



**Islamic Correspondence
Course
(Book 3)**

Author

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Lesson 21 : The Shari'a



1. The Place of Shari'a in Islam

The word “shari'a” literally means “a way.” In Islamic terminology, it means the legal system of Islam. It is normally translated as the laws of Islam or the Islamic laws.

Islam is a din—religion. The word din bears a concept wider and more comprehensive than the word ‘religion’.

It means believing in the fundamentals as well as living according to the Islamic laws. This concept of religion is beautifully conveyed in the terms used by Islamic scholars to describe the fundamental beliefs and the practical laws of Islam.

The “beliefs” are described as “usulu ‘d-din— the roots of religion”. The “shari'a laws” are described as “furu'u ‘d-din — the branches of religion”.

Beliefs without practice is incomplete Islam; and practice without belief may be useful in this world but not of much use in the hereafter.

The shari'a is a complete way of life; no aspect of human life is outside its domain. Islam expects a Muslim to follow its laws in every aspect of life: personal and familial, religious and social, moral and political, economic and business, etc. After all, “Muslim” means one who submits to God.

The Qur'an says, “When Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter, it is not for any believing man or believing woman to have a choice in their affairs. And whosoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has gone astray into clear error.” (33:36)

2. The Need for the Shari'a

Man's nature dictates that he can only function properly within a society. Human beings are interdependent by nature. This interdependency of human beings on each other is beautifully expressed in the following passage:

“The baker told me to bake my own bread; the tailor told me to cut and sew my own clothes; the shoemaker told me to make my own shoes; similarly, the carpenter, the engineer, the farmer, and all the labourers and workers told me to do everything by myself. It was then that I looked at myself and realized that I am naked, hungry and powerless with no shelter over my head, waiting for death to overcome me.

It was then that I realized that I cannot survive without my fellow human beings; my survival depends on living in the society.”¹ A society, however, depends for its existence on laws and regulations.

If there are no laws in a society, it is overtaken by the law of the jungle: the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. So the need for laws to regulate the lives of human beings is beyond any doubt.

Islam teaches that because of the imperative need of laws for a civilized society, God has sent a series of messengers and prophets with divine laws for man’s guidance from the very first day of his creation.

The last Messenger was Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings of God be upon him and his family) who brought the final and the perfect set of laws, Islam, as a guide for mankind till the end of time.

Many people think that there is no need for God-made laws, we can make laws by ourselves. Islam believes that a human being is a very sophisticated creature; and since he has not made his own body, nor did he create the world in which he lives, he, therefore, is not the best candidate for making laws about himself.

Common sense says that when you buy a complicated piece of equipment, like a computer, you should use it according to the ‘instruction manual’ prepared by the manufacturer of that particular machine.

To learn the computer by trial and error is not the smart way. Similarly, God as the Creator of man and the earth knows better how the human being should live.

The ‘instruction manual’ that God sent for us is known as the Qur’an. But the human being is not just any ordinary machine; rather he is more complicated than the most advanced computer a human can ever produce. So God did not only send the Qur’an— 1 Jurdaq, G., al-Imam ‘Ali: sawtu ‘l-’adalati ‘l-insaniyyah, vol. 5 (Beirut) p. 14. He also sent an instructor known as Prophet Muhammad.

The Prophet of Islam brought the Qur'an to us and also provided practical examples in how to conduct our lives. According to Shi'a Islam', after the Prophet, the Imams of Ahlu '1-bayt are the protectors of the Qur'an and the interpreters of its laws.

3. The Superiority of God-made Laws over Man-made Laws At this point, I would like to show the superiority of Islamic laws over man-made laws.

Man-made laws are by necessity influenced by the law-makers' social and racial biases. The United Nations Organization is the best example of how policies are enforced only when it suits the interest of the super-powers. The rule of the game in man-made laws is not honesty and justice, it is "the might is right".

God-made laws are superior because of the following facts:

- God is above class status;
- God is above racial prejudice;
- God is above gender rivalry;
- God, as the Creator, fully knows humans as well as the world in which they live.

God-made laws will be just and based on fully informed decisions. Let me demonstrate the superiority of God-made laws by using the example of capital punishment.

The secular system always swings according to the mood of the people: sometimes, the people feel that capital punishment for murder is not right and so they pressure their representatives to vote against capital punishment.

But when crimes rates increase and serial murder cases occur more frequently, public opinion changes and the legislators are influenced in favour of capital punishment.

Actually both sides of this issue reflect the Judeo-Christian basis of the Western society. Judaism, on the one hand, insists on the principle of justice which demands "an eye for an eye". On the other hand, Christianity promotes the principle of mercy by saying "turn thy other cheek."

Islam, the final version of God-made laws, takes a balanced look at the issue of capital punishment and has beautifully accommodated both the principles of justice and mercy in its system.

The Western system did not realize the difference between the two principles of justice and mercy: while justice can be demanded and legislated, mercy cannot be forced or made into a law. You can always plead for mercy but you can never demand mercy.

Islam takes this difference into full consideration, and, therefore, it talks about capital punishment on two different levels: legal and moral. On the legal level, it sanctions the principle of justice by giving the right of retaliation to the victim.

But, immediately, the Qur'an moves on to the moral level and strongly recommends the victim to forgo his right of retaliation and either to forgive the criminal or to settle for monetary compensation. This issue has been clearly mentioned in the following verse of the Qur'an:

In it (the Torah), We wrote to them: "A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and there is retaliation for wounds." But (before you act according to your right, remember that) whosoever forgoes (his right of retaliation), it shall be expiation for him (against his own sins). 5:45

Thus Islam has very beautifully provided the legal safeguard for human life on the social level and also encouraged mercy from a moral point of view on the individual level.

If human beings are left on their own in this issue, they will always swing between the two extremes of justice and mercy—only Islam, the final version of God-made legal system can accommodate both these principles.

This lesson is based on An Introduction to the Shari'a by Sayyid M. Rizvi

Lesson 22 : Sources Of The Shari'a

1. The Qur'an & the Sunna of the Prophet

The Muslims during the days of Prophet Muhammad lived by the shari'a by following the Qur'an and the sunna. Sunna means the example of the Prophet.

(Sunna is sometimes written as 'sunnat'.) Was not the Qur'an enough on its own? The Qur'an is a

book of guidance which was sent for the entire human world till the end of time. As such, it only deals with the general issues and mentions only the basic principles underlying the Muslim way of life.

The Qur'an is more like a constitution than a book of law. The details were left to the Prophet.

The Qur'an itself clearly explained this relationship between the Prophet and itself in the following verses:

He raised up among the common people a Messenger from among themselves to recite to them His revelations, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and the wisdom. (62:2)

And We have revealed, to you (O Muhammad) the Reminder (that is, the Qur'an) so you may clarify to the people what has been revealed to them, and so that they may reflect. (16:44)

These two verses definitely prove that Prophet Muhammad was not just a 'mail-man' whose only job was to deliver the Qur'an to us. He was a teacher and a commentator of the Qur'an. Even his actions are a source of guidance for Muslims:

You have a good example in Allah's Messenger for whosoever hopes for God and the last day, and remembers God oft. (33:21)

The obedience to the Prophet has been considered as the proof of loving Allah:

Say (O Muhammad), 'If you love Allah, then follow me; (if you do so) Allah will love you and forgive for you your sins.' (3:31) To show the importance of obeying the Prophet, Allah further says: Whoever obeys the Prophet has surely obeyed Allah, (4:80)

The Qur'an is not only silent on the details of things which can change over time, it is also silent on the rules of worship which can never change. For example, the Qur'an in twenty-five different places commands the Muslims to say the daily prayers (salat), but not once has Allah explained how the Muslims are to say their prayers.

(The only exception to this statement is that of salatu 'lkhawf, the prayer said in a battle-field or when one is in danger.) This silence on the part of the Qur'an, I believe, was for the specific purpose of forcing the people to go to the Prophet, ask him for details and follow his example.

2. The Example of the Imams

After the Prophet's death, the Muslims were very much divided on the issue of leadership. This

gave birth to the two groups known as the Shi'a and the Sunnis. The Shi'a lived by the shari'a by following the Qur'an, and the sunna of the Prophet and of the Imams.

The sunna, in Shi'a definition, means "the sayings, deeds and silent approval of the Prophet and the twelve infallible Imams of Ahlu "I-bayt."

Although the issue of the leadership has already been discussed in another lesson in Part One, I would like to mention one reason why the Imams of Ahlu 1-bayt are preferable as the source of the sharia than anyone else.

The Muslims of the early days realized the importance of the Prophet's sunna and started to memorize his sayings known as hadith. Later generations preserved the saying they had heard from the companions of the Prophet in the books of hadith.

Even the actions of the Prophet, observed by his companions, were preserved in writing. But this process of preserving the sunna of the Prophet "was not immune from mistakes and forgery.

Many sayings were invented and wrongfully attributed to the Prophet during the early period of the Islamic history, especially during the Umayyid era.

At times, the rulers bribed the companions to fabricate 'hadith' in their favour and/or against their opponents. At other times, some people invented 'hadith' for apparently good causes not realizing that they were using the wrong means of trying to make people more religious!

Abu 'Ismah, Faraj bin Abi Maryam al-Marwazi was asked: "From where have you got all these traditions narrated through 'Ikrimah, from Ibn 'Abbas, from the Prophet, describing the reward of reciting each and every surah (chapter) of the Qur'an?"

He said, "I found people interested only in the fiqh of Abu Hanifah and maghazi of Ibn Ishaq; therefore, I forged these ahadith for the pleasure of God to bring them back to the Qur'an."

In this background of the early development of hadith, we must find an authentic and informed source for the sunna of the Prophet.

When you look at the Muslims of the Prophet's days, you can find no one who was more knowledgeable, informed, reliable and closer to the Prophet than the Ahlu 1-bayt, the family of the Prophet: Fatimah, 'Ali and their sons.

After all, it is the Qur'an which testifies to their spiritual purity of the highest form by saying: "Verily Allah intends to purify you, O the Ahlu 'I-bayt, a thorough purification." (33:33) Combine

this verse about the Ahlu '1-bayt's purity with the following: "It is the holy Qur'an in a preserved tablet, none shall touch it but the purified ones." (56:79)

The real sense of this verse is that the Qur'an which is "in a preserved tablet" is not accessible to anyone except those who are purified by Allah. This shows that the Ahlu '1-bayt could understand the Qur'an better than any other Muslim.

It is for this very reason that Allah commanded His Messenger to ask the people to love his Ahlu 1-bayt: Say (O Muhammad), 'I do not ask from you any reward (for teaching Islam to you) except to love my near ones.' (42:23)

This love was made obligatory because it would automatically entail obedience of those whom one loves. If the Ahlu '1-bayt were not truthful, reliable, and worthy of following, would Allah command us to love them?

These few verses of the holy Qur'an are enough to show that the best commentators of the Qur'an and the most authentic source for the Prophet's sunna are the Imams of Ahlu '1-bayt.

The Prophet himself said, "I am leaving among you two worthy things. As long as you hold fast on to them both, you will never go astray after me. One is greater than the other: the Book of Allah (which is a rope suspended from the heaven to the earth) and my descendants, my Ahlu '1-bayt.

They will not separate from each other until they come to me at the (fountain of) Kawthar (in the hereafter). Therefore, see how you recompense me by the way you deal with them."

This is not the place to discuss the authenticity of this hadith, but it will suffice to quote Ibn Hajar al-Makki, a famous Sunni polemicist.

After recording this hadith from various companions who had heard it from the Prophet at various places and times, Ibn Hajar says, "And there is no contradiction in these [numerous reports] since there was nothing to prevent the Prophet from repeating [this statement] at those various places because of the importance of the holy Book and the pure Family."2

We can conclude from these verses and the hadith mentioned above that the Ahlu 1-bayt are the divinely appointed commentators of the Qur'an, and the most authentic and the best source for the sunna. It is for this reason that we prefer them to all other sources.

Even when we quote a hadith from the Imams of Ahlu '1-bayt, it is actually the hadith of the Prophet which they have preserved as the true successors of the last Messenger of God. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.), the sixth Shi'ite Imam, says:

My hadith is the hadith of my father, the hadith of my father is that of my grandfather, the hadith of my grandfather is that of Husayn [bin 'Ali], the hadith of Husayn is that of Hasan [bin 'Ali], the hadith of Hasan is that of Amiru 'l-mu'minin ['Ali bin Abi Talib]. as-Sawa'iq 'l-Muhriqah, chapter 11. section 1..

Talib], the hadith of Amiru 'l-mu'minin is that of the Messenger of God (s.a.w.), and the hadith of the Messenger is a statement of Allah, the Almighty, the Great.”³

The historical circumstances did not allow the opportunity to the first three Imams of Ahlu l-bayt to formally teach and train their followers in the matters of the shari'a. It was after the tragedy of Karbala that the Imams, especially the fifth and the sixth Imams, got the opportunity to formally train their followers in the shari'a laws.

The training by these Imams actually laid the foundation for the development of ijtiḥad among the Shi'as after the occultation of the twelfth Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi (a.s.).

During the Minor Occultation (ghaybat) of the Present Imam, it was still possible for the Shi'as to present their problems to the Imam through his specially appointed representatives. These representatives were 'Uthman bin Sa'id al-Amri (260-265 AH), Muhammad bin 'Uthman al-'Amri (265-305 AH), Husayn bin Ruh (305-326 AH), and 'Ali bin Muhammad al-Samiri (326-329 AH).

However, after the Imam went into the Major Occultation, the problems of the shari'a were resolved through the process known as ijtiḥad and taqlid—the two most important ways of living by the shari'a.

Ijtiḥad, in Shi'a jurisprudence, means “the process of deriving the laws of shari'a from its sources.” A person who can do ijtiḥad is known as a “mujtahid”. Taqlid means “to follow the mujtahid in the laws of shari'a.”

