

Core Curriculum

6 Measuring Good and Bad in Islam

6.2 **The Gray Areas of Islamic Law and Morality**

INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to our channel! It’s really easy to talk about the haram and halal, and at times, it is also easy to talk about right and wrong. But there are issues that are not so easy when it comes to things that aren't black and white but are somewhere in between. What moral standing do those things have? That’s what we will try to answer in this lesson.

BODY OF TEXT

The Messenger of Allah (s) once said:

The halal is clear and the haram is clear, and between them are matters unclear that are unknown to most people. Whoever is wary of these unclear matters has absolved his religion and honor. And whoever indulges in them has indulged in the haram. It is like a shepherd who herds his sheep too close to preserved sanctuary, and they will eventually graze in it. Every king has a sanctuary, and the sanctuary of Allah is what He has made haram.

Haram and halal are pretty clear in Islam. Something that is haram is morally wrong to commit. It is morally wrong in one or two ways. The act is either intrinsically wrong, such as murdering an innocent person for the sake of money. At other times, the act is morally wrong in so far as it

is an act of disobedience to Allah (swt), like a Muslim eating food that Islamic law forbids.

Other acts, just like haram things, are intrinsically good or circumstantially good. For example, helping the poor and helpless are often intrinsically good acts. Brushing one's teeth may be circumstantially good if done for the sake of Allah.

These acts are not hard to categorize. There are, however, other categories and deeds that are more difficult to categorize as either good or bad deeds. Most of these deeds fall under the legal category of "mubāh" meaning that something is legally neutral and hence morally neutral.

There are a lot of examples of how this could be. For example, simply sitting on a couch would be considered mubāh. It is not haram or halal, wajib or mustahab or makruh. It is legally and morally neutral. However, remember that a simple act of sitting can change in its legal and moral status if one's intention changes. For example, sitting for a specific purpose may be morally neutral. However, sitting as a sign of respect for one's parents within the context of it being for the sake of Allah would be legally mustahab and a good deed.

As you can see, much of what we consider to be good or bad deeds, at least in areas that fall in the "gray" area are largely determined by our intentions and goals.

What about makrūh acts? Makrūh acts are a different kind of category. A mustahab act is obviously permissible and encouraged within the law, but it is also morally good. For example, helping a neighbor for the sake of Allah is legally encouraged but it is also morally good even if it is not obligatory. Mustahab acts are deeds which people may reap great rewards from. A makrūh reprehensible, but still legally permissible.

Let's look at a few examples. Probably the most well known of makrūh acts is divorce. Divorce, unless there are urgent issues that require it (like serious cases of abuse), is a morally reprehensible act. The

Messenger of Allah (swt) once said about divorce:

“among lawful things, divorce is most hated by Allah”

A question that is often asked is the following: if something is reprehensible, why does Allah allow it in Islamic law? Know that life among human beings is far than simple. Imām Jafar al-Sādiq (as) one said that

“the intelligent person is not the one who can distinguish between right and wrong, but one who can distinguish between the greater of two goods and the lesser of two evils.”

Sometimes something may be wrong, but preventing it may cause too much hardship and lead to even greater evils. That’s the reality of human life. In the case of divorce, perhaps one of the reasons why Allah allows it is that if He were to forbid it, perhaps it may lead to greater rates of adultery or abuse. Rising rates of adultery would obviously be worse for the Muslim community (Ummah) than an act of divorce.

Whatever Allah’s suggestions may be, whether something is made makrūh, mustahab or otherwise, it is always to our benefit in the end of the day. The Qur’an says:

Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, even if you should be within towers of lofty construction. But if good comes to them, they say, "This is from Allah "; and if evil befalls them, they say, "This is from you." Say, "All [things] are from Allah ." So what is [the matter] with those people that they can hardly understand any statement?

What comes to you of good is from Allah , but what comes to you of evil, [O man], is from yourself. And We have sent you, [O Muhammad], to the people as a messenger, and sufficient is Allah as Witness. (Chapter 4, verses 53-54 of the Holy Qur’an)

Before we end our lesson, an important piece of advice is needed. A good basic knowledge of Islam will teach us right and wrong in Islam.

But many times situations are in the gray. We really don't know whether they are good or bad. What the hadith at the beginning of this lesson taught is that it is best to avoid them. If we spend too much time doing things that are morally questionable, it may result in us taking actual sins lightly and committing them - God forbid.

So if you fall into a morally shady area, it is best to avoid it.

Until Next Time, Thank you for watching. As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh