

AKHLAQ

(Ethics)

Lesson 1

Rights of Neighbours, Visiting the Sick & Helping Orphans & the Poor

The Rights of Neighbours

Neighbours are those who live in homes besides us. They are like an extended family because they affect our lives directly. When we have a troublesome neighbour who is dirty or noisy or rude, it directly affects our happiness and our homes. On the contrary when we have a good neighbour, it greatly enhances the quality of our life and often we find we have a trustworthy friend who can look out for us in emergencies and in time of need.

Time and again we may ask our neighbour for a favour or they may ask us. It may be to collect a parcel or check the mail while we are away or simply keep an eye out for our home when we are on vacation. Sometimes children of the same age live next door and therefore they play together and build a friendship.

Nowadays the properties in a particular neighbourhood are usually of similar values and therefore neighbours are usually of a similar financial status. In the days of Rasulullāh (s) this was not the case. Families would live in a particular neighbourhood for generations and often it was quite possible for a very rich person to own a large mansion next to a very humble house owned by a very poor person. This is why Islām emphasized the right of the neighbour. For example, a person had to ensure that his or her neighbour was not sleeping hungry while he or she had plenty to eat or that the neighbour was not without clothes or firewood for heating while they were comfortable.

Keeping relations with neighbours is very important but needs to be done within the limits of shari'ah. Islām does not favour one extreme where a person lives next to a neighbour for many years but has never spoken to them. Nor does it favour the other extreme where a Muslim or his children interact so much with the non-Muslim neighbours that issues like tahārah and najāsah, eating halāl food, passing on of

unIslāmic values and culture like dressing, music, etc. are all compromised.

The middle ground is to ensure our neighbour knows we are Muslims and what we can or cannot do (such as eating halāl, observing hijāb, etc.). Thereafter, we should keep the following rights of neighbours in mind:

- When you see your neighbour outside the house e.g. gardening or in the garage, always greet them with a smile and wish them.
- When your neighbour is celebrating e.g. the birth of a child or the graduation of a child, congratulate them and take them a gift.
- If your neighbour shares gifts with you on Christmas for example, ensure you do the same on 'Id.
- If your neighbour looks worried or stressed or you see a police car outside, do go over and ask if they are ok and if they need any help.
- When you are cutting your grass in summer or blowing leaves in fall or shovelling snow in winter, do some of your neighbour's area that shares a border with you. And you may even come up with a plan where you help each other with such matters.
- Be a good neighbour yourself by not being noisy (or nosy!), being careful not to damage your neighbour's property, looking out for them and not revealing their secrets or anything embarrassing about them that you may see accidentally.

Good neighbours are a blessing of Allāh and we should thank Allāh if we have a neighbour who is not noisy and who is respectful and trustworthy.

Islām asks us to respect the rights of neighbours even if they are not Muslims. The only matter we need to be cautious of is not to compromise on the laws of *shari'ah*.

Rasulullāh (s) said that the archangel Jibrāil emphasized the rights of neighbours to him so much that he feared they might even end up having a share in a person's inheritance!

Visiting the Sick ('Iyādah)

Going to visit someone who is ill is called *'iyādah* in Islām.

Islām stresses *'iyādah* for it is a sign of care and concern for the person who is sick. *'iyādah* is mentioned in hadith frequently as a 'right' of a fellow Muslim and some hadith talk of its reward and how a person who goes for the *'iyādah* of another is accompanied by angels from the time he or she leaves home; and the angels continue praying for him or her until he or she returns home from visiting the one who was ill.

When people are ill they are usually not just physically weak. Their spirits are down as well. When someone ill receives a visitor, it tells him or her that there are others who care for him or her and even if they are bedridden, the visitors help boost the ill person's morale and spirits.

When visiting someone who is ill try and take a thoughtful gift like fruits (if they can eat) and also try and cheer them up and make them laugh instead of making them feel worse. A lot of times the person who is ill only needs some company or someone to talk to as a distraction.

When we see others who are very ill, we should express gratitude to Allāh for His blessing of health and ask Him to help us use our health to serve Him. This gratitude is not expressed out of pride but in realization that we are not in any less need of Allāh's help and support at all times.

Visiting a person who is ill can have a profound effect on the patient especially if they are very lonely. A popular story is that of an old lady who always threw trash on Rasulullāh (s) as he walked past her house.

When she did not do so for a few days, Rasulullāh (s) enquired about her and when he found out she was ill, he went for her *'iyādah*. She thought he had come for revenge but the sincere and thoughtful action of Rasulullāh (s) that was only out of his love for all of Allāh's creatures and because he knew she was only hateful to him out of ignorance, had a great effect on her.

When the old lady learnt Rasulullāh (s) had only come to see her, she was ashamed of her past behaviour and chose to accept Islām. Tabligh and guiding others to the right path is not always done by preaching -

often it is done by showing love to others and practising good akhlāq. And 'iyādah is the perfect opportunity to show our love for others, who are also Allāh's creatures.

Helping the Poor & Orphans

Even though we sometimes see healthy and young people begging, we should not assume they are lazy and looking to make 'quick money'. Islām condemns begging but encourages Muslims to help those in need.

In particular, the ones in real need are often too ashamed to ask and we need to search and identify them. And along with that, the Qur'ān and hadith speaks highly of those who take orphans under their care.

The following are āyāt of Qur'ān and ahādith on helping orphans and the poor. Your teacher will discuss only some of them and ask you to read the rest on your own. He or she may also ask you to write an essay on one of the āyāt or ahādith below.

The Poor and Orphans in Qur'ān

﴿... لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا...﴾

... Worship no one but Allāh, do good to parents, relatives, orphans, and the poor, and speak kindly to people...

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:83

﴿لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ...﴾

Piety is not to turn your faces to the east or the west; rather piety is [personified by] those who have faith in Allāh and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets, and who give their wealth for the

love of Him, to relatives, orphans, the poor, the traveller and the beggar...

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:177

﴿يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلْ مَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ
وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَإِذْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ﴾

They ask you as to what they should spend. Say, 'Whatever wealth you spend, let it be for parents, relatives, orphans, the poor, and the traveller (in need).' And whatever good you do, Allāh indeed knows it.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:215

﴿فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ. وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ. وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ﴾

So as for the orphan, do not oppress him; and as for the beggar, do not scold him; and as for your Lord's blessing, proclaim it!

- Surah ad-Duha 93:9-11

﴿أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالذِّينِ. فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ. وَلَا يَحْضُ عَلَىٰ طَعَامِ
الْمَسْكِينِ﴾

Have you seen him who denies the Judgement (Day)? That is the one who drives away the orphan, and does not urge the feeding of the poor.

- Surah al-Ma'un, 107:1-3

Orphans in Hadith

The Messenger of Allāh (s) said, 'In Paradise there is a place called *Dār al-Farh* (The Abode of Joy) – none shall enter it except one who brings joy (*farh*) to the orphans of the believers.'

The Messenger of Allāh (s) said, 'One who takes hold of an orphan from the Muslims to share his food and drink, Allāh will definitely admit him to Paradise unless he commits an unforgivable sin.'

A man complained of being hard-hearted and the Messenger of Allāh (s) advised him, 'Do you wish to soften your heart and have your wishes

granted? Show mercy to the orphan and pat his head, and feed him from your food (i.e. what you eat). Your heart will soften and you will obtain your wishes.'

The Messenger of Allāh (s) said, 'I and the guardian of an orphan shall be like 'this' in Paradise, provided he fears Allāh, the Mighty and Glorious' (and he joined his index and middle fingers when saying 'this').

In his will just before passing away, Imām Ali ('a) said, 'Allāh, Allāh (i.e. I remind you of Allāh's command) concerning the orphans. That they should never be hungry or lost while you are present. For I heard the Messenger of Allāh (s) saying: 'One who supports an orphan until his needs are met, Allāh, the Mighty & Glorious, makes Paradise (Jannah) obligatory (wājib) on him because of that; just like He makes the Fire obligatory on one who consumes the property of orphans.'

Imām Ali ('a) said, 'If any believing man or woman places their hand on the head of an orphan, out of mercy for them, Allāh would write for them a good deed for every hair that their hand passes through.'

The Orphans of Aal Muhammad (s)

The Messenger of Allāh (s) said, 'More in need than the orphan who has lost his father is the 'orphan' who has been cut off from his Imām and is unable to reach him. He does not know what the (shari'ah) law is and what affects him in his religion. So whoever from our Shi'ah is learned in our teachings should take under his wing the one who is ignorant in our shari'ah and is cut off from knowing us. One who guides and sets (such a person) aright and teaches him our shari'ah, shall be with us in the highest level (*al-rafiq al-a'ala*) [of Paradise].'

The Messenger of Allāh (s) said, 'The learned ('ulama) from our Shi'ah will be raised on the Day of Judgement and honoured in proportion to the quantity of their knowledge and their effort in guiding the servants of God; until one of them will be given a million robes of honour made of light (nur). Then a caller of our Mighty & Glorious Lord will call out, [saying]: 'O you guardians of the orphans of the family (Aal) of Muhammad, you who revived and strengthened them when they were cut off from their (spiritual) fathers, their Imāms... here are your

students and the 'orphans' that you supported and strengthened, so give them (intercession) as you gave them knowledge in the world.'

Imām al-Hasan ('a) said, 'The superiority of a guardian to an orphan of Aal Muhammad i.e. one who is cut off from his Imāms and stuck in ignorance – and one who takes such a person out of his ignorance and teaches him – over the superiority of a guardian to an orphan that he feeds and gives waters is like the superiority of the Sun over a hidden (dark) star.'

Imām al-Husayn ('a) said, 'One who becomes a guardian on our behalf to an 'orphan' who is cut off from our love, and he shares with him of our knowledge that had fallen away from him, until he guides him and sets him aright, (then) Allāh, the Mighty & Glorious, says: 'O noble and charitable servant! I am greater in nobility than you (i.e. in how I shall give you). O' My angels! Give him in the gardens, in exchange for every letter that he taught, a million palaces, and add to them what is appropriate for them from all the blessings.'

Lesson 2

Altruism

Altruism means to be selfless (the opposite of selfish) i.e. to prefer others over yourself even when you are in need. For example, when you cheerfully volunteer your time without expecting to get paid, to get credits for school or even to get acknowledged and thanked, you are altruistic because you are only doing it for Allāh's pleasure and to help others.

Most people give their time or money only when they expect something in return. To be truly charitable, we must learn to give our time, money and even our lives for others without expecting anything other than Allāh's pleasure.

The Arabic word for altruism is *ithār*. A beautiful example of *ithār* is Rasullullāh (s)'s family when they fasted for three days and only broke their fast with water because every time they sat down to break their fast, a beggar knocked on their door asking for food and they gave up their share to him. Allāh has praised this one incident in several āyāt of Surah al-Insān (chapter 76) of the Qur'ān. In particular Allāh mentions how Imām Ali ('a), Sayyida Fatima ('a), Imām al-Hasan ('a), Imām al-Husayn ('a) and their maid Fidda (r.a.) did not even want to be thanked for giving their own share of food:

﴿وَيُطْعَمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلَا شُكْرًا﴾

They (the blessed) give food, for the love of Him, to the needy, the orphan and the prisoner, [saying,] 'We feed you only for the sake of Allāh. We do not want any reward from you nor any thanks.'

- Surah al-Insān, 76:8-9

The first step to becoming truly charitable, selfless and altruistic is to realize that all human beings are equal. Even when some are poor or sick or handicapped, all humans want peace and comfort and security and love. All humans enjoy pleasure the same way and feel pain the same way.

The second step is to realize that Allāh helps His creatures through other creatures and not directly. For example, when a mother shows kindness and love to her baby, it is Allāh's love that is shining through her to the baby. It is Allāh who is being kind and loving to the baby through the mother.

What does this mean? This means then that when we do good to help others, we should not be proud of what 'we' or 'I' have done. Instead we should thank Allāh for the opportunity to do good and that He chose us through whom He helped one of His creatures, when in fact He could easily have helped His creatures through someone else.

And when we are selfish or we hurt someone or refuse to help others, we should realize it is Shaytān that is blocking us from being used by Allāh to do good to His creatures. We therefore should do istighfār (ask forgiveness) and 'return' to Allāh (i.e. do tawbah) and become His servants again so that He can use us to do good to others and so that He may be pleased with us. In exchange Allāh promises us His love and to keep us close to Himself in bliss and for eternity. What can be more wonderful than knowing that Allāh is pleased and happy with you and that you live in paradise in the neighbourhood of Rasullāh (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt ('a) forever and ever?

Being Charitable

Allāh encourages us to be charitable and altruistic in many ways. Firstly He reminds us that even when we give others it is Allāh Who gave us what we are giving to others. So He is in fact the real Giver but He is only giving it to others through us so that we may have an opportunity to do good and to purify ourselves:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا بَيْعٌ فِيهِ وَلَا خُلَّةٌ وَلَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾

*O you who have faith! Spend **out of what We have provided you** before there comes a day on which there will be no bargaining, neither friendship, nor intercession. And the faithless—they are the wrongdoers.*

- Surah Baqarah, 2:254

Secondly Allāh reminds us that He does not benefit when we are charitable or altruistic. It is only we who benefit because He will give it back to us on the Day of Judgement in the form of much good:

﴿وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَمَا تُنْفِقُونَ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ اللَّهِ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يُؤَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ﴾

...And whatever wealth you spend, it is for your own benefit, as you do not spend but to seek Allāh's pleasure, and whatever wealth you spend will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:272

Thirdly Allāh reminds us that if hoard our wealth and just keep it for ourselves, it is useless after we die. But if we give in the name of Allāh and for His sake, then He 'converts' it to *thawāb*. So in a sense we can take our wealth with us to the next world:

﴿مَا عِنْدَكُمْ يَنْفَدُ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّ الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

That which is with you will be spent but what is with Allāh shall last, and We will surely pay the patient their reward by the best of what they used to do.

- Surah an-Nahl, 16:96

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'The land on the Day of Judgement will be (hot like) fire except for the shade of a *mu'min* (faithful Muslim). If he or she gives charity, it will shade him or her.'

Imām Ali ('a) said, 'Blessed is one who gives out his excess wealth but withholds his excess speech.'

And to show that we are not doing anyone a favour by helping them but in fact we need someone to take our help so that we can get rewarded, Imām Ali ('a) said, 'You are in greater need to give what you have earned than the needy person who agrees to take and receive your charity and wealth.'

To show that the only way to take our possessions and wealth to the next world is by giving it to others, Imām Ali (‘a) said, ‘You have nothing to benefit from your worldly life except what you spend of it for your hereafter.’ And Imām Ali (‘a) also said, ‘Whatever extra you have, send it forward (for yourself in the hereafter) and do not delay....’

Rasulullāh (s) once asked his companions, ‘Who amongst you loves the wealth of his heirs (those who will inherit from you) more than his own wealth?’ And the people said, ‘none of us. We all love our own wealth.’ So Rasulullāh (s) said, ‘Then know, your wealth is what you send forward (for yourself through charity) and the wealth of your heirs is what you keep (because that will be left behind when you die and taken by them).’

One of Rasulullāh (s)’s wife, Aisha said, ‘we once slaughtered a sheep and gave it in charity. Then Rasulullāh asked, ‘what is left of it?’ and I (Aisha) said, ‘nothing is left except a shoulder piece.’ And Rasulullāh (s) said, ‘All of it is left except the shoulder piece.’

Question: Why do you think Rasulullāh (s) said this and what do you think he meant by saying ‘All of it is left except the shoulder piece?’ [Discuss in class]

If a person is miserly and does not spend his wealth to help others or only helps people when there is a selfish reason for his or her own gain, then he or she just collects and hoards large amounts of wealth that in the end is left behind. But he or she will still be punished for being miserly and hoarding what other people need. Allāh says in the Qur’ān:

﴿...وَالَّذِينَ يَكْنِزُونَ الذَّهَبَ وَالْفِضَّةَ وَلَا يَنْفِقُونَهَا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَبَشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ يَوْمَ يُخْمَىٰ عَلَيْهَا فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ فَتُكْوَىٰ بِهَا جِبَاهُهُمْ وَجُنُوبُهُمْ وَظُهُورُهُمْ هَذَا مَا كَنْزْتُمْ لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا مَا كَنْزْتُمْ تَكْنِزُونَ﴾

Those who treasure up gold and silver, and do not spend it in the way of Allāh, inform them of a painful punishment. On the day when these shall be heated in hellfire and branded on their foreheads, their sides and their backs [and told]: ‘This is what you treasured up for yourselves! So taste what you have treasured!’

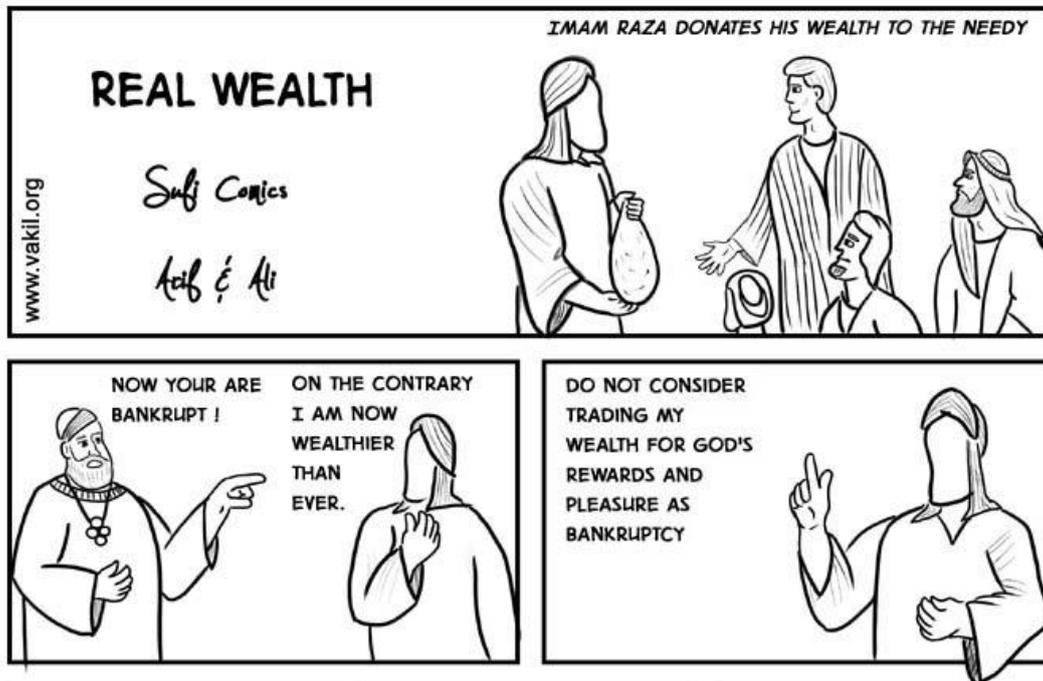
- Surah at-Tawba, 9:34-35

Lastly, we must remember that Allāh does not need us to be charitable or altruistic. He asks us to be generous for our own good. And if we give charity or help others but are reluctant or unhappy then it is no use. Allāh will not accept it and of course we cannot force Him to accept it. For such people Allāh says:

﴿قُلْ أَنْفِقُوا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا لَنْ يُتَقَبَلَ مِنْكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ وَمَا مَنَعَهُمْ أَنْ تُقْبَلَ مِنْهُمْ نَفَقَاتُهُمْ إِلَّا أَنَّهُمْ كَفَرُوا بِاللَّهِ وَبِرَسُولِهِ وَلَا يَأْتُونَ الصَّلَاةَ إِلَّا وَهُمْ كُسَالَى وَلَا يُنْفِقُونَ إِلَّا وَهُمْ كَارِهُونَ﴾

Say, 'Spend willingly or unwillingly, it shall never be accepted from you; for you are indeed a sinful group.' Nothing stops their charities from being accepted except that they have no faith in Allāh and His Apostle and do not perform the prayer (salāh) except lazily, and they do not spend [in charity] except reluctantly.

- Surah at-Tawba, 9:53-54



Lesson 3

Bribery & Usury vs. Lawful Earning

Islām emphasizes greatly that a person's earnings should always be halāl. When a person earns harām money, everything he or she buys and uses with the harām money affects his or her soul and his or her hereafter (ākhirah). Harām money is not just stolen money. It could also be a bribe taken from someone. It is harām to give or take a bribe from anyone. A bribe is called *rishwa* in Arabic.

Harām money can also come to us when we ask people to pay us extra money just because we lent them some money before. For example, if you lend your friend \$10 but then ask him to pay you back \$15 because you lent him some money, that is harām and is called *usury*. In Arabic usury is called *ribā*.

Our halāl money can also become harām when we don't pay our khums or zakāh, which we will learn about in detail later on. Both *rishwa* and *ribā* are harām because Islām wants people to work hard to earn their living and not to acquire it by taking advantage of other people's needs.

Earning halāl money is so important that it is better to only do what is wājib and earn halāl than to do so many mustahab acts like reciting Qur'ān, praying salāt al-layl, etc. but then to also cheat people, give and take bribes or charge others usury.

Earning a halāl livelihood also means that if I find money lying on the road, I should not pocket it. If I do, anything I use the money for will be harām. If I buy food, it will be harām to eat. If I buy clothes, I can't pray with them because it will be *ghasbi* and in addition to all that, I will of course be punished on the Day of Judgement.

When we find lost money and cannot find the owner, we should give it to the police or the nearest bank if it is a large sum. And if it is a very small amount we can give it in charity in the name of the real owner.

We have many ahādith from Rasullāh (s) and the other ma'sumeen ('a) to teach us that a true *mu'min* is not one who prays and fasts a lot but it is a person who does all that is wājib, keeps away from harām and then

is honest – never lies or cheats others and never bribes or uses harām ways to make money.

If we trust that Allāh is the one who feeds everyone, then there is no need to cheat or charge others interest or bribe or earn harām money in any other way.

Qard al-Hasanah

Qard means ‘loan’ and ‘*qard al-hasanah*’ means ‘a good loan’ or what we can call ‘an interest-free loan’. If Allāh has blessed us with wealth and we cannot give large sums of it away in charity, we can at least give it in loan to other fellow Muslims whom we trust. By giving *qard al-hasanah* to others, we help stop the corrupt practice of usury (*ribā*). The person in need will not have to take a loan from the bank and pay interest to them and we would get the *thawāb* of helping someone and eventually the money would be paid back to us.

When we give away money as interest-free loan, of course we don’t make any profit on it. But Allāh promises to multiply our rewards and give us far more in exchange.

﴿مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا فَيُضَاعِفَهُ لَهُ أَضْعَافًا كَثِيرَةً وَاللَّهُ يَقْبِضُ
وَيَبْسُطُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ﴾

Who is it that will lend Allāh a good loan (qard hasanah) that He may multiply it for him severalfold?....

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:245

﴿إِنْ تُقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا يُضَاعِفْهُ لَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ شَكُورٌ حَلِيمٌ﴾

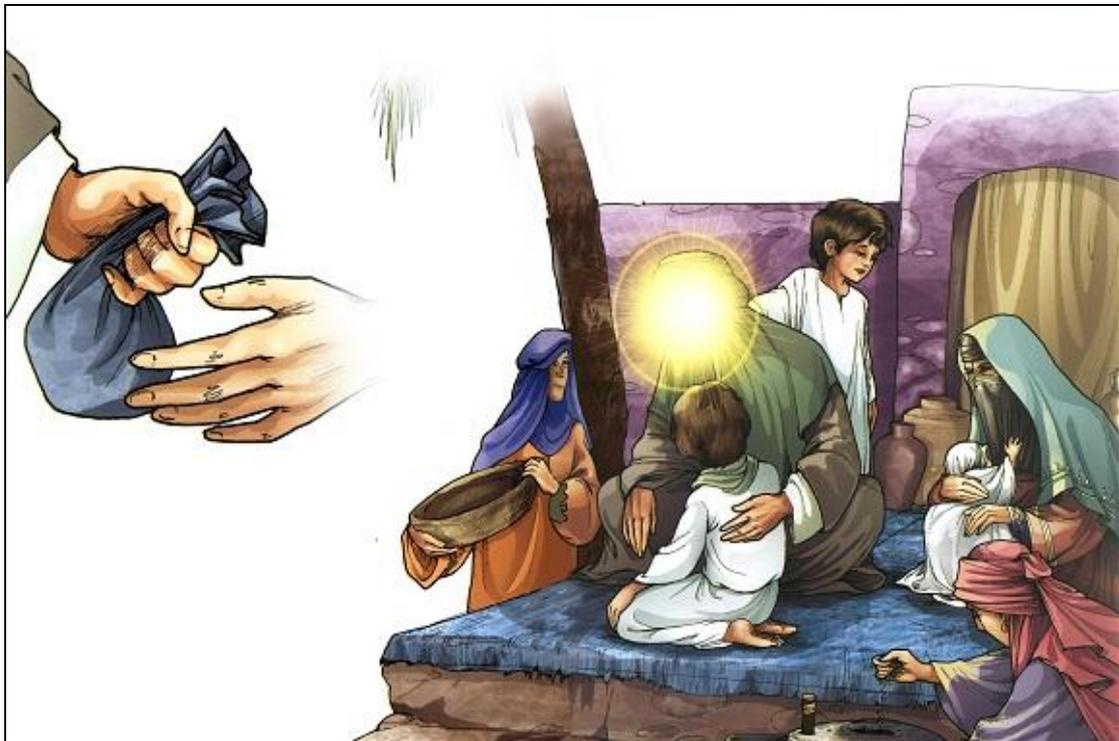
If you lend Allāh a good loan (qard hasanah), He shall multiply it for you and forgive you, and Allāh is all-appreciative, all-forgiving,

- Surah at-Taghābun, 64:17

Hoarding & Excessive Profit

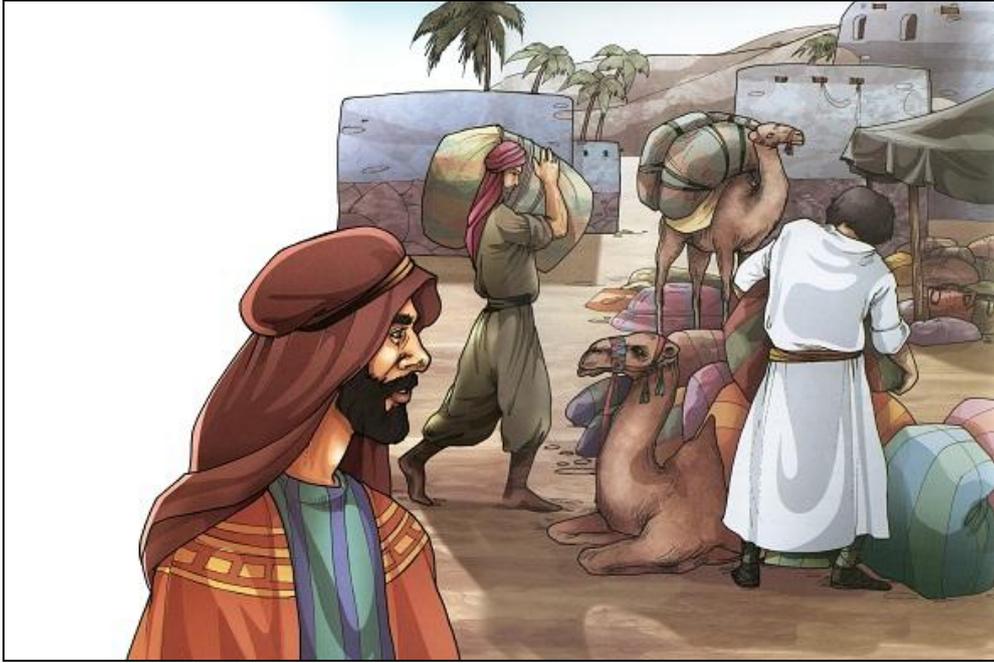
Another way that people earn harām money is by keeping a very high profit on their sales. Some people do this when they know there is a shortage for the goods they are selling and so they take advantage of people’s need for the goods and try and make money out of them. This is also harām especially if a person hoards necessities of life like food supplies and/or keeps a very high profit on them. The following incident in the life of Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) gives us an example.

The Unwanted Profit



Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) once decided to engage in trade. This was after his family had grown larger and his responsibilities and needs had also increased, and it had become difficult to support all of them with his present means.

And because Imām as-Sādiq (‘a) was also busy with an Islāmic university that he had set up in Madina where he was teaching many students, he was too occupied to go on trade himself. So he decided to appoint someone to do this on his behalf.

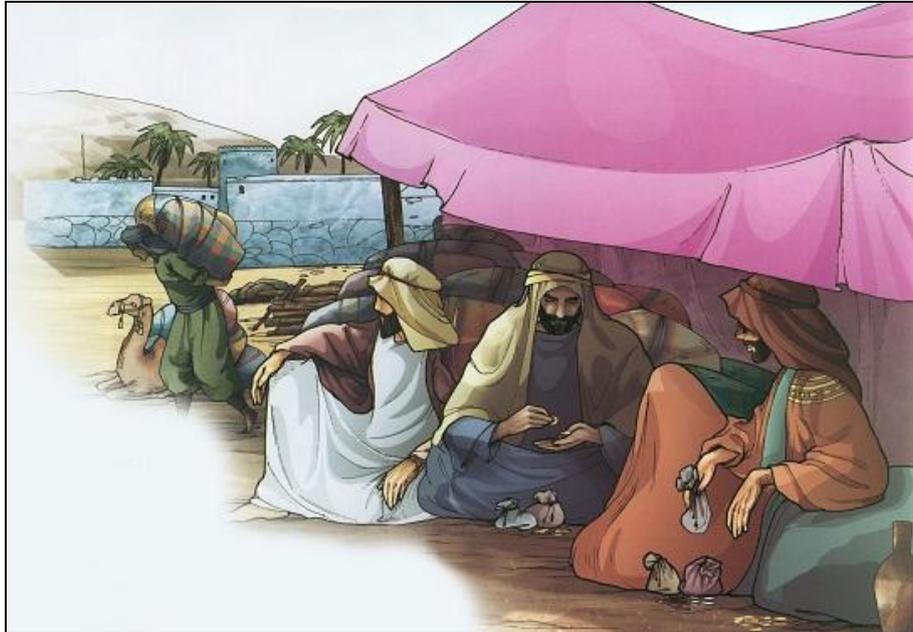


Imām as-Sādiq (‘a) decided to appoint one of the people working for him called Musādif and gave him 1000 dinars and said to him, ‘Prepare to go to Egypt for trade.’

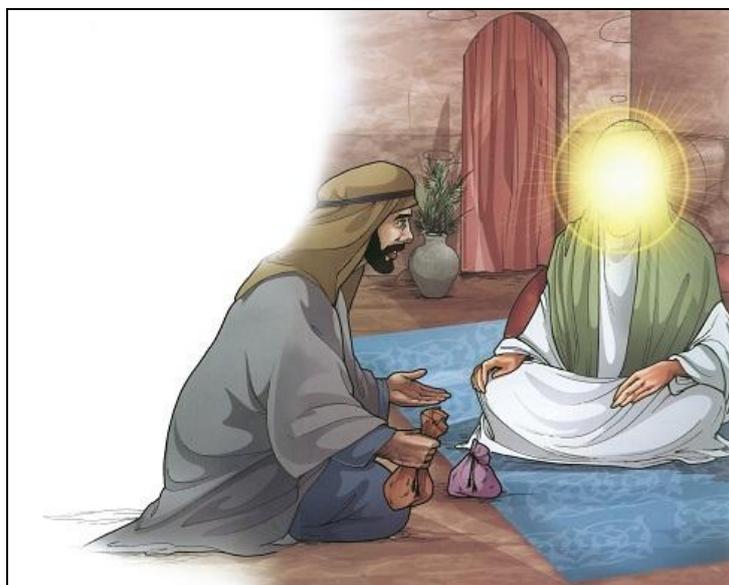
And so Musādif did that. He first went to the marketplace in Madina and inquired what goods the people in Egypt usually buy from Madina. Then he bought them and the next day he set off to Egypt with a group of other traders also heading the same way.



On the way, Musādif's caravan met another caravan that was returning to Madina from Egypt and when they asked them about what they had sold in Egypt, the caravan that was returning to Madina said to Musādif's caravan, 'The goods that you are carrying are in high demand in Egypt right now and the people really need it and have a shortage of it.'



Musādif's caravan was overjoyed to know this and all the traders including Musādif decided they would not sell their goods except at twice their cost. When they arrived in Egypt and realized it was true that there was a shortage for the goods they were carrying, they refused to sell their goods except at twice the cost (100% profit) and therefore made a lot of money.



Musādif returned to Madina with the other traders, overjoyed at the extra profit he had made. On the way back, he kept thinking how happy Imām as-Sādiq (‘a) would be that he made 2000 dinars out of the 1000 dinars the Imām had given him. Then he thought if he did this a couple more times, soon the Imām will become very rich and he (Musādif) will become a famous trader.

When he arrived in Madina and came to see Imām as-Sādiq (‘a), Musādif first gave back the Imām the first 1000 dinars that he had been given to purchase the goods. Then he produced the profit, which were another 1000 dinars. Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) asked him, ‘How did you make so much profit and get all this money?!’



And so Musādif told the Imām the whole story. How he and his fellow traders found a black market for their goods because there was a shortage in Egypt and how they all took an oath that they would not sell their goods for anything less than 100% profit; and how they decided they would make one dinar profit for every dinar of their cost.

Imām as-Sādiq (‘a) was not pleased with this act of Musādif at all. He said to Musādif, ‘*Subhān Allāh!* You all swore in the name of Allāh to take advantage of other Muslims when they were in need and to sell to them for over a 100% profit?!’



Then the Imām ('a) took the 1000 dinars that he had originally given Musādif and said, 'This 1000 dinars is the capital I had given you, so I will take it back. As for the profit you made in this trade, I don't want it.'

Then Imām as-Sādiq ('a) said, 'O Musādif! Fighting with a sword in battle is easier than earning a lawful (*halāl*) living!'

Lesson 4

Never Support the Unjust

Most humans are not cruel or evil by nature and they do not believe it is good to be unjust to others. But most humans end up helping or supporting the few that are truly unjust or evil. This happens because of a lack of courage, a lack of intelligence or out of greed for the world.

As Muslims we must be careful not to be 'used' by others for their own unjust goals in life otherwise we become a part of their evil. Even a tyrant cannot commit injustices to Allāh's creatures unless he finds someone to support him. Examples in history like Fir'aun and Yazid all prove this point. Yazid for example was not in Karbala himself. Yet he was able to kill Imām Husayn ('a) by bribing people, promising them wealth and positions of authority, threatening and intimidating others, and so on.

If we learn to be courageous, knowledgeable and content with little in life so that we are not constantly greedy for more, then others cannot 'buy' our support in any manner.

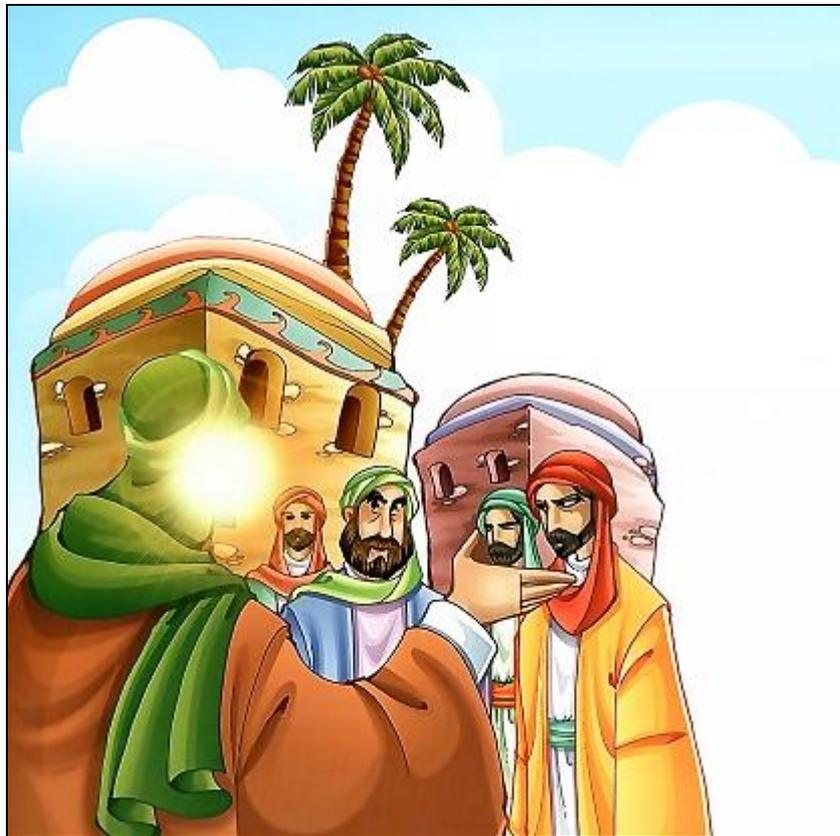
One way to check if we truly love Allāh more than the world and if we have the courage and faith to oppose the unjust, is to study examples in history and ask ourselves: *what would I have done?* For example, what would I have done when everyone was too afraid to oppose the tyrant Namrud who was trying to burn Nabi Ibrahim ('a) and he was alone? What would I have done when the tyrant Fir'aun wanted to crucify the magicians who repented and wanted to kill Nabi Musa ('a)? What would I have done when the Quraysh surrounded the house of Rasulullāh (s) and wanted to kill him on the night of hijrah? What would I have done in the Battle of Uhud? What would I have done when Rasulullāh (s) passed away and Imām Ali ('a) was denied his right? What would I have done if I were in Karbala? And so on...

The following is a story about a companion of our seventh Imām, Imām Musa al-Kādhim ('a) called Safwān. Safwān was both courageous and pious. He was not greedy for the world so when the tyrant Hārūn ar-Rashid almost used him for his own sinful goal, a simple reminder from Imām al-Kādhim ('a) was sufficient to help Safwān save his faith (*imān*).

Safwān the Camel Owner

The Abbāsi Caliph Hārūn ar-Rashid was a sworn enemy of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). He used to misuse the wealth of the Muslims for his own enjoyment and drink alcohol and have singers and dancers perform before him. He would never show mercy to others and was very proud and arrogant. If any Muslim would oppose his wishes, he would punish them severely.

Hārūn also claimed to be the Caliph and the successor of Rasūlullāh (s) when in fact the rightful successor was Imām Musa al-Kādhim ('a). Hārūn used to imprison, punish and even kill anyone who loved or followed the Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

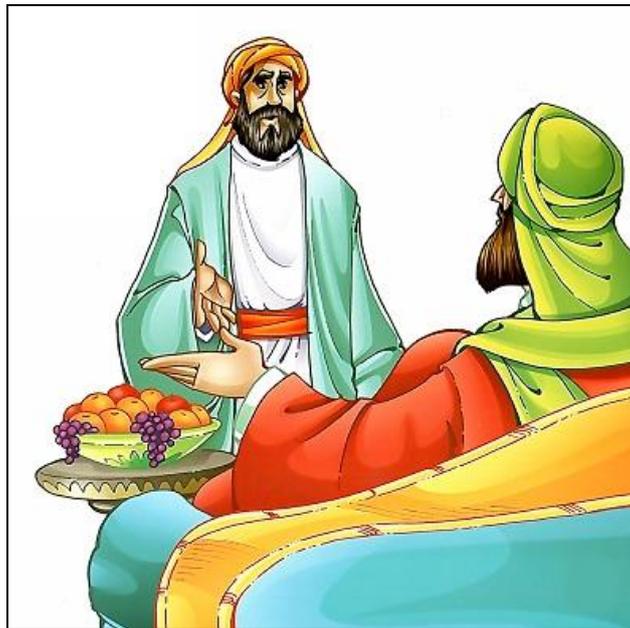


Imām Musa al-Kādhim ('a) knew Hārūn ar-Rashid very well and used to warn others about the hatred of Hārūn for the Shi'ah of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

One year, Hārūn decided to go for Hajj to Makkah and to show people that he was a good Muslim. He decided to go with all his ministers and officials and carry a lot of food and clothes and money and so he needed many camels to help carry all his possessions.



So he called for a man who owned many camels and whose name was Safwān al-Jammāl and asked to rent all his camels so that he could go for Hajj from Baghdad to Makkah. And Hārūn promised to give him a large sum of money for renting his camels, after he returned from Hajj.



Safwān agreed to the Caliph Hārūn's request because he was not able to refuse. He knew that this Caliph was a tyrant and that if he refused Hārūn would either kill him or take all his camels away by force. Especially because Hārūn knew that Safwān was a Shi'ah and loved Imām Musa al-Kādhim ('a), the man whom Hārūn hated the most.

And so Safwān said to Hārūn, 'I will keep all the camels for you when you go for Hajj.'



One day, Safwān decided to go and meet Imām Musa al-Kādhim (‘a) just to see how the Imām was doing and to learn from him. When he met Imām al-Kādhim (‘a), the Imām received him with honour and then said to him, ‘O Safwān! All your deeds are good and I am pleased with you. Except for one deed.’

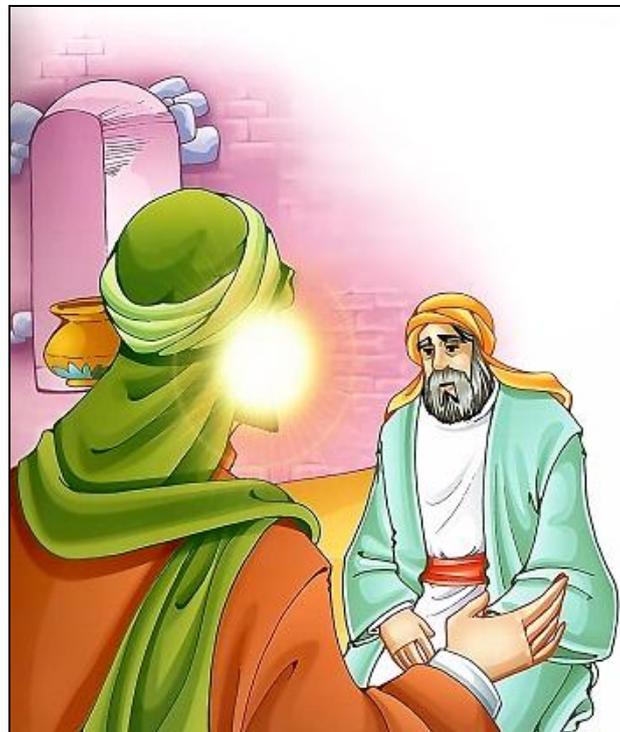
Safwān was surprised and asked Imām al-Kādhim (‘a) what that one action was that the Imām was unhappy with and did not like about him?

Imām Musa al-Kādhim (‘a) said to him, ‘You are renting your camels to Hārūn to go to Hajj and he will use your camels to carry the wealth that belongs to Muslims to entertain himself and for his own sinful habits.’

Safwān was surprised. How did the Imām know this? He said, ‘Dear Imām, I did not rent my camel with the intention of supporting any sin. I rented them for going for Hajj. And I won’t take the caravan myself. My workers will go with them.’



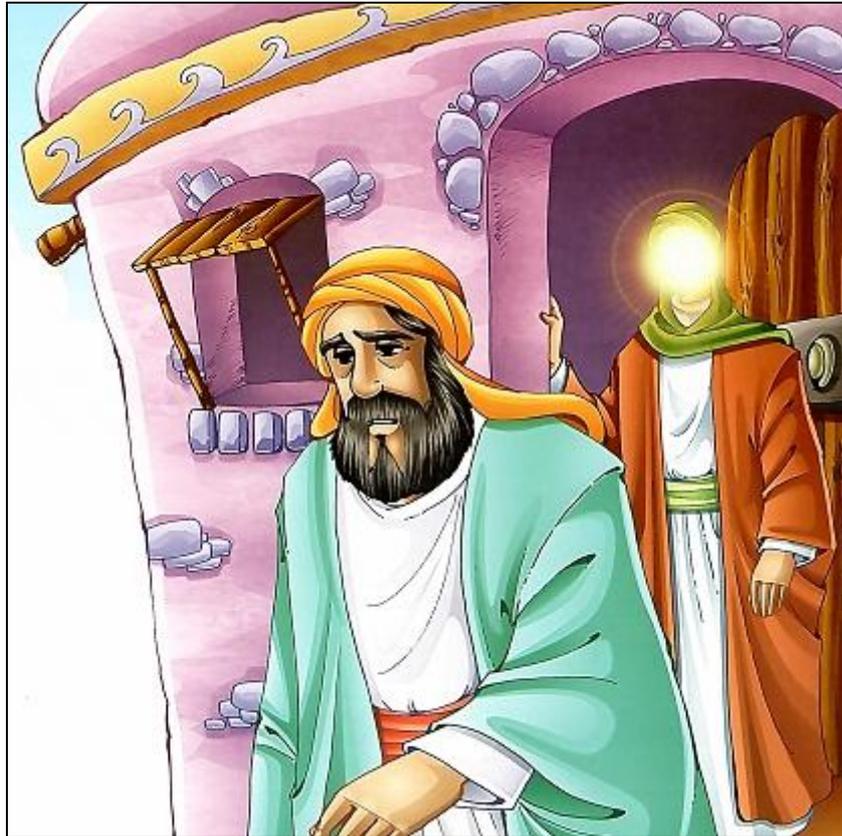
Imām al-Kādhim (‘a) said to him, ‘When Hārun returns from Hajj, are you hoping to receive payment for renting your camels?’



‘Yes mawla,’ replied Safwān. ‘So do you hope for Hārun’s well-being and success until he returns so that he can pay you for the camels?’ asked

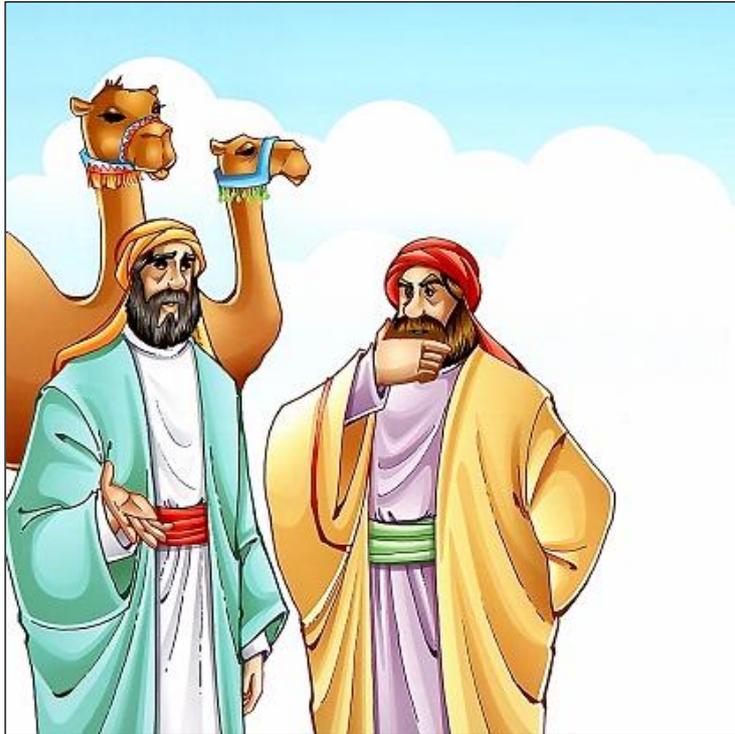
the Imām. And Safwān admitted, 'Yes, I wish he does come back and pay me.'

'But,' said the Imām ('a), 'no one wishes for the well-being of such an evil tyrant except someone who is evil like him and such a person will go to Jahannam on the Day of Judgement!!'



Safwān realized his mistake. He felt ashamed before Imām Musa al-Kādhim ('a). So he apologized to him and left. Then he decided that he would sell all his camels before the evil Hārun would need the camels. He realized that Hārun imprisons innocent Muslims and tortures and kills them and steals their property and wealth and therefore he is a tyrant who should not be supported in any way.

Safwān went to the market and started selling all his camels. Traders and caravan groups came and began buying all his camels until all were sold. Safwān did this because he wanted to please his Imām and not to do something that would displease and hurt his Imām.



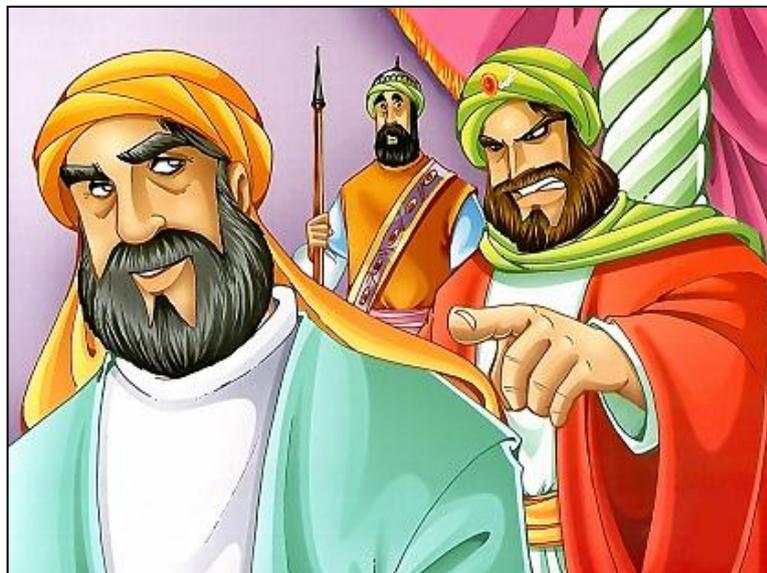
When Hārūn came to know that Safwān had sold all his camels, he was shocked. He summoned Safwān to his palace and said angrily, 'Safwān! I understand that you have sold all your camels!!'

'Yes, I sold them all,' replied Safwān.

'Why?!' demanded Hārūn.

'Well,' said Safwān, 'I am now getting old and I cannot look after them. It was getting too difficult and tiring for me.'

Hārūn stood up angrily and shouted, 'Get out of here! I know who gave you this idea. It is my enemy Musa bin Ja'far, who does not want you to support me in anything. Get out of my palace quickly before I have you killed!'



And so Safwān left, smiling to himself and pleased that he had been brave and done the right thing and pleased his Imām by not supporting a tyrant.

Lesson 5

Astrology & Witchcraft

Many people love to read and follow their 'star' (zodiac sign) everyday. Islām does not allow us to believe in 'stars' or to study astrology. Allāh wants a Muslim to trust Him and not to depend on what some people think the stars are predicting.

When a person makes a habit of believing in their zodiac sign or 'star', it makes them superstitious. If they want to do something good or spend in charity but their star predicts it is bad luck, they will not do it. But when a person places his or her trust in Allāh only, then Allāh always does what is good for him or her.

Even if we believe the 'stars' do have some truth, our knowing what they say will not change what will happen but it may weaken our faith and courage. And besides, an intelligent person does not believe that the same thing will happen to millions of people around the world only because they share one zodiac sign! And even if there was a way to know what will happen in the future, trying to control our future and make decisions on what the stars predict will only make us more fearful and weak. On the other hand, if we leave matters in Allāh's hands and we plan and forge ahead with trust in Him, it makes us courageous, confident and strong. Regardless of the outcome, we would increase in our faith and love for Allāh.

Remember Allāh created everything - even the 'stars' - and He decides when everyone will be born and when they will die. So never believe in 'stars' because it is harām to do so. Always pray to Allāh to do what is good for you in the future and He will always protect you and guide you.

We should also not be curious about magic and witchcraft. Practising witchcraft of any kind is harām and very evil. Even though some books and movies show magic to be cool, it is actually the practice of Shaytān. A Muslim depends on the power of Allāh and not on his or her own power. A Muslim wants Allāh to control everything and does not want to have the power to control things himself or herself.

Shaytān loves people who practice magic, witchcraft or astrology because it weakens their faith and trust in Allāh and gives Shaytān more power to control them.

Those who dabble with any form of sorcery and magic always, without exception, end up harming themselves and their loved ones. That is why it is harām to be involved in any kind of magic or witchcraft activity. Do not even listen to or sit with or befriend a person who always talks about these occult sciences and practices.

Whenever you are afraid of magic or witchcraft, recite Surah al-Nās and Surah al-Falaq and they are the best protection against all forms of evil.

The following story teaches us to place our trust only in Allāh.

The Astrologer of Kufa



Amir al-Mu'minin, Imām Ali ('a) one day announced that his army should get ready to go and fight in Nahrawan against the Khawārij who had disobeyed Imām Ali ('a) and were harming and killing innocent Muslims.

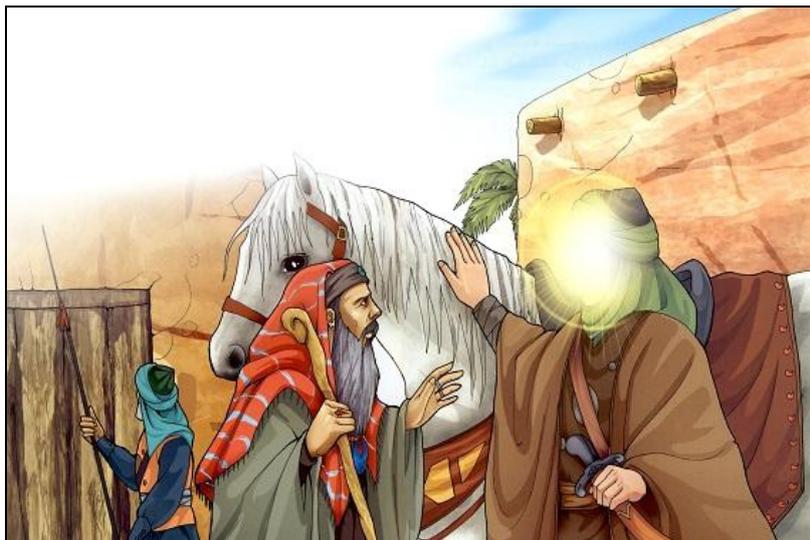
The men bade farewell to their families and their city, hoping to one day return from the war, safe and with victory.