This lesson is based on An Introduction to the Shari'a by Sayyid M. Rizvi

³ In Shi'a sources, see al-Kulayni, al-Uṣul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 52; in Sunni sources, see ash-Sha'rani, at-Tabaqat 'l-Kubra, vol. 1 p. 28; Abu Nu'aym, Hilyatu 'l-Awiyah, vol. 3, p. 193, 197.

Lesson 23 : Ijtihad, Taqlid & Ihtiyat

1. Introduction

As mentioned in the previous lessons, a Muslim must follow the shari'a in every aspect of his or her life. If Islam is a religion which is to stay till the end of time, then there must always be some people who can guide the Muslims in the changing circumstances of time and of place.

After the Prophet of Islam, the most ideal persons to guide the Muslims were the Imams of Ahlu 1-bayt.

However, the Present Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi (a.s.) has gone into the Occultation and will re-appear when Allah wishes him to appear. So what is to be done in the meantime? Are the Shi'as to suspend the shari'a? No, of course not! Islam is the religion for all times and places.

2. Ijtihad

The Imams of Ahlu 1-bayt had foreseen the time of the Occultation and had prepared their followers for the situation in which they will not be in direct contact with their Imam.

This preparation was done by training the Shi'as in the science of Islamic laws, or in other words, in ijtihad. (Ijtihad means "the process of deriving the laws of the shari'a from its sources.") Ijtihad is an essential phenomenon for the survival of the Islamic shari'a during the Occultation of the Imam (a.s.).

Without the system of ijtihad, we would not be able to apply Islamic laws in the rapidly changing circumstances of human society.

Ijtihad is not only permissible, but essential from the Islamic point of view. It is an obligation in Islam to study everything that is necessary for the spiritual development and material wellbeing of the Muslim community.

However, this obligation is of the category which is known as wajib kifa'i.⁴ In the present instance, for example, Islamic society needs experts in the medical sciences,

in 4 An obligation which is on every member of the community as long as it is unfulfilled; but as soon as some person or persons has fulfilled it; it is no longer an obligation on those who have not fulfilled it.

physics and chemistry, in engineering, education; and as long as there is a lack of expertise in these areas, it is an obligation on the community as a whole to acquire it. This means that a group of Muslims must devote themselves to research so as to benefit the Muslim community.

Similarly, an Islamic society without experts in the shari'a cannot properly consider itself Islamic, and so it is an obligation for a group of persons from this society to devote themselves to the study of the religious sciences to provide proper guidance to all Muslims.

This is such an important obligation that Allah has exempted those who go to seek religious knowledge from the duty of jihad. He says:

“It is not (right) for the believers to go forth all together (for Jihad). So why should not a party from every section of them (i.e., the believers) go forth to become learned in the religion, and to warn their people when they return to them—so that haply they may beware.” (9:122)

It is clear from many narrations that the Imams of Ahlu 'l-bayt (a.s.) used to be pleased whenever any of their companions taught religion or gave legal rulings (fatwa) to others. There are several documented cases of Shi'as who lived far from Medina asking the Imam of their time to appoint someone in their area to adjudicate between them in religious problems:

Zakariyyah ibn Adam al-Qummi and Yunus bin 'Abdu 'r-Rahman, for example, were named by Imam 'Ali ar-Riza, to solve disputes in their own districts.

In a famous hadith, 'Umar ibn Hanzalah asked Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) about the legality of two Shi'as seeking a verdict from an illegitimate ruler in a dispute over a debt or a legacy. The Imam's answer was that it was absolutely forbidden to do so.

Then Ibn Hanzalah asked what the two should do, and the Imam replied:

“They must seek out one of your own who narrates our traditions, who is versed in what is permissible and what is forbidden, who is well-acquainted with our laws and ordinances, and accept him as judge and arbiter, for I appoint him as judge over you...”

Besides these ahadith, we have quite a few sayings of the Imams that tell us what to do if we come across two ahadith which are contradictory or semi-contradictory—and solving the contradictory ahadith is one of the functions of ijtihad.

These types of ahadith are known as al-akhbdr al-'ilajiyah, the ahadith which solve the problems in the studying of the hadith.

In conclusion, we can say that one way of following the shari'a is to study the science of shari'a, learn the process of ijtiḥad and become a mujtahid.

3. Taqlid

Although we have mentioned ijtiḥad as the first of the possible ways of following the shari'a, it is not something which every person can do.

To become a mujtahid means spending the major part of your life in studying the Islamic sciences in general and the Islamic legal system in particular. A person must, first of all, study the Arabic language (especially classical Arabic) since all the sources of the shari'a are in classical Arabic.

Then he must study and gain expertise in Uṣulu 'l-Fiqh (the Principles of Jurisprudence) which involves the methodology of defining and using the sources of the shari'a.

One also has to study the Qur'anic verses on laws, the ḥadith literature, and also the conclusions reached by the past mujtahids. In studying the ḥadith literature, one has to also study 'ilmu 'r-rijal which deals with the narrators of ḥadith— otherwise he will not be able to distinguish the authentic ḥadith from the inauthentic ones. In short, ijtiḥad is not everyone's cup of tea.

The social life of human beings is based on mutual cooperation: each one of us takes the duty of fulfilling one of the needs of the society, and, in return, each one of us expects to benefit from the expertise of the others.

Just as not everyone can become his or her own doctor, in an Islamic society, not everyone can become a mujtahid. Those who are not mujtahid will follow the shari'a by doing taqlid—following the opinions of a highranking and pious mujtahid.

(A) Is Taqlid Reasonable?

First of all, taqlid is not "blind following," it is based on an informed decision taken by the individual Shi'a man or woman. Before you start following the opinions of a mujtahid in the shari'a laws, you have to ascertain that he has the required expertise and that he is of upright character.

Secondly, it is not always unreasonable to follow others and to hold uncritical faith in them. We can logically distinguish four possible forms of imitation:

1. an ignorant person imitating another ignorant person;

2. a more learned person imitating a less learned person;
3. a less learned person imitating an ignorant person;
4. a less learned person imitating a more learned person.

It is quite clear that the first three forms of imitations are unreasonable and can serve no purpose. However, the fourth kind of imitation is obviously not only reasonable, but also necessary and a matter of common sense;

in our everyday life we follow and imitate others in many things; we like to take the advice of experts in matters outside our own knowledge.

Someone who wishes to build a house, explains the basic idea of what he wants to the builder and then submits to his advice as to how he should go about the actual construction.

The patient follows the treatment advised by the doctor; a litigant consults a lawyer when drawing up his case for a court. The examples are abundant;

in most cases the advice is taken voluntarily, but sometimes the citizen may be required by law to seek expert advice and act upon it, before, for example, he is allowed to take some particularly dangerous drug. The clearest example is obviously a case of a legal dispute between two parties, when they are required to take their grievances before a judge and abide by his decision if they cannot settle their dispute amicably.

The practice of taqlid is an example of the same kind: the person who is not an expert in Islamic jurisprudence is legally required to follow the instructions of the expert, that is, the mujtahid.

(B) Support from the Qur'an & Sunnah:

This sensible practice of following the mujtahid in shari'a laws has been endorsed by Islam.

As mentioned in a verse quoted earlier, the Qur'an strongly exhorts at least a group of Muslims to devote their time and energy in studying religion.

This obligation is of such importance that Allah has exempted such persons from the duty of jihad. More interesting is the reason and purpose of their knowledge: "...to warn their people..." (9:122) This verse divides the people into two groups: those who are learned in religious sciences and those who are not.

It is the duty of the learned to “warn” (a broad term which implies advice and guidance) the common people, and it is expected of the common people to “beware” (take heed of the learned persons’ advice and follow).

In shari’a matters, this process of guiding the common people is technically known as “ijtihad,” and the process of following the guidance by the common people is technically known as “taqlid”.

The Imams of Ahlu ‘1-bayt (a.s.) have endorsed this system in theory as well as in practice:

In Theory: In a famous hadith quoted earlier, ‘Umar ibn Hanzalah asked Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) about the legality of two Shi’as seeking a judgment from an illegitimate ruler or a judge appointed by such a ruler in a dispute over a debt or inheritance.

The Imam’s answer was that it was absolutely forbidden to do so; and then he read the following verse: “...(Yet in a dispute) they desire to summon one another to the judgment of the tdghut though they were commanded to reject and disbelieve in him.” (4:60)

Then ‘Umar ibn Hanzalah asked, “What should the two (Shi’as) do then?” The Imam replied, “They must seek out one of your own who narrates our traditions, who is versed in what is permissible and what is forbidden, who is well-acquainted with our laws and ordinances, and accept him as judge and arbiter,

for I appoint him as judge over you. If the ruling which he based on our laws is rejected, then this rejection will be tantamount to ignoring the order of Allah and rejecting us, and rejecting us is the same as rejecting Allah, and this is the same as polytheism.”

In another hadith, Abi Khadijah relates that Imam Ja’far as- Sadiq (a.s.) sent him to his companions with the following message: “If a dispute or a difference occurs among you about a property,

then take care not to seek judgment from those illegitimate [judges]; instead, you must seek a person who knows what is permissible and what, is forbidden by us, for I appoint him as a judge over you. And take care that you do not seek judgment against one another with an unjust ruler.”

The least that these two narrations prove is that Shi’as are not allowed to refer to unauthorized jurists for solutions to their problems,

instead they are advised to seek the guidance of those who are well-versed in the teachings of the Ahlu 1-bayt. In these ahadith, the practice of seeking the advice of experts in shari’a laws is taken for granted.

In Practice: There are several documented cases of Shi'as who asked the Imams of their time to appoint someone to adjudicate between them in religious problems. Such questions were raised by those who lived far from Medina or those who could not gain access to their Imam in Medina itself.

4.1htiyat

If a person is not a mujtahid and does not even want to do taqlid of any mujtahid, then according to the laws of shari'a he must do ihtiydt.

Doing ihtiydt means taking precaution. In the context of our present discussion, it means that one must adopt a line of precautionary action by which he or she can be sure of fulfilling the requirements of God's commandment.

In practical terms, ihtiydt means that a person, in each and every problem, will have to study the views of mujtahids on that issue and act on the most precautionary of all views.

For example, if one mujtahid says that "it is disliked to smoke" and another says that "it is haram to smoke," then one has to follow the second view. Or if one mujtahid says that "you must shave your head during the first pilgrimage to Mecca" while another says "you have a choice between shaving or just cutting a little of your hair," then one has to follow the first view. This has to be done in each and every issue.

In short, during the Occultation (ghaybat) of the Present Imam (a.s.), there are three ways of following the shari'a: ijti had, taqlid and ihtiyat.

Lesson 24 : More About The Shari'a

The purpose of human life in this world is to successfully go through the trials and tribulations in order to achieve salvation in the hereafter. In the hereafter, life will have no end. God did not leave us without any means of guidance.

He sent prophets, messengers and books to guide mankind towards the right path. The last prophet and messenger was the Prophet of Islam, and the final revelation was the Qur'an.

Islam is the ultimate means of guidance for mankind through the tests and trials of this world. The Prophet was sent “to convey the revelation; to purify spiritually and to teach the Qur’an and wisdom.”

Islam seeks to guide its followers by the legal system known as “shari’a”. No aspect of our life is outside the jurisdiction of the shari’a: legal and moral, personal and social, economic and politics, all issues are directly or indirectly covered by the shari’a.

In this lesson you will learn more about the Islamic laws from different perspectives.

1. The Roots & Branches of Religion

To differentiate between the matters of belief and the laws of shari’a, the Shi’a scholars have coined two interesting terms: The matter of beliefs (monotheism,

justice of God, prophethood, imamat and resurrection) are described as “the Roots of Religion — Usul ad-Din” because they form the foundation of our faith. The Shi’a scholars have also coined the term “the Branches of Religion — Furu’ ad-Din” for the shari’a laws.

These terminologies actually reflect the connection between “belief and “practice”. If the roots are strong, they will generate healthy branches, green leaves, colourful flowers and delicious fruits; but if the roots are weak, the tree will be considered useless.

Similarly, if a Muslim’s beliefs are strong, then it should show in the practical life of that person. A non-practicing Muslim betrays the weakness in his religious roots which are in need of further nurturing through intellectual stimulation and spiritual guidance.

The items normally listed as “the Branches of Religion” are as follows:

1. Prayers (salat).
2. Fasting in Ramadhan (sawm).
3. Pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj).
4. Tax on Wealth (zakdt).
5. Tax on Money (khums).
6. Spiritual as well as Physical Struggle for sake of Allah (jihad).

7. Promoting good in the family and society (amr bil ma'ruf).
8. Preventing evil in the family and society (nahi 'anil munkar).
9. Loving and following the Prophet & his family (tawalla).
10. Disassociating from the enemies of the Prophet & his family (tabarra). These ten teachings reflect the main framework of the Islamic shari'a; otherwise, the entire corpus of Islamic shari'a falls under the term 'branches of religion'.

2. The Classification of Shari'a Laws

All the issues covered by the shari'a are traditionally classified into four main groups. The classification was put in the final form by one of the great Shi'a mujtahids of the 7th Islamic century, al- Muhaqqiq al-Hilli (d. 676 AH).

His famous work of jurisprudence, Sharaya'u 'l-Islam, is still one of the main reference books for the scholars of Islamic laws. Al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli classified the laws into the following groups:

1. 'Ibadat — the Acts of Worship like prayers, fasting, hajj, etc.
2. 'Uqud — Mutual Contracts like business transaction, partnership, trusts, power of attorney issues, and marriage.
3. Iyqa'at — Unilateral Instigations like divorce, confessions in legal matters, vows, etc.
4. Ahkam — Miscellaneous: anything which does not fit in the three groups above like rules of eating and drinking, agriculture, arbitration, testimony, etc.

Here I would like to present a modern classification of shari'a issues done by the late Sayyid Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr. Ayatullah as-Sadr of Najaf was a rising star among the new generation of mujtahids; unfortunately the Shi'a world was deprived of his knowledge and leadership when he was tortured and killed by Saddam's regime in 1981.

Sadr also divides the shari'a laws into four groups but his classification makes the issues more clear for the modern man unused to classical texts.

1. 'Ibadat — the Acts of Worship like prayers, fasting and hajj.
2. Financial Laws:

(a) On Social Level: issues like Islamic taxes of various kinds.

(b) On Individual Level:

i. the laws pertaining to the means of possessions.

ii. the laws pertaining to the utilization of one's possessions.

3. Personal Laws: issues like marriage and divorce, eating and drinking, vows and oaths, hunting and slaughtering, bidding good and forbidding evil, etc.

4. Social Laws: issues like the political system, judiciary, penal code, jihad, etc.

3. The Five Types of Decrees

All Islamic injunctions fall within the five main categories of laws: wajib, mustahab, ja'iz, makruh, and haram. There are other sub-divisions within these five decrees.

1. **Wajib**: means obligatory, necessary, incumbent. An act which must be performed. One will be punished for neglecting a wajib act, e.g., the daily prayers.

Ihtiyat wajib: Sometimes you might see the term "ihtiyat wajib" in the decrees of the mujtahids. It means "precautionarily obligatory and its significance is the same as that of the wajib with one difference: wherever the mujtahid says that "it is precautionarily obligatory," you have the option of leaving his opinion in that particular problem and following the opinion of the second best mujtahid provided the second mujtahid has a different opinion.

Wajib is also divided into two: 'ayni and kifa'i:

Wajib 'ayni means an obligation which is imposed on individual Muslims, e.g., the daily prayers. No one can do this duty for someone else.

Whereas wajib kifa'i means an obligation which is imposed on the Muslim community as a whole; and if it is fulfilled by one or more individuals, then the rest of the community is no longer required to do that.

For example, a dead Muslim must be buried in the proper Islamic way. This is a duty imposed on the Muslim community collectively; if some people do that, then others are not responsible; but if no one does that, then the entire community is answerable to God.

2. Mustahab, also known as sunnat, means recommended, desirable, better. It refers to the acts which are recommended but not wajib. If one neglects them, he will not be punished; however, if one performs them, he will be rewarded.

3. Ja'iz means permitted, allowed, lawful. An act which is permitted and lawful; there is no reward for performing it nor any punishment for neglecting it, e.g., drinking tea.

Halal & Mubah: There are other words which reflect the same meaning as ja'iz but with a different connotation: "Halal" also means permissible acts or things, but it is used mostly for permissible things rather than actions.

For example, the term "halal meat" is used for the meat whose consumption is permissible in Islam. Similarly, "mubah" means permissible, but it is exclusively used for things which are lawfully yours or under your control as opposed to "ghasbi— usurped".

4. Makruh means reprehensible, disliked, discouraged. An act which is disliked by Islam but not haram. If one does a makruh act, he will not be punished; however, if he refrains from it, then he will be rewarded.

5. Haram means forbidden, prohibited. An act from which one must abstain. If someone performs a haram act, he will be punished either by the Islamic court or in the hereafter or both.

Lesson 25 : Islam's Spiritual Program (1)

1. Introduction

Islam is concerned about the physical wellbeing of its followers as well as the spiritual wellbeing.

Spiritual training is an essential part of our life. While describing the mission of the Prophet of Islam, Allah says: "He is the one who has raised among the ignorant [Arabs] a messenger from among themselves who[1.] recites to them His revelations, [2.] purifies them, and [3.] teaches them the Book and wisdom." (62:2) The second purpose for sending the Prophet is "spiritual purification".

Spiritual purification or training is very strongly linked to the purpose of our creation.

2. Purpose of Creation

Allah is the Creator of human beings and the entire universe. In His capacity as the Creator, only He has the right to define the purpose of creation. He says in the Qur'an:

"...He is the one who has created death and life so that He may test you to see who among you does good deeds." (67:2) "And I have not created the jinn and the humans except so that they may serve Me." (51:56)

When you study these two verses (and many others on this subject), you will realize that according to Allah the purpose of life is: to successfully go through the trials and tribulations in this world in order to achieve salvation in the hereafter.

Unlike this worldly life, the life in the hereafter will have no end. The trials and tribulations can also be expressed as follows: to enter into the servitude of Allah by our own will and choice.

In order to understand the concept of trial and tribulation, it is important to understand the human being:

A human being is a very delicate creature. He has a physical aspect as well as a spiritual dimension. Our whole being revolves around two main powers: the soul and the emotions. 1. The soul (ruh) or the spirit is the king of our being.

The untainted intellect and the pure conscience are various aspects of our spiritual dimension. 2. The emotions and other physical faculties are also integral parts of our being. These emotions and faculties can be broadly classified under 'anger' and 'passion'.

Our entire adult life is an arena of struggle between the soul and the emotions. And herein lies the trial and tribulation of mankind. A Muslim is expected to use the soul to control the emotions.

Islam does not promote the complete suppression of emotions and desires; it only wants the Muslims to use their reason to restrain their desires by fulfilling them within the dictates of the Divine laws.

Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) has beautifully described this concept as follows:

Allah has blessed the angels with the power of reasoning but has deprived them of any desires; and He has blessed the animals with natural desires but has deprived them of the power of

reasoning; and He has blessed the human beings with both the power of reasoning and also the desires.

Therefore, one who restrains his desires by the power of reasoning, he is superior to the angels (who do not have to deal with any desires and emotions).

But one who lets his desires control his reason, he is inferior to the animals (who have not been blessed with the power of reasoning).

In conclusion, we can say that the purpose of creation is to live in such a way that our soul, reason and conscience control and restrain our emotions and desires. If we can live such a life, then we have succeeded in the trials and tribulations of this world, and hope for the salvation in the hereafter.

3. Program for Spiritual Training

Islam seeks to train a person in such a way that he can be a balanced human being in the spiritual sense of the world. A morally healthy person is he who can use his reason to restrain his emotions.

Allah did not only send prophets, messengers, divine books and Imams to guide us spiritually, He has also placed certain rituals in the Islamic laws which serve as spiritual programs for Muslims. There are two main programs for spiritual training: 1. An intensive program on an annual basis. 2. A regular program on a daily basis.

(A) THE ANNUAL SPIRITUAL TRAINING

Fasting during the month of Ramadhan⁵ is the annual spiritual program for strengthening the soul and keeping the desires/emotions within the dictates of Divine laws. Allah has described the purpose of fasting as follows:

O You who believe! Fasting has been prescribed for you as it had been prescribed for the nations before you — so that you may become God-fearing. (2:183)

God-fearing means taqwa. Taqwa, normally translated as “fearing God”, means the mind-set in which a person fears God’s displeasure because of the love that he has for God. In other words, taqwa is a frame of mind which prevents the person from committing sins that cause God’s displeasure with him.

How does fasting in Ramadhan help in acquiring such a mindset of taqwa? Fasting is a ritual which

begins at dawn and ends at sunset; and during that entire time, a Muslim is expected to refrain from ten things as follows:

1. Food. 2. Drink. 3. Inhaling smoke or dust. 4.

Vomiting intentionally. 5. Submerging the head into a body of water. 6. Liquid enema.

5 Ramadhan is the ninth month in the lunar calendar used by the Muslims.

7. Sexual intercourse. 8. Masturbation. 9. Staying till dawn in the state of impurity caused by sexual discharge.

10. To ascribe a statement wrongfully to God or His divine representatives.

The above list includes the two strongest desires of a human being: food and sex. By abstaining from them during the daytime for the whole month of Ramadhan, a Muslim is trained to strengthen his willpower and control his desires. By the end of Ramadhan, a Muslim is expected to be a spiritually stronger person than what he was before Ramadhan.

A Muslim who goes through this annual spiritual training is expected to maintain the domination of his soul over his desires and emotions.

However, this is not always easy for everyone. The spiritual power is not a static commodity; it has the potential of increasing and decreasing. The more you protect it, the more it will protect you; but if you neglect it, soon the desires will gain control of your life.

Generally, people go through a cycle of spiritual strength and weakness. As the distance in time increases between the Muslim and the month of Ramadhan, the soul starts to lose its strength in the face of material temptations.

That is why Allah has legislated the fasting on an annual basis so that we may get the opportunity to re-energize our soul and spirit at least once every year.

One way of maintaining the domination of soul over desires is by fasting after the month of Ramadhan on the days which are highly recommended in our shari'a. These days are:

- first and last Thursdays of every lunar month;
- first Wednesday after the 10th of every lunar month;

- 13th, 14th and 15th of each lunar month;
- the entire month of Rajab and Sha'ban;
- 4th to 9th of Shawwal; 25th and 29th of Dhul Qa'dah;
- 1st to 9th of Dhul Hijja; 18th of Dhul Hijja; 24th of Dhul Hijja;
- 1st, 3rd and 7th of Muharram;
- 17th of Rabi al-Awwal; 15th of Jamadi al-Ula; 27th of Rajab.

Fasting on these days (especially the first three in the list) will surely help in maintaining the strength of the spiritual power and will go a long way in keeping the desires under control.

In short, the ritual of fasting is actually a spiritual training to strengthen the soul and control the desires — the very nature of the trial and tribulation faced by us in this life.

Lesson 26 : Islam's Spiritual Program (2)

(B) THE DAILY SPIRITUAL TRAINING

Islam has also provided its followers with a program for spiritual training on a daily basis. This program is known as salat. Salat is not a "prayer" in the sense of talking to God whenever, wherever and however you like.

Salat is an act of worship which must be done in a prescribed manner. Whenever we use the words "ritual prayer" it refers to salat and not to "prayer" in the sense explained above.

In appearance, salat is just an act of worship; but with further insight into the philosophy of salat, you will realize that it is also a program which trains the Muslims to spiritually strengthen themselves and to become the masters of their own lives rather than be slaves of their desires.

It is this aspect of salat which has made it the pillar of Islam. The Prophet says: "The salat is the pillar of religion."

While describing the effect which salat should have on the lives of Muslims, Allah says: “Establish the salat; surely the salat prevents [the doer] from the indecencies and the forbidden facts].

And surely the remembrance of Allah is great.” (29:45) This verse clearly says that a true salat would help the doer in staying away from sins. It is in the light of this verse that the Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.) said, “The first deed to be checked [on the Day of Judgment] will be the salat: if it is accepted, then other deeds will also be accepted; but if it is rejected, then other deeds will also be rejected.”

What the Prophet meant was that the salat plays a pivotal role in the life of a Muslim: if his salat was a true salat and had affected his behaviour,

then there is a great chance that his other deeds will also be good; but if his salat was just a ritual without any impact on his life, then there is a lesser chance that his other deeds would be good.

The five daily prayers, provided done with understanding, will not just be rituals but a program for spiritual upliftment of the Muslim. The salat will constantly remind him to keep the purpose of life in focus and work towards it.

That is why the Prophet once asked his companions, “If there is a stream outside your house and you wash yourself in it five time every day, then would any dirt remain on your body?” When the answer was negative, the Prophet said, “Indeed the example of salat is like that flowing stream — whenever one performs a salat, the sins between the two prayers are washed away.”⁶

In this lesson, we will look at just three aspects of salat which can help us in spiritual training.

(i) Wuzu: Reminder of Spiritual Purity

Every Muslim is required to do ritual ablution (wuzu) before salat. Even this simple ablution is a way of reminding us about spiritual purification. When we study the two verses of the Qur’an about ablutions, we see that there are two planes of purification: physical and spiritual.

Although wuzu and ghusl (the major ablution) are related to physical purification, there is a more sublime reason underlying these two ablutions — they serve as a reminder to and gateway of spiritual purification.

In the chapter al-Baqarah, after talking about one of the major ablutions, the Qur’an says:

“Surely Allah loves those who oftenly turn to Him, and He also loves those who cleanse

themselves.” (2:222) In another verse, after talking about wuzu, the Qur’an says:

“Allah does not desire to make any impediment for you; but He desires to cleanse you, & that He may complete His blessings upon you;

happily you may be grateful” (5:6)

We find two different themes in these verses: First: Allah loves those who cleanse themselves, and that He desires to cleanse us. Second: He wants to complete His blessings upon us, and that He loves those who oftenly turn towards Him. The first theme is in 6: Wasa’ilu ‘sh-Shi’a, vol. 3, p. 7.

The first theme is related to the physical cleanliness, while the second theme is related to the spiritual purity.

The words of the first theme are very clear; they refer to cleanliness. But what do the words of the second theme mean? What is the meaning of “oftenly turning to Allah?” Turning to Allah implies that the person had turned away from Allah. What does this mean? These are the questions which I will discuss below.

In the Islamic value system, the human soul is like a light bulb. If the bulb is protected from dust and dirt, it will enlighten the area around it; but if dust and dirt is allowed to accumulate on the bulb, then it will not be able to illuminate the area as much as before.

Similarly, the human soul has to be protected from spiritual ‘dirt’ and uncleanness, otherwise it will not be able to guide the person as rightly as before.

After swearing by the most majestic signs of His creation, Allah says in chapter 91, verses 1-10 that the pure human soul has the ability to understand what is right and what is wrong provided it is purified and uncorrupted.

He makes it clear that the soul, just like the body, is capable of becoming spiritually impure and unclean. Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) has said, “The human soul is a precious jewel; whoever protects it, enhances its (effectiveness), and whosoever degrades it, decreases its (effectiveness).”

The impurities that can corrupt a human soul are collectively known as “sins”. Accumulation of sins can indeed render the human soul spiritually ineffective and, in Qur’anic expression, ‘seize the heart’.

Allah says, “Whatever (sins) they have committed has seized their heart.” (83:14) By committing sins, not only is the soul of a Muslim seized but he also spiritually turns away from Allah. Sins create a distance between God and man.

