

Core Curriculum

6 Measuring Good and Bad in Islam

6.7 **The Effect of Culture and Environment in Shaping our Religious Choices**

INTRODUCTION

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

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel! There’s been a long debate on what makes us what we are, nature or nurture? Are we born the way we are, or does the environment determine it instead? Well, we know for sure that the environment does play a definitive role alongside other factors.

Within the context of religion, the debate is similar. we know that we have free will and we know that we have some traits that we are born with, but we also know that our environment definitely affects us. Our environment includes cultural influences, our families, the kinds of things we watch and the kind of friends we have.

In this lesson, we’ll take a brief look into how our cultures and environment shape our religious choices.

BODY OF TEXT

The Messenger of Allah (s) once said:

"The example of a good companion and a bad companion is like that of the seller of musk, and the one who blows the blacksmith's bellows

(respectively). So as for the seller of musk then either he will grant you some, or you buy some from him, or at least you enjoy a pleasant smell from him. As for the one who blows the blacksmith's bellows then either he will burn your clothes or you will get an offensive smell from him."

Islam acknowledges the large role the environment plays in our religious life and by extension, the choices we make in the kinds of deeds we do, good or bad.

Many hadiths from the Prophet and his Ahl al-Bayt (as) ask us to look at the family backgrounds of those whom we want to marry. It also asks us to be proper role models for our kids and warns us about the kinds of people we choose as friends.

The above hadith, for example, tells us about the effect of friends. A lot of times we think that we are immune to the influences of the people around us, we think that we are strong and won't be influenced by them.

The Prophet (s) however, taught us otherwise. He taught us that even if we don't end up becoming just like them, we will still take on some of their characteristics. It's a bit like a sickness. If you hang out with people who are sick, eventually you're gonna catch the cold whether you like it or not.

Allah warns us about whom we choose as companions as well:

"And it has already been revealed to you in the Book (this Qur'aan) that when you hear the Verses of Allaah being denied and mocked at, then sit not with them, until they engage in a talk other than that; (but if you stayed with them) certainly in that case you would be like them (Chapter 4, verse 140 of the Holy Qur'an)

Probably the biggest influence in our lives is our parents. We often think that we are completely different from them, that they grew up in a different generation than we did. But we are often unaware of how much they've influenced us in terms of our patience, anger control, anxieties or even manners. No matter how strained our relationships are with our

parents, we inherit a lot of our attitudes from them.

Much of the teachings of Islam plays on our free will. It teaches us that we are to keep whatever good traits we inherited from our environment and direct them living a God-pleasing life. On the other hand, it teaches us to forgo the negative traits that we inherited from our parents, friends, tribes, culture and so on and so forth.

None of this can happen in one day. Islam shows us the correct way to behave, and clearly outlines what good and bad deeds are. Our bad behaviors are years of built up habits. It can sometimes take up to years to do away with bad habits by consistently replacing them with good habits. Sometimes we fail, sometimes we win. What Allah tests us on is our perseverance which is called *istiqāma* in Arabic. Allah says in the Qur'an:

So persevere firmly [on the right course] as you are commanded together with those who turn in repentance with you, and transgress not. Verily, He is All-Seer of what you do. (Chapter 11, verse 112 of the Holy Qur'an)

He tests us on how hard we try and how sincere we are. As the Most Merciful and Compassionate, He forgives us for our shortcomings as long as we fight the good fight and stay dedicated to Him.

Our dedication is what truly counts. Allah does not take us to task for the things we cannot change, or the things that are completely out of our hands. He takes us to task for the things we can change and do something about. When we fail to do so all the while being able to do them, that's when the trouble starts.

Allah says:

And the Day the wrongdoer will bite on his hands [in regret] he will say, "Oh, I wish I had taken with the Messenger a way. Oh, woe to me! I wish I had not taken that one as a friend. He led me away from the remembrance after it had come to me. And ever is Satan, to man, a

deserter." (Chapter 25, verses 26-29 of the Holy Qur'an)

The verse talks about how Satan deviates a person from the right path. The reason why a person will be in a state of regret is because he or she knows that change was possible, that taking the good path was an option but it wasn't taken. As powerful as influences may be, Allah has given us the power and the ability to overcome them through the power of our own habits and through His help.

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