.

﴿ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَآءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ ﴾

Only those of God's servants having knowledge fear Him. Indeed God is All-Mighty, All-Forgiving. (***35:28***)

Due to the fact that the Prophet understood his Lord, he used to seclude himself before his mission in the cave of Hira in Mecca for one month or so at a time, to communicate alone with God. He enjoyed these times more than anything else because he knew with Whom he was talking to. After experiencing that communion, the glamour of life meant nothing to him. In fact, God had to advise the Prophet not to deprive his physical body from sleep in His remembrance.

﴿ مَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لِتَشْقَى ﴾

We did not send down to you the Qur'an that you should be distress. (***20:2***)

The other prophets and imams were the same. Despite his immense involvement in society, Ali b. Abi Talib was described as someone who was estranged from the glamour of the world. He was said to be a person who sought solace with God in the solitude of the night; and he would spend hours speaking to God and never become bored. If we were acquainted with God, like the intimate friends of God were, then we would love to continue praying.

There is a famous story from Mashhad, Iran, in which there lived a young, beautiful princess named Gowhar Shah who built an elaborate mosque. After the last tile had been laid down, she wanted to be the first one to pray inside the mosque so she sent everyone home.

She was not aware that one of the laborers was curious to know what she looked like. Thinking that he would never have the chance to see the king's daughter again, he crept inside the mosque and hid behind some carpets. He was all alone there when the king's daughter entered. She looked around, marveling at the magnificent architecture, and began to pray.

He was spellbound for he had never seen a more beautiful woman in his entire life. By the time she finished her prayers and left the mosque, he had fallen deeply in love with her.

Thereafter, he lost all interest in eating or sleeping. When his mother, who he lived alone with, asked him what was wrong, he told her that he wanted to marry the king's daughter. She chided him because they barely had enough food to eat – how could he hope to marry a princess?

His situation became desperate. Finally, his mother took pity on him and decided to take the risk of approaching the king. One day, she made her way to the palace and stood in line to speak to him. When her turn came, she told the king that she had an important request and begged him not to refuse it. He promised to grant her whatever she wanted. She then told him that her son wanted to marry his daughter.

Silence fell. The king's aides thought that he would punish her. After a moment, he raised his head and surprisingly agreed that her son could marry his daughter, but on one condition. Drawing in her breath, she asked what that condition was. She assumed that he would name an impossible sum of money, but instead, he simply told her, "Tell your son that the king sends his regards, and if he stands for *Tahajud* (the Night Prayer) for 40 nights, then he can marry the king's daughter."

Thrilled, she rushed home and gave her son the good news. At first, he was skeptical. He did not understand what *Tahajud* had to do with him marrying the princess. His mother insisted and reminded him that the king had given his word in front of all of the people; and so he agreed to do it.

Since he did not know how to pray *Tahajud*, he rushed to a local *sheikh* to learn how to perform it, and then that night, he began the prayers. At first, it was very difficult for him. His mother had to wake him up because he was not accustomed to rising at that time in the middle of the night. As the days passed, he began to adjust to his new routine. He even began to look forward to his midnight session with God, rather than dread it.

The forty days passed, but they made no mention of it to the king. Concerned and slightly irritated, the king sent the mother an official letter of summons. When she came to the royal court, he asked her what had happened, and she replied that her son had fulfilled the agreement, but he did not mention anything again about marrying the princess.

Troubled, she returned home and asked her son what was wrong. Did he not know that his wait was over? Had he forgotten that he could now marry the girl of his dreams?

His reply was as follows, "I know that the forty days are over; but when I asked you to go to the king, my heart was empty. I was lonely. Now, I have found a very dear friend. I can talk to Him every night, and He responds to me; thus I do not need anyone else."

This is a true story. God filled the emptiness in his heart through the prayers. Of course, this is not to say that you should abstain from marriage and do *Tahajud* instead. Rather, once a person has that connection with God, one would never want to give it up for anything else.

Hence, those who know their Lord in the true sense eagerly await their prayers. However, hearts that have been tainted by sins are distant from feeling God's nearness. The prayer is the nourishment of the soul, it is equivalent to food. When we are healthy, we enjoy eating, but when we are ill, we lose our appetite. When it comes to prayers, the virus is not in our bodies, but rather it is in our hearts.

يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَمَا يَخْدَعُونَ إِلاَّ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ ۝ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْذِبُونَ ۝

They seek to deceive God and those who have faith, yet they deceive no one but themselves, but they are not aware. There is a sickness in their hearts; then God increased their sickness, and there is a painful punishment for them because of the lies they used to tell. (***2:9–10***)

We have to keep ourselves spiritually healthy in order to maintain our enthusiasm for the prayers. If we lose our eagerness for the prayers, then it is a symptom that something is wrong.

Furthermore, in order to reap the benefits of communicating with God, we need to approach him with sincerity. A tradition says, "Prayer is not bowing or standing. Instead, it is your sincerity."[53] Therefore, the essence of prayer is your sincerity. If you pray in order to show off, then your prayers are worthless. Unfortunately, some people pray to impress others while some even pray to impress themselves.

Every form of worship can have a pitfall, and one of the pitfalls of the prayer is arrogance. Some people might let the lengthiness of their prayers get to their heads and imagine that those few extended minutes make them a noble person. They forget how small they are in comparison to the Creator, and how the entire purpose of the prayer is to instill humility in a person not pride. It is similar to the act of charity. God has warned us that we can destroy our charitable acts by mentioning them to the beneficiaries.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لاَ تُبْطِلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالأَذَى كَالَّذِي يُنفِقُ مَالَهُ رِئَاءَ النَّاسِ وَلاَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَكَهُ صَلْدًا لاَ يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ لاَ يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ ۝

O you who have faith! Do not render your charities void by reproaches and affronts, like those who spend their wealth to be seen by people and have no faith in God and the Last Day. Their parable is that of a rock covered with soil: a downpour strikes it, leaving it bare. They have no power over anything of what they have earned, and God does not guide the faithless lot. (***2:264***)

Our worship should have nothing to do with worldly repute; otherwise, it will become worthless, and it will be as if we never did them at all.

Finally, we need to understand what we are saying in our prayers. While reverence comes from spiritual connection, awareness comes from intellectual understanding. On the most basic level, we need to

know the meaning of the words which we recite in our prayers. Reciting incomprehensible syllables will not really help us much in this world or in the next.

As well, we need to ponder upon what we are saying. Although we repeat the plea "*ihdina sirat al-mustaqeem* (guide us on the straight path)" at least 17 times a day, oftentimes, we utter these words with our tongues, but not our hearts. We have to delve into the deeper meanings of what we are reciting. Each word and every gesture of the prayer has a deep meaning and great importance attached to it.

Even the phrase "Allahu Akbar (God is Great)" has insurmountable depth. One day, a man seated next to Imam as-Sadiq commented, "Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest)."

"God is the greatest?" the Imam asked him.

"Yes," he replied.

"Greater than who?" asked the Imam.

He paused for moment to think and then said, "Greater than everything."

"You have limited God by comparing Him to His creations," the Imam said. "God cannot be compared to anything in this universe."

The man asked, "So what does Allahu Akbar mean?"

"It means that God is too great to be described," replied the Imam.

Prayers have many aspects and depth. By reading the traditions on the prayers we can begin to contemplate and understand them better. The more we understand them, the more we will enjoy them and thank God for this priceless opportunity to turn our full attention towards Him.

Inter-Gender Relations

Featured Themes:

Mixed Gatherings; Dating; Marriage; Spouse Selection

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

And of 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***)

Almost everything from the tiniest particle to the largest creature has been created in pairs and human beings are no exception to this rule. In fact, our creation is a bit more complex because we are more social beings, programmed to find companionship with one another. It is in our innate nature to find our other half, get married, and raise a family – this is part of the human cycle of life. God has created marriage for our benefit; and the sanctity of marriage provides a means of spiritual, emotional, and physical fulfillment for human beings.

﴿ سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الأَزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا مِمَّا تُنْبِتُ الأَرْضُ وَمِنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَمِمَّا لاَ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴾

Immaculate is He who has created all the kinds of what the earth grows, and of themselves, and of what they do not know. (***36:36***)

Unlike other ideologies, Islam does not force us to suppress our natural desires. In fact, it sets the guidelines and criteria on how to best channel our natural instinct, while at the same time, also protects us from the dangers of promiscuity. Rather than allowing us to run uncontrolled and do whatever we feel like, Islam instructs us to control our desires in the most appropriate way. Ali b. Abi Talib says in *Nahjul Balaghah*, "Control your desires before they control you." Our Creator, Who knows what is best for us, has given us the correct way to handle our desires – and that is through the institute of marriage. Simultaneously, He has taught us how to behave with the opposite gender in order to avoid falling into inappropriate situations. He did this in order to protect us, as had there been wisdom in promiscuity, He would have permitted that, however He taught us how to limit the ways that we express our desires.

One of the most frequent questions asked is whether young Muslim boys and girls can talk to one another? Can they see each other or can they call, text, Facebook or Twitter people of the opposite gender? The answer to these varies according to the situation. In general, Islam has no problem with men and women interacting respectfully and responsibly in a decent setting, such as in an educational or spiritual setting. Take for example, the most sacred place on earth, which is the Ka'bah (Masjid al-Haram) in which men and women worship God side by side during Hajj season. He has permitted this because He knows that our intentions when we go there are solely for Him.

However, getting together just to waste time in private or public settings is not recommended. You might think you can go to a mixed wedding or birthday party or even a café and not run into problems, but God knows that even the best of us can be led into immoral actions. Usually the situation starts innocently, like studying and preparing for exams, but then the topic begins to drift off from the studying and onto private talk, and before you know it, emotions are connected, desires are stirred, and the unexpected can happen, but by then, it is too late. Therefore, He has not allowed attending these sorts of mixed gatherings, even if they are held in public setting or seem to appear innocent.

In order to prevent anything from happening in private, being alone with a non-*mahram* (non-family member) is not permitted. If a woman is not your mother, sister, wife, daughter, aunt or niece, then you

should not be alone with her, even if she is your cousin. Satan has sworn that, “Whenever two non-mahram people get together, I will be the third one there, and I will not leave them until I impel them to commit adultery.”[54]

You may not be aware of his presence, but he will be the third having the *shisheh* (tobacco water pipe), tea or coffee. Do not try to convince yourself that you are just studying together. It might begin with mathematics or theology, but it can very likely lead to something else. That is why God warns mankind in the Noble Qur’an that, “Do not approach adultery,”[55] not only is God telling us not to do it, but He insists – do not even get near it! Therefore, we need to avoid this road entirely.

A horrendous story is told about a thief who lived in Madinah during the time of the Prophet. He was not interested in stealing the wealth of the living; instead he preferred to steal the burial shrouds of the dead bodies. Whenever someone died, he would follow the funeral procession to see where the dead body was laid to rest. Then late at night, he would creep into that graveyard, unearth the deceased body, and take the shroud (*kafan*) to the market to sell.

He lived like this for a long time, until one day, the Prophet found him sobbing in the mosque. The Prophet asked him what was wrong. He replied that he had committed a terrible sin that God would never forgive him for.

“Is your sin greater than the heavens?” the Prophet asked.

He said it was.

“Is your sin greater than Earth?” the Prophet asked.

He said it was greater than that too.

“Is your sin greater than the oceans?” the Prophet asked.

He said it was even greater than them.

Finally, the Prophet asked him, “Is your sin greater than the mercy of God?”

“No, O Messenger of God,” he replied.

The Prophet encouraged him to relate what he had done so that he could find out the way to seek God’s forgiveness. He said that he used to make a living by stealing the shrouds from the dead bodies and then reselling them. In his neighborhood, a young lady was about to die from an illness. Knowing her time was short, she went to him and told him that she knew about his crimes.

He tried to deny it, but she told him that she had seen him going to the graveyard and begged him not to dig up her grave after she died. She even offered him new shrouds from the market to sell so that he would not have to take hers. Touched by her words, he agreed and a few days later, she died. As his

habit, he walked in the funeral procession and then came home. He was determined not to leave his house that night. But Satan came to him and started whispering about how much her shroud was worth. All that money was going to waste. She was dead now; she did not need it.

Finally, temptation overwhelmed him, and he hastened to the graveyard. Quickly, he dug up her body and pulled off her shroud. The full moon was illuminating her corpse. Suddenly, a new and more twisted idea came to his mind. He tried to resist it, but Satan kept whispering to him, “She is dead now.” Finally, he gave in to this horrible thought and did the sinful deed.

As he was climbing out of her grave, suddenly her voice called out to him, “May God disgrace you since you have violated and humiliated me among the dead!” He fled, guilty and terrified, and began begging for forgiveness of his evil act.

Soon after telling his story to the Prophet, he left the city and went to the mountains and continued to seek forgiveness. After forty days of penitence, God sent Angel Gabriel to tell the Prophet to relate to him that God had accepted his repentance, for he had been truly sincere.

This story shows how Satan and our desires can get the better of us. Our desires can blind us and be deadly. We cannot be sure that we will never do anything “too extreme.” We never know what may happen until the situation presents itself and then it may be too late! Satan has vowed to mislead all of us.

﴿ قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴾

He said, “My Lord! As You have consigned me to perversity, I will surely glamorize [***evil***] ***for them on earth, and I will surely pervert them.”*** (***15:39***)

Therefore, we need to prevent ourselves from getting into perilous situations before it is too late.

One way to keep ourselves from this type of harm is to abide by the Islamic prohibition of dating. It should be understood from the beginning that dating is not the same thing as spouse selection. Although dating and spouse selection do not usually go hand in hand, nonetheless, some Muslims today advocate “modernizing” Islam to make it compatible with Western customs and to allow their children to meet freely, so that they can find their own partners. However, there is no such thing as “Islamic dating,” just as there is no such thing as “Islamic dancing.” God has set the limits for a reason, and these limits will remain the same until the end of time, regardless of where we live, or what the day and age we are in.

Why is the Western form of dating not allowed?

To begin with, most of the time, boys and girls go out on a date to have fun, they are not searching for a life partner. The basis of dating is temporary, a passing enjoyment period, without any real form of

obligation or commitment to one another. It will not stand the test of time or survive adversity; and sadly one of them will eventually get hurt.

Some people swear that they can date and not do anything wrong. They will go out and “just talk.” How long can you “just talk?” A month? A year? Emotional involvement will eventually lead to physical involvement. Not only is that a sin, but you will even lose your sense of self–respect.

Boys who chase after girls to satisfy themselves are not interested in the institute of marriage. They just want to enjoy themselves. They are like wolves in human disguise and this is completely wrong. Women need to be respected, not used. If you let yourself be used, then you will regret it for the rest of your life. In addition, once you cross the line of having relationships outside of marriage, then you will find it very difficult in the future to content yourself with one partner, no matter how wonderful that person is. It will harm your future life and your marriage.

One may wonder that if “dating” is not permitted, then how Muslims are supposed to get married.

Seeking a spouse is different than seeking physical enjoyment. God has permitted the first, but prohibited the second. Islam encourages you to get to know your future spouse, but not alone. Islam does not teach us to rush into marriage. You should get to know your future partner, but through the proper means. People spend months shopping for a house or a car, so why not spend at least that long searching for a spouse? Take your time, and make sure that you are making the right decision. Visit the potential partner at their family home when others are present, and get the advice of others who know the person.

Although you do not need to solemnize the marriage (*aqd*) before speaking to each other; nonetheless, you have to be careful about what subject matters you discuss. Do not transgress to inappropriate topics. Court each other respectfully in a way that your future children would admire. If you do not conduct yourselves respectfully, then your children will be the first ones to lose respect for you.

What should one look for in a spouse?

While economic security and attractiveness are good, they are not the most important qualities to look for. Beauty and money come last. The most important quality that one should seek is religious integrity (*akhlaq*). Faith alone is not enough. You need someone who believes and acts upon their beliefs. A father once asked Imam Husayn what sort of man he should marry his daughter to. The Imam replied, “Marry your daughter to a man who fears God, for if he finds fault in her, he will still treat her well because he fears God.”[56] Likewise, a wife who acts on her religious integrity will keep the family intact. Keep this in mind when you are contemplating upon your partner – would this person be a great father or mother for my children?

After you are sure of his or her religious integrity, then look into the family. Genes are powerful and family habits are an integral part of a person. Some families are known for their generosity, and likewise,

some families are known for their miserly; thus, a girl should ensure that a man comes from a family that is giving and not stingy. If he is used to living in a family environment where money is deliberately restricted, then he will do the same to her in marriage, even though the tradition says, “A miserly person is distant from God, distant from the people, and distant from Paradise.”[57] Finally, be watchful about your future family in-law because they will become part of your family for the rest of your life. Marriage is a unification of two families, which may even include (the challenges of) two different cultures. The other family will become your children’s grandparents, aunts, and uncles. So consider them carefully and aim to find a spouse who has been raised in a decent family environment.

Aside from looking at the family, Ali b. Abi Talib also advised us not to be blinded by physical appearance, and to make sure that our future spouse is intelligent and open-minded. He advised us to avoid marrying someone unintelligent because it could be hereditary, and surely, no parent wants their child to inherit such a trait. When it comes to finding your life-long partner you have the absolute right to be selective. Also, keep in mind not be too emotional - allow wisdom to guide your decision.

No doubt, physical attraction is important. Islam does not discount it, but it should not be at the beginning of the list. You might meet someone who has an ordinary exterior, but on the inside there lies a beautiful soul. After you get to know them, you will think that they are the most beautiful person in the world. In contrast, you might meet someone who is gorgeous looking, but intolerable to love.

No matter how stunning they are now, they may become the ugliest person in the world in your eyes. Nonetheless, chemistry is important. God does not want us to have a nightmare every time we see our partner’s face! However, attractiveness should not be your only concern. If you find someone decent, then you will learn to love him or her for other qualities, such as honesty, nobility, commitment, and sacrifice. That is real love. Real love grows after years of staying together. Everything else beforehand is just an illusion.

Good Parenting

Featured Themes:

Role of Parents; Role of Child; Marriage

يَابُنَيَّ إِنَّهَا إِنْ تَكُنْ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ فَتَكُنْ فِي صَخْرَةٍ أَوْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ أَوْ فِي الأَرْضِ يَأْتِ بِهَا اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ. يَابُنَيَّ أَقِمِ الصَّلاَةَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنْ الْمُنكَرِ وَاصْبِرْ عَلَى مَا أَصَابَكَ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الأُمُورِ

(***Said Prophet Luqman***) ***O my son! Even if it should be the weight of a mustard seed, and*** [***even though***] ***it should be in a rock, or in the heavens, or in the earth, God will produce it. Indeed God is all-attentive, all-aware. O my son! Maintain the prayer and bid what is right and forbid what is wrong, and be patient through whatever may visit you. That is indeed the steadiest of courses.***

(***31:16–17***)

Parents hold an unrivaled level of esteem in Islam. God addresses the status of parents as being second only to His. In the same chapter of the Qur'an as the above mentioned passage, God says:

﴿ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ﴾

Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me is the return. (***31:14***)

He teaches us that we cannot be grateful to Him without first being grateful to our parents, and that we cannot worship Him without honoring them as well.

﴿وَقَضَى رَبُّكَ أَلاَّ تَعْبُدُواْ إِلاَّ إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا إِمَّا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِندَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلاَهُمَا فَلاَ تَقُل لَّهُمَآ أُفٍّ وَلاَ تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُل لَّهُمَا قَوْلاً 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***)

If our parents are still living, then we should thank God for the opportunity to have them in our lives, for being kind to our parents is the quickest way to earn His blessings. We will regret it when we lose that opportunity.

One day, a companion of the Prophet lost his mother. Although he was an adult and still had his father, he kept weeping for his mother until people began reminding him that she had gone to Paradise. He replied that he knew she was in Paradise, but he was crying for himself because when his mother was alive he had two wide gates to Paradise open, and now one of them was closed forever. Therefore, he was mourning at the loss of an opportunity to earn God's pleasure by serving his mother.

Elsewhere, it is written that a man who committed a terrible sin asked the Prophet how he could ever be forgiven. The Prophet did not tell him to pay charity or to perform the pilgrimage, instead he asked him whether his parents were still alive. When he said that his father was alive, the Prophet instructed him to serve him for the rest of his life. As the man left, the Prophet commented that had the man's mother been alive, God would have accepted his repentance much quicker.

Abu Zayd al-Bastami, an Islamic philosopher, says that he uncovered heights of spiritual knowledge simply by serving his mother. He relates that one night he was alone with his old, ill mother. It was bitterly cold and snowing outside. In the middle of the night, she woke up and told him that she was thirsty. At first, he did not want to brave the cold weather to go outside and bring her water, but he was her only son, so he trudged out into the snow to a nearby stream and brought back some water for her.

When he returned, she had fallen asleep again. He did not know what to do. On one hand, he did not want to leave the water next to her because he did not think that she would be able to find it, and on the other hand, he did not want to disturb her sleep, especially since she was ill. Finally, he decided to stand there and wait for her to wake up. He stood by her side all night long, holding the cup of water in his hand, until dawn broke and she woke up for the morning prayers. When she saw her son holding the cup of water, she prayed for him. He says that at that time, God uncovered spiritual truths in his heart, and he knew that it was a result of his mother's prayers.

That one simple act gave him so many blessings, but even so, it cannot make up for the years of trouble that mother spent raising him. It is narrated that, one day the Prophet met a man carrying his mother on his shoulders as he circled the Ka'bah. The man asked, "O Messenger of God, have I fulfilled my duty to her?" The Prophet replied, "You have not even repaid her for the pain of one contraction." Therefore carrying a parent on your back, taking them out, or bringing them medicine, can never make up for what they have done for you.

