Islamic Morals

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RESPECT TO PARENTS

Respect to parents is a topic taught to many classes in the Madressa. By now you must have studied it many times, but in this note, an attempt is going to be to make you understand just how vital and important their role is in bringing up you the individual, and the society as a whole

Allah has mentioned kindness to parents at 7 places in the Qur'an.

Allah tells us in Qur'an (Surah 17, Ayat 23)

"Your lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. Whether one of them or both of them become old in your life, do not say a word of contempt (uf) to them or repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility and say: "My Lord! Bestow upon them your mercy even as they cherished me in childhood.""

The word "uf" is a very mild word, but Imam Ja'far as Sadiq (A) said that if a milder word were to exist in the language, Allah would have used it instead.

One should never call parents by their names, but refer to them as mother and father.

A man once went to the Prophet (S) and asked him if there was any act worthy of Allah's mercy. The Prophet (S) asked him whether his parents were still alive, to which he replied yes. The Prophet (S) replied that the best deed worthy of Allah's grace was to be kind to parents since this was preferred over all acts.

It is said in Tafseer that one should pray to Allah that He may grant heaven to their parents, and if ones parents are committing any act with which would displease Allah, then we should pray that Allah helps them to reform and guides them.

Indeed, the first thing that Allah caused to be written on "Lauhe Mahfuz"explain what lauhe mehfuz is in the teachers notes, - the stone tablet created before time was that "I am Allah, and there is no god except Me. I am pleased with the man with whom his parents are pleased, and displeased with him whose parents are not pleased."

The Prophet (S) once said to Imam Ali (A) that "sitting in the company of parents for an hour is preferable to going for Jihad." He further added, "O Ali! If only a word is uttered with a view to pleasing the parents, Allah can be pleased."

The word parents does not just refer to your natural parents, but also refers to those who have taken trouble to teach you, especially to those who have improved you as a person. There are

at least three sets of parents, the natural parents who caused your existence, the teachers who taught you, and the parents of the person you marry. All these people have rights over you, so fulfil your duties to them as explained above.

Now that we have seen how to respect our parents, we can discuss why we should respect them.

Parents have brought us up, but have taken part in our creation. Look at your house, would you say that the four walls, the roof and the floor are the only items which make up your house? No you would not since the house is also made by the furniture, the colour scheme and most importantly, by those who live within it.

In the same way, your parents did not create your body, but it was they who created your character and developed your thinking. They have lived for you. They gave you love and attention, they taught you the difference between right and wrong, they gave you food.

If there was ever a time when there was only enough food for one person, they would give it to the child. Your mother gave birth to you and nursed you in your infancy. Can you imagine the trouble and anguish parents go through, and if you ask them why, they will say that they wanted to give you a better start in life then they had. Then how can we not respect them, and how can we not love them?

This is one of the reasons why Islam has said that

"Heaven lies under the feet of your mother"

This means that if we displease our mother, we will never enter heaven, i.e. the way to heaven is through the pleasure of your parents. This again is repeated when Allah says to one of the Prophets:

"I swear by My Honour that anyone who does not obey his parents, even if he comes with the deeds of the Prophets in front of Me, I will never accept him".

Duties to Parents

There are many ways to respect your parents, some of them are:

1. Never raise your voice at them.
2. Do not sit when they are standing.
3. Do not walk in front of them unless told to do so.
4. Do not speak when they are speaking.
5. Never correct them in front of others.
6. Do not displease them or make them angry.
7. Never insult, argue or shout at them.

When you wake up in the morning the first thing you should do is say "Salamun Alaykum" to

your parents. These are all simple things, but how many of us actually do them. How many of us will actually stand and say "Salamun Alaykum" when our mother or father enters the room ? If your parents ask you to do something, like go shopping, you should not even show them that you are tired. You should not even cast a weary glance at your parents.

That is why it is said:

"Looking at the face of your parents with respect is like looking at the Ka'ba, the reward is the same."

The displeasure of Allah is so great on those who displease their parents that the person who is disowned by his parents, he will never smell the fragrance of heaven. Also, if the parents are displeased with a child, and remain so overnight, and the day dawns with their displeasure, it will be as if two gates of hell have been opened for the son.

DUTIES TOWARDS CHILDREN

We have spoken about respect to parents before and realise how important this topic is. But what about the children? Surely there must be duties towards which have to be fulfilled towards them.

Allah tells us in Qur'an, Oh you who are faithful, save your soul from burning in the fire of hell the fuel of which will be stones and men, by refraining yourselves as well as stopping your children and other members of your families from committing sins.

This shows that one of the first duties towards children is to teach them what is right and what is wrong. This must be done by setting an example.

One of the duties of the parents to the children is to give education. This is first Islamic education, and then material education. This does not mean that all the children should be sent to Haws for years and years, but means that every child should have at least the basic principles of Islam taught to it, so that when it does learn its formal education it will know how to use its knowledge to serve Islam and the community.

Prophet Muhammad (S) has said that we should treat our children fairly, love and be kind to them, and fulfil our promises to them, since we are their Sustainer, and they look to us for help.

The Prophet (S) was once walking and saw some children, he immediately shook his head and said that he was sorry for the parents of the children of the last age.

The people asked him, "Why, would they be non-believers ?"

The Prophet (S) said, "No, it would not be that, but the parents would be such that they would not give training to the children in religious education, but would be pleased to teach them worldly education. He said that such people were not from him, and that he would not love them."

The Prophet (S) once said to Imam Ali (A)

"Oh Ali, there are as many rights of children wajib upon parents as there are rights of parents wajib upon children.

One of the first rights is to give the child a good name. This is so the child will try and emulate those who they are named after, or try and follow the meaning behind their name.

The child has three stages of life before he is ready to walk fully into the world of "grown ups". Each stage is for seven years. For the first 7 years of its life, the child is the MASTER and should be allowed to enjoy and play, without responsibility. This does not mean that you let it do whatever it wants, but should give it freedom with the boundaries of Shari'a. It should not be burdened with formal education, but should be taught by doing principal.

For the next 7 years, the child is the SLAVE. This means that now it should be taught responsibility should be taught rules of Islam and worldly knowledge. This does not mean that the child should be oppressed, but the things that it was allowed to get away with in the first seven years should now be restricted.

The final seven years are called the years of MINISTRY. This means that the child, or young adult should now start to work and help in the home. He should start to put back into the family all that he took out when he was growing.

The virtuous child is a flower from the flowers of paradise.

Islam lay so much stress on being kind to children that the Prophet (S) said, that,"A good act is written in the record of the virtuous deeds for one who gives a kiss to his child."

Once a man came to the Prophet (S) and said: "I have never kissed a child." When he turned and left, the Prophet (S) said that "This stone-hearted person is one of the people of the fire."

This is part of a du'a written by our fourth Imam, Ali Zainul Abideen (A), it can be found in Sahifa e Kamila.

One of his du'as for his children

O Lord, oblige me by sparing my children from death, by educating them for me and by blessing me with them.

My God, prolong their lives for me. Increase their terms of existence for me. Bring up those tender years for me. Strengthen the weak one for me. Heal their bodies, faith and morals. Let them be safe in soul and body and in everything I am anxious about concerning them. Let their sustenance flow into my hand.

Let them be virtuous, pious, able to see and hear, obedient to You, and lovers and well-wishers of Your friends and hostile to all Your enemies. Amen !

O Lord, strengthen my arm with them and straighten with them my crookedness.

Enlarge my number because of them. Adorn my society with them. Keep my memory alive by means of them. Make them care for my affairs in my absence. Help me with them to satisfy my need.

Let them love me, be kind to me. favourable, faithful, obedient, not disobedient, not wicked, nor adverse nor guilty.

Help me in training them, educating them and in doing good to them.

Grant me from You, male descendant from among them. Let this be a benefit to me.

Let them be my helpers in whatever I ask of You. Protect me and my offspring from Shaitan, ...the stoned one. For verily You did create us and command us

HAQQ-UN-NAAS

The phrase Haqq-un-naas comprises two words, (Haq) which means right, i.e. a person's right to have or own something, and (naas) which means person, or human beings.

It can be seen from this, that Haqq-un-naas means the rights of people. Every person has certain rights which are vital, and should not be taken away. If I am holding the estate of an orphan, then it is the right of the orphan to inherit the estate when he comes of age. I should not consume it for my self, taking advantage of my position as the custodian.

Allah who is Just and Merciful, will (Inshallah) forgive us for the sins which we commit against Him, provided we repent for them sincerely; but how can He forgive you for the sins which you commit against others.

That would be going against His justice. We can never be forgiven for breaking Haqqunaas, the rights of others, unless the person whom we have wronged forgives us himself. This makes .Haqqunaas a major sin, and one which is unforgivable

The next question is "What actions break Haqqunaas?"

A person has a right over you even when he is not there. Imagine you were at a gathering, and were discussing with others. If I am not at that gathering, I still have a right that my name should not be insulted, nor my reputation spoilt. This means that if you do Gheebat, or Tohmat, or Fitna in which my name is mentioned then you have committed a sin against me.

Such a sin cannot be forgiven unless I have forgiven it. It is because of these high consequences that we should avoid committing actions which breach the rights of others. This shows that Islam is a religion that not only benefits a person directly, but helps the community in general. Where else can you find a law the commands you not to insult others, and to guard their reputation in public and private.

You are answerable for Haqq-un-naas even after death. Islam advises that we should seek

forgiveness from the person whom we have wronged before one of the parties dies. If person dies before forgiving the other, then there is no direct way of obtaining forgiveness, and that sin will carry forward until the day of Judgement.

Consider the danger of this sin! Allah who can create the universe and destroy it in one stroke, who can perform any action conceivable, who is eternal and lives forever. Even He cannot forgive us for crimes against Haqqunaas. He Himself has told us that only the person who has been wronged can forgive. This does not matter whether the person is a Muslim, or a non .Muslim, whether he is a sinner, or a believer

RECONCILING PEOPLE

Reconciling people means to bring two people, or groups back together after some incident has cause them to split or quarrel.

It is the duty of every Muslim to try and make peace between two parties which are known to him. Allah says in Qur'an 49:10: The believers are but a single Brotherhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers: And fear God, that you may receive Mercy.

If a person can make peace between two parties at not cost to himself, but does not, then he is held answerable for not taking action.

If someone harms you, then you are entitled to harm them back to an equal degree, BUT it is better on your part to show your Akhlaq, to set an example, and forgive. This is also explained to us, where Allah says, 42:40: The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): BUT if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, His reward is due from God: for (God) loves not those who do wrong.

Imam Ali (A) also explains that to bring together to parties is also regarded as charity. "Reconciliation between two parties is the best kind of charity".

There is a limit to reconciliation. Although Islam is a peaceful religion, it is not idle. If there is someone who breaks the Shari'a of Islam, and breaks the rights of others, then this is the crime of Haqqunaas, and for this, action should be taken.

49:9: If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel make you peace between them: but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight you (all) against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of God; but if it complies, then make .(peace between them with justice, and be fair: for God loves those who are fair (and just

What is the point of reconciliation?

The reason why we are told to bring people together is for unity. Islam is a universal religion,

which brings together people regardless of physical differences. Only together can we survive, and prosper.

If we let ourselves become divided, and quarrel against ourselves, then others will take advantage of this, and widen the divisions even more. Remember, the Prophet (S) explained to us, "One who does not take interest in the affairs of Muslims is not a Muslim".

SERVICE TO HUMANITY

By now, you have been taught, and explained that Islam is a religion for a community, to interact and bring the whole society together under one faith and to guard their rights.

Human beings have many qualities which distinguish them from other animals. They have supreme intelligence, they can tell between right and wrong. One feature which humanity shares with many other animals is their ability to form and live together in large communities.

The spirit of consideration is the central force that binds the people together in a society. Human life without consideration is transformed into animal life, since every one is for himself, and it becomes survival of the fittest.

If a person can not use his abilities to help others, and to guide them, then that person is leading a useless life. This service to others has been emphasised again and again in Islam. The Holy Prophet (S) has said:

"One who does not take interest in the affairs of Muslims is not a Muslim. And that person too is not a Muslim who hears a Muslim calling for help and does not respond to his call".

The reward offered for this service to humanity is so great, that few other deeds carry similar rewards.

"One who fulfils the needs of a brother Muslim is like one who has been worshipping Allah throughout his life". Sometimes, you are asked for help, and you are not in a position to give it. Even in this circumstance, if your niyyat was pure then you are rewarded.

Our 5th Imam (A) has said,"At times it so happens that a Muslim seeks help from another Muslim and the latter, though inclined to help him, is not in a position to do so; Allah will send him to Paradise for this very resolution".

Perhaps the best advice on service to humanity comes from Imam Husain (A) who explained to us,"the requests which people make to you are blessings of Allah, so do not feel weary or uneasy".

There are many places where we have a chance to perform services for others. There are ample opportunities in our day to day lives, and also on occasions such as Haj. When we are in Haj, we need to show that unparalleled service to others, which is all part of the experience. Even if people take you for granted, or they insult you, remember that your niyyat is for the sake

.(of Allah (lillah

QARDH E HASANAH

This means to give a loan to those who require aid.

In Islam, there is a duty and a unity which should bind all Muslims, this duty should be so strong that material goods should be put aside to fulfil it.

If there is a person who has had the ability to be successful and has made a good and profitable business, then he should thank Allah for the opportunities which made him successful.

This thanks should not be just in prayers or in words, but in action. The best thanks to Allah, is by performing something which helps other human beings, because Allah is above any needs.

Allah has explained this concept of lending money to those who require it as a loan to Allah Himself. In Suratul Baqarah, Ayat 245, Allah declares: "Who is he that will lend to God a fair loan so that He will multiply it to him manifold;....."

We should know that any loan which is lent to Allah will be paid back manifold (many times).

Allah also says in Qur'an, Surah 64, Ayat 17:

"If you lend to God a beautiful loan, He will double it to your credit, and He will grant you forgiveness: for God is most ready to appreciate service."

Since Allah has given you opportunities to be successful, you should go out of your way to provide opportunities for others.

If someone comes to you and asks you for financial or other aid, it becomes your duty to help him. You should lend him the required amount if you have the means, and give him further assistance.

However, this duty is mutual. The facility of Qardh e Hasanah is been provided by Islam so that the community as a whole can develop and prosper, while at the same time become more united. Thus, the one who borrows the money should have the intention to pay it back as quickly as he possibly can, and should not delay. If he misuses the facility, then he is taking advantage of the system, and will cause difficulties for others.

What is the concept behind this giving, why is it so important ?

There is a saying that a man will manage to find sleep at night even though a relative may have died the previous day, but the day he has lost his money, he will never sleep.

This highlights particular vices which exist in a man's heart, greed and selfishness. If a man is able to lend a substantial amount of money, without any profit in return for himself, then he has conquered both these vices.

He has conquered the SELFISHNESS by letting the money out of his hands, to give others the chance of becoming successful.

He has also conquered the GREED because he knows he will earn no profit on the money, because to charge interest is Haraam.

We must always help our community and people at large, if we stop to ponder for a moment, tomorrow we will not be on this earth any more, but our book of deeds will remain open. If we leave behind us people who will remember us for helping them, we will still gain blessings. If on the other hand, the only memory that people have of us is our meanness, then on the day of ?Judgement, what will be the use of all our wealth and riches

DESTRUCTIVE EMULATION OF WESTERN CULTURE

Emulation means to copy someone or something, to try and become like that thing.

A culture is a way of living. Culture embraces the ways people live together, the food they eat, the general way they behave. Islam has a culture of its own, but leaves space to accommodate practises from other cultures, as long as they are within Shari'a (Islamic Law). This is why Islam is called a universal religion, because it has it own central core of behaviour, but allows the cultures of any nation in the world to mingle in.

We are in living in a western world, and are surrounded by the western culture. All cultures have some good in them, and the western culture is no exception.

We, the children of the west, have to find how we can be proper Muslims in the western environment, without sacrificing any of our principles, but still adapting to the world we live in. We can do this by picking up the good points in the west. But, we must be careful because there are lots of elements which are against Islamic culture, and we should avoid those.

What we should NOT DO is follow that which our friends do blindly, and try and become totally western, this will lead to us losing our Islamic identity all together. We must always remember, we are MUSLIMS FIRST, and then anything else.what about language, is it worth writing a note on the importance of language.

At school, we see a lot of ways that other people behave, and because we do not want to be the odd one out, we want to mix in and act in the same way. This idea is wrong. When we see the guys at school wear earrings, and start dressing up so that the girls can see them. When we see this we should realise that this is not what Islam has taught us, and avoid such behaviour. In Islamic culture, you dress up well if you want to, not for others to see you.

Also we see that the guys at school have girlfriends, and go out to discos and parties. This is not the way we should behave. In the west, a girlfriend is only taken because of her looks. Every other week, a guy has a different girlfriend.

Islam says that is wrong. When the time comes for a boy to get married, he will be introduced to girls who also want to get married, with similar ideas, not just a girlfriend for one or two weeks, but a companion for life. This is one reason why there are so many divorces in the western culture and so few in an Islamic culture.

There are certain habits which are quite common in the west which we should avoid. An example is when we go and play sports. We see that people change openly in the changing rooms displaying their private parts with no hint of shame, they take showers with nothing on. Although there are only men in the changing rooms, in Islam, it is Haraam to expose your private parts to anybody, or to look at the private parts of others.

This means that when you change, you should use a towel or something to cover yourself, if you take a shower, you should wear some type of swimming costume, so that you do not remain naked at any moment. You should also be careful not to look at others who are changing.

Do not let the west fool you. Most of the people in the west do not really believe in heaven or hell, they think that they will live on this world, and that will be it. That is why they try and have fun, and the only fun they have is physical, because they do not understand the soul at all. They satisfy their desires by going out with girls to parties, drinking alcohol and satisfying their lust.

A Muslim however realises that this world is only a moment, a twinkle in the eye compared to the life in the next world.

There is more to life then just physical pleasure. Islam does not say that you can not have any pleasures, it just explains you that desires should only be satisfied within a marriage, and not like animals.

It is important that you understand this point.

We should not feel that "Why can they have fun, and we can't" because it stops being fun after a while. If you eat ice-cream every day, then after a while you will be fed up of ice-cream. You will not want any more.

Similarly, Islam teaches us that our desires should be controlled. We should limit ourselves. If we let ourselves out of control like the western world, then we might have fun for a while, but soon we will ask ourselves "There must be more to life then just parties and girlfriends and pubs ?"

There is much more to life. Islam opens our eyes, and makes us look from a different point of view. If you imagine this life to be a maze. The western world tries to solve the maze by just walking through, taking things as they come. Islam takes you up, so that you can see the maze from above, so that you know which way to turn, and what to avoid. That is the only way to get

through the maze.

Another habit we should avoid is smoking. Smoking is both dangerous and addictive. Islam has made smoking Makruh (one should avoid). We see boys and girls in our school smoking at lunch time, or on the way home.