Can a person rescue his soul from the seizing of the sins? Can a sinner spiritually get closer to God? Yes, indeed, a sinful person can spiritually return to Allah. Returning to Allah means repenting and asking forgiveness for your sins. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) has explained this phenomenon as follows: “Each believer has a bright soul.

When he commits a sin, a dark dot appears on his bright soul. If he repents, the dark dot will disappear. But if he persists in his sins, the darkness will increase until it covers the entire soul—then the person would never return towards goodness.”⁷

Just as our bodies can become impure by the physical things, our souls can become impure by sins. To rid our bodies of the physical dirt, we use water; similarly, to rid our souls of the spiritual impurities, we use tawbah (repentance). In short, the human soul is corruptible; it is corrupted by sins; the corrupted soul can be purified by tawbah.

After talking about ritual ablutions which are done by water, Allah says that “He loves those who do tawbah”. By this He is drawing our attention to the spiritual purification. So with this insight into the Qur’anic verses, whenever a Muslim does the ritual ablution, he also remembers the spiritual purification which is even more important than the physical purification.

(ii) Salat Helps in Spiritual Training

The five daily prayers have different” numbers of cycles known as rak’ah. Each rak’ah consists of the act of standing while reciting two short chapters from the Qur’an, the act of bowing and two prostrations.

The fajr (dawn) prayer consists of 2 cycles.

The zu.hr (noon) prayer consists of 4 cycles.

The ‘asr (afternoon) prayer consists of 4 cycles.

The maghrib (evening) prayer consists of 3 cycles.

The ‘isha (night) prayer consists of 4 cycles. -

One wonders why Islam prescribed a different number of cycles for these prayers? Why could not they be the same for all ritual prayers?

⁷ Al-Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 273.

Many people have attempted to explain it in different ways, but I have also looked at this question and came to the conclusion that there is no particular reason for this variety in the number of cycles. It seems that this difference in the number of cycles was introduced by Islam in order to create a sense of discipline among the Muslims and to create the spirit of absolute obedience to the Divine laws.

A Muslim is someone who voluntarily submits himself to Allah. This is not always easy keeping in mind the trials and tribulations which we are going through. Praying on a daily basis and following the number of cycles prescribed by the shari'a without questioning its merit is a way of instilling in us the spirit of obedience to the laws of Islam.

You must pray in the prescribed manner even if you do not understand the merit of some of its rules; you should pray with the thought in your mind that this is how Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala, wants you to pray.

This will indeed help you in harnessing the power of desires and emotions within yourself, and help you in getting closer to the purpose of life — to totally submit ourselves to the will of Allah.

(iii) Sajdah: Daily Reminder of the Purpose of Life

Sajdah is the last part in each cycle of salat; it is the part where you prostrate in such a way that your forehead, both palms, both knees and the big toes of both feet are touching the ground. Sajdah is to be done twice in each cycle: one should go into the first sajdah, then sit upright for a moment, and then go into the second sajdah.

Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) was once asked why we have two sajdahs in each cycle of salat. The reply that the Imam gave shows that sajdah (like many other parts of the ritual prayer) has a symbolic meaning also.

He said, "While you are in the first sajdah, you are saying [to God] 'From it [the earth] You have created me.'

While getting up from the first sajdah, you are saying 'From it You have taken me out.'

When you go into the second sajdah, you are saying To it You will return me.'

While getting up from the second sajdah, you are saying, 'From it You will take me out again.'"

In this hadith, the holy Imam has actually applied the following verse to the sajdah: "From it We

have created you, and to it We shall return you, and from it We shall take you out again.” (20:55)
If you study this hadith carefully, you will realize that:

1. You have been created from the earth. Remembering your origin will not allow you to be arrogant and proud on the basis of race or wealth.
2. Getting up from the first sajdah is like our birth, going down into the second sajdah is like death and getting up from the second sajdah is like resurrection. This symbolic meaning will never let us forget the day of judgment and the life hereafter.
3. It also shows that this worldly life is symbolically nothing more than a few moments that you sit between the two sajdahs. This insight into the philosophy of sajdah will surely transform your salat from a mere ritual to a practical reminder about your origin, the transient nature of this world and your ultimate destination in the hereafter.

What you have read above are just three examples from the rules related to salat which help the Muslims in focusing on the purpose of life and strengthening themselves spiritually. We thank Allah, subhanahu wa ta’ala, for providing such means of spiritual training in the daily rituals of an Islamic life.

Lesson 27 : The Islamic Community 1

1. The Brotherhood of Islam

A Muslim is related to different people in different ways: first, he is very closely related to his family members; second, he is related to his relatives;

and finally, he is related to other Muslims in the bond of religious brotherhood known as the Muslim Ummah. The first two circles of relationship are based on family ties.

You and your brother or you and your cousin are from a common fore-father. But the third relationship is not based on family ties, it is based on religious ties.

All Muslims are related to one another through Islam, and this relationship is known as the “Islamic Brotherhood”. Allah says in the Qur’an, “Indeed the believers are brothers.” (49:10)

The basis of Islamic brotherhood is not a common forefather, but the common God, Prophet, the Book, etc. All Muslims believe in Allah, Prophet Muhammad, and the Qur'an, and they all pray towards the same Ka'bah.

Relationships are also based on common race, language or country. People of the same race, same language or same country feel a special fraternity towards each other. But Islamic brotherhood transcends all these boundaries of race, language, country, colour and wealth.

Allah says in the Qur'an: "O you mankind! We have created you from a male and a female; and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other [more easily]. Indeed, the most noble among you in view of Allah is the most pious of you." (49:13)

All Muslims are brethren of each other even if they are from different families, races, and countries, or have different skin colour and language. Muslims in China, Mexico, Iraq, Kenya, USA, India, England, Turkey, Malaysia, Ghana, Japan and Tunis are all brethren of one another on the basis of their common faith and beliefs.

Their colour, country, and language are less important when it comes to their relationship based on Islam.

All the Muslims of the world form a single brotherhood or community which is known as "the Muslim Ummah". Every Muslim is a member of the ummah. The Ka'bah is a visual center of gravity for the Muslim ummah—Muslims all over the world face the same Ka'bah five times a day and confirm their brotherhood.

2. The Prophet & Islamic Brotherhood

The issue of Islamic brotherhood and fraternity was so important in Islam that soon after migrating to Medina, the first important social decree of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) was on the issue of brotherhood.

The Muslim community of Medina was divided into two groups: the Ansar and the Muhajirin. "Ansar" (Helpers) was a title used for the natives of Medina, whereas "Muhajirin" (Immigrants) was a title used for those Muslims, mostly Meccans, who had migrated to Medina.

Among the Ansar, there were two tribes known as the Aws and the Khazraj who were bitter enemies and had fought each other for more than a century. The Prophet had resolved this conflict even before he migrated to Medina.

With the advent of Islam, the Aws and the Khazraj put their past animosity behind and accepted the bond of Islamic brotherhood. Referring to this blessing of Islam, Allah says: “And remember the favour of Allah upon you—you indeed were enemies (of each other) and then He created fraternity between your hearts and thus you became brethren by His blessing...” (3:103)

The Prophet found that there was cultural and economic disparity among the Ansar and the Muhajirin. So with the guidance of Allah, the Prophet announced one day that he was going to establish the bond of brotherhood between the Ansar and the Muhajirin.

He gathered the two groups at the mosque and then started calling out the name of one Muhajir and one Ansar, and declared them to be brothers of each other. Referring to this bond of brotherhood, Allah says: “Those who believed, migrated and fought in the way of Allah [i.e., the Muhajirin], and those who gave shelter and helped [i.e., the Ansar]—they are the true believers, for them is forgiveness and a noble sustenance...” (8:75)

Some of the Ansar went beyond the call of duty in fulfilling the rights of brotherhood: they divided their entire wealth into two and gave one-half to their immigrant brother-in-faith.

Some even specified a substantial portion in their estate to be inherited by their immigrant brother-in-faith. Then Allah revealed the following verse “The blood relatives have more right to each other in the Book of Allah”.

This shows that one of the first steps towards building an Islamic community is creating the atmosphere for Islamic brotherhood and fraternity.

An interesting segment of the event of brotherhood is that when the Prophet had joined each Muhajir with an Ansar, ‘Ali bin Abi Talib (a Muhajir) was left out. So he came to the Prophet (who was also a Muhajir) and complained that he had been left out from the bond of brotherhood between the Muhajirin and the Ansar. The Prophet said, “O ‘Ali! You are my brother in this world as well as in the hereafter.”

3. The Moral Rights of Brotherhood

Islamic brotherhood as expressed in the Qur’an (“Indeed the believers are brothers”) is not just a fancy idea. It had been implemented by the Prophet in Medina. There are certain rights which the believers have over each other.

Allah has described some of those rights immediately after the verse quoted above. In this lesson, you will learn six of those rights from the Qur’an: “O you who believe!

1. “No people should laugh at, or make fun of, another people.”

You might laugh at others because of what you see—their appearance, dress or way of living. But you do not know anything about their hearts and minds.

Their faces and dresses might look funny to you, but inside they may be better than you. Therefore, do not make fun of other people “because those who are being laughed at may be better, in Allah’s view, than those who laugh.” (49:11)

2. “Do not find fault with your own Muslim brothers.” (49:11) A Muslim should pay more attention to his own deeds and try to amend his own mistakes. There is no need to probe and find the faults or mistakes of others.

3. “Do not call one another by insulting nicknames.” (49:11) Every Muslim has a good name; call others by their proper name or by a nickname which they use for themselves. But never call names because Allah does not like that one Muslim should insult his own brother-in-faith.

After mentioning these three rights of Muslim over each other, Allah ends the verse with the following statement: “And those who (commit such sins and) do not ask forgiveness, they are the unjust people.”

This verse of the Qur’an makes it clear that even such trivial things — making fun of others or calling names— are so much disliked by Allah that He considers such sins as “injustice”. And He surely does not like the unjust people!

4. “O you who believe! Avoid most of the suspicious [thoughts about other Muslims].” (49:12)

The reason why Allah wants us to avoid most of the suspicious thoughts about other Muslims has been explained by Allah in the next sentence: “Surely suspicion in most cases is a sin.” Islam wants you to think positively about your Muslim brother and sister.

5. “And do not spy [on each other].” (49:12)

Spying on your Muslim brother or sister and trying to find their weak points and secrets is not allowed in Islam.

6. “Nor should some of you backbite others.” (49:12) “Backbiting” is known in Arabic as ghibat. Ghibat means talking about the hidden bodily defects or secret inappropriate behaviour of someone behind his/her back.

The reason why ghibat of another Muslim is forbidden in Islam has been explained by Allah in the next sentence of the verse: “Does any one of you like to bite the flesh of his dead brother?! Surely you dislike it.”

Ghibat is just like biting the dead body of your own brother: he cannot defend himself. Saying bad things about someone in his absence is almost the same—he is not present to defend himself. In this sense, the term “backbiting” is very close to the meaning of “ghibat”.

The last three sins —suspicion, spying and backbiting— are connected to each other. If you avoid the first one, you will be able to stay away from the other two sins.

But if you always suspect others, then you will be tempted to spy on them or find bad things about them. If you find out anything negative about others, then you are tempted to gossip about them.

So keep your mind clean and try to think good of your Muslim brethren. These are some ethical rights which Muslims have over each other.

Lesson 28 : The Islamic Community 2

1. Equality of Believers

(A) THE CONCEPT

Islam came with a universal concept of brotherhood. Its foundation is based on tawhid, the belief in One God. And its social program is also based on unity of the believers.

Just as in tawhid, one first has to reject the false gods and then declare faith in the One and Only God, similarly, Islam rejects all artificial and man-made marks of distinction. No one can claim any superiority over the other based on race, colour, language or wealth.

Allah clearly declares in the Qur’an:

O you mankind! We have created you of a male and a female, and then We made you into races and tribes so that you may know each other. Surely the most honourable of you in Allah’s sight is

the one who is the most pious among you; surely Allah is All-Knowing and Aware. (49:13)

According to this verse, all humans can trace their origin to Adam and Eve. Allah has divided them into different tribes and races so that it may be easy to recognise each other. Thus the difference in race, tribe, colour and language are to facilitate the recognition of each other.

These physical and material differences cannot be a standard for preference or superiority of one over others. Besides knowledge and Jihad, the only mark of distinction recognized in Islam is taqwa, i.e., piety and Godfearing. As Allah has said, "Surely the most honourable of you in Allah's sight is the one who is most pious among you."

Islam preached and promoted racial equality and harmony among the believers. It does not say that one should not feel fraternity towards the believers who belong to his tribe or culture.

However, a Muslim crosses the acceptable limits of ethnic fraternity when he starts preferring the evil person of his own tribe over the good Muslims of another tribe. Such racial prejudice is not allowed in Islam at all.

(B) EXAMPLES FROM HISTORY

When the adhan, the call to prayer, was introduced in Medina, the Prophet selected Bilal as the first mu'azzin — even though Bilal was not an Arab, he was an Ethiopian. He could not even pronounce the letter "shin" properly; it sounded like "sin"; so instead of saying "Ash-hadu an la ilaha il-lal-lah" he used to say "As-hadu an..." Some Arabs came to the Prophet and complained about his choice for the first mu'azzin.

The Prophet rejected their complaint and said Allah hears the sin of Bilal as shin.8 Juwaybar was a native of Yamamah who came to Medina in search of the truth about Islam.

He soon accepted Islam. Since he had neither money nor any friend, he was temporarily accommodated along with other poor Muslims in the Mosque by permission of the Prophet.

The Mosque, however, was not a place of habitation; therefore, the Prophet selected a site outside the Mosque and erected a shed over it for the homeless people. This place came to be known in history as "Suffa".

One day the Prophet came to the people of Suffa and started talking to Juwaybar. He said, "How good it would be if you could marry and start a family, ending this loneliness and isolated life?"

Juwaybar said, "O Messenger of Allah, I have neither wealth nor beauty; nor have I a noble

descent or lineage. Who will marry me? And which woman likes to be the wife of a poor, short, dark complexioned and ugly man like me?"