As your parents mature, so should your respect for them. No matter how old you are, your mother will always be your mother; and one should address her humbly. When you pray, pray for your parents and one of the best ways is to recite the following verse, at least once a day:

﴿ رَّبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا ﴾

My Lord! Have mercy on them, just as they reared me when I was a small child." (***17:24***)

Our parents merit our respect no matter how they have raised us. We may never understand, nor value parenthood until we become parents ourselves. Parenting is a huge responsibility.

Parents need to do their best to nurture their children into healthy adults. One of the primary responsibilities of parents, particularly fathers, is to provide for their children. According to a tradition, a man who fathers children but does not provide for them is cursed by God. Their welfare is his primary responsibility. During the time of the Prophet, one of the companions used to donate all of his wealth to the poor. When he died, he left nothing to bequeath to his children, and they went hungry. When they informed the Prophet about their situation, he replied, "Had you told me this about him earlier, then I would not have even allowed him to be buried in an Islamic cemetery."

Parents on the other hand also need to prevent themselves from going to an extreme when raising their children. Spoiling children will not prepare them for the reality and responsibilities of life. Some parents lavish their children with luxurious gifts to the point that their children exert pressure on them in order to maintain their lifestyle.

Instead of being an asset to you, they become a liability. This is why another tradition says, "Your sole concern should not be your wife and children. If they are religious, then God will take care of them; and if

they are not religious, then what business do you have with an adversary of God?"[58] For this reason, it is important to keep a balance, neither to over indulge, nor to disregard your children.

In addition to providing for your children physically, you also have to nurture them spiritually. You are your child's first teacher. In particular, young children will learn first from their mother.

Unfortunately, nowadays the word "mother" has become degraded. Many women bristle at being called mothers. They would rather be called a doctor, a lawyer, or a secretary – anything but a mother. However, being called a mother is one of the greatest honors. Your success today is most likely due to your mother. Had you had a neglectful mother, then your life may have been in disarray. A mother's impact on her child should not be underestimated.

It is extremely important to maintain a spiritual relationship with your children. Teach them about God and pray with them.

﴿ ...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***)

The prophets did not pray alone – they prayed with their families and children. In America, there is a beautiful saying, "A family who prays together stays together." This is very true, for if you want your family to remain united, then you need to worship together.

The best way to instruct your children is to simply be the best example you can be for them.

﴿ وَأْمُرْ أَهْلَكَ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَاصْطَبِرْ عَلَيْهَا﴾

And bid your family to prayer and be steadfast in its maintenance. (***20:132***)

When this verse was revealed, someone asked the Prophet, "I can barely protect myself from sins, and now God wants me to protect my wife and children as well? I cannot do that!" The Prophet replied, "It is enough that you enjoin upon them what you enjoin upon yourself and forbid them from what you forbid yourself."[59] This means in simplified terms that **practice what you preach**. Sometimes as parents we think that our children are not watching us, but in fact, they are watching our every move. Children are very alert of their parents' actions, they learn mainly by them, not so much by their words. If we cheat at work, then they will cheat at school. If we behave immodestly, then they will not be chaste. Preaching without practicing will have no effect.

﴿ كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ تَقُولُوا مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ﴾

It is greatly outrageous to God that you say that which you do not do. (***61:3***)

A tradition says that, "God curses those people who enjoin good but do not practice it; and He curses those people who forbid evil but do not abstain from it."[60]

There is a famous Muslim book on prayers and supplications called *Mafatih al-Jinan* (the *Keys to Paradise*). Although we have hundreds of prayer books, this one has attained a unique status due to the author's approach.

After completing it, the author, Sheikh Abbas al-Qummi, was about to publish it when he had an episteme. He said to himself that it would be useless to give it to others without first trying to perform every prayer and worship act in the book himself. So he took it back from the publisher and spent the next year praying every prayer and fasting every fast that he had written about, to make sure it was humanly possible to follow the recommendations contained in it. Only then did he submit the book for publication. This is one of the reasons that this book holds a special place; his humility is another reason.

The same lesson applies to how we raise our children. If we preach to them for hours about something, but do not practice it ourselves, then our words will fall on deaf ears. However, if we model what we would like them to do, then they will learn from our example. Our actions set the standard for them more than anything else. If we are good, then they will assume the role of goodness. On the other hand, if we lie, abuse or steal, then our children will assume that those things are the norm and permitted.

Parents' responsibilities do not end with raising their children. Parents also have a vital duty to facilitate their children's marriages.

These days, this responsibility seems to be getting neglected more and more. Islam places so much importance to the institute of marriage that it equates it as fulfilling half of one's religion. However, parents seem to neglect encouraging their mature children from fulfilling this aspect of life. They set education or a career as a first priority over marriage. In fact, some parents discourage or even refuse to discuss the subject.

Meanwhile, our mature youths of today are eager to get married. They are old enough to shoulder the responsibility, but some parents hinder them. If you stop or delay your children from getting married, then you will be held accountable before God, for that is one of the three primary duties of parents, which according to a tradition include: giving your child a good name, educating them, and marrying them (to good spouses).

Times have changed a lot. Our children are not being raised in the same environment as we may have lived in. When we were growing up there was a sense of innocence and morality. We lived within a generation that had a set of principled standards and limited boundaries. Today it is a different story – it seems that nothing is sacred or honored like before. Many of the innocence of our children are being lost

today; and the pressure is on; it hits them from every direction – be it from the peer–pressure at school, the movies, music, and even some of the books which they read. What they watch and hear affects them tremendously. You may keep them from talking to boys or girls at home, but the moment they step out of the house, they are mingling freely. We have to fear God and keep our children from being misled by encouraging them to follow the best route, which is marriage before they go down other avenues. If one child goes astray, the entire family will suffer.

During the time of the Prophet, marriage was relatively simple. We Muslims have turned it into a nightmare. Do not say that your son does not have enough money to get married because God will provide for him in the marriage. Do not say that they have to finish college first. Some parents will never be pleased because they will keep delaying their child from marrying until their post doctorate, and by that time they will be very selective about potential partners.

A lady asked me whether women could propose to men or not. The answer is of course they can, but they should also keep in mind that there are manners and ways in how to go about it; the consultation of the parents is critical in this approach. Once, the Prophet was giving a sermon in the mosque when a Muslim lady stood in front of everyone and asked the Prophet to find her a husband.

The Prophet asked the men present who wanted to marry her, and finally, a man stood. The Prophet asked him what he had to offer her as a marriage gift (*mahr*). He said he did not have anything. Then Prophet Muhammad asked him if he knew any verses of the Qur'an. He said that he knew *Surah al–Fatihah* (the Opening). The Prophet asked her whether she would agree to marry him on the condition that he would teach her *Surah al–Fatihah*. She accepted, and they were married. It was that simple, and it can be less complicating than it is even today.

Today, the gift of marriage (*mahr*) has skyrocketed way out of proportion. Men who want to marry are prevented by the high cost of the gift marriage. We have to stop overburdening our future generations and facilitate marriage for them. Marriage is not a business transaction. You are not selling your daughter. The marriage gift (*mahr*) is a symbolic gesture of love and respect; just look at the marriage gift that Ali b. Abi Talib gave to Fatima al–Zahra – it was so simple, yet theirs was the most successful marriage. Ahlul–Bayt did not demand hundreds of thousands of dollars for their daughters. We need to learn from them and then apply this into our own lives.

We also need to learn how to communicate with our children. This lack of communication is one reason why we are not hearing their voices. Often youths come to me first to discuss their personal issues, when instead they should begin with their parents. It may be normal to have a generation gap, but among the Islamic community in the West, the generation gap has become a gaping chasm. Parents and children either do not communicate well or they misunderstand each other. That is why many of them at the age of eighteen want to escape from the home. Some parents simply do not make time to talk to their children. They spend all of their time at work or on other things; although they thank God for granting them the opportunity to come to the West and make money, they do not realize that their

children are slipping out of their hands.

There is a story that circulated about a boy who never saw his father. His father would leave home before he woke up and came back home after he was asleep. The son missed his father terribly. Finally, he decided to force himself to stay awake until his father came home from work. Hours passed, and he kept yawning until at last his father came through the door. As soon as he saw his father, he asked him how much he made per hour. Annoyed, his father told him he that he makes twenty-five dollars an hour. The boy then held out twenty-five dollars and asked his father to sell him an hour of his time. Just imagine how sad this is. We cannot just focus on our children's physical well-being, but then ignore them as individuals.

Fathers are not the only ones who are guilty of this. Even some mothers choose to leave their young children at a babysitter or day care so they can work even though some do not need the money. I met a mother once who earned twelve hundred dollars a month at her job. Nearly nine hundred dollars of it went to childcare and the rest of it she spent on gas. At the end of the month, she had no money left, but she kept on working.

What she did not realize was that not only was she not making any money, but she was losing her children and her energy as well in the process. These early years in the lives of children can never be made up. They will be permanently affected by your actions. You have to do whatever you can to ensure that you do not miss this crucial time in their lives. What happens then will set the stage for how you interact with each other later on.

Without establishing a foundation of proper communication, both generations will stubbornly insist on following their ways. Most of the time, the older generation is entrenched in their traditions, and the younger generation is enchanted with the Western lifestyle. Many young people suffer an identity crisis. At home, they are Abdullah, and outside, they become Dave. They want to assimilate, and try to fit into society.

One day, a young man came to the mosque and told me that his name was Bob. He did not look like "Bob!" So I asked him what his real name was. He told me that it was Abbas. What is wrong with Abbas? What better name could you possibly have? We need to help our children be proud of who they are, and not at all feel ashamed. By helping them to grow up physically and spiritually sound, we will be able to instill pride in their beliefs. That way, they will be fully ready to face the challenges of society and influence in a positive way, rather than being caught up in the negative trend of it.

Events Precipitating Ashura

Featured Themes:

The Prophet's Character; Major Battles; Imam Husayn; Opponents of the Prophet: Abu Sufyan,

Muawiyah, & Yazid

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلاَّ رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِن مَّاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَى أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَمَن يَنقَلِبْ عَلَى عَقِبَيْهِ فَلَن يَضُرَّ اللّهَ شَيْئًا وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ

Muhammad is but an apostle; [***other***] ***apostles have passed before him. If he dies or is slain, will you 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***)

in order to understand why Imam Husayn was murdered on the day of Ashura, the tenth of Muharram in the year 61 ah, we need to review the history of Islam from its inception. The chain of events that led to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn did not begin a day or two before Ashura. Rather, it began a long time before that.

The first century of Islam was characterized by three important campaigns. Unlike border skirmishes, these conflicts threatened the integrity of Islam itself. The first attack was against the Prophet, the second against Ali b. Abi Talib, and the third against Imam Husayn, which ultimately led to the Battle of Ashura. Each campaign was related to the other, and each one, if not repelled, would have proven deadly to the nascent Muslim community.

The first onslaught was carried out against the Prophet by the pagans of Mecca. Threatened by the spreading fame of the Prophet and his mission, the pagans decided to end this menace to their hegemony by brutally torturing the Prophet and the early Muslims. The Prophet remained neutral for several years, but as the attacks and killings worsened, the Prophet was forced to defend his community, although that was not what he was sent for.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلاَّ رَحْمَةً لِلْعَالَمِينَ

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

The Prophet was sent to bring mercy to humankind, not violence. However, in order to keep the mercy of the divine message alive, he had to protect the Muslims.

Even so, he never lost hope in human potential. He was the only prophet never to invoke the Lord's wrath onto his people. Prophets Noah and Jonah called upon the wrath of God onto their communities. Virtually most of the prophets cursed their people, except for Prophet Muhammad, since he was sent to bring mercy and love not chastisement. Despite all of the cruelty that his enemies subjected him to, he never mistreated them, in fact, he pardoned and forgave them.[61] As a result, even his enemies could speak no evil about him.

﴿ وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلى خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴾

And indeed you possess a great character. (***68:4***)

The Prophet's moral standing was unfathomable. When a Jewish man came to Madinah and asked the second caliph to describe the Prophet's character, the second caliph directed him to Ali b. Abi Talib, who was sitting in the mosque. Ali b. Abi Talib rebutted the man if he could put the glamour of this worldly life into words; to which the man replied that he could not. Ali b. Abi Talib asked him how he could then put the Prophet's character into words, since he was far more indescribable than this mere physical world.

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا. وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا ﴾

O Prophet! Indeed We have sent you as a witness, as a bearer of good news and as a warner, and a summoner to God by His permission, and as a radiant lamp. (***33:45-46***)

The Prophet spread light and compassion to everyone, even to his enemies, and he continues to do so today even though he is not physically in the world. His mercy reached everyone, even those who stoned him, exiled him, and persecuted him. He never said one word against them. He was truly a blessing for all of mankind.

Today, some evangelical leaders claim that the Prophet was evil. However, it is not possible to bring a single fact from history to prove this. Granted, unfortunate incidents do occur today within the Muslim world, but they are not indicative of the Prophet. People of the book make mistakes too, but that does not mean that Jesus and Moses were evil. If you study reliable history books and read the Qur'an, then you will find that nothing but compassion flowed from the Prophet's hands.

This was the man who bore the responsibility of protecting Islam against the first onslaught, led by the oligarchy of the Quraysh, and in particular Abu Sufyan – whose real name was Sakhr b. Harb. From the very beginning, he was determined to make the Prophet's life miserable and wanted to stop the spread of Islam in order to keep the status quo. What exactly was the status quo? Abu Sufyan and the enemies of the Prophet were trying to preserve Arab society precisely as it was.

This was a society based on blood feuds and vengeance. The Aus and Khazraj tribes of Yathrib (Madinah today) had fought a vendetta for over a hundred years, and regularly massacred and pillaged each other. Infanticide was rampant and even one of the caliphs before accepting Islam preferred to bury his daughter alive with his own hands, rather than live the shame of having a baby girl. Poverty and decadence lived side by side; society was divided and stratified. Against all odds, and by the end of his mission, the Prophet had united these warring clans and replaced hatred with brotherhood, men and women were to be treated justly, and he had spread righteousness and humanity to such a degree that God termed the first Muslim community as:

﴿كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ﴾

***You are the best nation* [*ever*] *brought forth for mankind: you bid what is right and forbid what is wrong, and have faith in God.* (*3:110*)**

In the new Muslim community, the Ansar in Madinah opened their houses to shelter refugees from Mecca. Former enemies sat side by side and broke bread together. Different nationalities worshiped in unison in this new religion. Bilal, an African, read the call to prayer, and Salman al-Farsi, a Persian, was referred to as one of the Prophet's family. The spirit of Islam had been realized, and fairness prevailed.

