

Core Curriculum

6 Measuring Good and Bad in Islam

6.1 The Effects of Our Actions in this World

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!

In this lesson we will look at how every act according to Islam has an effect our souls and the world. We will also look at how everything we do has a consequence in the realm of the divine as well.

BODY OF TEXT

The Prophet Muhammad (s) once said:

“Beware of sins which are treated as being minor, just like a people who encamp in the center of a valley, so someone brings a stick of firewood and someone else brings a stick until they are, therefore, able to bake their bread. Likewise, sins which are treated as being minor, and for which the person is taken to account, will destroy him.”

The Messenger of Allah (s) also said:

Should I not inform you of that which I fear for you even more than the dangers of the Anti-Christ? It is the hidden idolatry: Showing-off (riyā); a person stands to pray and he beautifies his prayer because he sees the people looking at him".

Every single action in this world has an effect. When we walk, our feet press on the ground and disturbs any small creature it touches. When we sit on our chairs and breath, the act of breathing alters the make up the air in our room as we breath in oxygen and breath out carbon dioxide.

Our good or evil acts also work the same way. They not only affect our souls, but they also affect our families, societies and even the environment.

Let's start with the soul. According to a hadith from the Prophet Muhammad (s), every time a person sins, a black spot appears on his or her soul. A sin isn't always or necessarily a pure evil act. One of the words for sin in the Qur'an is khattā, which in old Arabic was an arching term meaning to "miss the mark."

With the context of sin and guidance, sinning is to miss the purpose of life, which is friendship or wilāya with God. When one sins, one chooses a pleasure over friendship with Allah. In this sense, one deviates more and more from God. This distance creates a disturbance in the soul whereby a spiritual black stain appears. Enough of these stains ruins a person's salvation and substitutes heaven for hell.

The personal effects of sin are many. Distance from God's light makes us vulnerable to Shaytān for he comes to fill in the void. As Shaytān or the devil comes closer, the more susceptible we become to his suggestions. Perhaps the worst of his suggestions or "whispers" or waswasa are those of despair, worry and anxiety which usually come in the form of panic attacks.

Remember that sins are not just sins of ritual, or the obvious sins of theft and murder, they also include the sins of prejudice, judging people, gossiping and slandering, or being dishonest, pretentious and holding negative opinions and grudges against people (this usually comes in the form of being bashful of people).

When one looks at sin like this, is it really worth it? The worst enemy a person can have is himself or herself. It is the nurturing of the inner tyrant that ruins our lives with torturous thoughts. One can live in a mansion and have everything in the world but still be a prisoner inside the mind. This is what distance from God does to a person.

So to sum this argument up: anxiety is the mark of spiritual insecurity, an insecurity that is created through distance from God. This distance is exacerbated by sin as one chooses base pleasure over friendship with Allah.

Sins also have an affect on our families and society (especially the Muslim community). Remember that behavior is inherited. Our children often do not do the things we say, they do what we do. If you've ever heard the saying, "monkey see, monkey do," that's how it works with our kids.

Our kids pick up on our behavior and turn it into a lifestyle without even knowing it. If we embark on sinful behavior, like lying, gossiping, being bashful, our kids will most certainly inherit them, either in part or in whole.

Our families are not the only ones who pick up on our behavior. Other people also copy us directly or indirectly.

First, like family members, they pick up on our auras. Sin creates bad auras, and auras are transferred to others. How many children and adults today are directly or indirectly under the influence of movie stars and singers? As famous sinners have effects on people through TV or other forms of media, we affect the people whom we interact with on a regular basis. They pick up on our behavior and mimic it without even noticing it.

Have you ever met a person who was depressed and sad, and you came out of your meeting with that person a bit sadder, a bit more bitter? It is very difficult to avoid. Sinfulness leaves a ripple in the fabric of society, and people pick up on it and repeat it. It is, in short, a chain reaction.

The other way around is also true. When we choose good, when we chose the moral life, the life of obedience and surrender to God, we chose the friendship of God over base pleasures and grow closer to Him. By growing closer to him, Shaytān is further distanced from us, we weaken the inner tyrant and become less susceptible to spiritual vices such as extreme forms of anxiety and panic attacks. The good we do is also inherited by our family, children and society. The more good we do as individuals, the more others are encouraged to do the same. It's just human nature.

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

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

6.3 Heaven and Hell in Islam

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!

A common theme in Abrahamic religions, and in almost every other religion in this world is belief in heaven and hell. On many grounds they are similar, but they are also different. A common similarity is that heaven is usually a place of bliss filled with gardens. Hell on the other hand is a place of fire and pain where evil-doers are punished for the evil they committed while they lived on earth.

In this lesson, we're going to look at the effects that belief in heaven and hell have in the lives of Muslims. We will then expand on "how" people will dwell in heaven and hell. We will then address the questions that are usually raised concerning eternal damnation.

BODY OF TEXT

"Gardens of perpetual bliss: they shall enter there, as well as the righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their offspring. Angels shall enter from every gate (with the salutation): 'Peace be with you, that you persevered in patience! Now how excellent is the final home!'" (Chapter 13, verses 23-24 of the Holy Qur'an)

"They will not hear therein ill speech or commission of sin. But only the saying of: 'Peace! Peace!'" (Chapter 56, verses 25-26 of the Holy Qur'an)

According to Islam, as taught to us by the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), heaven and hell exist right now. The words for heaven and hell are Jannah and Jahannam respectively. According to the kind of life people live, they are, in a sense, already partaking in heaven or hell. However, this only becomes fully apparent in the Hereafter when the "curtain" will be lifted. Sometimes, for people who are more spiritually advanced, they may be able to have spiritual visions of heaven and hell which gives them a glimpse of the unseen (al-ghayb).

In terms of this world, there is a general understanding that knowledge of heaven and hell's existence is supposed to alter our behavior in this world. Human beings are primarily driven by two factors, the want for happiness and pleasure, and the fear of loss and pain. Much of what we do in this world, whether in school or work is driven by these two things.

Allah tells us in the Qur'an that those who hold fast unto God and are conscious of Him, and lead the good moral life will attain heaven.

Heaven is a place where everything in life has purpose. It is a place of complete comfort, joy and happiness where all human and divine relationships reach perfection. The Qur'an often describes heaven as a place that is mostly immersed in nature, with rivers, trees and all kinds of fruits. It also describes it as a place where one's marital relations are in complete harmony.

Allah's description of heaven in the Qur'an, which by no means exhausts the full reality of it, is meant to entice human beings to be better. If pleasures in this world must be sacrificed for the sake of Islam, that kind of sacrifice will be compensated for with something even greater in the next life. The point, however, is that in the meantime, one must cultivate oneself spiritually and abstain from sin in order to find salvation.

A question here may arise: if heaven is eternal as Islam teaches us, won't people get bored after a while, say, after a few thousand years?

Remember that in heaven, one is in direct communion with Allah. As Allah is eternal and infinite, in heaven one is totally immersed into the infinite beauty and bliss of Allah. One only gets bored with finite realities whereas the reality of God is infinite. As such, boredom in heaven is impossible no matter how long one dwells in it.

Now let's look at the subject of hell in Islam. Hell is a terrible place to be. It is dark, full of fire and horrors. In the Qur'anic narrative, it is meant to be a warning to people who want to commit evil in this world instead of choosing the proper moral life. The fire in hell is not the same fire of this world, but it is real. It not only puts bodies in pain, but it also burns the souls.

The effect of belief in hell is to make one desist from committing bad deeds in this world. Sometimes people commit evil when they think no one can see them and they think they can get away with whatever they do. However, when a person knows that God looks over everything people do, and that hell exists ... then real and genuine belief in hell will often restrain a person from committing those immoral acts.

People must not make the mistake and think that hell is not a punishment. Hell is a punishment for the evil people committed in this world. However, hell is also a hospital of some sorts, it is meant to purify people of the pollution that has taken over their souls.

The Qur'an teaches us that some people who are facing damnation will ask for forgiveness, but

God will not let them exit their hells as their pleas are not genuine and sincere ... that is, if they were allowed to come back into the world, they would just go back to the way they were and commit evil all over again.

Yet this point is quite suggestive. Perhaps the greatest objection against the “moral status” of hell is that people will be punished forever in the hell fire for a finite amount of deeds. Isn't this injustice? According to Islam, the people who remain in hell forever stay there out of their own choice.

In other words, they are people who genuinely do not want to repent and do not want God's friendship. If they do ask for forgiveness, it is only for the pain to cease. They don't really regret anything they did. However, when a person seeks true and genuine forgiveness then God may forgive them and take them out of hell.

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

6.4 **Life and Death in Islam**

INTRODUCTION

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

Welcome back to our channel!

In this lesson, we will be looking at the concept of life and death in Islam and how it is directly connected to the idea of guidance in Islam.

BODY OF TEXT

But those who disbelieve say, “The Hour (i.e. the Day of Judgment) will not come to us.” Say, “Yes, by my Lord, it will surely come to you. [God is] the Knower of the unseen.” Not absent from Him is an atom's weight within the heavens or within the earth or [what is] smaller than that or greater, except that it is in a clear register - That He may reward those who believe and do righteous deeds. Those will have forgiveness and noble provision. But those who strive against Our verses [seeking] to cause failure (i.e. to undermine their credibility) - for them will

be a painful punishment of foul nature. (Chapter 34, verses 3-5 of the Holy Qur'an)

Muslims believe that this life is a trial and test in preparation for the Hereafter. Allah says the following in the Qur'an:

And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me. (Chapter 51, verse 56 of the Holy Qur'an)

The purpose of our creation is not simply belief in Allah. If belief in Allah is all that counts, then there is no reason for Iblīs or the Devil to be cursed by God. The purpose of human existence, and the ultimate preparation for the Hereafter is to establish a healthy and good relationship with God. By purifying our souls and having a good relationship with Allah, we find salvation.

This world therefore acts as a nurturing ground for our souls to be saved in the next life. As the Prophet Muhammad (s) once said, "this world is the farming field of the Hereafter"

In this world, we learn from our mistakes, we face problems and learn to overcome them. By learning to tame our desires and our egos, we purify our souls and open them up to the Light of God. The purified soul or heart is the only thing that counts in the next life.

Allah says in the Qur'an says:

The Day when there will not benefit [anyone] wealth or children. But only one who comes to Allah with a sound heart." (Chapter 26, verse 88-89 of the Holy Qur'an)

Without belief in life after death, one cannot purify the heart. Denial of the after life results in nihilism. Nihilism is a world view where there is no ultimate purpose or meaning to anything. Without belief in the Hereafter, morality becomes totally subjective and spiritual progress becomes completely meaningless.

If there is no Hereafter, all of morality becomes inconsequential. Spiritual progress also becomes meaningless for it leads to no where. The spirit only has value if it can live beyond the lifespan of the body.

As life is a test, death is the end of the test. It is when people need to put their pencils down

and hand back their exams to the invigilator. Death, according to Islam, is not a tragedy in the strictest sense. Some people complain that death is evil. How can God allow the death of a young person? Should not the person have the chance to live a longer life?

If life stopped in this world only, that statement might have been true. But true life, that is, eternal life, begins after the death of our bodies. Death in this world is not evil, it is merely the end of a test and the beginning of eternity. As the Hereafter is eternal, it is all the more important that we take advantage of our short time here to lead the best possible life in the next.

The accumulation of good deeds and closeness to God is what makes us pass this test and find success in the next life. The Qur'an says:

[For such is the state of the disbelievers], until, when death comes to one of them, he says, "My Lord, send me back that I might do righteousness in that which I left behind (i.e. in that which I neglected)." No! It is only a word he is saying; and behind them is a barrier until the Day they are resurrected. So when the Horn is blown, no relationship will there be among them that Day, nor will they ask about one another.

And those whose scales are heavy [with good deeds] - it is they who are the successful. But those whose scales are light - those are the ones who have lost their souls, [being] in Hell, abiding eternally. The Fire will sear their faces, and they therein will have taut smiles (i.e. their lips having been contracted by scorching until the teeth are exposed). (Chapter 32, verses 99-104 of the Holy Qur'an)

Historically speaking, many of the Prophet's companions became moral people after they learnt about the Hereafter. This demonstrates that often enough, the lack of belief in the Hereafter leads to an immoral life. As Dostoevsky once remarked, if God does not exist, everything is permitted.

Here is a question that people often ask. We know how belief in life after death benefits us in the next life but how does it benefit us in this world?

Genuine belief in the Hereafter brings peace and happiness in this world. Think about it, if you know that you will only live a few years in this life (half of which is spent in sleep) and that

eternity awaits you in the next, few things can sadden you in this world.

This is because you know that in the long wrong, your short lived suffering is nothing compared to the eternal bliss that awaits you. It is like waiting in line and being uncomfortable, but being mentally at ease for you know that in a few minutes you will be out of the line and on the way to where you want to go!

In fact, even thinking about hell is a therapy for humans for it belittles any tragedy that this world has to offer.

Although in our minds we know that one day we will die, our hearts are often not convinced. We suffer much as we subtly believe that we're going to live forever in this world and by extension, suffer forever. Understanding and really grasping the impermanence of this world and the reality of death is freedom from the temporary suffering of this world.

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

6.5 Guidance According to Islam

INTRODUCTION

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

Welcome back to our channel!

What is the point of religion? More precisely, what is the point of Islam? The question is rather simple, but how we answer it can either make or break someone's Islam. Many Muslims today make the claim that Islam is the solution to all of humanity's problems and hence the point of Islam is to solve all of humanity's problems.

Although at face-value this may be correct, we believe that unqualified answers like these are not helpful. Think of it this way, can Islam, as a religion, directly solve and provide answers for the coding problems of my website? Think about it ...

So we need to be a bit more precise when we talk about the "point" or "goal" of Islam. Strictly

speaking, the point or goal of Islam is guidance towards God, that is, closeness and intimacy with the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

A good word to sum this up is the word salvation. The point of Islam is the salvation of the human soul.

In this lesson, we will overview some of the basic characteristics of salvation in Islam.

BODY OF TEXT

The Qur'an is the best source in explaining what salvation in Islam means. Here we will outline some verses in the Qur'an and hold a brief discussion on them.

Guide us to the straight path (Chapter 1, verse 6 of the Holy Qur'an)

Say, "Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you. [He commands] that you not associate anything with Him, and to parents, good treatment, and do not kill your children out of poverty; We will provide for you and them. And do not approach immoralities - what is apparent of them and what is concealed. And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed] except by [legal] right. This has He instructed you that you may use reason."

And do not approach the orphan's property except in a way that is best until he reaches maturity. And give full measure and weight in justice. We do not charge any soul except [with that within] its capacity. And when you testify, be just, even if [it concerns] a near relative. And the covenant of Allah fulfill. This has He instructed you that you may remember.

And this is My path, which is Straight, so follow it; and do not follow [other] ways, for you will be separated from His way. This has He instructed you that you may become righteous. (make sure to emphasize and look hard at the camera on this word my path)

(Chapter 6, verses 151-153 of the Holy Qur'an)

Guidance and salvation comes under many names in the Qur'an. The word for guidance is called hidayah. But perhaps the most all-encompassing term for guidance and salvation in the Qur'an is something called Sirat al-Mustaqim, which means the Straight Path.

What the above verses teaches us is that being on the Straight Path, that is, being in a state of guidance is not simply a matter of belief. Indeed, one must be strictly monotheistic and not associate any other gods to Allah.

But in addition to belief, what is integral to guidance in this world is also developing moral character, leading the morally good life which above all means to choose what is good and right over wrong and evil no matter how difficult it may be. Without the moral life, one cannot be guided and simple beliefs (no matter how correct the beliefs are) are of little value.

What is the moral life? What are the right choices? What is evil? The verse gives us a few good examples. They are: being good to parents, our families as a whole, treating people with dignity and helping them when they are in need. It is also being kind to those who are weaker than us. When doing the good, avoiding pretentiousness and being sincere is necessary in Islam.

Proper moral character in Islam also includes not shedding blood or being part of a system that facilitates the killing of innocent people. It is also being kind, just and fair to others and looking after the most vulnerable members of our society. It is also managing our expectations of people and not burdening them beyond their capacity.

Salvation and moral character is knowing that Allah is our only true sustainer and that we must not sacrifice our honor, dignity or moral standing due to the fear of loss either in wealth or in our relationships.

The moral life, that is, doing what is right and avoiding harm is what strengthens and purifies the heart. Good and bad essentially stems from the human heart according to Islam. The Qur'an says:

The Day when there will not benefit [anyone] wealth or children. But only one who comes to Allah with a sound heart." (Chapter 26, verse 88-89 of the Holy Qur'an)

So when you are reciting Surah al-Fātihah and you reach the 6th verse, remember that being on the Straight Path is not just about belief and rituals, but also leading the morally good life. As our 6th Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq (as) once stated:

If you want to know the religion of a man, do not look at how much he prays and fasts. Look at how he treats people.

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

6.6 Fate and the Consequences of our Choices in Islam

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! Fate is commonly understood as a series of developments or events that are beyond a person’s control. In Abrahamic religions, these events are usually regarded as having been determined by God Himself.

In Islam, there is no question that fate itself exists. God determines a large sequence of events in existence that are beyond anyone’s control. The continued existence of the world, the movement of subatomic articles, the existence of gravity in the universe, or the movement of photons across space are all physical events that are beyond anyone’s control.

Islam, however, also believes that we have free will, that we are able to make choices and through these choices, we can, through God's permission and will, influence some results. It is based on these choices that we make that Allah takes us up to task, whether we sin and ruin our souls, or rise ourselves spiritually and attain salvation.

If all was determined by God, then there would be no reason for Allah to send Prophets unto this earth, including the Prophet Muhammad (s) as well as his successors, the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (as).

In this lesson, we want to briefly look at the consequences of the free will that Allah has given us. As a matter of expediency, we won’t dwell into philosophical discussions of predestination (called qadar in Arabic) vs. free will as those kinds of discussions are rather complex and require care, something which a 10 minute lecture cannot cover.

BODY OF TEXT

Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness]. (Chapter 30, verse 41 of the Holy Qur'an)

And we will surely let them taste the nearer punishment short of the greater punishment that perhaps they will repent. (Chapter 32, verse 21 of the Holy Qur'an)

According to Islam, our free will in this world is limited. Much of what we think is under our control, such as the results of many of our actions, are actually not in our hands. There are millions of factors that play into how our choices and events unfold in this world.

These include our environment, upbringing and a predetermined set of rules, such as unconscious cultural and social norms that mediate our choices as well as the results of these choices.

For example, we may be raised in such a way that would make us more likely to commit a deed that society would consider a crime (like not paying taxes) and based on that deed, a set of rules (beyond our control) would be applied to us, like imprisonment.

Despite our environment, we still have some limited maneuverability in choosing the direction we want to take in life. Allah sends Prophets and Divine Books in our lives to show us, despite what our environment tells us, what right and wrong is. Based on these teachings, we are given some space in making some form of God-directed, rational choice.

The primary recipient of these consequences are our selves, that is, our souls. Every single choice that we make in this world brings about two things, either they take us away from God, or they strengthen the bond and relationship we have with the Creator of the world.

The Messenger of Allah (s) taught us that we are either servants of this world or servants of God. The Qur'an instructs us to prayer and repentance so as to exalt us to God.

By pulling us into friendship with God, we free ourselves from the environmental dictates of our surroundings. For example, the world may tell us that we have no hope in healing our sickness, whereas the verses we recite in our prayers tells us that no, God is the owner and

master of all of existence and that through prayer, we may find healing despite what doctors tell us.

Through a relationship with God, limited choice becomes vastly expanded. But this doesn't come easy. As humans, we are very prone to sink into a life of heedlessness and forgetfulness. For this reason, God makes sure that our actions in this world also have consequences in this world.

When we do evil deeds, God makes us see their consequences in this world so that we may pay heed and desist from what may destroy us. Through these tests and "karmas," God betters us as human beings so that we may be better examples for others, create better families and better communities (in our case, Muslim communities).

The tests we face in this life, and the karma that Allah makes us see in this world are meant to build us spiritually. They are there to guide us in making better, "free-er" choices which only a state of closeness to God can produce.

Verily, We shall put you to test with some fear, and hunger, and with some loss of wealth, lives, and offspring. And (O Muhammad) convey good tidings to those who are patient, who say, when inflicted by hardship, "Verily we are of God and verily to Him shall we return;" upon them is the blessings of Allah and His mercy. (Chapter 2, verse 155 of the Holy Qur'an)

So whatever actions we choose, along with the intentions behind them, find their greatest impact internally. Our internal states cannot be discounted for these are the primary determinants of how others are affected by us. The effect that our words have, on their own, are limited.

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

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

6.8 Major Sins in Islam

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! In this lesson, we will outline some of the major sins in Islam. A major sin in Islam is the kind of sin that not only ruins the spiritual heart, but it also ruins the Muslim community and one's salvation in the Hereafter by bringing about direct damnation.

In other words, major sins (or kabā'ir) are the kind of sins that will directly lead one to the hell fire unless one repents from them. In this lesson, we will outline 4 major sins in Islam.

Obviously they don't exhaust them all, but see this as a starting point so as to start thinking about the most dangerous acts of disobedience towards God.

BODY OF TEXT

Shirk (polytheism)

Allah says the following in the Qur'an:

Verily, Allah forgives not that partners be set up with Him (in worship) but He forgives other than that to whom He pleases; and whoever sets up partners with Allah (in worship), he has indeed invented an enormous wrong." (Chapter 4, verse 48 of the Holy Qur'an)

Shirk is the greatest sin in Islam. Shirk is often translated as polytheism in Islam. However, according to the Qur'anic narrative, it is having objects of worship other than, or in addition to, Allah. The word for worship in Islam is 'ibādah, which means to enslave oneself. In the context of shirk, it is to take something as one's greatest point of devotion and love.

The goal of our lives is to take Allah as our sole point of worship. By synchronizing our hearts with God, our hearts become purified and get spiritually elevated. With this we become true human beings.

The following things are objects that we often take for worship: imaginary deities, money, status or people. To open our hearts to them is to choose illusion instead of truth. It is to direct the heart away from that which purifies our hearts (God) to that which darkens it (worshiping other than Him).

Despair (Yas)

"...and despair not of Allah's Mercy; surely none despairs of Allah's Mercy except the unbelieving people." (Chapter 12, verse 87 of the Holy Qur'an)

Despair or yās is another major sin in Islam. It is a major sin for despair is to have a bad opinion of Allah. Despair is of two types:

1. To despair of Allah's mercy. It is to believe that we are in such a bad state that Allah will never forgive us. One of Allah's greatest names is al-Rahmān, which means the All-Merciful. To think that He will not forgive us is to think badly of Him, that is, to believe that there is some lack of kindness and mercy in Him.
2. To despair in this world. Our life in this world is temporary, however, Allah helps us and provides for us. He (metaphorically speaking) extends His hand to us to help, but it is also our duty to extend our hand to Him by relying on Him so that the help may be given. To not extend one's hand to Him is to reject Him, to believe that He is unwilling to help us is a sin. A point here is important to take into consideration.

When we say Allah will help us, it is to the extent that He will help us with what is beneficial to us and not necessarily what we want. Sometimes having too much of a comfortable life in this world makes us heedless. Out of His love for us, Allah will provide for us but will also make us go through difficulties so that we remember Him and worship Him.

Murder

Every human life is sacred. It is a life that Allah has breathed into it from His own self. We do not have the permission to arbitrarily take the life of another without proper right.

Allah says in the Qur'an:

"And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his punishment is Hell; he shall abide in it, and Allah will send His wrath on him and curse him and prepare for him a painful chastisement."
(Chapter 4, verse 93 of the Holy Qur'an)

Murder is one of the worst evils one can commit. It is evil as it is not simply an isolated harm that one does to another. Most people have loved ones, family and people who depend on them. When one murders a person, one murders a son, daughter, husband, wife, mother or father. One destroys a family and a social order in which that person was an integral part of. For this reason, the Qur'an says:

"Whoever slays a soul, unless it be for a manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all men; and whoever keeps it alive, it is as though he kept alive all men."
(Chapter 5, verse 32 of the Holy Qur'an)

Like shirk, murder leaves a big dark hole in one's heart. Notice people who have killed a lot in their life time, they are usually people who have utter lack of compassion and love in their lives, items which are at the essence of our true humanity. They are also they basis of our imān and relationship with Allah.

According to the Prophet (s), a heart that is devoid of mercy and compassion cannot contain Allah.

Disobedience to Parents (Āq al-Walidayn)

“And dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me insolent, unblessed.” (Chapter 19, verse 32 of the Holy Qur'an)

Disobedience to parents is a major sin for many reasons. Here we will outline one:

Our parents are those who gave us life. They are the ones who fed us and clothed us when we were incapable of doing anything by ourselves. In short, we owe our lives to them. Being disobedient to them is a form of ungratefulness for all of the good they have done for us.

If one is ungrateful to one's parents, how will one be grateful to Allah?

Our parents are a testing ground for us on how we will act with Allah. Now remember that the only time we don't need to obey our parents is when they ask us to disobey Allah. That is the time when disobedience to them is not a form of ungratefulness.

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

6.9 Why Allah Allows People to Sin

INTRODUCTION

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

Welcome to the Muslim Converts Channel! There are many reasons why people come to

believe in God, and there are also reasons why people come to disbelieve in God. The most popular reason why people chose to disbelieve in God, at least here in the West, is why God allows people to commit heinous crimes and evil in this world.

In many monotheistic religions across the world there is a belief that God allows respite for sinners and evil-doers on this earth. People are allowed to sin and commit evil without God intervening and stopping that action from taking place. A God who allows people to commit evil deeds is a God that some people choose to reject.

They sometimes object with the following example: if a loving parent sees their child being attacked by a criminal, the parent, out of love, would protect the child and stop the criminal from hurting him or her. If God is supposed to be All-Loving and caring for His creation, He would stop people from hurting others. But since there is no one miraculously stopping people, then there must be no God according this view or at the very least, this God is callous and careless.

In this lesson, we will explain why Allah allows people to sin in this world without stopping them and therefore answer some of the objections that have been raised against Allah's existence, such as the one we just mentioned.

BODY OF TEXT

Then has there not been a [single] city that believed so its faith benefited it except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in worldly life and gave them enjoyment for a time. And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed - all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers? (Chapter 10, verses 99-100 of the Holy Qur'an)

On this earth, we have the ability to go about in two ways. We may either choose good or moral paths, or we may choose evil and immorality. Allah has given us the ability to do good. However, the ability or choice to do good comes at a price. This price is the ability to do evil as well.

This ability we speak of, that is, the ability to do good or evil is what we call free will. Free will is the ability for us as individuals to make choices. In technical terms, it is the power of acting without the constraint of necessity, determinism or fate. It is the ability to act at one's own

behest or discretion.

If Allah were to take away our ability to do evil, then He would have to take away our free will. In other words, the price of taking away evil is to take away good. Now few people would think that that is a good thing!

So that's our first reply to the objection. There is another way of looking at the matter as well. God's intervening in our sinful behaviors and oppression of others is a total package. When we ask the question of why God doesn't intervene when people commit sins or evil acts in this world, we should be careful as to what we are wishing for. For example, why doesn't God zap our mouths when we lie? Why doesn't He twist our wrists when we cheat in our exams or taxes? Why doesn't God zap us when we insult and belittle our spouses or children or when we gossip about others?

In a world like that, people would essentially be robbed of their own free will, or at the very least, the world would lose its purpose of being a testing grounds for us and a place that nurtures our spiritual growth.

If our lives were simply limited to this world, perhaps, and that's a big "perhaps," there may have been some credibility to this objection. However, what does God have in mind? Does He want short term comfort in this world as opposed to long term, eternal salvation? By our own actions, we create the path to heaven and by that same ability, we create our own paths to damnation. Physical well-being or pain are minor compared to the well-being or pain that we feel in our souls in the Hereafter.

By giving us free will, God gives us the opportunity to acquire eternal joy for ourselves. By allowing us to sin, He allows us to rectify our mistakes and learn from them. By learning from our mistakes and turning towards God, we mature spirituality and attain union with Him.

Allah says in the Qur'an:

Indeed, We created man from a sperm-drop mixture that We may try him; and We made him hearing and seeing. Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful. (Chapter 76, verses 2-3 of the Holy Qur'an)

These two verses are important. It states that our birth in this world, that is, our coming into

this world was so that we would be tried. Through trials, mistakes, sins, repentance, all under God's guidance, we are taught to become grateful and thus gain experiential knowledge of God's grace on earth.

Now ...a final point is worth mentioning. God does often punish us for our sins in this world. Most people have the ability to see the consequences of their evil actions in this world, but there are a number of people who wish to ignore them. These are people who wish to ignore God's grace and guidance.

There is another group of people and insha'Allah they are in the minority; they are people who completely lack God's grace. These people are not directly punished in this world and are completely blinded from the consequences of their own actions due to their egos and arrogance.

The reason for this is because God is saving His full punishment in the Hereafter which is much worse than anything one can experience in this world. Punishment in the next world is where one is confronted with the full spiritual and physical pain of one's misdeeds at much lengthier periods of time which for some is eternity.

In the end, no matter how one looks at it, all our actions, big or small, will one day be held to account, either in this world or in the Hereafter.

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

6.10 Repentance and Forgiveness of Sins in Islam

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!

Disobeying means incurring Allah's displeasure. However, we know that Allah is the Most-Merciful and the Most-Forgiving. Due to His kind nature, Allah has provided us the opportunity to make up for our mistakes and "turn back to Him" by having us ask Him for forgiveness.

Asking for forgiveness is called repentance. In this lesson, we will go over what it means to ask Allah for forgiveness and to repent, and the different kind of ways through which we can go about in acquiring Allah's forgiveness.

BODY OF TEXT

“O My servants who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of God: verily, God forgives all sins. Truly He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Chapter 39:, verse 53 of the Holy Qur'an)

The Arabic word for repentance is tawbah. Tawbah literally means to “return” or to “turn back.” In other words, when we sin and disobey Allah, what we're doing is that we're turning away from Him instead of moving towards Him. The act of tawbah is to know that one made a mistake and by acknowledging that mistake, one turns around to God and seeks His forgiveness.

Allah forgives us as He knows that we are weak and fallible. He knows that we get distracted and we make wrong choices. He knows that we make mistakes, sometimes out of ignorance and sometimes out of selfishness whilst knowing better. By giving us the opportunity to repent, and the opportunity to be forgiven, Allah demonstrates that He is not interested in punishing us or throw us in hell, He is interested in reforming us and making us better people who live moral lives and are God-conscious in all that they do.

When Allah sees that we have repented and have tried to change, He even takes our sins and turns them into good deeds. This is proof that punishment and hell is the last thing Allah wants for us. Allah says in the Qur'an:

““And those who do not supplicate to another god along with Allah, nor do they kill a person that Allah has made forbidden (to kill) except with just cause, nor do they commit fornication. And whoever does this shall receive the punishment. The torment will be doubled for him on the Day of Resurrection and he will abide therein in disgrace. Except those who repent and believe and do righteous deeds; for those, God will change their sins into good deeds, and God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Chapter 25, verse 68-70 of the Holy Qur'an)

There are also other forms of repentance in Islam. Shafa'ah is one of them. Shafa'ah means intercession on the Day of Judgment. On the Day of Judgment, there will be a group of people who will be condemned to hell. However, through the intercession of the Prophet, the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) or other righteous people, where they will ask Allah to forgive these people who are bound to hell, and Allah may forgive them.

Here is an important question, Allah doesn't need people to intercede in order to be merciful. Remember that as people who are faithful to Allah, we are all one community. When we come together as a community, even on the Day of Judgment, in order to vouch for one another, we display great forms of compassion. This kind of compassion, especially coming from the righteous among Allah's creation, is something that is very pleasing to Allah.

Repentance, however, is not just restricted to this world. Allah gives us the opportunity to repent sincerely in the grave, on the Day of Judgment, as well as in hell. But this point here needs to be expanded upon.

Let's first start with repentance in this world. Just merely saying astaghfurallah (God forgive me) is not enough. Tawbah is to return to God, which means that one must sincerely regret what one did and do one's best to put a stop to that sin. In other words, tawbah, for it to be fully complete, must come about through a change of heart.

On the Day of Judgment and in hell, there will be many people who will ask Allah for forgiveness. But as the Qur'an teaches us, their repentance is not sincere for if they were given the chance to live again, they would commit the same sins over and over again.

However, if a person on the Day of Judgment or in hell has a genuine change of heart, then he or she will be forgiven on the Day of Judgment or in hell and will go to heaven.

Real repentance and full forgiveness is a matter turning to Allah sincerely. Allah says in the Qur'an:

"Say to those who have disbelieved [that] if they cease, what has previously occurred will be forgiven for them..." (Chapter 8, verse 38 of the Holy Qur'an)

Repentance is therefore a state of being, and not merely an utterance of words. Islam teaches

us that Allah loves the repentant sinner but dislikes the person who does good deeds but becomes arrogant as a result of it.

Allah says the following in the Qur'an:

"Verily, Allah loves those who repent and those who purify themselves." (Chapter 2, verse 222 of the Holy Qur'an)

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

6.11 The Three Kinds of Rights in Islam

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! The Arabic word for right in Islam is haqq. The word haqq has many derivative meanings. One meaning is truth. Allah, for example, is known as al-Haqq, meaning The Truth. In terms of rights based relationships, the word haqq does not only mean right, but it also means responsibility. In other words, every right in Islam is also a responsibility.

There are three kinds of rights in Islam. The rights of the self (haqq al-nafs), the rights of others (haqq al-nās) and the rights of God (haqq Allah). These rights are what make up the borders of sin and the borders of the salvation of our souls. They are at the core of a healthy Muslim community. In this lesson, we're going to briefly outline what these rights are, along with examples.

BODY OF TEXT

Rights of the Self

Our fourth Imām, Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn (as) says the following about the rights of the self:

And the right of yourself incumbent upon you is that you employ it in obeying God; then you

deliver to your tongue its right, to your hearing its right, to your sight its right, to your hand its right, to your leg its right, to your stomach its right, to your private part its right, and you seek help from God in all that. (Risālat al-Huqūq)

If we were to write an entire book on the rights of the self in Islam, we still wouldn't exhaust the topic. The rights of the self includes respect for one's body. This means that we should eat and sleep properly, maintain proper hygiene and not endanger our health nonsensically, be it physical or mental.

The right of the self is also to dignify oneself as well as the hadith from our fourth Imam is suggesting. This means that we should not waste our short time on this earth doing frivolous things. We need to make sure that we lend our ears to what is worth while and what will benefit us, and lend our sights to what is right. For example, we shouldn't listen to nonsensical music, or waste our time aimlessly going on youtube watching random videos!

Another theme the Imam mentions is to respect how we conduct our intimacy with other peoples. This means that we should avoid zina and keep intimacy in marriage only. Remember that any relationship we engage with is essentially an exchange of spiritual energies. Having relationships with people who do not observe God's commands means that we will absorb their negative, and perhaps Satanic energies.

The Rights of Others

There is no possible way we can cover all rights of people. For the sake of brevity, we'll just stick to one example from the fourth Imam in terms of the rights that others have on us. This example is that of a neighbor:

Our fourth Imām once said:

The right of your neighbor is that you guard him when he is absent, honor him when he is present, and aid him when he is wronged. You do not pursue anything of his that is shameful; if you know of any evil from him, you conceal it. If you know that he will accept your counsel, you counsel him in that which is between him and you. You do not forsake him in difficulty, you release him from his stumble, you forgive his sin, and you associate with him generously. And there is no strength save in God.

The neighbor refers to people who are close to us. Our duty is to honor them in their absence, meaning that we should protect them and not betray them with things like gossiping. If they are oppressed or evil is committed against them, we should defend them. If they do something wrong, we are to conceal their bad deeds from people and if possible, even make excuses for them.

Remember that if we make excuses for people in order to protect them and their reputation, God will also do the same for us, in this world as well as the next.

We often dump our friends when they are in difficulty. The neighbor, who is also our friend, has the right that we help them in his or her times of difficulty, be it in sickness or in financial difficulty.

Rights of God

Our fourth Imam once said:

The greatest right of God against you is that you worship Him without associating anything with Him. When you do that with sincerity (ikhlas), He has made it binding upon Himself to give you sufficiency in the affair of this world and the next.

We often think of worshiping others as an act of polytheism and idol worship. In other words, we think that shirk in Arabic simply means polytheism. This, however, is not correct. The word shirk means to associate others with God, especially in his powers. We often think that our jobs are really in the hands of our bosses, or that our longevity depends on our genes and how we treat our health.

Our actions do have consequences in this world, both in our financial lives as well as our health. However, according to Islam, Allah is the one who allows these consequences to take place. Without His permission, nothing can happen. If He wills something, no action from our part can stop it. Shirk means to associate the powers of others to that of God, thinking that somehow they can do things independently in this world.

This worldview is wrong and part of the rights of God is that we reject this erroneous belief.

Part of the rights of God is also that we trust Him, that we know He wants what is good for us and that He will be there to help us, only if we have faith in Him.

6.12 **Sinning Against Others and their Delayed Punishment**

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! Sins can be divided into multiple levels. On the basic level, any sin that we commit in this world affects us directly. They also affect others indirectly as the damage we do to ourselves leaves an imprint in this world.

They not only pollute us but they also pollute the air around us. Think about a cold, you get sick and you sneeze. When you sneeze, the virus goes air born and people catch it.

But looking at it from the context of “indirect effect” we aren’t held fully accountable by God for the indirect effects of our sins. That’s part of God’s mercy. However, there are sins in which we not only damage ourselves, but we also directly affect others.

This is when we commit deliberate acts of evil against others. In this lesson, we will look at two things. First, we will list some of the direct sins we commit against others. Second, we will look into the question of why God sometimes delays His punishment of people who commit these deeds.

BODY OF TEXT

“And be afraid of the Day when you shall be brought back to Allah. Then every person shall be paid what he earned, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.” (Chapter 2, verse 281 of the Holy Qur’an)

When we talk about the kind of evils we commit against others, the first thing that comes to most of our minds are things like murder or theft. But the kind of evils we commit against others are much more than these two, and they are more subtle. The following are a list of

some sins we commit against others:

Backbiting (ghībah)

Backbiting or ghībah is speaking ill of someone behind their back. Ghībah is saying something that is true about someone, but is something that a person does not want exposed. In one hadith from the Messenger of Allah (s), the following is narrated:

The Prophet (s) once gave counsel to Abu Dharr (r) , saying: “O Abu Dharr! Beware of backbiting, for backbiting is graver than adultery (zina’).” Abu Dharr (r) said: “Why is that so, O Messenger of Allah?” He (s) replied: “That is because when a man commits adultery and then repents to God, God accepts his repentance. However, backbiting is not forgiven until forgiven by its victim.” (wasā’il al-shī’ah)

The hadith tells us that ghībah is worse than zina or fornication. Why is it so? Remember that the Muslim community is a cradle that nurtures our souls. It is in a healthy community where there are strong religious bonds of trust that people spiritually grow the best in.

By backbiting or lying which is also harām and a sin, erodes the bonds of our community by instilling hatred and mistrust of others.

Lying

The Prophet Muhammad (s) once said the following about lying:

“When a believer utters a lie without a valid excuse, he is cursed by seventy thousand angels. Such a stench emanates from his heart that it reaches the sky and because of this single lie Allah writes for him a sin equivalent to that of committing seventy fornications. Such fornications that the least of which is fornication with one’s mother.” (Mustadrak al-Wasā’il)

Like ghībah, lying also erodes the trust that exists between people. Without trust, there are no bonds between people and without bonds, there is no ummah. But the problem goes even further. Lying leads to feuds between people, it leads to wars and economic corruption. It not only erodes trust, but it ruins the lives of whole nations.

Most of the injustices, corruption and poverty people face in countries stems from one vice: lying. Much of the wars and poverty people suffer from are due to lies. This is why lying is worse than zina!

Breaking Promises

Imam Jafar al-Sādiq (as) once said:

“A believer’s promise to his believing brother is a vow that has no expiation (It cannot be broken). But one who goes back on his word declares his opposition and enmity to Allah, and invokes the anger of Allah.” (wasā’il al-shī’a)

Breaking a vow is another sin that directly affects another person. Like backbiting and lying, it also erodes trust between people, corrupts the ummah which again, is essential as it is the nurturing womb for people’s souls.

Breaking promises does something else as well, and this one is very detrimental. Breaking promises sows the seeds of hypocrisy in our hearts. What is hypocrisy? It is saying one thing but doing another.

Hypocrisy is an act of deceit, it is deceiving others by creating the appearance of virtue while succumbing to sin. In other words, it is choreographing and maintaining an illusion to others. So the question here is, can anything stand on an illusion?

Why Allah Delays His Punishment of Sinners

We’ve talked about sins that are committed against others. But a question that is often asked is the following: if Allah hates injustice and evil, why doesn’t He punish it immediately? Why the delay? Doesn’t this encourage people to do more bad deeds?

This question can be answered on two levels. The first level is that when Allah punishes a sin to its full extent in this world, it is an act of mercy for punishment in the next world is much, much worse. If a person fails to see much of a punishment vetted out against him or her in this life, you know that he or she is in real trouble.

The second level is that all sins are punished in this world. What we call delay is a delay in “full punishment”. Consider the following hadith about backbiting from the Prophet Muhammad (s):

“Whoever backbites a Muslim spoils his fasts and breaks his wudu', and shall come on the Day of Resurrection with his mouth's stench more putrid than a carcass', and it shall irk those who are with him in his station (mawqif). If he dies before repenting, his death is like that of one who dies while considering permissible that which is prohibited by God, the Exalted and the Glorious.” (wasā'il al-shī'a)

Notice that people don't get a mouth that stench due to backbitting. People will only see that on the Day of Judgment, and the sin will be punished in its fullest in hell. Yet people are still punished in this world, as in the previous one we quoted earlier about God humiliating us in this world for speaking ill of others.

So people are punished in this world for all the misdeeds they do. First, the punishment comes through the pollution and darkening of one's soul. Second, God is often subtle in His punishments where it comes to us in ways we don't expect or notice.

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

6.13 **Kufr in Islam**

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! The present lesson is a special one. It is special because it is an overview of a very misunderstood subject, namely that of kufr. Kufr is often translated as disbelief ...as in disbelief in God, His Prophets and His religion.

However, we feel that this translation does not fully convey the Qur'anic implications of what the term means. In this lesson, we will overview the various meanings of the word kafir, or so-called disbeliever and what their implications are.

BODY OF TEXT

And when there came to them a Book from Allah confirming that which was with them - although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved (kafarū) - but [then] when there came to them that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it; so the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers. How wretched is that for which they sold themselves - that they would disbelieve in what Allah has revealed through [their] outrage that Allah would send down His favor upon whom He wills from among His servants. So they returned having [earned] wrath upon wrath. And for the disbelievers is a humiliating punishment. (Chapter 2, verse 89-90)

Among Abrahamic religions, particularly with Christianity and Islam, there is a popular approach to salvation. This approach states that in order to enter heaven, you need to have believed in a particular set of religious doctrines. To disbelieve in them means to enter Hell in the next life.

The word kufr is used ubiquitously in the Qur'an. Just a moment ago, we mentioned how kufr is often translated as disbelief and kafir as disbeliever. However, we said that according to the Qur'anic world view, this understanding of kufr is highly problematic.

Let's look at the verse that we quoted just now. It said that "there came to them that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it". The word used for disbelieve is kafarū which comes from the root word kufr.

Kufr literally means to bury or cover something. In its religious sense, it means to cover up the truth. If one is covering up the truth, doesn't mean that you believe in it on some level if you've acknowledged it's the truth? In this sense, kufr is much more than just disbelief.

It is only in this way that one can make sense of the verse, for how can you disbelieve in something that you just recognized? To recognize is to believe! But if kufr means to bury the truth, the verse makes a lot of sense, as one sees the truth, but decides to bury it as it is not convenient to his or her goals and plans in life, or way of going about things.

By looking at this verse this way, the more accurate way to translate it would thus be: "there came to them that which they recognized, but they willfully rejected it." In other words, they rejected it whilst knowing its truth.