"O Juwaybar said the Prophet, "God has changed the worth of the human being in Islam. Many people were high-placed in the pre-Islamic society and Islam brought them down. Many were despised nonentities and Islam bestowed them with honour, high rank, and brought them up.

Islam abolished racial discrimination and pride of lineage. Now all people irrespective of their colour & Rizvi, S.Saeed Akhtar, Slavery from Islam & Christian Perspectives, p. 69. and origin are equal. Nobody has superiority over others except through piety and obedience to Allah.

"Therefore, O Juwaybar, do as I say. Go to the house of Ziyad bin Labid to ask for the hand of his daughter in marriage."

Ziyad was one of the wealthiest persons of Medina and was held in high status by his own tribe. When Juwaybar entered his house, Ziyad was surrounded by his relatives and some of his tribesmen. Juwaybar took a seat, paused for a moment and then raising his head, he said, "I have brought a message from the Prophet. Do you like to hear it confidentially or openly?"

Ziyad: "A message from the Prophet is an honour to me, better tell it openly."

Juwaybar: "The Prophet has sent me to request you for your daughter for myself."

Ziyad: "Did he himself make this suggestion to you?"

Juwaybar: "I don't speak on my own accord. Everybody knows me, I am not a liar!"

Ziyad: "Strange! We do not give our daughters to persons of unequal status nor outside our tribe. You go back; I shall go to the Prophet and have a talk with him myself."

Juwaybar left the house murmuring, "By God whatever the Qur'an teaches and whatever is the purpose of the prophethood of Muhammad is totally against what Ziyad says."

Those nearby heard the murmuring of Juwaybar. Zalfa, the lovely daughter of Ziyad, heard these words. She came from behind the curtain and said to father: "Father, who was the man who just went out saying something? And what did he mean?" Ziyad: "He had come to ask for your hand in marriage and was claiming that the Prophet had sent him for this purpose."

Zalfa.: "Isn't it possible that he had really sent him, and thus your rejection may amount to disobedience of the Prophet's order?"

Ziyad: "What do you feel about it?"

Zalfa: "I feel you should bring him back before he reaches to the Prophet; and then go yourself to find out the truth." So Ziyad went behind Juwaybar and persuaded him to come back to his home. Then he went hurriedly up to the Prophet.

Ziyad: "O Messenger of God, Juwaybar came to me with such and such message from you. I would like to inform you that our custom is to give our daughters to persons of equal status from our own tribe who all happen to be your companions."

"O Ziyad" said the Prophet, "Juwaybar is a faithful man. That dignity and honour of which you are talking of has not been abolished. Every believer man is equal (for the purpose of marriage) to every believer woman."

Ziyad returned to his house and explained the matter to his daughter. She said, "Please do not reject the proposal put by the Prophet. This matter concerns me. I accept Juwaybar whatever his condition may be. If the Prophet is pleased with it, I am also pleased." The wedding was duly solemnized. Ziyad paid the mahr (marriagegift paid by the groom to the bride) and also provided a house and its essential items to the newly wed from his own wealth.

When the night came, Juwaybar was dazzled by the beauty of his bride and the richness of the house which was given to him. He was completely overwhelmed by the unexpected blessings of Allah; in spiritual ecstasy, he went to a corner of the room and spent the whole night in recitation of the Qur'an and prayer.

It was dawn when he came to himself and then decided to fast in gratitude to God.

When the women from Ziyad's family came to see the bride the next morning, they found her untouched. They kept the matter secret from Ziyad. Two nights and days passed in the same manner: Juwaybar prayed during the nights and fasted during the days.

Now the women informed Ziyad about this unusual situation because they thought that perhaps Juwaybar was impotent. Ziyad took the matter to the Prophet; the Prophet called Juwaybar and inquired about the unusual behaviour seen in him.

"O Prophet!," answered Juwaybar, "when I entered the house and found myself amidst that affluence, a state of gratitude and devotion over took me. I thought it was necessary to offer thanks and prayers to Allah before doing anything. Tonight I shall go to my wife."

Juwaybar and Zalfa lived a most happy life. When the call for jihad came, Juwaybar participated in it with enthusiasm typical of a brave Muslim, and attained martyrdom under the banner of Islam. After his martyrdom, Zalfa was the most sought after woman for a wife and people were eager to pay the greatest mahr for her.⁹

The example of Bilal (a non-Arab) and Juwaybar (a poor and “status-less” Arab) shows that the concept of equality was not only presented on a theoretical level in Islam rather the Prophet demonstrated equality among the Muslims during his own lifetime in a practical manner.

It was in light of this teaching that he married his cousin to Zayd bin Haritha, a freed slave, and gave the sister of ‘Abdu ‘r-Rahman bin ‘Awf (a Qurayshite) in marriage to Bilal, an ex-slave of Ethiopian origin.

In his last khutba, the Prophet openly declared: “There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor for a non-Arab over an Arab, nor for a white man over a black, nor for a black over a white, except by piety. All of you are from Adam and Adam was from the dust.”

⁹ Mutahhari, M., Anecdotes of Pious Men, p. 8.

(C) PROMOTION OF EQUALITY & BROTHERHOOD

Islam has also instituted certain rituals that promote the sense of equality among the followers of Islam.

One important way of promoting brotherhood among the Muslims is the salat in both forms: furada (individual prayer) and jama’at (congregational prayer).

In the furada prayer, you are required to recite surah al-Fatiha (the first chapter of the Qur’an). If you read the meaning of this surah, you will notice that half of the surah uses plural pronouns. For example:

“Only You, WE worship; and only You WE ask for help.” “Guide US to the straight path...”

You have to say these sentences with plural pronouns even if you are praying furada, on your own. You have to say “We...We...” even when you are praying alone. Why?

Firstly, because Allah wants you to realize and feel that you are not alone; that you are part of a brotherhood known as “the Islamic brotherhood”; that you belong to a community known as “the Islamic ummah.”

Secondly, Allah wants us to think of the Islamic ummah even when we are all alone. Islam is not a personal religion; it is a social religion. Thinking about other Muslims will surely promote the sense of brotherhood among the followers of Islam all over the world.

Although the daily prayers can be said individually as well as in congregation; however, to say the daily prayers in congregation has been highly recommended because it promotes the feeling of brotherhood and equality in Islam. How?

Firstly, all stand in lines regardless of any difference of race, tribe, colour, language or wealth. It often happens that a poor person will be standing in the front row while a wealthy person will be standing in the second row.

And this means that in the position of sajdah (prostration), the head of the wealthy person will be at the feet of the poor person! This will make the wealthy person realize that in God's view, rich and poor are all equal.

Secondly, there is no reservation in the rows of congregational prayers. No one can come and say to someone else that "move from here, this is my place." And if a person forcefully removes someone else, then his salat will be invalid (batil). This rule ensures that everyone feels equally related to God.

Thirdly, in jama'at prayer, every one will be reciting in the same language, and doing exactly the same action at the same time—takbir, ruku", sajdah, etc. And also saying "we...we...". This will surely create a sense of unity among the Muslims.

It is because of this aspect of congregational prayer that Islam has strongly recommended the jama'at prayer on a daily basis. And it is because of this aspect of jama'at prayer that Islam has even increased the spiritual reward of group prayer as follows:

Number of Persons Reward for 1 rak'at is equal to:

2 150 prayers

3 600 prayers

4 1200 prayers

5 2400 prayers

6 4800 prayers

7 9600 prayers

8 19,200 prayers

9 36,400 prayers

10 72,800 prayers

more than 10 nobody knows but Allah

Another important practical demonstration of equality and brotherhood in Islam is the ritual of hajj—the pilgrimage to Mecca. Although hajj is obligatory only once in a lifetime for those Muslims who can physically and financially afford the journey, it is indeed an experience that leaves longlasting and deep impressions on the psychological and spiritual dimension of the pilgrim.

Before entering the holy territory of Mecca and its vicinity, it is necessary that all pilgrims change into ihrdm. Ihrdm (pronounced as ehram) is simple dress for pilgrims: For men, it consists of two extra-large size white towels—one to be tied from the waist down to the knees, and the other to be placed over the shoulders. For women, it consists of a two-piece simple white dress.

Also, no cosmetics are allowed while a person is in the ihrdm. This dress takes away all means by which a person would distinguish himself by the use of dress and cosmetics; you are not even allowed to look at yourself in the mirror.

When the pilgrim reaches Mecca, he has to proceed to the Holy Mosque and do tawdf—going around the Ka’bah seven times. This uniformity in dress and action—all believers moving around the Ka’bah has a strong impact in bringing out the real identity of a person: you are nothing but a slave of God, and in this there is no difference between you and the next person doing the tawaf.

It is appropriate to quote the impression which hajj had on one of the most famous Muslim figures in the Afro-American community of the USA, Malcolm X.

“There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue-eyed blondes to black-skinned Africans. But we were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experience in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white and the non-white.

“America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem.

Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered ‘white’—but the ‘white’ attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color.”¹⁰

Lesson 29 : The Islamic Community 3

1. AMR BI ‘L-MA’RUF & NAHI ‘ANI ‘L-MUNKAR BIDDING THE GOOD & FORBIDDING THE EVIL

Islam: A Social Religion. Islam is not a religion in the spiritual sense of the word only; it deals with all aspects of human life. Islam also seeks to create peace and harmony in the social life of a Muslim society.

It has instituted ways to promote good and prevent evil in the society. The most important social principle of Islam is known as “amr bi ‘l-ma’ruf wa nahi ‘ani ‘l-munkar”.

Amr bi ‘l-ma’ruf means to bid the good or to promote the good; whereas nahi ‘ani ‘l-munkar means to forbid the evil or to prevent the evil. This social principle is relevant on the individual level as well as social level.

We have to promote good and prevent evil within the sphere of our own family and friendship circle as well as within the Muslim community and the human society at large.

2. Importance of Amr & Nahi

Amr bi l-maruf & nahi ‘ani l-munkar is a moral and ethical safety-net for the Muslim community and the human society at large.

It does not allow the Muslim community to abandon its members in the path of immorality and self-destructive path. Nor does it allow the Muslim ummah to be indifferent to the moral and ethical dilemma faced by humanity at large. Allah says:

“There should be among you (O believers), a group (of the learned and sincere persons) who should call (the people) towards goodness, bid (them) to the good and forbid (them) from the evil—they are the successful people.” (3:104) While describing the believers, Allah says:

“...The believing men and the believing women are helpers of each other: they bid the good, forbid the evil, establish the prayer, pay the alms, and they obey Allah and His Messenger—these are the people on whom Allah will be merciful.

Indeed Allah is Powerful and Wise.” (9:71) In the latter verse, while counting the positive qualities of the believers, Allah has placed *amr bi ‘1-ma’ruf* and *nahi ‘ani 1- munkar* before the *salat* and the *zakat*.

Because it is with *amr* and *nahi* that *salat*, *zakat* and other good deeds will be promoted and practised in the Muslim community.

Imam ‘Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) said: “Verily the people before you perished because when they committed sins, the Rabbis and the Priests did not forbid them from it. And when the people became submerged into sins and the Rabbis and the Priests did not forbid them, then the chastisement came down upon them.

Therefore, bid towards the good and forbid the evil; and know that bidding towards the good and forbidding from evil will not hasten your death or decrease your sustenance.”

On the same lines, the Prophet of Islam (may peace be upon him) had said earlier that, “My followers will be in good condition as long as they bid (each other) towards the good, forbid (each other) from the evil, and cooperate with each other in good (deeds).

If they do not do this, then the (heavenly) blessings will be lifted from them and some (evil ones) among them will be imposed over them (as a ruler). In that state, they will have no helper, neither on the earth nor in the heaven.”

Once a person from the tribe of Khath’am came to the Prophet and asked him: “O the Messenger of God! Please inform me about the best [teaching] of Islam.”

The Prophet: “Believing in God.”

Khath’ami: “Then what?”

The Prophet: “Maintaining [good] relations with the relatives.”

Khath'ami: "Then what?"

The Prophet: "Bidding the good and forbidding the evil."

Then the Khath'ami asked, "And please also tell me what are the worst deeds in view of Allah?"

The Prophet: "Shirk: associating a person or a thing with Allah."

Khath'ami: "Then what?"

The Prophet: "Severing relations with the relatives."

Khath'ami: "Then what?"

The Prophet: "Promoting evil and forbidding the good." These ahadith from the Prophet and the Imam are sufficient to impress the importance of amr bi '1-ma'ruf and nahi 'ani '1- munkar for the ethical and moral wellbeing of the Muslim ummah and humanity at large.

3. Amr & Nahi: An Expression of Brotherhood

Amr and nahi should not be seen as interfering in the lives of other people; it is, on the contrary, one of the demands of brotherhood in Islam.

The Qur'anic verse in which Almighty Allah has talked about Islamic brotherhood is not actually a verse about brotherhood—it is a verse which gives an extreme example of amr and nahi, and it justifies the "interference" by saying that "indeed the believers are brothers". Now read the entire two verses:

If two groups from among the believers fight (against each other), then you should make peace between them. However, if one continues its aggression over the other, then fight the aggressor party until it agrees to return to the command of Allah.

If the aggressor agrees to return (to the command of Allah), then make peace between the two on the basis of justice. Be just; verily Allah loves those who are just.

Indeed the believers are brothers, therefore, make peace between your brothers. And fear Allah so that you may be dealt with mercy." (49:9-10)

This verse is saying that Muslims cannot be indifferent to the problems of their brethren; they have to get involved: either they should resolve the conflict peacefully or side with the oppressed

against the aggressor until peace and justice is achieved in the society. This is not interference in the negative sense, this is the demands and rights of brotherhood which Allah has established among the believers.