﴿ وَاذْكُرُواْ نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنتُمْ أَعْدَآءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُم بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا﴾

***And remember God's blessing upon you when you were enemies, then He brought your hearts together, so you became brothers with His blessing.* (*3:103*)**

The change in Arab society was so dramatic that the Roman king, seeing what had happened, summoned one of his traveling merchants to ask him how the Prophet had done it. The answer was simple. The Prophet carried out his mission with sincerity and steadfastness. He never waved from his Divine call, even for a moment. Although he had many companions, two were indispensable – his first cousin, Ali b. Abi Talib with his bravery and steadfastness; and his first wife, Khadijah b. Khuwaylid with her moral support and wealth. As a result, Muslims grew from being three to 1.3 billion today and Islam has become a world religion.

However, although dramatic, the advances that the Prophet made were fragile. Not long after his death, Islam's first civil war threatened to destroy the Muslim state. The Messenger of God had known what would happen. So before his death, he warned Ali b. Abi Talib, "O Ali, you will have to fight to preserve Islam just like you had to fight to establish it. You will fight the violators and the defectors and the seceders."[62] Just as the Prophet predicted, Ali b. Abi Talib had to fight them in three battles, which came to be known as the Battles of Jamal, Siffeen, and Nahrawan.

After the murder of the third caliph, Uthman, the people surrounded Ali b. Abi Talib's home and pressured him to take the caliphate. Once he became the legitimate caliph, Aishah, one of the wives of the Prophet, instigated a war against him. Although the Qur'an had commanded the wives of the Prophet to stay inside their homes, she rallied Talha, Zubayr and thousands of men from Madinah to Iraq to fight him. As a result, thousands of Muslims perished in the Battle of Jamal, which took place in Basra in southern Iraq. This was the battle of the "violators" that the Prophet had predicted. They violated the legitimate right of Ali b. Abi Talib as the ruler. This tragic battle was the first, but not the last one that the Muslims fought each other on such a grand scale.

Immediately after this battle, Muawiyah, the son of Abu Sufyan, who at that time was the governor of

Syria, decided to extend his reach and invaded the territories of Iraq. Denying the legitimacy of Imam Ali, he called himself the caliph instead. His incursions led to the second confrontation at Siffeen. There, Imam Ali was forced to accept arbitration because of the loss of his supporters, his "defectors." The battle ended, but Muawiyah continued the war.

To complicate the situation further, some of Imam Ali's more fanatical fighters who disagreed with his decision to accept arbitration decided that they knew better than the Commander of the Faithful and thus seceded. They became immortalized as the Kharijites (the Seceders). Soon afterwards, they launched the Battle of Nahrawan. They proved to be pernicious opponents, for while they outwardly maintained the appearance of religiosity, they were inwardly destroying Islam.

However, Imam Ali managed to suppress them and preserve the fabric of Muslim society until he was assassinated. At that time, Muawiyah began to re-exert his hegemony, and that led to the third drastic internecine conflict within the early history of Islam – the Battle of Karbala.

In fact, this battle began long before with Muawiyah's father, Abu Sufyan's persistent attempts to obliterate Islam. Abu Sufyan had not been content with massacring the companions of the Prophet in Mecca, such as Sumayyah and Yaasir, the parents of Ammar who were the first martyrs in Islam. He and his minions had plundered the Muslims' wealth and exiled them as well. Even when they had abandoned their homeland, he still sent campaigns against them to Madinah, which resulted in the Battles of Badr, Uhud, and Ahzab.

Only during the conquest of Mecca, when he was taken captive and brought before the Prophet, did Abu Sufyan agree to surrender to Islam. The Prophet asked him, "Abu Sufyan, isn't it time for you to accept Islam?"[63] He resisted, saying that it was too difficult for him to accept Muhammad as the Prophet of God. The companions, including Umar, raised their swords. The Prophet told them to lower their weapons, but he converted, however reluctantly; in the words of Ammaar b. Yaasir, "[Bani Umayyad] surrendered to Islam rather than having accepted it."

Abu Sufyan's conversion could have been the end of his animosity towards the Prophet and Islam. The Prophet tried to win his heart (as a good will of gesture) by giving him and his tribesmen money and gifts and even position. He declared that anyone who entered Abu Sufyan's house would be granted immediate amnesty. Rather than ending his tirade against Islam, Abu Sufyan now decided to attack it from the inside. In his final days, when he had even become old and blind, Abu Sufyan gathered his relatives together and instructed them, "O my clan, take the caliphate and play with it like a toy ball. I swear that there is no Hereafter, no Paradise, and no Hell."[64]

The Prophet had all along sensed Abu Sufyan's intentions. One night, he had a terrible dream that monkeys were climbing up and down on his pulpit in Madinah. When he asked the Angel Gabriel what that dream meant, Gabriel replied that it meant the Bani Umayyad would one day seize the caliphate. In order to stave off that evil, the Prophet publicly declared that the caliphate was forbidden for Abu Sufyan

and his descendants. However, it was to no avail, and they still carried out their plans. They truly were the “cursed tree” as it is described in the Holy Qur’an:

﴿ وَالشَّجَرَةَ الْمَلْعُونَةَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ وَنُخَوِّفُهُمْ فَمَا يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلاَّ طُغْيَانًا كَبِيرًا ﴾

And the tree cursed in the Qur’an. We deter them, but it only increases them in great rebellion. (***17:60***)

To them, the caliphate had nothing to do with the trust and responsibility of Islam; nor with upholding the message of the Prophet. It was simply an opportunity to dominate the Muslims, exploit their wealth, manipulate Islam, and remain in power. Thus Muawiyah, the son of Abu Sufyan, carried out his father’s will.

As soon as he was secure in his base of power, Muawiyah b. Abu Sufyan began terrorizing the Muslims. He murdered many of the companions of the Prophet including Hijr b. Uday, Maytham al-Tammar, Rushayd al-Hajari, and Imam Hasan who was the eldest grandson of the Prophet. When Muawiyah decided to kill the grandson of the Prophet (Hasan), he sent a message to the Roman king asking him for a particularly kind of deadly poison. The king replied that his culture prohibited using that poison against human beings because of its potency. Muawiyah wrote back that he was intending to use this poison against the grandson of the Prophet who had threatened his hegemony.

Muawiyah did not only confine himself to killing the companions of the Prophet, he also ordered the prayer leaders to curse Ali b. Abi Talib, the fourth caliph, from the pulpit. He bribed others to malign the names of Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn from the pulpit. Sadly, the status of Muslim orators was determined by how well they slandered these four people. Mentioning Ali’s name became such a crime that people had to refer to him as “Abu Zaynab” if they had anything to say.

Yet curiously enough, the Shia are the ones who are accused of cursing some of the companions. Nonetheless, the opinion of the Shia on the Companions of the Prophet is the same opinion given in the Book of God. Some verses praise them, meaning the companions who did well, and others condemn them, those who went against the true teachings of Islam. Both *Surah al-Munafiqun* (the Hypocrites) and *Surah al-Tawbah* (the Repentance) condemn the evil-ones, for some of the Companions of the Prophet were hypocrites in disguise.

Therefore, the way in which the Bani Umayyad were rewriting Islam in order to serve their purpose, led Imam Husayn to give his life. He had no other choice. The masses had been blinded and had forgotten the warnings of the Prophet. Concerned primarily with their own welfare, they followed whatever their rulers decreed even when it contradicted the teachings of the Prophet. Islam was in grave danger.

The Battle of Karbala was a major turning point. There, the forces of injustice finally clashed with the forces of justice. Falsehood finally came head to head with the truth. Although that battle only lasted half

a day, it has been immortalized throughout the ages. That is why we say, “every day is Ashura, and every land is Karbala.” Karbala was not confined to a small area south of Baghdad; rather, Karbala is everywhere. Wherever you find an oppressive tyrant that land is Karbala, and that day is Ashura, and thus, one must rise up against oppression.

Since he was under the sole living representative of the house of the Prophet, Imam Husayn was one of the few remaining threats for the Bani Umayyad. Therefore, when Muawiyah passed away and designated his son Yazid as his successor, he left him instructions to take an oath of loyalty immediately from Imam Husayn. Needless to say, Imam Husayn refused to give allegiance to Yazid because he was even more of a dissolute than his father. He was guilty of every illicit deed mentionable. If the last survivor of the Prophet had given his hand, Islam would have come to termination.

Danger was looming over Islam when Yazid ascended the throne. People had deviated from worshipping God. Although before they were worshipping idols of stone, at the time of Muawiyah they were worshipping idols of flesh. Imam Husayn took it upon himself to save the religion. No one else could have done what he did, and as a result of his sacrifice, the third and final early threats of Islam was countered, and the message of Islam was preserved throughout the generations to come.

Islamic Revival

Featured Themes:

Imam Husayn; Ashura; Yazid

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ. وَلاَ تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتٌ بَلْ
أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِنْ لاَ تَشْعُرُونَ. وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِنَ الأَمْوالِ وَالأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ
الصَّابِرِينَ . الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ. أُوْلَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ
وَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ

O you who have faith! Take recourse in patience and prayer; indeed God is with the patient. And do not call those who were slain in God’s way “dead.” Rather they are living, but you are not aware. We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger, and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient – those who, when an affliction visits them, “Indeed we belong to God, and to Him do we indeed return.” It is they who receive the blessings of their Lord and [***His***] ***mercy, and it is they who are the*** [***rightly***] ***guided.*** (***2:153–157***)

as the bodies lay scattered on the battlefield on the afternoon of the day of Ashura, the battle seemed over. Yazid’s forces appeared to have won. Only a handful of women and children from Imam Husayn’s camp remained to cry over the martyred, and they too would soon be enslaved.

However, the day of Ashura proved much more catastrophic for the Bani Umayyad than they could have ever imagined. Rather than subsiding, the grief over Imam Husayn and his companions intensified, and it continues even more so up until today. Word of the greatest tragedy spread quickly and within a year after the battle, people began flocking to his shrine in Karbala.

Today, Imam Husayn is remembered everywhere. Onlookers often assume that we are mourning someone who was killed recently. They are shocked to learn that Imam Husayn was martyred 1,400 years ago. One thousand four hundred years – and we still keep his memory alive! In essence, remembering Husayn has kept Islam alive. Tyrants, kings, caliphs, and dictators have never been able to suppress his name, for God Himself has willed for it to be remembered.

يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَيَأْبَى اللَّهُ إِلاَّ أَنْ يُتِمَّ نُورَهُ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ

They desire to put out the light of God with their mouths, but God is intent on perfecting His light though the faithless should be averse. (***9:32***)

Ashura unveiled the ugly face of the Bani Umayyad. Beforehand, they had been able to disguise their animosity towards Islam. Umar b. Sa'd, the Commander-in-Chief of the Umayyad Army on the day of Ashura was able to spur on his soldiers by shouting, "O horsemen of God! Go forward! Paradise lies before you when you kill Husayn!"[65] And 30,000 men had agreed with him.

After the tragic day, rather than boast about their accomplishment, the Bani Umayyad were forced to lie about who they had captured at Karbala – meaning that they could not disclose the fact that it was the family of the Holy Prophet. They claimed that the captives they were dragging and dishonoring from city to city (and finally to Damascus) were Romans and Persians, secessionists, and non-Muslims, who deserved to be punished for their crimes. However, soon after they arrived in Damascus, the truth came out. All that Imam Husayn's sister, Zaynab and his son, Imam Zain al-Abideen had to do was tell their story for the people to be shocked.

In a sermon, Imam Zain al-Abideen began to introduce himself to the people by saying, "I am the son of Mecca, I am the son of Madinah, I am the son of Safa and Marwah, I am the son of the well of Zam Zam…" and by such a profound introduction, the people knew the gravity of what had happened in Karbala. These were no "secessionists." They came from the heart of Islam itself; they came from the heart of the Prophet himself. The martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his companions revolutionized the Muslim nation – they saw right through Bani Umayyad's facade.

The first to tumble were the killers of Imam Husayn. When they returned home, they expected accolade, instead they found scorn and shame. On the afternoon of Ashura, Umar b. Sa'd had distributed the victims' heads among the tribes as trophy. Each tribe received one head. However, Umar b. Sa'd wanted the head of Imam Husayn to reach Kufa quickly to prove his victory, so he sent it with Khiwala b.

Yazid al-Asbahi. Kufa was about 15 or 20 hours from Karbala by horse, and it was already near sunset. Although he rode fast, Khiwala did not make it to Kufa until well after midnight. By that time, Ibn Ziyad (the governor of Kufa) was asleep, so he decided to go home.

He knocked on his door in anticipation. When his wife opened the door, he told her with excitement that he had great news. She asked what it was. He confided in her that he was carrying the head of the grandson of the Prophet in his bag. Immediately, she reprimanded him, "May God curse you! Is this good news? People come home with jewelry and gifts for their wives and you bring me the head of Husayn and you are proud of it?" Later that day, when Khiwala brought his prize to the governor of Kufa, even Ibn Ziyad's mother damned him. Their own families could not tolerate them anymore.

The rewards they had worked so eagerly to merit slipped right through their fingers. Umar b. Sa'd had known that what he had done was wrong. Imam Husayn was related to him through blood and that is why on the night of Ashura he hesitated to go through with having Husayn martyred. However, Yazid had promised him that if he killed Imam Husayn, he would become the governor of Ray (near modern-day Tehran). Greed for power overwhelmed him, so he shoved aside his concerns and went on with his onslaught. However, when he offered the head of Imam Husayn to Yazid to collect his reward, Yazid reproached him, "You may be stupid, but I am not stupid. I know you wavered in your resolve." Just like that, Ray fell out of his grasp. He and the others lost everything that they hoped for, in this world and in the next life.

Their lives did not last long. Shocked into revolution, the Muslims from Iraq to Madinah began revolting. Unable to enjoy his rule, Yazid abruptly lost his life. Within six years, all of the murderers of Imam Husayn had met justice. Mukhtar al-Thaqafi put Kufa under siege, and in one day, he dispensed with Umar b. Sa'd, Shimr, Khiwalah, and 280 others who had participated in the murder of Imam Husayn. Revolutions continued until the Bani Umayyad finally collapsed.