Sometimes they come up to us and ask us if we want a drag. Do not be afraid to say NO! It does not matter what they think, whether you are a chicken or not, don't let yourself be pushed into trying things bad for your health, especially at such a young age.

Please remember, Islam really is a religion which will make man happy and content. Do not try and follow those things in the west which Islam does not allow, it might look and feel go for a .while, but in the end you will realise the hard way

HUSN DHAN AND SU'U DHAN

These two words, which are antonyms, refer to opinion you have about others.

People are of two types, those who always think bad of others, and those who try and think the best about others.

Husndhan means to have a good opinion about other people. Not to assume the worst about them, not to suspect their actions. If you see a Muslim talking with a girl who is Na-Mahram, and you then assume that he is having a date, or is of loose morals, then you have already dented his reputation in your eyes.

If you tell others your opinion, you have committed Fitnah and Fasaad. You should give the benefit of the doubt. Even if such suspicions turn out to be true, who are you to spread other peoples' faults, when Allah has covered yours.possibly that line from dua e kumail about covering defects, there must be something in sahifa e kamila.

If a person assumes the worst of peoples actions, then this is Su'udhan, and is a very bad habit. It leads to Fitnah and Fasaad, and other terrible deeds.

If for example, a person stands up and gives a few thousand pounds to a charity, I can think in two ways. Either I can think that this person has pride is just showing off all his money, or I can think that this person is sincere, and is setting an example for others to follow.

Qur'an (49:12) explains to us that we should avoid suspicion of others, since in some cases it can be a sin. This is true if start going and spreading rumours.

Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin People who are narrow minded, don't want to do good themselves, and they don't want others to do it. They try and spoil peoples names at every opportunity. This is what Su'udhan leads to.

Allah will show His Anger at those who accuse others falsely. In the time of Prophet Salih (A), he was accused falsely, and he asked Allah for help. The verses below explains what

happened.

23:39: (The prophet) said: "O my Lord! help me: for that they accuse me of falsehood."

23:40: (God) said: "In but a little while, they are sure to be sorry!"

23:41: Then the Blast overtook them with justice, and We made them as rubbish of dead leaves (floating on the stream of Time)! So away with the people who do wrong!

In conclusion, always give someone else the benefit of the doubt. Even if you know for sure that they have done something wrong, do not tell others. If Allah can keep our secrets, we should also try and keep the secrets of others. If you really want to do something, try and approach the person and persuade them that they are doing wrong.

If you think that will fail, then talk to someone whom you think will be able to help. This is the concept of Amr bil Ma'aroof and Nahy anil Munkar (direct towards good, and persuade against evil).

KADHIMUL GAIZ

Kadhimul Gaiz means to swallow anger, to forgive others.

It is similar to forbearance but refers specifically to when you have been wronged, and is one of the most commendable acts in Islam.

There is a saying in English to "bury the hatchet", this means that instead of trying to get revenge (i.e. with the hatchet), just bury it and put it out of your mind. There is also another saying to "forgive and forget" which has a similar meaning.

This does not mean that you let people crook you left right and centre and then forgive them! It applies to those whom you have power over, or those who repent or have done the deed without intention.

Anger is a bitter pill to swallow, and is only managed with a strong will power. This can be seen by the following sayings of the Prophet (S), "The strongest of you is he who overpowers himself when enraged and the most forbearing of you is the one who forgives when having overpowered his enemy."

"Do you consider the intense strength as being in the lifting of (a heavy) stone whereas in fact it is in overpowering oneself when filled with anger".

The way to swallow your anger is to "cool off".

"Verily anger is from Shaitan and the Shaitan is created from fire. And the fire is but extinguished with water. Therefore whenever one is overtaken with anger, he should make wudhu."

Wudhu has a calming effect on the body, and cools it down. It also makes us remember Allah, so we gain control over our self again. Imam Ali (A) has said that:

"Should any of you be faced with anger, he should sit down if standing, should lie down if sitting."

All of us have done sins at some time in our lives, something that might have been worthy of punishment. But if Allah can forgive us with his infinite mercy, then what right have we be angry at others when they are sorry.

"Almighty Allah had said, Oh the son of Adam! Remember Me when in anger so that I remember you when you deserve my wrath and do not destroy you." Also we are told in Qur'an, 3:133: Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a garden whose width is that (of the whole) of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous. Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity; WHO RESTRAIN ANGER, AND PARDON (ALL) MEN; for God loves those who do good.

Imam Musa al Kadhim (A) was given the title AL-KADHIM for this reason. He is the ideal example of one who swallowed his anger. He was treated despicably and imprisoned by the oppressors right up to his martyrdom in prison, but he restrained his anger and bore it with patience.

Surah 42 Ayat 36 onwards explains

"Whatever you are given (here) is (but) a convenience of this Life: but that which is with God is better and more lasting: (it is) for those who believe and put their trust in their Lord; those who avoid the greater crimes and shameful deeds, and, WHEN THEY ARE ANGRY EVEN THEN FORGIVE; Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance; And those who, when an oppressive wrong is inflicted on them, (are not cowed but) help and defend themselves.

The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, His reward is due from God:

for (God) does not love those who do wrong.

But indeed if any do help and defend themselves after a wrong (done) to them, against such there is no cause of blame."

IKHLAAS

This means to be sincere and honest in all respects. To be sincere means to really mean something when you say it, to really feel for something with your heart. We should be sincere in all our actions, although this sounds very easy, it is one of the most difficult task ever set before us. Ask yourself, "How sincere am I when I offer my prayers?"

Why is it difficult to be sincere?

When Allah created man;

2:30: Behold, your Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They asked, "Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? While we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holy (name)?" He said: "I know what you know not."

This means that the angels were unaware of Allah's plan for his best creature.

The angels have intellect, but no desire, therefore they have no test upon them, they do what they are told, they have no will of their own. They can think, but there is nothing telling them to disobey Allah's command.

Allah created man and gave him a balance. In a universe where everything has an opposite, light and dark, good and bad,... Allah gave man FURQAN, the ability to judge between the opposites.

Allah then created that facet of our nafs which is receptive to the voice of Shaitan. It is in our innermost hearts and whispers evil thoughts into our mind. In Qur'an , Surah 104, Ayat 2,3, we ask Allah for protection from this whisperer, from the thoughts which it tries to implant into our minds. This is what we have to fight against.