4. Conditions & Levels of Amr & Nahi

The issue of amr bi 1-ma'ruf and nahi 'ani 1-munkar, depending on the circumstance, can take different forms: it can become wajib or sunnat. Even the means of amr and nahi depends on the circumstances of the issue and the person involved. The person who wants to do amr and nahi should observe the following conditions:

1. You must be familiar with the Islamic view on that issue in order to properly define "good" and "evil" before encouraging others to do good or forbid them from evil.
2. In each given case, you must weigh the possibility of the influence of your advice. If you are sure or there seems to be a great probability that your words will have no effect on the other person, then it is not necessary to do amr or nahi.
3. You must also evaluate the state of the person whom you want to advise. Is he insisting or repeating the evil deeds or was it just a one time slip on his part? If you discern or come to know that he is not going to repeat the sin, then you do not have to do amr or nahi.
4. You must also evaluate the overall situation to make sure that your action of amr or nahi would not lead to a worse situation than what exists at present.

Even when you have decided that you should do amr or nahi, you will have to look at the different level of doing amr bi 'lma'ruf and nahi 'ani 'l-munkar. In all, there are three levels of amr and nahi:

1. By indirect action: By indirectly expressing your dislike of the other person's wrongful behaviour. For example, by not greeting him or greeting him without the previous warmth, or by ignoring him:

with the hope that this might lead the person to think about change in your attitude towards him, and hopefully guide him to the right direction.

2. Verbally: If the first method does not work, then talk to the person. Whether you should talk politely and friendly, or harshly depends on the situation.

3. By direct action: This is only applicable to those who have authority over others: parents, teachers and Islamic government. If preventing the evil depends on physical action, then it must

be thought out very carefully. The example mentioned in 49:9 is of this level of amr and nahi.

Lesson 30 : Islamic Economic System (1)

1. The Middle Path

Islam is a complete way of life. It is not only concerned with the spiritual upliftment of human beings, it is equally concerned about their material and physical wellbeing. Islam guides its followers in financial and economic matters, in social and political affairs, and also in moral and personal spheres of human life.

In this lesson, I will briefly describe the economic system. However, one must always remember that the Islamic economic system is not in itself complete; it is a part of the overall system of life.

Islam is a compact system of life in which all its aspects (religious, ideological, social, political and ethical) are well synchronized. Muslims will succeed only if they put the whole system into work, and not just choose and pick from it according to their likes and dislikes.

Anyhow, for this lesson, the simplest way to describe the Islamic economic system is by highlighting its differences with capitalism and communism.

Capitalism is an economic doctrine based on the idea of private ownership of the means of production and distribution. It is a system in which the capitalist is given a free hand; and government does not regulate anything for the benefit of the workers. For example, there is no minimum or fair wage.

Everything is left on the principle of supply and demand. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Poverty is equated to idleness; personal shortcomings are considered the chief cause of poverty.

Hence, in its ideal system, capitalism has no room for compassion and benevolence towards the poor and the needy.¹¹

A similar mentality also existed among some aristocrats of Mecca. The Qur'an says, "When it is said to them, 'Give charity from what God has given to you,' the unbelievers say to the believers,

‘Should we feed the person whom God, if He wished, could feed?’” (36:47)

It was to remedy this situation that some thinkers of the West promoted the ideas of communism. The economic doctrine of communism is based on the idea of centralized public ownership of the means of production and distribution.

The communists went to the other extreme and completely denied the concept of private ownership. Communism was a reaction to the vices of capitalism; but a reaction which tried to completely suppress a concept ingrained in us by nature, that is, private ownership.

Naturally, as soon as the masses were given political freedom, they rebelled against communism. The collapse of this system in Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is a living testimony to this fact.

Although communism has failed, it had quite an impact on the economic policies of many countries. Quite a few Western capitalist countries, to prevent the spread of communism, modified their economic system and created what is now known as welfare states. A welfare state allows provisions to prevent exploitation of the workers and to provide for the basic needs of each citizen.

Islam is “a straight path;” and naturally, its economic system is based on very balanced standards. Islam, in contrary to communism, recognises the concept of private ownership.

But, in contrary to capitalism, Islam has limited the means of acquiring wealth to prevent the excessive accumulation of wealth in a minor quarter of the society.

11 A prominent example in our time of such thinking was U. S. President Ronald Reagan. Patti Davis, Reagan’s daughter, blamed her father’s policies for fostering homelessness in the United States; she ridiculed her father’s anecdotes about “welfare cheats” and his view that people are “homeless by choice.” (See Globe & Mail, September 21, 1990.)

The Islamic economic system is based upon the belief that only Allah is the real and actual owner of everything. But God has also implanted the concept of ownership in our nature; and thus, we are allowed to “own” the wealth of this world. The Qur’an says, Whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah.” (2:284) Allah is the owner of the whole universe.

It is in this capacity that He has allowed us to own the blessings of this world by saying, “He has created for you whatever that is in the earth” (2:29)

However, Islam also wants to prevent the excessive accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few people so the society may not fall into two classes: one is overstuffing, while the other is starving.

The chance of such a situation is very real.

A look at one of the richest nation in the world, the United States of America, and its problem of the poor, hungry and homeless people will bear us out. The Qur'an justifies the concept of tax by saying, "...so that (the wealth) may not become a monopoly of the rich among you." (59:7)

In the early period of the Islamic history, such a situation actually occurred. When 'Uthman bin 'Affan became caliph, he handled the public wealth in such a manner that within a short time, his tribe, the Umayyads, became the richest people in the Muslim empire.

Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib, in a famous sermon, explains the reasons why he was reluctant to accept the caliphate after "Uthman's murder.

The Imam says, "Had it not been for the pledge of Allah with the learned people that they should not be indifferent to the gluttony of the oppressor and the hunger of the oppressed, I would have cast the rein of caliphate on its shoulders..."¹² Top in the list of priorities of Imam 'Ali's caliphate was the re-establishment of social justice in the Muslim community.

And it was this same agenda which created strong opposition to 'Ali among those who were used to special privileges during the previous caliphate.

Islam does not only teach equality of the Muslims in the eyes of Allah, but it also promotes equality in economic sphere. ¹² Sayyid ar-Razi, Nahju 'l-Baldghah, sermon No. 3. However, "equality" in Islam does not mean "similarity". Islam aims to elevate all its followers to the level of ghina—being free from want. It is this equality which Islam strives for in its economic system.

2. The Economic Equality

To bring about this equality in the economic condition of the people, Islam has introduced various methods. An important method is the transferring of the excess wealth from the fortunate sector of the society to its less fortunate members. This is done on two different levels: on an individual level and on a collective level.

On Individual Level:

Economic equality is pursued through the moral and ethical teachings of charity. In Arabic, this is known as sadaqa and infaq. There are many verses in the Qur'an which command the Muslims to help others voluntarily.

There are more verses dealing with voluntary charity than the obligatory dues. Every one is

morally obliged to help others according to his or her own means and resources. First level of charity:

They ask you (O Muhammad) as to what they should spend (in way of charity). Say, "Whatever can be spared (from your wealth after your own expenses)." (2:219)

Second level of charity:

...The pious (are) those who...spend (in charity) from whatever We have given to them. (2:3)

Third level of charity:

The pious people (are) those who spend (benevolently) in good and bad days. (3:134)

In all these levels, one must remember to follow the path of moderation: neither keep your hand shackled to your neck (out of greed), nor outspread it completely open—otherwise you will sit reproached and denuded. (17:29)

Someone asked Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq about a group of people who are prosperous while their Muslim brothers are in severe need.

Is it right for the rich people to eat and drink satisfactorily while their brothers are hungry, especially during the difficult days? The Imam said, "Surely a Muslim is brother of a Muslim; he does not oppress his brother, neither abandons him nor deprives him. The Muslims are obliged to work hard for their brother, to relate to him, to help him, and to be charitable towards the needy people."13 On Collective Level:

Economic equality is guaranteed through the obligatory taxes on the excess wealth of every Muslim. In an ideal Islamic society, the Islamic government is responsible for enforcing the laws of Islamic taxes like khums, zakat, fitrah, khiraj, etc.

For example, while explaining the role of an Imam in his capacity as a leader, Imam Musa al-Kazim says, "The Imam is the heir of a person who has no heir, and he is the provider of a person who has no provider."14

This economic security is to be extended to all the subjects of an Islamic state, even if they are non-Muslims. Once Imam 'Ali passed by an old man who was begging on the side of the road.

The Imam asked, "What is this?" The people said, "O Amiru '1- mu'minin, he is a Christian." The Imam said, "You have used him until he became old and is unable (to work any longer), and then

you have deprived him (of his basic needs)!! Provide for him from the public treasury.”¹⁵

In short, Islam aims at eliminating the “need” (hajat), and elevating the needy people to the level of being “free from want” (ghani).

Lesson 31 : Islamic Economic System (2)

1. Importance of Zakat

“Zakat” literally means “purity; justness; integrity and honesty”. In Islamic legal terminology, the word “zakat” is used for one of the main obligatory taxes imposed upon the wealth of the Muslims derived from the natural resources given to them by Allah.

Its literal meaning implies that by paying zakat, one is purifying his wealth by sharing God’s blessing with the less fortunate members of the ummah. The wealth of the person who does not pay zakat is impure and tainted with the share of the poor and the needy.

One of the ways by which we describe the value of a seemingly simple thing is by comparing it to an item well known for its value.

In the Qur’an, Allah, subhanahu wa ta’ala, also uses this method of emphasizing certain Islamic values: whenever He wants to show the importance of an issue, He combines it with something whose importance is well known to the Muslims.

Salat, the symbol of Allah’s right upon human beings, is a well known virtue in Islam; it is known as “the pillar of the religion”. Similarly, Allah has used zakat as the symbol of the rights of human beings upon each other.

In order to show the importance of fulfilling the rights of fellow human beings, in many verses, Allah has combined the order of salat with the order of paying zakat.

All items of zakat are related to the natural resources of the earth. They are not the creation of man but blessings of Allah. So by paying zakat, we thank Allah by sharing His blessings with other human beings; and we also show our concern for the poor and the needy.

Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) said, "Almighty Allah has made the zakat obligatory so that He may test the rich people and provide for the poor. If the people pay zakat from their wealth, no one would be poor any longer..."

2. Obligatory Zakat

(A) SHARING THE NATURAL RESOURCES

Zakat, according to the Shi'a school of thought, is limited to the following nine items:

I. Coins:

1. Gold Coins. 2. Silver Coins.

II. Cattle:

3. Goats and sheep. 4. Cows.

5. Camels.

III. Crops:

6. Wheat. 7. Dates.

8. Barley. 9. Raisins.

These are the nine items on which zakat is wajib. At this stage of our discussion, we will not go into details of the rules to explain how much becomes wajib on which item at what time. We shall only mention some details about zakat on crops.

Zakat on crops becomes wajib only when the production reaches the minimum nisab (the specific amount or quantity on which zakat becomes wajib). The nisab for each of the four crops mentioned above is 846 k.g. So if you produce less than 846 k.g. of wheat, then there is no zakat on you.

The amount you have to pay as zakat tax depends on the methods used for watering the crops:

- if the farm was watered by a river or by rain, then you have to pay 10% of the total crop.
- if the farm was watered by drawing water from a well or by using modern machines, then you have to pay 5% of the total crop.

So if you produced 100,000 k.g. of wheat and you had watered your farm through a near-by river, then you have to pay 10,000 k.g. wheat as zakat. But if you used modern technology to water your farm, then you have to pay 5,000 k.g. wheat as zakat.

(B) ZAKATU 'L-FITRA: SHARING ON THE DAY OF 'IDDU 'L-FITR:

Besides the zakat mentioned above on the natural resources, Islam has introduced a zakat common to all affluent people on the occasion of 'iddu '1-fitr, the celebration which occurs after the end of Ramadhan. This zakat is known as zakatu '1-fltra.

By "affluent" we mean anyone who can provide the necessary expenses of his self and his dependents for a year.

The amount to be paid depends the one's eating habits and the number of his dependents. One has to pay three kilos of wheat or rice (or its market value) on behalf of himself and each of his dependents. So if a person has a wife and three children, then he must pay fifteen kilos of wheat or rice, or its monetary value.

It becomes due on the eve of Iddul '1-fitr and must be paid before one performs the special salat of "idd. This zakat is to be paid to the poor and the needy so that they may be able to share in the happiness and joy of the day of "iddu '1-fitr.

3. Recommended Zakat

All other forms of charity are considered as sunnat zakat or sunnat sadaqah. The levels of voluntary charity has already been discussed in the previous lesson.

Here I would like to mention one more sunnat zakat: If a business man buys certain merchandise for investment and it remains in his inventory for a full year, then it is recommended that he should pay the zakat on that particular merchandise at the rate of 2.5% of its market value. This recommendation is applicable only if the value of that merchandise is at least equal to 69 grams of gold.

4. The Usage of Zakat Fund

The revenue generated from the zakat tax is to be used for the following persons and projects:

1. The Poor: a person who does not earn enough to cover a year's expenses for himself and his family.

2. The Needy: a poor person who is so desperate that he begs for his needs.
3. Those in debt: A person who is in debt and does not have the ability to pay it off can be helped from the zakat fund for the paying of the debt.
4. In the way of Allah: A project which can be classified as “fi sabili ‘l-lah — in the way of Allah” can also be financed by the zakat fund. This includes construction of roads, bridges, hospitals, shelters for the poor, mosques, religious schools, religious publications and other projects which contribute to the betterment of the society in general.
5. The Way-farer: A traveller who has run out of money and, therefore, cannot return to his home, can be helped by the zakat fund.
6. Those poor non-Muslims whose hearts are inclined towards Islam and/or Muslims. Islam allows the use of the zakat to win the goodwill of the financially weak non-Muslims in whom one finds an inclination towards the religion of Islam or towards the Muslim people.
7. The Zakat-Collectors: The wages of those who work in the revenue department of an Islamic government to collect zakat comes out of the zakat revenue itself.
8. The slaves: Islam allows the usage of zakat to buy slaves in order to emancipate them in the way of Allah.

This list is based on the following verse of the Qur’an: “The alms (zakat) are only for the poor, the needy, those who work (to collect) them, those (unbelievers) whose hearts are inclined (towards the truth), the slaves, the debtors, in the way of Allah, and the traveller. So does Allah ordain. Allah is Knowing, Wise.” (9:60)

Lesson 32 : Islamic Economic System (3)

1. Khums in the Qur’an & History

“Khums” literally means “one-fifth or 20%”. In Islamic legal terminology, it means “one-fifth of certain items which a person acquires as wealth, and which must be paid as an Islamic tax”. The Qur’an mentions it in the following verse:

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Know that whatever of a thing you acquire, a fifth of it is for Allah, for the Messenger, for the near relative, and the orphans, the needy, and the way-fare r...(8:41)

In this verse, the word “ghanimtum” has been used which has been translated as “you acquire”. As explained above, it means “certain items which a person acquires as wealth.” What are these certain items?

According to the ahadith of the Imams of Ahlu ‘l-bayt, the items which are eligible for khums are seven:

1. the profit or the surplus of the income.
2. the legitimate wealth which is mixed with some illegitimate wealth.
3. mines and minerals.
4. the precious stones obtained from sea by diving.
5. treasures.
6. the land which a dhimmi kafir buys from a Muslim.
7. the spoils of war.

However, there are some people who interpret the word “ghanimtum”. as “whatever of a thing you acquire as spoils of war,” thus confining the obligation of khums to the spoils of war only.

This interpretation is based on ignorance of the Arabic language, the history of khums, the Islamic laws and of the interpretation of the Qur’an.

To make this point crystal clear, I would like to quote the following arguments from my father, ‘Allamah Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi. In reading the following paragraphs, remember that the word ghanimtum has been derived from al-ghanimah.

(A) THE MEANING OF “GHANIMTUM”

“The famous Arabic dictionary of al-Munjid (by Father Louis Mal-f of Beirut) says, ‘al-ghanim and al-ghanimah means: (a) What is taken from the fighting enemies by force, (b) All earnings

generally...Furthermore, the saying al-ghunm bi 'l-ghurm means that the profit stands against expenses, i.e., as the owner is the sole proprietor of the profit and nobody shares it with him, therefore only he bears all the expenses and risk.'¹⁶ This implies that in Arabic language al-ghanimah has two meanings: one the spoils of war, and the other 'profit'.

The above quoted proverb also proves that 'profit' is not the uncommon meaning. When a word in the Qur'an can be interpreted in more than one way, it is incumbent upon the Muslims to seek guidance from the Prophet and the Ahlu l-bayt. Otherwise, they would be guilty of tafsir bi 'r-ra'iy (interpreting the Qur'an according to one's own personal views); and this is a sin which pushes the sinner into jahannam.

(B) THE HISTORY OF KHUMS

"Khums is one of those things which was introduced by ^Abdu '1-Muttalib, the grandfather of the Prophet, and continued in Islam. Acting upon a command of God given to him in dream, when "Abdu '1-Muttalib rediscovered the well of Zamzam, he found in it many valuable things which were buried in it in the very remote past by the Ismailites when they feared that their enemies would usurp them.

When 'Abdu '1-Muttalib found that buried treasure, he gave away one-fifth (literally, khums) in the way of God and kept the remaining four-fifths to himself. Then it became a custom in his family; and after the hijrah of the Prophet, the same system was incorporated in Islam.

Thus the first khums was not given ¹⁶ See the entry under G-N-M; in the 28th edition of al-Munjid (Beirut: Dar el- Machreq, 1986) it is on p. 561. Also see other famous dictionaries like Lisan al-'Arab and al-Qamus.

from the 'spoils of war', but from a buried treasure (which is one of the seven items eligible for khums.)

(C) THE ISLAMIC LAWS

"Not a single sect of Islam confines the meaning of ghanimah to the 'spoils of war'. In addition to the "spoils of war¹ the following items are subject to khums: (a) Minerals: eligible for khums in Shi'ah and Hanafi sects, (b) Buried treasure: eligible for khums in all Muslim sects (that is, Shi'ah, Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali and Sha'f'iy).

(D) THE INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'AN

"As mentioned earlier, the interpretation of the Qur'an must be based on the teachings of the

Ahlu '1-bayt. The word ghanimah in the verse under discussion has clearly been interpreted as 'alfa'idatu 'l-muktasabah — the earned profit' by our Imams.

“To conclude, we can say that the word ghanimah was never treated as being confined to the 'spoils of war' by any sect of Islam; and as far as our Imams are concerned, it meant many things besides the spoils of war right from the day of Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him), as the authentic traditions show.”¹⁷ What has been quoted above can also be substantiated from the practice of the Prophet of Islam himself.

For example, when the Prophet sent “Amr bin Hazm to Yemen, he wrote instructions for him in which, among other things, he says, “...to gather the khums of Allah from the gains [of Yemenis].”¹⁸ And when the tribe of Bani Kilal of Yemen sent its khums to the Prophet,

the latter acknowledged it by saying, “Your messenger has returned and you have paid the khums of Allah from the gains (al-ghana'im).”¹⁹ It is 17 Rizvi, S.S.A., Your Questions Answered, vol. 1 (Dar-es-salaam: Bilal Muslim Mission, 1973) p. 44-46.

¹⁸ Ibn Khaldun, Ta'rikh, vol. 2, part II (Beirut: al-A'lami, 1971) p. 54; Ibn Kalhir, al-Bidayah wa 'n-Nihayah, vol. 5 (Beirut: al-Ma'arif, 1966) pp. 76-77; Ibn Hisham, Sirah, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dani 1-Jayl, 1975) p. 179.

¹⁹ Abu 'Ubayd, al-Amwal (Beirut: Mu'assah Nasir, 1981) p. 13; al-Hakim, Mustadrak, vol. 1 (Hyderabad: 'Uthmaniyya Press, 1340 AH) p. 395. For interesting to note that the Bani Kilal obeyed the Prophet's order and sent the khums of its gains to him while no war had taken place between the Muslims of Yemen and the unbelievers. This is a clear indication that khums was not restricted by the Prophet to the spoils of war.

The importance given by the Prophet to the issue of khums can also be seen in his advice to the delegation of Bani 'Abdu '1-Qays. It seems that Bani 'Abdu '1-Qays (which was a branch of Rabi'ah) was not a very strong tribe.

Moreover, in order to travel to Medina, they had to cross an area inhabited by the Muzar tribe which was against the Muslims. Consequently, the Bani 'Abdu '1-Qays could not travel safely to Medina except during the months in which warfare was forbidden according to the Arab custom.

Once a delegation from Bani 'Abdu '1-Qays came to Medina and said to the Prophet, “We cannot come to you except in the haram months [when warfare is forbidden], and there are between us and you the unbelievers of Muzar. Therefore, please give us some advice that we may give to those whom we have left behind and that we may enter the Paradise [by acting on it ourselves].”

The Prophet advised them to believe in One God, establish prayer, pay zakat, fast in the month of Ramadhan, and “to pay khums (one-fifth) of whatever you gain.”²⁰

The circumstances of the Bani “Abdu ‘1-Qays —they were weak and small in number, and were thus prevented from travelling safely to Medina— leaves no room for interpreting the application of khums in the above hadith on spoils of war exclusively.

Lesson 33 : Family Life in Islam (1)

1. Introduction

A sensible and well-balanced family system is the very foundation of a happy life. Indeed, it is the root of an advancing civilization. Religion comes to take human beings closer to Allah. Therefore, it must create an atmosphere conducive to that ideal; otherwise, it cannot achieve its goal.

No religion can be regarded as complete unless it has a well-defined code of family life which expressly shows the exact role and responsibility of each member of the family.

The family is a closely-knit unit of human society; and this closeness creates danger of friction and conflict unless every member is told in unambiguous terms what his duties and rights are.

Islam is a comprehensive religion with guidance for every aspect of human life. In the next few lessons, you will learn about family life in Islam.

2. Extended & Nuclear Family Systems

Human family systems are normally divided into two types:

Extended (or Joint) Family System and Nuclear (or Separate) Family System.

Extended Family System:

In this system, all members of a clan: father, son, brother, sister, uncle, nephew, and others live together. The income of the individual is not treated as his personal property, rather it belongs to the family and the expenses of all members are met by that ‘family or collective income’.

This system intends to promote togetherness, mutual trust and co-operation among the family members. However, this system also breeds the attitude of laziness and dependency among some family members, and, as a result, it also kills the initiative to work harder among some others. (The Hindu society is based on the extended family system.) Nuclear Family System:

In this system, everybody is responsible for his own immediate dependants only. His income belongs to him and not to the 'family'. This system lacks the disadvantages of the Extended Family System but it also breeds self-centeredness and selfishness.

3. The Islamic View

What does Islam prefer? The family system advanced by Islam has combined the advantages of both systems mentioned above and has avoided their disadvantages.

On the one hand, Islam endorses the set-up of the nuclear (or separate) family system since it has clearly defined the people for whom you must provide. On the other hand, it has strongly emphasized on the issue of silatu 'r-rahm (keeping the bond of relationship intact) thus promoting the virtue of helping the relatives.

In Islam, a family can take the following two shapes:

- a couple and their children.
- a couple, their parents and their children.

This definition is based on the law which defines the persons whose maintenance is your obligation: your wife, your parents, and your children. These people are your dependents, it is obligatory upon you to provide for them. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) said:

"The ways of spending one's wealth are twenty-four in all...Thus, the five ways in which spending wealth is obligatory (wajib) are the expenses of the maintenance of one's children, father, mother, wife and slave. These expenses are obligatory upon him whether he is financially in constrain or affluent."

As for your cousins, uncles and aunts, they are your "relatives" but not your "dependents". That is, it is not obligatory upon you to provide for your relatives.

However, in Islam, it is important to have good relations with your relatives, and to love, respect and help them. Imam as-Sadiq further says: "And the five strongly recommended expenses are:

dedication of perpetual gift, doing good to one's relatives, doing good to other believers, recommended charity and emancipation of slaves."

Both aspects of this Islamic view are clear from verse 24:61. There is no blame upon...you if you eat (without permission) in your own houses,

the houses of your fathers, the houses of your mothers, the houses of your brothers, the houses of your sisters, the houses of your paternal uncles, the houses of your paternal aunts, the houses of your maternal uncles, the houses of your maternal aunts, the house which is in your trust, and the house of your friend.

The verse, on the one hand, clearly mentions separate houses for fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, uncles and other relatives thus implying that one should not put the burden of his dependants even on one's parents or other family-members forever; one must be self-reliant and self-supporting.

On the other hand, to promote unity, love, friendship, and also to be aware of each other's situation, the verse allows you to go and eat at the houses of your extended family members without prior permission.

4. Examples in History

We also find many examples in the lives of the Holy Prophet and his Ahlu '1-bayt which prove that they had lived separately from their extended family-members.

There was a famine in Mecca in 35 'Amul Fil (i.e., 35 years after the birth of the Prophet). Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle, had many children and his means of livelihood were limited at that time. The Holy Prophet, who himself had been raised by Abu Talib, felt that his uncle was facing financial difficulties. He, therefore, suggested to his other uncle 'Abbas (who was wealthy at that time) to help Abu Talib.

'Abbas went with the Prophet to Abu Talib. After some discussion, they decided to share the expenses of Abu Talib's sons: 'Ali should live with the Prophet, Ja'far with 'Abbas, and 'Aqil was to remain with Abu Talib.

This shows that the house of the Prophet was separate from that of Abu Talib. This was so, in spite of the close relationship between Abu Talib and Prophet Muhammad. This event also gives an example of silatu 'r-rahm.

During the last Ramadhan of his life, Imam 'Ali used to break his fast one day at the house of

Imam Hasan, next day at the house of Imam Husayn, and the third day at the house of his son-in-law, “Abdullah bin Ja’far.

This shows two things: our Imams had separate houses with their own family but, at the same time, they fulfilled the duty of silatu ‘r-rahm.

These two examples are sufficient to guide Muslims in their daily life. If any Muslim ventures to deviate from this straight path, he will no longer remain on the path of Islam. It is only by following this Islamic code that mankind can obtain peace of mind in this life and everlasting happiness in the life hereafter.

This lesson is entirely based on ‘Allamah Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi’s The Family Life of ham (Revised Edition, 1980) with slight modification for this course.

Lesson 34 : Family Life in Islam (2)

1. Children’s Status & Rights

Allah, subhanahu wa taala, has made the parents’ heart as the source of love for their children. The love for children has been ‘legislated’ by Allah in the very nature of parenthood. It is normal for a parent to love his or her child; it is abnormal for a parent not to love his or her child. This is the natural law as well as the religious law.

Islam has provided some wonderful guidelines for the parents in order to bring up their children—from birth, to age 21—in the proper Islamic manner.

The Prophet said to Imam ‘Ali: “O ‘Ali, there are as many rights of children incumbent upon parents as there are rights of parents incumbent upon children.”

2. Some Basic Rights

The rights of children upon their parents can be summarized under the following six items:

1. THE RIGHT TO LIVE: No parent has the right to abort the child or to kill the child after birth for any reason whatsoever. For example, the Qur’an has strongly condemned those who kill their

children for fear of poverty. Allah says: "Do not kill your children because of (fear of) poverty— We will provide for you and them."

(6:152) The Prophet said, "Whoever refrains from marriage because of fear of poverty, he has indeed thought badly of God."

2. THE RIGHT TO BELONG TO A FAMILY: No parent can disown his or her child, or deprive the child from the family name.

3. THE RIGHT TO HAVE A GOOD NAME: Imam 'Ali says: "The first beneficence of a parent towards his child is to give him a good name; therefore, you should name your child with a good name."

A child hears his name day and night; and it is reasonable to believe that the meaning of that name subconsciously strengthens those characteristics which are implied in that name. What is emphasized here is the fact that a name has a psychological effect on the person, provided it is not counter-manded by rearing or society.