Here's another verse that can help understanding the concept of kufr in the Qur'an:

And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam"; so they prostrated, except for Iblis. He refused and was arrogant and became of those who committed kufr" (Chapter 2, verse 34 of the Holy Qur'an)

We all know that Iblis is the Devil. Who can claim that the Devil doesn't believe in God's existence? No one can claim that the Devil doesn't believe that the Prophet Muhammad (s) was a Prophet from God!

The verse says that Iblis committed kufr when he was commanded to perform a certain action, namely prostrating before the Prophet Adam (as). How is it possible for him to stop believing in God's existence because he was commanded to prostrate to Adam? Wasn't he with Allah at the time? Obviously this doesn't make sense.

Kufr here means that Satan rejected the truth, that is, he rejected God by refusing to obey Him out of His own arrogance.

Another verse, which describes the event of Iblis's disobedience confirms that kufr means to reject God's command:

And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate to Adam," and they prostrated, except for Iblees. He was of the jinn and departed from the command of his Lord. Then will you take him and his descendants as allies other than Me while they are enemies to you? Wretched it is for the wrongdoers as an exchange. (Chapter 18, verse 50 of the Holy Qur'an)

Kufr, however, is not simply a mental state of rejection. Kufr in the Qur'an is always associated with evil or more specifically, evil actions for the state of kufr is that of arrogance, pride and hatred against the truth.

The Qur'anic concept of kufr therefore teaches us that one can believe in God and His religion and His Prophet (s) yet still be Kafir. In other words, you can have it all in your mind, but in action reject it all.

Unfortunately, we are often guilty of sin and transgressing against Allah's commands despite believing in Islam. Our transgressions often stem from our arrogance because we think that we are somehow above the law. Here we must be careful for as the previous verse showed us, arrogance can lead to kufr, that is, a rejection of God Himself and thus land us in a lot of trouble on the Day of Judgment.

As such, we must be very careful in not disobeying God for it brings about a spiritual disposition that may lead to kufr and ruin our souls.

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

6.14 Trivializing the Harām

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! When driving on roads, most people are conscious of red lights. Even to the detriment of their own breaks, most people will make abrupt stops when they realize that they are about to pass a red light. Why is this?

For some, it's a moral choice. They know that passing the red light may result in some kind of tragic accident. Not only will it endanger their own lives, but it will also endanger the lives of others. Most people, however, will obey traffic light rules because they are afraid of fines which can be quite hefty.

When it comes to observing the halāl and harām, it is unfortunate that we don't see the same rate of "consciousness" as we do with traffic light rules. Part of it is understandable even though it is not justifiable! Most people are deterred by immediate punishments. You pass the light, a police officer stops you right away and gives you a ticket. When we break God's rules, things, at least at face value, don't happen that fast. We don't get those immediate fines with visible ink.

Yet the toll it takes on us is much heftier than a simple fine or a point reduction. In previous lessons, we've seen how sins darken our hearts. In this lesson we will continue this theme by

looking at how belittling sins and trivializing the harām also destroys our souls and our chances at salvation.

BODY OF TEXT

There shall be no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from [the way of] error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil (tāghūt) and believes in Allah has indeed taken hold of a support most unyielding, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing. Allah is near [and a friend] to those who have true faith, taking them out of deep darkness into the light - whereas near unto those who are bent on denying the truth are the powers of evil that take them out of light into darkness deep: it is they who are destined for the fire, therein to abide. (Chapter 2, verses 256-257 of the Holy Qur'an)

We live in society. We are all brought up within particular cultures. These cultures teach us a variety of dos and don'ts, virtues and taboos. Some of what is culturally learnt is in sync with Islam, but others are not. An unfortunate reality is that the sins that we consider culturally unproblematic are often taken lightly.

Some of our cultures, for example, may not consider backbiting or having intimate relationships with the opposite gender as a moral problem. Unfortunately, this is not unheard of among some Muslim communities nowadays.

Although Islam condemns backbiting and fornication, sometimes these sins are trivialized as they are culturally accepted. A common approach is to play on God's mercy where it is argued that God is so infinitely merciful that He will forgive these sins in the Hereafter.

The first and most obvious problem with this view is that it assumes that God will forgive these sins. Although He is merciful, there is no guarantee that He will not take us up to task on the harām acts we've committed. This approach is as presumptuous about God as it is naïve. It assumes a false certitude that we know what God will do.

The second, and perhaps greater problem is that it discounts the effect of committing harām deeds has on our souls. The Qur'anic verse we read earlier taught us two things: the point of our lives is to establish a friendship with God.

This friendship is established by doing what God, in all His Infinite wisdom, has deemed healthy for our souls. Friendship with Him is to our benefit for it takes us from darkness into light. That is, it takes us from a state of inner darkness and corruption to inner light and purity.

Committing sins, that is, doing what is harām isn't just about being taken to task by God for disobeying Him, what is really at stake is the poisoning of our inner souls.

For example, it is illegal to take drugs. If one is caught taking drugs, one will get punished by the law. However, if we don't get caught, does this mean that no harm has come to us? Any rational person will know that the harm that a drug like heroin does to us is much worse than any kind of punishment (jail, fines, probation etc.) that the police and a court judge can throw at us.

Choosing the harām is choosing friendship with the powers of evil, the head of which is Satan, over friendship with God. In the former, we poison and corrupt our souls, whereas in the latter, we chose what will benefit them. It is the choice between the life of light and the life of darkness.

By committing the haram we are not harming God in anyway, who we are harming first and foremost is ourselves. If Allah gets "angry" with us (please indicate some quotation to note that this word is used figuratively) it is out of His infinite love where He wants what is best for us and does not want us to destroy ourselves by our own devices.

Allah says the following in the Qur'an:

[And said], "If you do good, you do good for yourselves; and if you do evil, [you do it] to yourselves." (Chapter 17, verse 7 of the Holy Qur'an)

Even if God forgives us for our sins on the Day of Judgment, remember that the action, regardless, kept us from growing spiritually and rising to higher levels in Paradise. Our goal in this life is not simply to avoid sin, but it is to grow spiritually.

To trivialize the harām is to trivialize our own souls.

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

6.15 Benefits of Islamic Law in this World

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! In Islam, the effects of good deeds and bad deeds don't only happen in the Hereafter only. The good deeds that Allah asks us to do in this world and the bad deeds He asks us to refrain from also benefit us in this world.

In this lesson, we will look at some good and bad actions in Islam that directly affect our material lives in this world.

BODY OF TEXT

Everything we do in this world, every action we undertake inevitably affects our souls. Directly or indirectly, these actions play a role in our salvation. The purpose of our lives is to worship Allah.

The Qur’an says:

And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me

(Chapter 51, verse 56 of the Holy Qur’an)

This verse does not mean that the reason Allah created us was to have people worship Him, it means that the goal of our life in this world is to worship Allah. In other words, the goal of our lives is not simply believing that God exists, but it is to have a good relationship with Him.

As Allah is our Creator and Nurturer, He also wants us to live good lives in this world. A good life does not necessarily mean a life of luxury, but it does mean a life of dignity and honor. These are characteristics which either poor or rich can assume. Living a dignified and honorable life requires a certain degree of harmony in all aspects of our lives and in all our relationships.

Let's take a look at some examples where Islamic law betters our life in this world:

Marriage

Marriage is one of the foundations of faith in Islam. It is highly encouraged, and if one is prone to sinning, it becomes obligatory. The Prophet Muhammad (s) taught us that marriage is half of our faith. It is half of our faith for multiple reasons. For one, it prevents fornication which is an act that pollutes the human heart and soul.

It is also half of faith for it forces us to learn patience. Patience, as Imam Ali (as) once said, is the "head" of faith or *īmān*. With patience we are better able to tolerate the adversities of this world and thus grow closer to Allah.

Marriage also has worldly benefits.

One of the worst calamities to befall humans is a life of loneliness. There is only so much we can do with friends for in the end, they go back to their homes and we go back to ours.

Marriage on the other hand, if managed properly, can make us happier in life and make us live longer. According to various studies done on marriage, people who are happily married live 15 years longer than single people!!

Having Children

Having children is not an easy thing. Islam encourages procreation and having offspring. Islam teaches us that our righteous children will intercede on our behalf on the Day of Judgment and possibly save us from total damnation.

However, children also have worldly benefits.

All young people will one day grow old. One of the greatest difficulties that the senior generations are currently facing at the moment is the crisis of loneliness. Many elderly people are forced into nursing homes or live alone in their homes. They seldom meet people and converse with them.

The government may provide us with financial and medical help, but they can't remedy our social needs. Having children is helpful in that one day they will hopefully grow up to take care of us when we are old just like we took care of them when they were young. It means that we may be surrounded by family in old age and continue to live a happy and fulfilled life.

Not Drinking Alcohol

Drinking alcohol is completely forbidden in Islam. The Qur'an teaches us that alcohol makes us more susceptible to Shaytān, forgetting Allah and committing immoral deeds. In short, alcohol, a ritually impure substance, pollutes our souls and endangers our salvation in the Hereafter.

However, alcohol also has many bad effects in this world as well. According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, 2.5 million people die because of alcohol related illness and injury. Nearly 4% of deaths worldwide are related to alcohol.

But this is just talking about deaths. There are countless people who are abused daily by family members because of alcoholism. Countless people make life changing mistakes because of alcohol and unfortunately, they have to live with their consequences for the rest of their lives.

An important point must be made regarding all of these examples. A big mistake that Muslims often make is that they think the social and worldly elements of obligations and prohibitions are the primary reasons for Allah's divine commands. This is completely false.

The primary reason is always the salvation of humans in the Hereafter. It is the saving of souls through obedience to Allah. We perform deeds because we want to obey Allah and thereby establish a good relationship with Him.

Although the worldly benefits of Allah's commands concerning good deeds and bad deeds are important in themselves and benefit us in this world, they are not primary. This is important to keep in mind as not all examples of Allah's commands have clear cut and direct benefits in this world that everyone can see and understand. It's not that Allah doesn't have reasons, its just that our knowledge is limited!

Also, look at it this way. Our understanding of their negative or positive worldly benefits also change over time. For example, how many contradictory studies have you seen concerning the

so called benefits or harms of wine? If we were to solely depend on that, then Islamic law would have to change every time a new medical article about alcohol is published!

So make sure to always see the spiritual and Afterworldly effects of good deeds and bad deeds in Islam as primary. There are benefits to these rulings in this world, but they are not the primary cause of them!

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

6.16 **Good and Bad Deeds: The Spiritual Consequences of our 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! The greatest and most distinguishing feature of a human being is that of choice. From the day we are born, until the day we die, our lives are all made up of choices, either by ourselves or by other people. Without choice, our entire social order would cease to exist.

Often times, we don't make the right choices. This is for various reasons. Sometimes doing the right thing means going against our interests, or because our carnal desires want something else. At other times, it is simply because of ignorance, we just don't know any better. Regardless of what it is, Allah is our Lord and our Nurturer.

His primary interest in us is not to make us happy, but to make us grow in spirit and in wisdom and thus purify our hearts. Allah uses various ways to encourage us to reach this lofty goal.

In this lesson, we will briefly look over the question of choice in Islam. Secondly and lastly, we look at how suffering in this world is a means to push us in making better choices.

BODY OF TEXT

Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like, but Allah guides whom He wills. And He is most knowing of the [rightly] guided. (Chapter 28, verse 56 of the Holy Qur'an)

It is often thought that a person can refrain from making choices. Perhaps nowhere is this more common than with the question of right and wrong, or religion itself. Being irreligious is a choice in itself.

Similarly, by not choosing right and wrong, one does make a choice and that choice is not only acquiescing to what is wrong, but it is also choosing to live a life of heedlessness. Heedlessness is a life of indifference and negligence towards one's duties with Allah.

Avoiding choice is thus impossible unless one is dead, unconscious or afflicted with some serious condition that robs us of a normal life. Choice is an essential part of being a human being.

All of our choices play a direct role in shaping our hearts. By hearts we mean our souls. If everything in life is centered on choice, then everything affects our hearts. They can either purify our hearts, or corrupt them.

How is the soul or heart purified and how is it corrupted? A pure heart is a heart that has nothing in it except for God. It is a heart that is focused on pleasing God and doing good for humankind.

It is a heart that is devoid of spiritual vices like arrogance. One of the major features of arrogance is thinking we are better and know more than others, which sometimes includes thinking we know better than Allah Himself.

It is quite self-evident where this kind of arrogance may lead to. We commit crimes and hurt others in various ways since we think they are not worthy of respect or that they are inferior to us.

Similarly, we sin against Allah as we sometimes implicitly think that we know more than Him even though we care not to admit it.

But Allah wants to purify our hearts. He wants to get rid of all thoughts but Him. He wants to take out evil and put only good in our souls. He wants us to stop being arrogant and become humble servants of Him. He wants us to be doers of good in this world.

Sometimes living the easy life is good in this world, but it can be the most terrible thing that can befall the human soul. For many people, comfort and ease may lead us to a life of carelessness.

Why improve oneself? Why reexamine one's life when everything is going smoothly? People often turn to God in hardships, but at times of ease, they forget Him.

As we are creatures with free will, and free will is the only way to attain good (for how can you be good if your actions are not of your own?), Allah will not force us to make choices. What He will do, however, is to put us in circumstances that will make us more likely to turn back to Him.

For example, people turn to God when they fall very ill, or when some large tragedy is about to happen. They see that nothing in the world can save them except for the All Mighty Creator of the universe!

By turning back to God we often realize the ugly nature of our bad deeds and bad choices. It offers us the opportunity to reform ourselves to become better people and better servants of Allah.

The Qur'an says:

"If God helps you, none can overcome you; and if He forsakes you, who is there after Him that can help you? And in God (Alone) let believers put their trust." (Chapter 3, verse 160 of the Holy Qur'an)

In order to make us mindful of sins and encourage a state of mind in us that would lead us to salvation in the Hereafter, Allah sometimes afflicts us with difficulty in this world so that we may "snap out" of our slumber and heedlessness and thus turn back to Him.

The Qur'an says:

"And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to the patient ones." (Chapter 2, verse 155 of the Holy Qur'an)

This only happens under one condition and that's having sufficient awareness. Sometimes we are so blinded by pride that we don't see our weaknesses and failures. We don't see that the only way to tranquility and peace is in God.

In this way, suffering has little effect. But for many other people, suffering opens them up to compassion. It opens them to the reality that they are indeed helpless and that only God can help them. This is where we find something called "redemptive suffering," that is, suffering that helps us grow spiritually.

And I leave you with the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned. "Our Lord, do not impose blame upon us if we have forgotten or erred. Our Lord, and lay not upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us. Our Lord, and burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear. And pardon us; and forgive us; and have mercy upon us. You are our protector, so give us victory over the disbelieving people." (Chapter 2, verse 286 of the Holy Qur'an)

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