Shaitan asked Allah to give him freedom until the day of Judgement. Allah agreed and Shaitan said that he will guide human beings away from Allah. Surah 15 Ayat 36 onwards,

(Iblis) said: "O my Lord! give me then respite till the Day the (dead) are raised."

(God) said: "Respite is granted to you--"Till the Day of the Time Appointed."

(Iblis) said: "O my Lord! because You have put me in the wrong, I will make (wrong) fair-seeming to them on the earth, and I will put them all in the wrong--

"Except Your servants among them, SINCERE and purified (by Your grace)."

(God) said: "This (Way of My SINCERE servants) is indeed a Way that leads straight to Me.

"For over My servants no authority shall you have, except such as put themselves in the wrong and follow you." And verily, Hell is the promised abode for them all!

So Shaitan is there waiting for us, his voice starts its whispering, praising us, and telling us how great we are. If we are not aware, our niyyat will change, and we will have lost all our sincerity.

When we pray our Namaaz, we should be sincere. We should not try to hurry our prayers in the morning so that we can climb back into our beds. We should think for a while, that we are thanking the One who gave us life. Put your hand on your chest, feel your heart beat and remember the force which caused it into motion. That is the force we are worshipping.

Then this voice starts whispering, telling you how warm your bed is, how tired you are.

When we are in public, our niyyat is under attack by this same voice. Instead of telling you to

pray fast, it will now tell you to pray slowly, so that others can see what a pious person you are. Allah says in Hadith e Qudsi "I was a hidden treasure, and I wanted to be discovered, therefore I created." A treasure is something we benefit from, whether it is knowledge, wealth etc.. Allah is a hidden treasure, but He has left plenty of clues (signs) to how He can be discovered. Qur'an is full of advice about the signs of Allah, of how we can reach him. The secret of finding the path is to keep your niyyat sincere, to make your every action honest and for the pleasure of Allah.

This will work both ways, because Allah has told us that when we remember Him, He will also remember us. Surah 2 Ayat 152 Then you do remember Me; I will remember you.

By being sincere in our actions we will receive an inner strength from Allah, a way of looking at things which is superior to the gaze blinded by worldly goods. We will find more of a purpose in our life, and a contentment and harmony where we will find ourselves at peace with everything around us.

Once we overcome that whisper, then our ears will only receive true guidance. It takes a little .bit of effort, but the reward is beyond imagination

LEADING A MORAL LIFE

Let us first define morals, as "concerned with the distinction between right and wrong." Islam is a religion which is sent as a gift from Allah to mankind, to bring them together in peace and harmony. This can only be done if the morals of the community are pure. Therefore in order to have a peaceful life, Islam has given man a set social values (morals) so .that each individual and thus the whole community can build up a moral character

How are we to live a moral life ?

Each of us has a responsibility to the other, to maintain justice, to respect the rights of the other.

In the Holy Qur'an (Surah 49, ayats 11,12) Allah explains to us certain ways of behaving: "O you who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other by (offensive) nicknames...

Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: and spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs (gheebat). Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother ?"

There are countless ways to behave in a community, the essence of all moral behaviour is in CONSIDERATION. If one considers the needs of others, then he will not do anything to cause

further hardship.

Prophet Muhammad (S) has said:

"Prefer for people that which you prefer for yourself."

In a very short Surah (Suratul Asr) Allah explains the way the whole of mankind should behave.

Ayat 2:

"Verily Man is in a loss." This is thought to refer to the day of Judgement when Allah will raise man from his grave to answer about his life, some men will say that they had lived an IMMORAL life, and these men will be in a loss. Some men will reply that they had been very good themselves and established regular prayers, THESE MEN TOO WILL BE IN A LOSS.

Ayat 3:

"Except for such as have Faith, AND do righteous deeds, AND join together in the mutual teaching of Truth, AND of patience."

This shows that being good by yourself is not enough, you must lead such a life so as to serve and teach the community by guiding them towards the truth and enjoining them towards good. This is known as Amr bil Ma'aroof (direct towards good) and Nahy anil Munkar (persuade against evil).

The set of morals given to mankind by Allah is reflected in the behaviour (Sunnah) of the Holy Prophet and Imams (may Allah bestow peace upon them.) Once Imam Ali (A) was asked what a person's morals should consist of, he answered :

"When powerful, he forgives easily.

He is generous in appropriate ways.

His behaviour is gentle.

His actions and walk reflect modesty.

People enjoy his affection and calmness.

He is ready to bear pain in order to comfort others.

In friendship he is sincere.

He honours his promises.

He helps the oppressed and is concerned about the deprived.

He does not abandon those in distress; he tries to relieve their burdens.

He respects the rights of those who are absent.

He accepts the apologies of those at fault.

He assists those who have assisted him.

He does not divulge (tell) peoples' secrets.

He does not inquire into secret affairs which do not concern him.

He sets a good example for those who succeed him.
His good deeds are not performed for the sake of being boastful.
He does not fall into the same difficulty twice."

Also, in the du'a for excellence in morals, Imam Ali Zainul Abedeen (A) has written :

"Oh Allah, advance my faith to the greatest perfection. Let my belief be the most excellent of beliefs. Let me be honoured, but do not let me fall prey to pride. Issue from my hands good to mankind, but do not let it be undone with reproaches. Give me excellent morals and save me from boasting. Give me grace to behave with sincere good-will to him who was insincere to me."

.Let us try to change these words into actions

FORBEARANCE

To forbear means to have patience and tolerance. The Arabic word for this is HILM.

In life, there are always times when problems arise, difficulties mount up. When such problems occur, a person can do ONE OF TWO THINGS. He can try his best to tackle the problem and put it behind him, or He can sit and complain, and wait for the problem to disappear itself, (if it ever does).

If the person tries to solve the problem, then that is called positive action, and he will have at least a chance of success. However if his attitude is negative, the problem will remain, and the person will just keep feeling sorry for himself.

Allah only helps those who help themselves, so if a person complains to Allah, and says "Why does it have to be me ?" then he has very little faith. This is because, when a misfortune falls upon us, Allah is testing us. In Qur'an Allah tells us that do we think it is enough to say that we are believers, and not be tested ?

It is like in a competition. If a person says that they can break the world record, do you think people will say " O.K., here is the gold medal. Thank you very much." Of course not!!, they will test him to see if he can really do what he says. Prophet Muhammad (S) has said:

"Let your wailing not cancel your reward. Were you to witness the reward of your misfortune, you would have come to know that it is smaller than the greatness of the reward of which Allah has promised for the people who submit (to His will) and bear (misfortunes) with patience."