In that city, there was an astrologer who believed he knew hidden matters and that he could predict good days and unlucky days based on the stars and their positions.

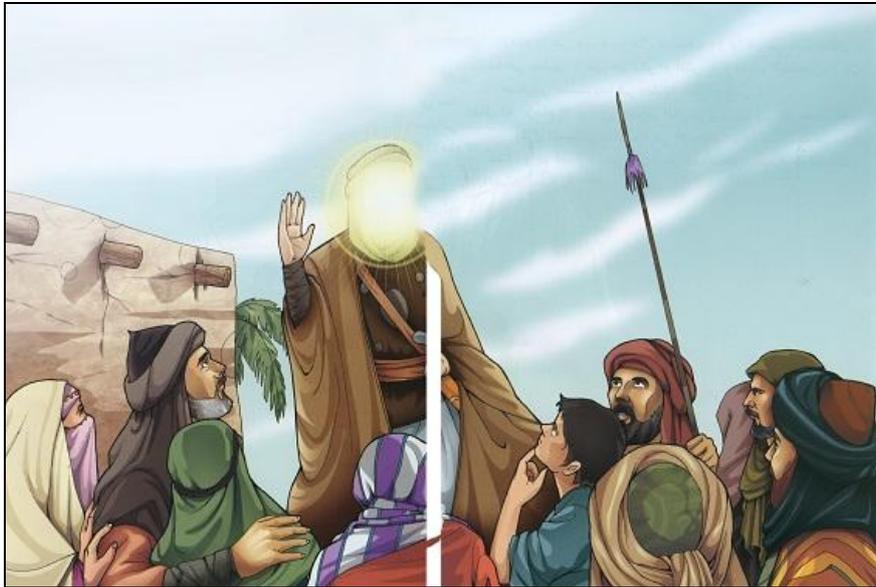
When he came to know that Imām Ali (‘a) was planning to leave for war, he came to him and said, ‘O Amir al-Mu’minin, I wish to inform you of a very important matter.’

‘What is it?’ asked Imām Ali (‘a). ‘Do not leave right now,’ said the astrologer. ‘Wait for three hours and then leave because if you leave right now, it will bring bad luck to you and your followers.’

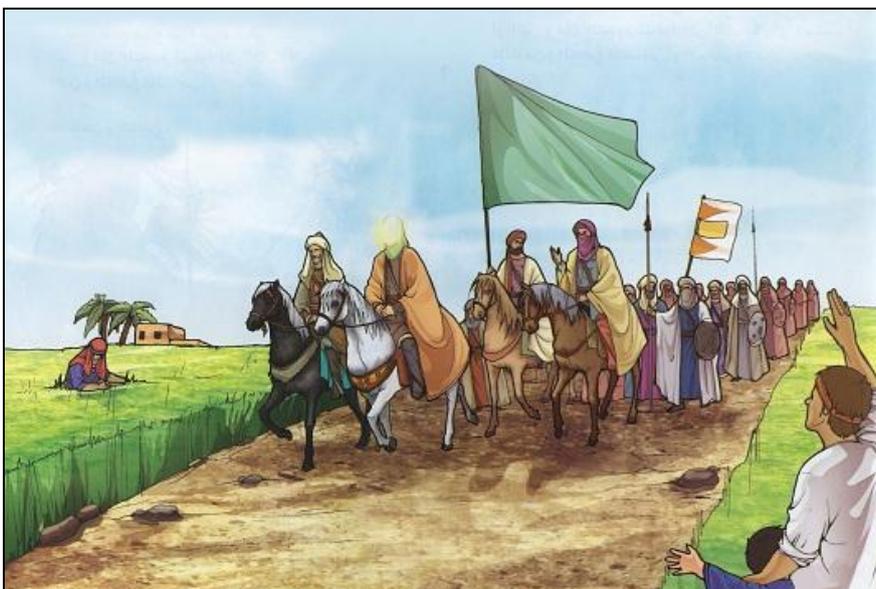


Imām Ali (‘a) said to the astrologer that only Allāh knows hidden matters. The Qur’ān says, only Allāh knows when the world will end and He knows what is in the wombs. No one knows what he or she will earn

tomorrow and no one knows where he or she will die. Then the Imām ('a) said to the astrologer, **'So whoever believes you, has disbelieved in the Qur'ān.'**



Imām Ali ('a) turned to the people and said to them, 'O people! Beware not to take any interest in astrology! A person who studies astrology will take an interest in magic. An astrologer is like a magician and a magician is a sorcerer and a sorcerer is a disbeliever in Allāh and a disbeliever will end in Hellfire!'



Imām Ali ('a) raised his hands towards the heavens and prayed to Allāh to grant them patience and victory and to protect them from these misguiding thoughts.

Then Imām Ali (‘a) said to the astrologer, ‘We will go against your words and leave now when you believe it is an unlucky hour.’ Then he ordered the army to leave for Nahrawān.



When the battle took place, the army of Imām Ali (‘a) fought bravely and all the enemies were killed except eight who ran away. And less than ten men in the army of Imām Ali (‘a) were martyred.



The battle ended with a great victory for Imām Ali (‘a) and his army. The Muslims rejoiced. As for the astrologer, he didn’t know where to hide his face from people because of how embarrassed he was after he was proven to be wrong and his prediction was completely false.

Lesson 6

Thanking Allāh & Being Content

﴿... وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِي﴾

... and thank Me, and do not be ungrateful to Me.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:152

Everything we are and everything we have are blessings from Allāh. When we don't thank Allāh or appreciate that He is the One Who is our Benefactor, we become like beasts who are oblivious of who their Lord and Sustainer is. To thank and show gratitude is therefore to be human.

If a person does not thank us for something we do for them, we feel they are being ungrateful or rude. Similarly, it is a sign of being ungrateful when we don't thank Allāh. Even worse is when we keep expressing dissatisfaction with what we have in life and keep wishing we had more.

In Arabic, thanking Allāh is called '*shukr*' and it is expressed by saying '*al-Hamdu lillāh*' (All praise is for Allāh) or by saying '*Shukran lillāh*' (All thanks is for Allāh). And contentment is called '*qanā'ah*'. Qanā'ah means to be pleased with what Allāh has given us. Of course it is not wrong to pray to Allāh for more or to work hard to get more. But it should never be with a sense of dissatisfaction and unhappiness. People who are always complaining that life has been unfair to them lack qanā'ah.

Allāh tells us that if we thank Him, He will give us more but if we are ungrateful, we will only earn His wrath and punishment:

﴿وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ﴾

And when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in blessing], but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is indeed severe.'

- Surah Ibrāhim, 14:7

What is important to keep in mind is that Allāh has nothing to gain or lose whether we thank Him or not. But He insists that we thank Him for our own good. Because the more we thank our Creator and appreciate

His role in our lives, the more we grow spiritually and come closer to Him. Otherwise, as we said earlier, we remain like beasts that are unaware of who they are, where they came from or where they are going.

That is why Allāh tells us:

﴿...وَمَنْ يَشْكُرْ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ﴾

...and whoever gives thanks, gives thanks only for his own sake. And whoever is ungrateful, [let him know that] Allāh is indeed all-sufficient, all-laudable.'

- Surah Luqmān, 31:12

Even when you thank another person, it is yourself who looks good and is honoured. The person who is thanked does not benefit from it.

Imām Ali Zayn al-Abidin ('a) said, 'All praise is to Allāh who, had He concealed from His servants the knowledge of praising and thanking Him for the continuous favours that He bestows on them, then they would have still benefited from His favours but they would not have praised Him and they would still be sustained by Him but they would not thank Him. And if that were to happen then they would cease to be human and they would become like animals and beasts that He describes saying, '*...they are like cattle; rather, they are more astray...*' (Surah al-'Arāf, 7:179).'

When Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) was asked about the most honourable creatures before Allāh, he said, 'One who thanks Allāh when he is blessed and he bears patience when he is tested (with suffering).'

So Allāh deserves to be thanked for every breathe we take. And even when we thank Allāh, it is because He blessed us to think about thanking Him. So then we must thank Him again for allowing us to thank Him and letting us think of saying '*Al-hamdulillāh*' or '*Shukran lillāh*'. And that again requires another thanks. In the end, Allāh only wants us to realize His blessings on us and to be grateful and content.

Our eleventh Imām, Imām Hasan al-Askari ('a) said, 'Only one who appreciates a blessing will thank (Allāh).'

Not to thank Allāh is therefore a sign of ungratefulness for His blessings. It means we are mean and we enjoy Allāh's gifts and favours every time but cannot be bothered to thank Him for them. Allāh tells us that most people never bother to thank Him:

﴿وَلَقَدْ مَكَّنَّاكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَايِشَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ﴾

Certainly We have established you on the earth, and made in it [various] means of livelihood for you. Little do you thank.

- Surah al-'Arāf, 7:10

﴿قُلْ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْشَأَكُمْ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ﴾

Say, 'It is He who created you, and made for you hearing, eyesight, and hearts. Little do you thank.'

- Surah al-Mulk, 67:23

How to Thank Allāh

So besides saying 'al-hamdu lillāh' and shukran lillāh', how do we truly thank Allāh and show that we are grateful for His blessings?

True thanking of Allāh is by obeying Him. Imām Ali ('a) said, 'Even if Allāh had not warned people of punishment for sinning, it would still be wājib not to disobey Him as thanksgiving for His blessings.'

When we sin, we use the time and energy and health and body and limbs and eyes and hands that Allāh has given us as favours, to disobey Him. True gratefulness means you don't use His favours to sin against Him.

Thereafter, we should also find ways to express our thanks. For example, after every salāh, we should prostrate and thank Allāh in *sajdat ash-shukr*. And every time we realize a favour of Allāh or receive or hear something good, we should thank Allāh. Our ninth Imām, Imām Muhammad al-Jawād ('a) said, 'When you don't thank Allāh for a blessing, it is like committing a sin and then not asking for forgiveness from Allāh.'

And in fact, if we are true and sincere Muslims then we must show utmost contentment by thanking Allāh at all times – even when something bad befalls us, we should say, *‘al-hamdu lillāhi ‘ala kulli hā’* (All praise is to Allāh in every circumstance).

Once a group of people came to our fourth Imām, Imām Ali Zayn al-Abidin (‘a) and claimed they were his Shi’ah and his true followers.

The Imām asked them what they did when they received something nice. They replied that they thanked Allāh. The Imām then asked them what they did when something nice was taken away from them. They said they got upset, but came to terms with the loss. The Imām then asked what they did when they got nothing. Puzzled, they replied that they did nothing.

Imām Zayn al-Abidin (‘a) replied that these were not the actions of his Shi’ah, but those of a dog:

- When dogs are given something, they wag their tails in thanks.
- When something is taken away from them they bark a little to complain, then walk away.
- When they get nothing, they do nothing.

Imām Zayn al-Abidin (‘a) then explained that his true followers and Shi’ah are those who thank Allāh:

- When they get something.
- When something is taken away, and
- Even when they get nothing.

Another aspect of thanking Allāh is that even when people do us a favour or help us or give us a gift, we should first thank Allāh and then thank the person or people.

When we tell people who don’t believe in God that Allāh has given us everything, they laugh and say, ‘No one has given me what I have. Even the money I have, I have earned it all by myself with my hard work.’

This shows that they are ungrateful. Their example is like that of a little boy who was sitting at home on his birthday. Suddenly the doorbell rang, and the boy rushed to see who it was. When he opened the door, he saw the postman with a HUGE parcel. The postman gave the parcel to

the boy and left. Excited, the boy rushed to open it. When he unwrapped it, he saw a big, new, shiny bicycle. He was very happy.

Then, later on in the evening, the phone rang, and the boy went to pick it up. When he picked up the phone, he heard his grandmother on the other side of the line, she said to him: 'Happy birthday! Did you like the bicycle that I sent you?'

The boy replied, 'You did not send the bicycle, the postman did!'

What would this story tell us? It would show that the boy did not understand that the postman only delivered the bicycle, and did not send it. In the same way, when something good comes our way, we sometimes fail to realize that it came from Allāh and that the person who gave it was only a means through which Allāh blessed us. That is why, when we receive any blessing, we should first thank Allāh (to acknowledge it came from Him) and then thank the person who gave us or helped us.

And finally, a huge part of thanking Allāh and showing our gratitude to Him is to use His favours and blessings to serve His creation and help others. Whether we are blessed with wealth or knowledge or some other talent (artistic ability, physical strength, etc.) we should use it to serve Allāh by helping others.

In summary, true thanking Allāh is:

- Knowing you can never thank Him enough.
- Not disobeying Him.
- Saying '*al-hamdu lillāh*' frequently and on all occasions, good or bad.
- Sharing with others what Allāh has blessed us with e.g. money, time, knowledge, and health.
- Thanking people when they do us a favour or help us.

Thanking Others

We are told in hadith, ‘One who does not thank people, has not thanked Allāh.’

This is because Allāh helps us through other people. So when we thank the people who were the means of Allāh, we actually also thank Allāh.

The way to thank others is to say, ‘Jazākumullah’, which means ‘may Allāh reward you.’

Muslims don’t believe anyone can do much good without Allāh’s help. That is why we don’t just say, ‘have a nice day’. It’s not up to the person to ‘have a nice day’. We say ‘may Allāh bless your today.’

Or for example, we don’t say to other Muslims, ‘have a safe trip’ or ‘drive safely’. It’s really not up to the person to do much more beyond what anyone would do and no one puts himself or herself in danger intentionally. Unless of course when we say that we mean ‘I pray to Allāh that you have a safe trip’.

Otherwise the words ‘have a safe trip’ on their own are meaningless unless we say, ‘Fi Amānillah’ – ‘May you be in Allāh’s care’ or ‘may Allāh protect you and keep you safe’. When we **add Allāh** to the wish, it is meaningful because Allāh is able to make a difference and our greeting or farewell or wish becomes a prayer.

In the same manner, ‘thank you’ does not do much for the person we thank except that it makes us look good and perhaps makes him feel good. But ‘Jazākumullāh’ (“May Allāh reward you”) is a prayer in which we are thanking the person, expressing our gratitude and as well asking Allāh to reward them for helping us.

Lesson 7

Sins of the Tongue

The tongue can be used for much good (praying, reciting Qur'ān, giving good advice to others, bring joy to people, expressing love, and so on) but it can also be used for much evil, such as lying, cheating, being rude, swearing, uttering blasphemy, and so on.

In this lesson we will review some of the major sins related to the tongue. In particular we will study what Islām says about *kidhb* (lying), *ghibah* (backbiting), *tuhmah* (slander), as well as flattery and boasting.

Lying (Kidhb)

﴿إِنَّمَا يَفْتَرِي الْكَذِبَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَاذِبُونَ﴾

Only those fabricate lies who do not believe in the signs of Allāh, and it is they who are the liars.

- Surah al-Nahl, 16:105

Rasulullāh (s) was asked, 'Can a *mu'min* be a coward?' He said, 'Yes.' He was asked, 'Can a *mu'min* be a miser?' He said, 'Yes.' Then he was asked, 'Can a *mu'min* be a liar?' and he said, 'No.'

Imām Ali ('a), 'A person will never taste the sweetness of faith (*imān*) until he or she gives up lying, seriously or in jest.'

A perfect example of honesty is our Holy Prophet Muhammad (s), who was known as the truthful one (*as-Sādiq*) even by his enemies.

A man once said to Rasulullāh (s) that he committed many sins but was willing to give up one of them. Rasulullāh (s) told him to give up lying. The man thought he got off easy. But the next day, as soon as he thought of committing a sin, he realized that if Rasulullāh (s) or anyone else asks him about it, he couldn't lie. This stopped him from other sins and forced him to give up other sins as well. This is why lying is called 'the key' to the door of sins. It is only through lying that we cover up other sins.

Listening to Lies

Listening to lies eagerly or even willingly, is equally a great sin. One of the qualities of Jannah is that there is no lies spoken there:

﴿لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِذَّابًا﴾

Therein they shall hear neither vain talk nor lies.

- Surah an-Naba, 78:35

So if we wish to be among the people of Jannah, we should not listen to lies either. When we know someone is lying and we cannot stop them, we should simply stand up and leave.

When we tolerate liars or laugh with them, it gives them the impression that 'lying is ok' or normal. Instead we should express shock and disgust when someone lies and never be friends with a liar.

Lying About Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)

One of the worst forms of lying is to lie about the meaning of an āyah of the Qur'ān or to lie about a hadith of a ma'sum ('a). That is why people who preach to others have to be extra careful. Some of the ways in which the Muslim scholars and lecturers have to take extreme care are:

- Not to quote hadith from unreliable books. To only quote hadith from well-known and trusted sources.
- Not to exaggerate especially when reciting the masāib (tragedy) of Karbala.
- Not to add one's own opinions to the meaning of an āyah of Qur'ān or hadith unless it is made clear to the listeners that this is just a personal opinion.
- Not to swear in the name of Allāh falsely.

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'One who attributes something to me, which I have not said, shall sit in Hellfire.' If we know a preacher has the habit of quoting unreliable reports or books of hadith or makes up stories,

especially in masāib, we should not go and listen to them when they preach. Otherwise we share in their sin of lying.

Allamah Dastghayb in his book *Dhunub al-Kabira* narrates that a preacher once came to a pious scholar called Agha Muhammad Ali and said with fright, 'I dreamt that I am tearing at the flesh of Imām Husayn ('a) with my teeth. What does this dream mean?'

Agha Muhammad Ali thought about it for a while and then said, 'You must be a preacher, who recites the masāib of Imām Husayn ('a).' The man said, 'Yes.' And so Agha Muhammad Ali told him, 'It is because you make up things or say unreliable reports about Imām Husayn ('a). You should either stop preaching or quote only from reliable books.'

Another similar incident is recorded in the book, *Shifā as-Sudoor*. A preacher was reciting a majlis in the presence of Ayatullah Muhammad Ibrāhim Kalbāsi. In the midst of his masāib, he said, 'Then Imām Husayn ('a) called out to his sister and said, "Zaynab, O! Zaynab." When Ayatullah Kalbāsi heard this, he got upset and loudly exclaimed (scolding the preacher), "Imām Husayn ('a) did not say 'Zaynab' twice, he had said it only once!"

These examples show us how important it is to be very careful when quoting any hadith or incident relating to Rasullullāh (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

Lying in Jest

Islām does not allow lying even whilst joking. Unless of course everyone listening to the joke knows it is not true.

Rasullullāh (s) has said, 'Allāh curses the liar even if he lied in jest.'

This also means when we are being polite to people we should not lie. For example, we should not tell people 'come home some time' if we don't really mean it and we don't really want them to come. They may realize we are not serious but we form a habit of saying lies only to make ourselves look good to others. It is far better to just keep quiet even if the person may think he or she is not welcome to your home.

'White' Lies

A 'white' lie is when we conceal the truth without actually uttering a lie. It means to say something that could be interpreted in more than one way.

White lies are permissible under special conditions. For example, if a person's life is in danger and to protect him we say, 'he is not here' and by that we mean he is not at the door, then that is ok. And in fact it is wājib to even lie outright so as to save an innocent life.

Similarly, it is harām for a Muslim to reveal or confess to others the sins he or she commits. So if someone asks a Muslim, 'have you committed this sin?' then to save his or her honour and also not to publicize a sin and make it trivial, it is ok to say something unclear like, 'Do you really expect me to commit such a grave sin?' or 'May Allāh protect me from such a sin!'

Similarly if your friend tells you that others say he or she has a particular fault and you know that it *is* true but if you confirm it then your friend's feelings will be hurt, you still cannot lie and say, 'They are liars, you don't have this fault in you'. Instead you can try and help your friend by choosing a more gentle way to tell him or her the truth.

In summary, 'white' lies for the sake of convenience or because we lack the courage to say the truth are not permissible. They are still harām like lies because we intentionally lead someone to believe something untrue. However if not saying a white lie or even an outright lie causes another more serious harm like endangering a life or publicizing a sin or hurting someone's feeling, then the minimum 'white' lie is permissible.

When Lying is Permissible

As we have said, outright lying is permitted if it is save your or someone else's life, honour and even property.

When it comes to saving the life of a Muslim, Rasulullāh (s) allowed Muslims to even take a false oath and he said, 'Swear falsely by Allāh, but save your Muslim brothers from unjust murder.'

Another occasion when lying is permitted is to bring peace between two parties, whether it is a husband and wife or even two countries about to go to war.

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) said, 'Speech is of three types: truth, lies and reconciling people.' Someone then asked him what 'reconciling people' meant and he replied, 'It is when you hear someone speaking ill about someone but you tell the other person that the former was saying good about you.' In other words the Imām did not even categorize this as a lie but rather gave it another category altogether.

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'After the fulfillment of wājib acts, the best action is to bring about peace and reconciliation among people because this is an act that spreads goodness in the world.'

When recording his final will to Imām Ali ('a), Rasulullāh (s) also said, 'O 'Ali, Allāh even likes a lie for the sake of peace and dislikes truth that spreads mischief.'

In other words if the truth will cause hate and fights and spread gossip and mischief, we should conceal it and if making something up will bring peace and give people time to get to know each other than that is what we must do.

Hiding the truth during war against the faithless is also permitted so as to give the faithful Muslims an advantage over their enemy e.g. the number of soldiers or number of wounded and dead, and so on.

Lying to Allāh, Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)

We have discussed lying *about* Allāh or Rasulullāh (s) or the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). But now we discuss lying *to* them.

It is important to pay attention to what we say in our prayers (salāh) and supplications (du'as) and salutations (ziyārāt). For example:

- Are we not lying when we saying 'Allāhu Akbar' (Allāh is the Greatest) but our actions show that we think money, games, friends or family are the greatest thing in our lives?