Even non-Muslims were shaken by the tragedy. As the caravan of captives traveled from Kufa to Damascus, it passed a temple inhabited by a Christian monk. The monk immediately realized that something unusual had happened, so he asked whose head was being carried on top of the spear. Since he was not a Muslim, the commanders shared their secret and told him that it was the head of the grandson of their Prophet. He reprimanded them, "Woe upon you! May God deprive you of blessings! This is how you treat the grandson of your Prophet? If Jesus had a son, we would have kept him close to us in our hearts." In Palestine, the Christians built a famous church called the Church of the Hoof. It was built around the footprint of Jesus' donkey. Not Jesus' footprint, but that of his donkey. That was the level of respect and love that they had for the Prophet Jesus.

In contrast, the Wahhabis have been racing to obliterate the history of Islam. There are over 10,000 companions of the Prophet, including four imams buried in the cemetery of Al-Baqi in Madinah. Their headstones have been removed, no one would even know where their graves are if people did not memorize where the imams are buried. In fact, no one would even know the identities of the deceased

by looking at the graves because only razor sharp rocks mark the headstones – all courtesy of the Wahhabi ideology.

No one knows the name, gender, birth, or death–day of the graves. It is sad to see that even after death a human being cannot be honored by marking his name. If you attempt to recite prayers at the graves of the four imams, a guard tells you that it is religiously unlawful to "worship stones." They want to erase and eradicate every Islamic historical landmark. They see no value or reason why historical marks should be preserved. In America, next to my own home, the city has preserved a home as a historical landmark because it was the home of the first settlers in that town. People throughout the world honor its past citizens whom have cultivated, preserved, and contributed towards building their civilizations, but the Wahhabis want to desecrate the history of Islam.

Like the Wahhabis, the Bani Umayyad had tried to relegate Islam to an empty set of puritanical rituals, devoid of meaning, in order to diminish its spread. As a result, some of their soldiers came to kill Imam Husayn praying, "*qurbatan ilaa Allahi ta'aala* (we are doing this in order to seek nearness to God)" – by killing the grandson of the Prophet.

However, the massacre on Ashura uncovered the corruption that had crept into the religion. The falsehoods that the Bani Umayyad had propagated began to vanish, and the original message of Islam lay in clear view.

No one can oppose the power of truth. Many times throughout history, the ruling powers have tried to obliterate the grave of Imam Husayn. At one point, a simple man went to Karbala and walked from place to place, scooping up handfuls of dust and inhaling its fragrance, until he finally stopped and said, "This is the grave of my beloved Husayn." No one can ever suppress his grave.

If you seek happiness in this temporary life, stay with the Ahlul–Bayt. Be loyal to them, and try to serve them, especially Imam Husayn. A tradition by one of the imams says, "All of us are arks of salvation, but the ark of Husayn is the fastest." Be with him, help his cause, and teach his lessons. Although you may not consider yourself to be an orator or a writer, but if you speak about Imam Husayn, the words will come out naturally. Share his story. Tell people that this is your history, the history of Imam Husayn.

1. Al–Qur'an, 17:70
2. Bihar al–Anwar, Al–Allamah Al–Majlisi, v. 44, p. 138
3. Bihar al–Anwar, Al–Allamah Al–Majlisi, v. 64, p. 71
4. The Umayyad dynasty (661–750) established a system of hereditary succession for the leader of the Muslim world. The Umayyads, headed by Abu Sufyan, were a largely merchant family of the Quraysh tribe. They had initially resisted Islam, not converting until the last few months of the Prophet's life. Umayyad rule was divided between two branches of the family: the Sufyanid (reigned 661–684), descendants of Abu Sufyan, and the Marwanid (reigned 684–750). The Sufyanids, notably Muawiyah (b. Abu Sufyan) (reigned 661–680) centralized his caliph authority in Damascus. Muawiyah administered the death of Imam Hasan, and his son Yazi also administered the death of Imam Husayn, which eventually led to the start and end of the Umayyad rule.
5. Bihar al–Anwar, Al–Allamah Al–Majlisi, v. 2, p. 32 and Tafseer Al–Razi, Al–Fakhr Al–Razi, v. 1, p. 91

6. Ashura, being the 10th day of Muharram. It is recognized as “the day” in which the events and tragedy at Karbala occurred.
7. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 79, p. 198 and Kanzul Ummal, Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi v. 7, p. 525
8. Al-Qur’an, 5:3
9. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 45, p. 8
10. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 45, p. 8
11. Mustadrak Al-Wasael, Al-Mirza Al-Noori, v. 2, p. 386
12. Al-Irshad, Sheikh Al-Mufeed, v. 2, p. 129
13. Musnad Ahmad, Ahmad b. Hanbal, v. 4, p. 172 and others
14. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 44, p. 247
15. Ibid
16. Al-Kafi, Sheikh Al-Kulayni, v. 8, p. 113
17. A smokeless flame creation made by God that has the ability of free-will; some jinns can be good or evil.
18. Iblis is another name for Satan.
19. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 78, p. 186
20. Amalee Al-Sadooq, Sheikh Al-Sadooq, v. 1, p. 395
21. Al-Kafi, v. 8, p. 45
22. Ghurar Al-Hikam, Al-Amidi, hadith 1378
23. Al-Qur’an, 7:11
24. Al-Kafi, v. 2, p. 125
25. See translation (tafseer) of Qur’an, 17:64
26. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 101, p. 41
27. Maqatil of Imam Al-Husayn
28. Kanzul Ummal, v. 7, p. 106 and other sources
29. Al-Fusool Al-Muhimmah, Al-Amili, v. 3, p. 257
30. Al-Jami’ Al-Sagheer, Al-Suyooti, v. 2, p. 235
31. Al-Ghadir, Al-Amini, v. 10, p. 42
32. Al-Amalee, Sheikh Al-Sadooq, p. 634
33. Full talqeen can be found in the index
34. Al-Kafi, v.3 p. 134
35. Majma’ul Bahrain, Sheikh Al-Torayhi, v. 4 p. 238
36. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 44 p. 366
37. Al-Kafi, v. 2 p. 375
38. Al-Khisal, Sheikh Al-Sadooq p. 228
39. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 70 p. 60
40. Du’a Arafah, Imam Husayn
41. Al-Amalee, p. 414
42. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 27 p. 105
43. Al-Qur’an, 42:23
44. Kanzul Ummal, hadith 45410
45. Sahih al-Bukhari, “Book on the Interpretation of the Qur’an,” hadith 4531; Sahih al-Muslim, “Book on Divorce,” hadith 2694
46. Al-Amalee, Sheikh Al-Toosi, p. 525
47. Al-Amalee, Sheikh Al-Toosi, p. 93
48. Except for the followers of the Ahlul-Bayt, they never ceased recording the narrations of the Prophet.
49. Musnad Ahmad, v. 3 p. 14
50. Musnad Ahmad, v. 5 p. 92
51. Al-Kafi, v. 3 p. 268

52. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 79 p. 303
53. Sharh Nahjul Balaghah, Ibn Abil Hadid, v. 1, p. 325
54. Mustadrak, v. 14, p. 265
55. Al-Qur'an, 17:32
56. Al-Mustadraf, Al-Abhishi, v. 2, p. 218
57. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 73, p. 308
58. Nahjul Balaghah, hadith 352
59. Al-Kafi, v. 5, p. 62
60. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 34, p. 89
61. When he recaptured Mecca, he even forgave the killer of his noble uncle, Hamzah b. Abdul Muttalib.
62. Al-Kafi, v. 5, p. 12
63. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 21, p. 128
64. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 31, p. 197
65. Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Allamah Al-Majlisi, v. 44, p. 391

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