Thus to forbear, after trying your best to help yourself, is an act of faith, because Allah has PROMISED us that we will be tested, and that is a difficulty we must overcome.

If we forbear and have patience in difficulty, we past the test, and we are promised comfort because Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, Surah 94, ayat 6:

"Verily, with every difficulty there is relief."

Therefore, if we forbear, then the problem will sort itself out with the grace of Allah. Forbearance is not just when calamity befalls you, but also when you have been wronged. There are very few feelings which give as much sweet satisfaction as revenge over someone who has harmed you. It is not easy to forgive such a person, especially when you are in a position to give back. To forbear is these circumstances requires a strong will power, this is shown by the following saying of the Holy Prophet (S), "The strongest of you is he who overpowers himself when enraged and the most forbearing of you is the one who forgives ".when having overpowered his enemy

FITNA AND FASAAD

This means to spread rumours, and tell lies about people, with the niyyat (intention) of damaging their reputation. It is like backbiting, except that the rumours are totally unjustified and untrue.

Another word for fitna and fasaad is to slander (spoil someone's name)

Imam Hassan (A) has said:

"If a person comes to you and speaks ill of someone else, you should know that he is actually speaking ill of you. It is worth while to regard such a person as your enemy, and not to trust him, for lying, backbiting, trickery, deceit, jealousy, hypocrisy, duplicity and creating dissension go hand in hand with slander" Imam Ali (A) has said:

"The worst of you are those who slander and create discord among friends. They will find fault with the innocent." Slandering is such a bad deed, that the Holy Prophet (S) said that:

"A slanderer will not enter paradise."

Slandering is haraam because it damages a person's reputation, it is unfair on the one who is being slandered since people will think he has committed deeds which he has not. Slandering breaks the community, and cause enmity and hatred. It is one of the worst sins, and goes hand in hand with gheebat and other social crimes.

Now that you are reaching a stage that you are becoming more involved in the community, it is ESSENTIAL that you realise the harm and danger of committing fitna and fasaad. You will meet people who disagree with your ideas, you will find people whom you dislike. Do not resort to fitna and fasaad to remove them from your path. Go through the proper channels. If someone is doing something which you do not like, then come out in the open and sort the problem out.

Do not start spreading false rumours about that person to remove them from their position. Many families have broken, and communities have split because of this sin. So you have been warned of the consequences.

The worst punishment Allah reserves is for those who harm others. Do not risk the anger or punishment of Allah in such serious matters. The only people who slander are cowards, if they see someone with whom people are good, they become jealous and they want to destroy his reputation. They do not have any courage to face up to that person, and so they go around like .snakes slithering and whispering rumours in the dark

CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Allah created us all, and made us the inheritors of the earth. He gave us the world and all the creatures within so that we may live and prosper by using them, not abusing them. He mentions in Qur'an 6:165 » It is He who has made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth: This shows the we must look after our planet, and find ways of cleaning up the mess and damage we cause to it. When you are given something, it is important that you use it properly, only then will it last. If you abuse something, then it will work for a while, but in the end it will get bad and it will have to be thrown away.

Our world is getting used, and abused. We can not throw that away. We only have one world, our world, and only by keeping it clean can we make sure it lasts. The same way we inherited the earth from our ancestors, we have to look after it so that we can hand it down in good condition to the next generation.

Consider your house, you live in it, you sleep in it. What would happen if you did not bother to clean up the mess you make, the dishes, the clothes, the dust, the dirt. If this was not dealt with, then the house would soon become uninhabitable. There is no point just sweeping everything under the carpet since that is a short term solution, you must clear the rubbish and remove it totally.

This planet has over 5 billion people, if we do not clear our rubbish, then where can we go when it becomes too polluted to live in? How can we do things to keep our world clean ?

We can start thinking, start realising that we should not waste things. The more we waste, the more we throw away. This all adds up. We should try not to use chemicals which damage the ocean and the sky, we should throw things in their proper places, and not on the streets, or out of the windows. Just imagine, if everyone threw their rubbish on the street.

It would all add up and there would be an awful mess. We are not the only creatures on the planet. We have to share this world with the rest of Allah's creatures.

Everything in this universe is created by Allah, and serves His purpose. We must respect these, and use them sparingly without waste. We should even respect the plants since Allah explains us 55:6 » And the herbs and the trees-both (alike) bow in adoration.

Let us not make so much mess that the rest of the creatures become poisoned and hurt

because of our selfishness.

What examples of Environmental Pollution can you think of ?

Is it just commercial industry that causes pollution, or is it the individual consumer?

?What solutions, both long term and short term can you think of to prevent pollution

TAKKABUR, RIYAA AND UJB

These are some of the major faults in a person's character.

Takkabur means to think of oneself as BETTER than someone else, to have PRIDE. Riyaa means to SHOW OFF to others Ujb means to have SELF CONCEIT, to like oneself too much.

These three topics are all related and deal with one aspect, a person's ego.

A person's ego is the way he thinks about himself.

As soon as we achieve something good, or as soon as we are praised, a feeling of joy reaches us, if we are not careful, this feeling can soon turn to pride.

Our Holy Prophet (S) has said:

"Pride enters the heart like a black ant crawling over a black rock at night." This shows how easily pride can overtake us.

Pride is known as one of the diseases of the soul. It is caused by a lack of belief in God. You see, if you become proud, you feel that you have accomplished all your deeds by yourself, you forget that Allah was the one who guided you. If we ever achieve anything good, we should be pleased, but there is an important point to note, we should be pleased by the RESULTS of what we have achieved, not by the fact that WE have achieved it.

However, our nafs starts whispering to our hearts that we have done something great and it tells us how wonderful we are and carries on praising us ..... etc ..etc. This causes us to start showing our greatness to others (Riyaa), to show them what brilliant individuals we are. All of you must have had the occasion of seeing someone in your life, and who after looking at him for a few seconds, said, "That guy is nothing but a show-off".

If we want to continue being successful in the future, the FIRST thing we should do is remember Allah. In the du'a after Asr prayers we say to Allah "My Lord , whatever talents I have got, it is but from You."

If we want to remain humble, we should always remember this sentence and say it to ourselves EVERY time we do something good, or come first or win something. That way we will stop our nafs from praising us, and make it praise Allah. We also realise that we have nothing to show .off about, since we have only been able to accomplish what we have with the help of Allah

WHAT IS WRONG WITH PRIDE ?