A bad name has one more tangible evil effect. Whenever that name is announced, the person will feel embarrassment and the name will become a source of constant irritation, affecting his outlook on society. Hence the emphasis in ahadith on giving good names to children.

The Prophet used to emphasize this aspect of life so much that Imam as-Sadiq said, "The Prophet used to change the bad names of people and places."

4. THE RIGHT OF MAINTENANCE: It is a child's right to be provided by the parents with the necessities of life: food, dress, shelter, furniture, and whatever a person normally needs to live a respectable life.

5. THE RIGHT TO HAVE BASIC EDUCATION: It is the right of a child to receive basic secular as well as religious education.

6. THE RIGHT TO BE BROUGHT UP ACCORDING TO ISLAM: It is the right of the child to be brought up in a home environment which is Islamic.

3. Three Stages of Life

Islam has divided the upbringing of a child into three stages from birth to age 21. The division is based on the following hadith of the Prophet (s.a.w.): "The child is the master for seven years; and a slave for seven years and a vizier for seven years;

so if he grows into a good character within 21 years, well and good; otherwise leave him alone because you have discharged your responsibility before Allah.”

The same hadith has been explained by Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.): “Let your child play upto seven years; and keep him with you (for education and training) for another seven years; then if he succeeds (well and good); otherwise, there is no good in him.” The First Stage: from birth to age seven.

As the first stage is a care-free period, the child is to be considered as “master” of the parents. The Prophet said, “The child is the master for seven years.” This is the age of being a child and playing; he or she is not yet fully ready for education through formal instruction.

What has been said above, however, does not mean that a child cannot grasp or understand anything; not at all. The child is constantly influenced by the atmosphere in which he lives; he/she learns by observation and imitation;

therefore, it is absolutely necessary for the parents to provide good examples by their own behaviour. The Prophet said, “Respect your children and teach them good behaviour, Allah will forgive (your sins).”

Although the child is not ready for formal instructions, our Imams have emphasized that religious issues —very basic and simple— should be introduced to them gradually.

“Graduality” is the most important point to remember at this stage of life. The following hadith narrated by “Abdullah ibn Fazl from the fifth or sixth Imam is very significant to understand what is meant by gradually:

“When the child reaches 3 years of age, teach him seven times to recite la ilaha il-lal lah.

Then leave him at that till he is 3 years, 7 months and 20 days old; then train him to say Muhammadun rasu-lul lah.

Then leave him at that till he completes 4 years, then teach him seven times to say sal-lal lahu ‘ala Muhammadin wa ali Muhammad.

Then leave him at that till he reaches the age of 5 years; then see if he can distinguish between the right and the left hand. When he knows the difference, then make him face qiblah and tell him to do sajdah.

This is to continue till he is 6 years of age. Then he should be told to pray and taught ruku’ and

sajdah. When he completes 7 years, then he should be asked to wash his face and hands, and then told to pray.

This will continue till he reaches the age of 9 years, when he should be taught proper ritual ablution for prayer and proper salat.

When he learns proper wudu and salat, Allah forgives the sins of his parents.”

The Second Stage: from age eight to fourteen.

The Prophet said, “The child is...a slave for [the next] seven years.” Since this is the age when the child’s mind can grasp logical reasoning and is developed for formal education—it is very important that the child not only be educated but, at the same time,

he or she should, be raised with proper Islamic ethics. By saying that the child is a “slave” from eight to fourteen, the Prophet wants to emphasize that at this age the parents should be strict in disciplining their children.

A child is a “slave” in the sense that he has to follow the instructions of parents and teachers. In the sayings of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and the Imams of Ahlu ‘1-byat (a.s.), three things have been emphasized for the male children in the second stage of upbringing: 1.

literacy for secular knowledge; 2. religious knowledge and 3. physical education and martial arts. For example, the Prophet (s.a.w.) said, “It is the right of the male child on his father to...teach him the Book of Allah...and riding and swimming.” Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) said, “It is the duty of the father to teach his son writing.”

Religious education is very crucial at this stage so that the child’s religious beliefs are based on sound reasoning and firm foundation. Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) said, “Make haste in teaching your youngsters hadith before they are approached by murji’ite (a misguided sect).”

Literacy, and seeking of secular and religious knowledge has been equally emphasized for the girls in our ahadith. However, instead of physical education, the ahadith talk about those specific subjects which would help the girls in becoming good wives and educated mothers.

The destiny of the future generations of the ummah, after all, depends on the mothers who are learned, informed, and aware of their role in establishing a society which is always conscious of Allah’s presence.

The Third Stage: from age fifteen to twenty-one.

The Prophet described this stage of upbringing as follows:

“The child...is an adviser for [the next] seven years.” At the age of fourteen, fifteen and up, a Muslim child is expected to have become a responsible teenager. Therefore, the Prophet says that the parents should now treat him or her more like a friend’ than a ‘slave’.

At this stage, the parents should guide and help their teenage child in making correct decisions for themselves. In mid- and late teens, the child has to start the specific training or education for the career that he intends to pursue so that he may soon stand on his own feet. It is also the time when the child is nearing the age of marriage.

Islam has strongly emphasized that the parents should get their daughters married at an early age when they have acquired mental maturity—their higher education can continue even after marriage but marriage should not be postponed for the sake of anything else. The condition of mental maturity cannot be measured by age or time. The same emphasis goes for male children.

At the age of twentyone, the parents’ responsibility towards their children comes to an end. If anyone brings up his children based on Islamic values, that child surely will be the apple of the parents’ eyes and the delight of their hearts; and it is this child who, in his turn, may be hoped to fulfil his obligations towards his parents.

The Prophet said, “A virtuous child is a flower from the flowers of Paradise.” He also said, “Among the good fortunes of a man is the virtuous child.”

Lesson 35 : Family Life in Islam (3)

1. Parents’ Status

(A) FATHER

In the Islamic family system, the father is considered as the head of the family. Whenever some people form a group, they must also have a leader.

For example, a soccer team needs a captain who would make sure each player follows their plan

properly; a school needs a principal; a government needs a ruler. "Family" is a group of people; and, therefore, it also needs a leader whom we call as "the head of the family".

As the head of the family, it is the father's responsibility to provide the necessities of life for his dependants: his children, his wife (and elderly parents, if they are needy).

What are the necessities of life? Food, dress, shelter, furniture, and whatever a person normally needs to live a respectable life. The rights which a father has over his children are of three types:

- Spiritual & Emotional: to love one's father, and to deal with him in a humble, kind and merciful manner.
- Physical: to cheerfully bear any hardship you may face in taking care of him; to talk gently to him; not to raise your voice or hands above his; and not to precede him in any way.
- Financial: to fulfill his needs before he asks you for it.

Imam Zaynu 'l-Abidin (a.s.) said: "It is the right of your father to realize that he is your root and you are his branch; and that without him you would have been non-existent.

Therefore, whenever you find in yourself anything that is likeable, remember that your father is the basic means of that gift [of Allah] to you. And be thankful to Allah and grateful to your father accordingly."

(B) MOTHER

In Islam, the mother is a substitute head of the family. In many Muslim societies, the father works outside the house, whereas the mother is in charge inside the house.

As mentioned earlier, it is the father's duty to provide the necessities of life for the children. If the father is dead, then it is the duty of the grandfather to provide for his grandchildren. Only when both, the father and the grandfather, are dead the duty of providing the necessities of life for the children fall upon the mother.

A mother's basic duty towards her children is to love, nurture and train them as best as she can so that they may grow up as healthy and good Muslims. That is why it is said that, "Paradise is at the feet of the mothers."

The three types of rights mentioned for the father, equally apply for the mother also. Rather in some ways, the rights of mothers are superior to that of fathers.

Hakim bin Hizam asked the Prophet, "O Messenger of God, to whom should I do good?" The

Prophet said, "Your mother." Hakim asked, "And then who?" The Prophet again said, "Your mother."

Hakim asked the same question for the third time, and the Prophet again answered that "Your mother." When Hakim asked the fourth time, only then did the Prophet say, "Your father." Why is so much importance given to the rights of mothers? Imam Zaynu 'KAbidin (a.s.) says:

"It is the right of your mother that you should appreciate that she carried you [in her womb] as nobody carries anybody, fed you the fruits of her heart which nobody feeds anybody, protected you [during pregnancy] with her ears, eyes, hands, legs, hair, limbs, [in short] with her whole being, gladly, cheerfully and carefully.

She patiently suffered all the worries, pains, difficulties and sorrows, till the hands of God removed you from her and brought you to this world. Then she was most happy feeding you forgetting her own hunger; clothing you, even if she herself had no clothes; giving you milk and water, not caring for her own thirst;

keeping you in the shade, even if she had to suffer from the heat of the sun; giving you every comfort with her own hardships; lulling you to sleep while keeping herself awake...Therefore, you must remain thankful to her accordingly, and you cannot do so except by the help from Allah."

2. Parents' Rights in the Qur'an

As the children step into adulthood, parents proceed towards old age. The children, in their childhood, need the protection of their parents; and the parents, in their old age, need the kindness of their children. Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala, says: "If We grant long life to any, We cause him to be reversed in nature (i.e., from strength to weakness)." (36:68)

The three types of parents' rights mentioned earlier are based on the following verses of the Qur'an:

Your Lord has decreed that you should worship no one but Him and that you should • be kind to your parents; • and if one or both of them attain old age in your life [and become angry with you for some reason], then do not even say to them 'Oh' [in contempt], nor should you repel them. Instead, you should address them in respectful manner. •

And out of kindness, behave with them humbly. • And [pray for them by] saying 'My Lord! bestow upon them Your mercy Just as they cherished me in childhood.} (17:23-24)

In many verses, the Qur'an has combined the kindness towards the parents side by side with the

worship of Allah. “Worship Allah and join not any partner with Him and do good to parents...” (4:36) In verse 17:23, it says: “And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you should be kind to parents...”

Obedience to the parents is a mirror of obedience to Allah. For example, in verse 31:14-15, Allah says: “And We enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents...Show gratitude to Me and to your parents. To Me is your return. And if they strive to make you join in worship with Me things of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them; yet bear them company in this life with fairness and consideration.”

The last sentence means that you should be kind to your parents even if they are non-Muslims; however, you should not obey them if they ask you to do anything against the teachings of Islam.

We find that the Qur’an and hadith has emphasized more on the rights of the parents than the rights of the children. Why? The fact is that the parent’s heart is the fountainhead of the love for the child; this affection becomes the life-blood of the parents.

The Qur’an has alluded to this instinctive parental love in several places. On the other hand, children especially when they are no longer in need of parental care, do not feel so much love for the parents. We are not speaking about respect.

Here the talk is about instinctive love; and experience is a reliable witness to confirm this observation. Allah, subhanahu wa taala, says: “Your parents and your children, you know not which of them are nearest to you in benefit.” (4:11)

It is a known fact that signposts are not needed on a road going straight; but at a crossroads where several routes branch out, one cannot expect to get onto the right path without a guide or a signpost. It is for this reason that Islam does not emphasize in so many words those aspects of life which are taken care of by human nature itself.

It is where the hold of natural instinct is loosened that Islam extends its helping hand and leads man onto the right path by telling him what he is expected to do. It is for this reason that Islam did not emphasize the rights of children so forcefully; but full emphasis was given to the rights of the parents.

3. Importance of Silatu ‘r-Rahm

The importance of silatu ‘r-rahm can be seen from the following verses of the Qur’an and the ahadith of the Prophet and his Ahlu ‘1-bayt.

The Positive Aspect:

Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala, says: Say to them: "Whatever of good (wealth) you spend, it is for your parents, the near relatives, the orphans, the poor and the estranged traveller." The primary recipients of your charity should be your parents and your relatives if they are needy.

The Prophet (s.a.w.) said, "Some people go on an evil path and commit sins, but they behave gently with their relatives. Because of their silatu 'r-rahm, their wealth is increased and their lives are prolonged.

How much more would have been their reward if they had been good people?" Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said, "The reward of charity is increased ten times; and the reward of lending is increased eighteen times; and the reward of doing good to a believer is increased twenty times; and the reward of doing good to a relative is increased twenty four times."

Imam Husayn (a.s.): "Anyone who desires to prolong his life and his livelihood, then he should have strong ties with his relatives." There are many other ahadith on silatu 'r-rahm. The rewards of silatu 'r-rahm in this world can be summarized as follows:

- prolonging of life;
- increase in livelihood;
- prosperity in family and home;
- last moments of death will be eased.

The Negative Aspect:

Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala, says: "Those who break their covenant with God...those who sever the relationship which Allah has ordered to be joined, and those who do mischief on the earth—they are the (real) losers." (2:27) In another verse, after describing the same acts, He says: "...on them shall be the curse, and they shall have a terrible home (in the hereafter)." (13:25)

On the basis of these verses, severing the ties with one's relatives is counted among the major sins in Islam. Imam Ali (a.s.) said, "I seek protection of Allah from the sins which hasten death."

Someone asked, "O' Amir al-mu'minin, is there any sin which hastens death?" The Imam said, "Yes; and this is the severance of relationship. Indeed, when the members of a family remain united and help each other, then Allah gives them livelihood, even if they be drinkers of liquor. And, indeed, when members of a family separate from each other and sever relationship with one another, then Allah deprives them (of their livelihood) even if they are pious."

The Methods of Silatu'r-Rahm:

How should we do silatu 'r-rahm? Silatu 'r-rahm, as mentioned earlier, means keeping strong ties with one's relatives. There is no one way of doing silatu 'r-rahm. For example, in one hadith, the Prophet said, "Do silatu 'r-rahm even if it is by saying salam."

Silatu 'r-rahm can take different forms: • not giving any trouble to one's relatives; • dealing with relatives on the basis of love and Islamic ethics; • participating in ones' relatives' sorrow and joy; • helping them financially.