- What do you think of a person who says in salāh ‘*diyyāka na’budu wa diyyāka nasta’in*’ (You only do we worship and from You only do we seek help) but then day and night they ‘worship’ things like sports and games?
- What about when we say in the Fajr du’a, ‘I place all my trust in Allāh’ (*wa ufawidu amri ilallāh*). Or when we recite, ‘I am pleased with Allāh as my Lord’ (*raditu billāhi rabban*). Do you think some people say this but they are lying?
- What about when we recite duas and say to Allāh, ‘I weep out of fear of you and the fear of my sins’. Are we being sincere or lying?
- When we salute Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), in some ziyārāt, we say, ‘O Imām! I accept your words and act on your commands and teachings’. And in some places we say to them, ‘I am at peace with those who are at peace with you and I am at war with those who are at war with you. I am with you and against your enemies.’ Can a person say this in words while his or her actions show they are lying?

The solution of course is not to stop praying or reciting duas and ziyārāt. A Muslim should never lose hope in Allāh’s mercy, kindness and love. The solution is to change our habits and actions so that when we recite these we are not lying.

Backbiting (Ghibah)

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَبَ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ﴾

O you who have faith! Avoid much suspicion. Indeed some suspicions are sins. And do not spy on or backbite one another. Will any of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it. And be conscious of Allāh; indeed Allāh is all-forgiving, all-merciful.

- Surah al-Hujurāt, 49:12

The āyah of the Qur’ān above shows us that backbiting about a person is the same as eating their flesh after they die.

Rasulullāh (s) defined backbiting by saying, 'Ghibah is remembering your (Muslim) brother in a way he dislikes.'

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) defined it by saying, 'Ghibah is to reveal (the evil) about a Muslim what Allāh has kept hidden.'

And in fact we should not even backbite a non-Muslim because speaking ill of others is an addictive habit and it harms us more than it harms the person we speak ill of.

Imām Ali ('a) said, 'Ghibah is a sign of a hypocrite (*munāfiq*)' and he also said, 'the most disgusting habit to Allāh is backbiting.'

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) said, 'If you backbite others then others will backbite you. Don't dig a hole for your Muslim brother (or sister) otherwise you will fall into it. As you do to others, so shall be done to you.'

And our fourth Imām, Imām Ali Zayn al-Abideen ('a) warned us, 'Beware of *ghibah* because it is the food of the dogs of Hellfire.'

Listening to Ghibah

Imām Ali ('a) has said, 'One who listens to backbiting is like one who backbites.'

This is because if we show an interest in what a person is saying when he is backbiting, it encourages the backbiter to keep his habit and do it more often. But if we show disgust and walk away or tell him to stop backbiting, he may feel bad but will learn to give up the habit. And on the Day of Judgement he will thank you for stopping him from backbiting.

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'If a person hears his Muslim brother (or sister) being backbitten in a gathering and defends him or her and stops the people from backbiting, Allāh will defend and protect him in this world and the hereafter. And if a person can defend another Muslim who is being backbitten but keeps quiet and does nothing, Allāh will humiliate and disgrace him in this world and the hereafter.'

So when you can't defend a Muslim when others are backbiting him or her, you should do *istighfār* (ask Allāh for forgiveness) and stand up and leave so that you don't listen to it and become a part of it.

Why Ghibah is Harām

Ghibah causes disunity and hatred in a community. It breaks up families and creates ill feelings that can last for a lifetime.

Ghibah is a major sin and only cowards who lack the courage to say to people what they dislike about them directly will speak about them behind their backs. Ghibah is also cowardly because the person being backbitten is not there to defend himself or herself. Even if you hear wicked things about others, you should give them a chance to defend themselves before you believe what you hear.

Ghibah is also a sign of jealousy because the person backbiting cannot tolerate to see the person he or she is backbiting so they try and 'bring them down' by lowering their esteem in the eyes of others.

Allāh hides the sins of people and takes pride in being *Sattār al-'Uyub* (The Concealer of Defects). When we expose the sins and defects of others and talk about it to people, we not only humiliate others but also remove the veil and cover that Allāh had put over their deeds. What right do we then have to expect Allāh to cover and hide our faults?

Ghibah is also addictive and habit-forming. If one is not careful they soon start doing it every time they meet others. We should never trust a backbiter because just as they tell us about others, you can be sure they tell others about us.

We should also be aware that sometimes ghibah is done without the tongue. For example, when a person passes by and we wink to someone else and imitate his or her look or how he or she walks, etc. All of this is a great sin that can cause a person to end up in Hellfire unless they seek forgiveness from the person they have backbitten.

And when we hear others backbiting, we shouldn't become their messengers either. A man once spoke bad about our first Imām, Imām

Ali b. Abi Tālib (‘a) when the Imām was not present. Someone came to report it to Imām Ali (‘a) but the Imām was angry at him and said, ‘He shot an arrow at me but missed. You picked the arrow from the ground and stabbed me with it!’

The Kaffāra (Penalty) of Ghibah

Sometimes we make a mistake and speak bad about someone to others.

To make up and compensate for a mistake is called *kaffāra* in Arabic. The *kaffāra* for ghibah is to ask the person whom you did ghibah about to forgive you.

If the person has died or moved to another country or if you feel that if you tell him or email him and ask his forgiveness he will not understand and it may make it worse, then the *kaffāra* is:

1. Ask Allāh for forgiveness and promise not to do ghibah again.
2. Pray to Allāh to forgive the person whose ghibah you did.
3. Think of the good qualities of the person and praise him when you can.
4. Whenever you remember your Muslim brother or sister whose ghibah you did, pray for them and ask Allāh to bless them and forgive them.

You can even do some good deed on behalf of the person whose ghibah you did. For example, you can give some money as *sadaqa* on behalf of the person and ask Allāh to give the *thawāb* of the *sadaqa* to that person. Or you can recite a *tasbih* of salawāt on behalf of your Muslim brother or sister.

Rasulullāh (s) has said, ‘Allāh does not forgive a person for ghibah until he asks for forgiveness from the person whose ghibah he did.’

When Ghibah is Permissible

Like lying, there are occasions when revealing a person's fault is permissible. These are:

1. If a person sins openly and shamelessly like for example a Muslim who drinks alcohol in public. Such a person is called a *fāsiq*. However we can only speak of what they do publicly. If they also commit another sin in private, we cannot mention it to others.
2. To mention the injustices of oppressors is not ghibah. For example if we talk of Yazid and his crimes it is not ghibah. He was both a *fāsiq* and an oppressor (*dhālim*).
3. If revealing the evil of someone is important in advising and saving another Muslim. For example if a person wishes to do business with someone dishonest or they have received a marriage proposal for their daughter from a dishonest man, then it is *wājib* to reveal the dishonesty of the man so as to save your fellow Muslim from suffering loss or harm.
4. If by speaking to someone else, a person can be stopped from sin then it is permissible e.g. telling a parent about their child's bad habit. This would be done as a form of *nahi 'anil munkar*.

Sometimes people who backbite others try to defend themselves by saying, 'but it's true!' That however is what ghibah is – to say what is true about a person when they are not present but they would not like to hear it. If what we say is not true then it is even worse and is called *tuhmah* (slander) meaning, a false accusation.

Tuhmah

Tuhmah (also called *Buhtān*) is like Ghibah except that what is said about another person is not even true and is false accusation.

The Qur'ān warns us that when people who have a habit of gossiping tell us something, we should not believe them right away:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ﴾

O you who have faith! If an open sinner (fāsiq) should bring you some news, verify it, lest you should harm some people out of ignorance, and then become regretful for what you have done.

- Surah al-Hujurāt 49:6

Imām as-Sādiq ('a), 'When a *mu'min* accuses his fellow Muslim brother or sister of something untrue (i.e. does *tuhmah*), his faith (*imān*) dissolves like salt dissolves in water.'

At the same time, we should not go to places or do things that will make people suspect us. Imām Ali ('a) said, 'A person who goes to a place where sin is committed, will be accused of sin.'

The Qur'ān warns us though not to falsely accuse others or slander them just on mere suspicion:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا...﴾

O you who have faith! Avoid much suspicion. Indeed some suspicions are sins. And do not spy on or backbite one another....

- Surah al-Hujurāt, 49:12

Flattery

Praising others on their face is called flattery. It is also a sin committed by the tongue and it is disgusting habit. A person who praises you on your face is rarely sincere. A person who sincerely loves you will praise you to others when you are not present. A flatterer on the other hand will praise you on your face but backbite you when you are absent.

Miqdād, the companion of Rasulullāh (s) said, 'Rasulullāh (s) ordered us to throw dust on the face on anyone who flatters us.'

And Imām Ali ('a) said, 'One who flatters you slaughters you.'

A man once praised someone while Rasulullāh (s) was there. So Rasulullāh (s) said to him thrice, 'You have slit the throat of your friend.'

The reason for this is because when a person is praised on his face, it makes him or her proud and reduces his or her sincerity. It can cause a person to stop working for Allāh and even to fail in the hereafter.

If you think someone is good, always praise them to others but not in their presence. You can encourage them to continue doing good but without showering them with lavish praises. It is definitely *harām* to praise a tyrant, a public sinner (*fāsiq*) or an anti-Islāmic ruler.

Flattery also results in many evil traits in the flatterer and not just the person being flattered. First, it encourages lying, since one of its means is exaggeration and pleasing is its aim. It also encourages immodest behaviour and hypocrisy.

What to Do when Someone Praises You

When some people praised Imām Ali ('a) on his face, he prayed to Allāh said, 'O Allāh, You know me better than myself. And I know myself better than them. O Allāh, make me better than they think and forgive me for what they do not know.'

Even worse than flattering a person about what is true about him is to flatter him about a quality that he does not possess. Imām Ali ('a) said not to believe a person who flatters you about things that you know are untrue because it is as if he is making fun of you.

We should not even accept the flattery of a hypocrite. One day a hypocrite, who was in fact among the enemies of Imām 'Ali ('a), came to him and praised him exaggeratedly. Imām Ali ('a) said to him, 'I am below what you say of me but above what you think of me!'

Praising Oneself

Praising oneself is also called boasting or bragging. Young people sometimes love to praise themselves and show off jokingly but it is wrong because it quickly becomes a habit and in time a person actually

begins to believe they *are* what they praise themselves for. Allāh tells us not to praise our own good qualities even if they are true.

﴿أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ يُزَكُّونَ أَنفُسَهُمْ بَلِ اللَّهُ يُزَكِّي مَن يَشَاءُ...﴾

Have you seen those who present themselves as pure? Rather, it is Allāh who purifies whomever He wishes...

- Surah an-Nisa, 4:49

Imām as-Sādiq (‘a) explained the meaning of ‘present themselves as pure’ in the āyah above and said it means to say, ‘I prayed yesterday...’ or ‘I am fasting tomorrow...’ and so on.

Rasulullāh (s) said, ‘One who boasts “I am the best of people” is actually the worst of them and one who says, “I am definitely going to Jannah” will go to Jahannam.’