Apart from isolating yourself from others because you think yourself superior, pride is also bad for you on an intellectual level.

If you become proud of what you know, or have done, you will think yourself as being one of the greatest, therefore you will not try to improve.

However, if you think that you have plenty of room for improvement, then you will try harder and harder until you achieve better results.

In the time of Prophet Musa (A), there was an instance that he thought to himself, Oh Musa, indeed you have reached the pinnacle of mankind, there is no one alive on the earth today who knows as much as you do.

He did not utter these words, they only flicked through his mind.

Allah immediately told Angel Jibraeel, Go and save Musa from himself.

This was when Prophet Musa (A) was told to go and seek Khizr, someone who was alive and knew more than Musa. He was told to go and learn from him. By doing this, Musa understood that there was someone else who knew more than him, and so was saved from becoming proud.

Pride was the reason that Iblis (Shaytan) was removed from Allah's mercy, and is a lesson to all of us who become proud.

When Allah created Adam, he commanded the whole of creation to bow to him, all of them except Iblis did this. Iblis replied to Allah, I am made from fire, and Adam is made from clay, there fore I am BETTER than him. Allah immediately removed Iblis from His mercy and told him to begone. In Islam we are told that one man is no better than another.

In Islam, there is nothing wrong with being successful, or a leader of others, the only point to remember is that greatness is a test to see how we can cope, as long as we are aware that it was with Allah's help that we became great, and realise that we are not superior to our fellows then we will pass the test.

Our 4th Imam (A) says in Sahifa e Kamila:

"O Lord, do not honour me even one degree among the people unless You lower me to an equal amount in my own soul.

Create for me no outward respect unless You have created for me an equal amount of HUMILIATION in my spirit."

The opposite of arrogance/pride is humility. How can we be humble, does it mean sitting on a prayer mat, reciting all the time ?

No, it does not. Imam Ali (A) has said :

"From the signs of humility is to be content with any place in an assembly, to salute when you meet, to abandon quarrels and discord even if you were on the right; and not to except (love) ".praise for your fear of Allah

WHY SHOULD WE ABANDON PRIDE AND TRY TO BE HUMBLE ?

By being humble, we are showing to the world that Allah has created all men equal, whether they are black, brown, white or yellow. We are showing that the only person who is greater in the eye's of Allah is the person who has taqwa (ashamed of displeasing Allah). The Holy Prophet (S) has said:

"Indeed, humility exalts a man's position with Allah. Thus be humble and Allah will shower you with mercy." The final stage of pride is Ujb. When you actually start thinking and believing that you are superior to the rest. When you have to high an opinion of your own ability, beauty etc.. This is called self conceit. It is at this stage that you start spending too much time in admiring yourself in front of the mirror.

When a person reaches the stage that he thinks that there is no one like him, then he is lost. He has built a wall around himself and is totally cut off from the outside world. He is living in his .own dream world

ABUSIVE LANGUAGE, INSULTS, SARCASM AND IMPERTINENCE

To use abusive language means to swear or insult someone. This is so obviously wrong, but surprisingly it is a common habit especially amongst the youth.

Let us consider the use of such language, and what purpose, if any, it serves. Most people swear when something bad happens to them, or when someone does something that they don't like. These people say that the actual swearing helps them to control their anger, and stops them from doing other things which might be even worse.

This argument is logical, but Islam rejects it because a person who cannot restrain his anger, without using foul language must have a very weak will power. The most noble person according to Islamic etiquette (akhlaq) is that person who can control his anger, and even manage to look happy. To use swearing as a means of insulting someone is unjustified under any circumstances. Islam teaches us NEVER TO INSULT. If someone has wronged us, we should either take action, or tell them that we do not like what they say; but to insult them is to stoop to a very low stage, and Islam does not accept that a person should become so undignified.

To be sarcastic to others, and tease them also shows that part of a person's character is faulty. It may only feel like a joke, but think for a moment. Pretend that you were them. Would YOU

like someone calling you names all the time, making life miserable for you. Would YOU like some laughing when you fell down, or someone telling tales at you. Would YOU like people making fun of your family, or the colour of your skin, or at the way you are.

Below are a few saying of Imam Ali (A) about the danger of the tongue. Look over them, and think about their meaning. "Nothing else need to be restrained and kept under control but the tongue".

"Whosoever desires to remain safe should guard against what comes out of his tongue". "Take care of your tongue".

"Woe be upon you! Will people be with their noses prostrated in hell fire except for reasons of what they had reaped out of (misuse) of their tongues".

"The one from whose tongue people are afraid of is from the inmates of hell fire".

"Salvation of the believer lies in guarding his tongue.

The above sayings give you an example of the dangers of verbal abuse.

One other point that needs mentioning is impertinence. This means to give cheek, or disrespectful answers back to people who are talking to you. If someone is talking to you, whether he is telling you off or not, you should never be rude in your replies. If you are innocent then explain yourself, but to answer back to a parent or a teacher in such a manner is an inexcusable example of bad akhlaq.

The respect which parents and teachers command over you is very great, and you are not supposed to even show them displeasure, let alone answer back to their face.

Impertinence just proves that you have a poor character. It may make you feel big in class for a while, but at the end of the day, you will have lost all your respect in front of your elders.

BETRAYING SECRETS

Secrets are something which every human being possesses. They are affairs that they would rather not disclose to others, due to embarrassment, shame, guilt or such reasons.

When someone tells you a secret, they are trusting you with something very important, and we do not realise this. The Holy Prophet (S) has said that:

"He who keeps no pledge has no religion". When a person commits a bad deed, it is one thing to know that he is doing something bad, and it is another thing to refuse to believe that what he is doing is haraam.

This occurs when we tell someone else's secret. Many people tell secrets that they have been trusted with, and when they are told that this is wrong, they refuse and say that it is allowed.

In the Holy Qur'an Surah 8 ayat 27 Allah says:

"O ye that believe! betray not the trust of God and the apostle, nor exploit knowingly things

entrusted to you" If someone was to hand over some money to you, and say "Please look after this, don't give it to anybody." Now, if you agreed, and then were to go and give that money to someone else, you would be breaking your word, even if you were to get the money back. It is the same with a secret, it is something entrusted to you, (AMANAT), and you do not have any right to disclose it to anyone else. The Holy Prophet (S) has said that: "Four things when allowed to enter a house become the cause of spoiling and depriving it of prosperity," of those four things, one of them is the breach of trust. He also said: "A hypocrite is recognised by three signs:

1. He lies when he talks,
2. He breaks promises,
3. He betrays when trusted."

If someone reveals a secret to you, and you feel that by telling someone else, you may be able to help him, what to do you do ? In this case, it is not a sin to tell the other person's secret, as long as you do not give his identity, and that you SINCERELY feel that it is for his good. One thing we should always remember, Imam Ali (A) has told us, if we can not keep our secrets to ourselves, and tell others, how can we expect them to guard our secrets, when we ourselves cannot !!

ADULTERATION IN MERCHANDISING

Adulteration means to make something IMPURE, to CONTAMINATE IT. Merchandising refers to TRADING in goods, commodities. Thus, adulteration in merchandising means to make something which you sell, impure or reduce its value in some way. It is a form of cheating. It is haraam because:

(i) the one who is doing the cheating is gaining something at someone else's expense.

(ii) the one who is doing the cheating is gaining without working for it.

In a market, if someone comes to buy rice, and it is weighed out for them on a scale. If the weights of the scale have been "fiddled" so that the person gets less rice, then that person is paying you MORE for LESS rice. As a result you are gaining extra money, and he is losing it. One thing about cheating is that no matter how many people you cheat, or how well you can cheat, you can never cheat yourself or Allah. If you are cheating someone, your conscience (the second stage of nafs) will realise immediately.

In Qur'an Allah tells us of Prophet Shuaib's words to his people (Surah 7, ayat 85) "Oh my people !.... Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due:.." On the day of Judgement, you will have to answer to Allah, and you will also be judged according to a scale, according to the weight of your good and bad deeds, and cheating is one

.of the heaviest of bad deeds

ANGER

The arabic word for anger is pronounced as Ghazb. Anger is a disease of the soul. It causes many problems which we will discuss below. Anger is defined as "extreme displeasure", which means to be annoyed at someone's words or actions. When a person becomes angry, he is on the verge of losing control over his mind, he can become violent and break things, he can say things which he will be sorry for later on.

This is why it is very important to be able to control yourself when angry, since you can destroy, beyond repair, with a few words something which may have taken years to form.

Prophet Muhammad (S) has said:

"Do you consider the intense strength as being in the lifting of (a heavy) stone whereas in fact it is in overpowering oneself when filled with anger". This shows how difficult it is to control yourself during anger.

Anger is also very dangerous. Many people lose their mind when angry, and start fighting, and shouting. They become violent, beyond reason. Later on, after cooling down, they realise that the things that they have said have spoilt their own name, and have made people think badly of them. This is why Imam Ali (A) has said:

"Anger is a fire kindled: he who restrains it, puts it out; but he who lets it loose, is the first that is consumed by it." That shows that the person who cannot control his anger will be the first to be damaged by what he says, or does. It also illustrates that there is no benefit in becoming angry. The person who grows angry, wastes his energy, at the same time he is the loser at the end of it all.

What should we do when we become angry, how can we control ourselves ?

The first thing to do is to calm down.

The way to do this is explained by the Holy Prophet (S) in his words:

"Verily anger is from Shaytan and the Shaytan is created from fire. And the fire is but extinguished with water. Therefore whenever one is overtaken with anger, he should make wudhu." Wudhu has a calming effect on the body, and cools it down. It also makes us remember Allah, so we gain control over our self again. Imam Ali (A) has said that:

"Should any of you be faced with anger, he should sit down if standing, should lie down if sitting." What is anger caused by ?

Anger is caused by many circumstances, examples of which are pride, and stubbornness. If you are wrong, and someone tells you, you can either accept it or become proud and insist that you are correct. This can lead to anger because you refuse to admit that you are wrong.

This anger is so bad, that it spoils the rest of your deeds, Imam Ali (A) has said that: "Ill-temper spoils good actions just as vinegar spoils honey."

If you put one drop of vinegar in honey, you spoil the honey; so as soon as you get angry, you spoil your deeds by the way you act. "The strongest of you is he who overpowers himself when enraged and the most forbearing of you is the one who forgives when having overpowered his enemy."

This shows us that even if we have a right to be angry, we should forgive the person who deserves our anger. And Allah reminds us of this because we have all committed deeds which He is not pleased with: "Almighty Allah had said, Oh the son of Adam! Remember Me when in anger so that I remember you when you deserve my wrath and do not destroy you." If we remember Allah when we are angry, and forgive our enemies, He will also remember us on the day of Qiyamat, and Inshallah, forgive us.

THE STAGE OF BECOMING BALIGH

When Allah created the human being, he created it in a way so that it grows up in stages. It is totally dependant when it is born, then as it grows it gains knowledge, it learns the ways of the world. Then it reaches a stage where it has been taught how to live, and what to respect. It has been taught what is right and what is wrong. It is now ready to take on the responsibility of being an adult. It is no more a child, nor has it reached adulthood. This stage, when a child is changing into an adult is known as becoming baligh or adolescence.

In English, people translate baligh as the state of puberty, however this is not adequate. Baligh means responsibility, it is a combination of becoming an adult BOTH physically and mentally.

What are the signs of becoming baligh ?

There a three signs (for males), ANY ONE of which can confirm whether the person is baligh or not. 1. If the boy has reached the age of 15 (lunar years) or 14½ years in the solar calender, then he should be considered as baligh, whether or not he has seen the next two signs.

2. Growing of HARD hairs around the private parts. SOFT hairs are NOT considered as signs of becoming baligh.

3. If there is a "wet dream." This means that during the boys sleep, he has a dream of some sort, and there has been some discharge of thick liquid which is not urine. This liquid is called semen, and it is recognised by its milky colour, and it has a strong smell like yeast. It is important to realise, that a person MUST perform Ghusl of Janaabat when semen is released at any time, whether or not it is a voluntary discharge. Without this Ghusl, the person will be in a state of impurity (janaabat), and will not be able to offer any prayers or fasts.

If the person is not sure whether he is baligh or not, then he has to wait until he is sure, or one

of the other signs take place. What does becoming baligh mean ? The first point to realise, is that becoming baligh is natural. You are not the only one. All boys go through this stage somewhere between the ages of 13 – 15.

When we are baligh, it becomes WAJIB to perform all the actions that are laid down by Islam, and HARAAM to do the things that Islam forbids. This means that Salaat, Saum (fasting), Hajj, Khums are all now wajib.

The next thing to realise is that when you become baligh, you will feel certain emotions that you have not felt before.

The body goes through physical changes, you are changing at a tremendous rate. All your glands are working like mad, creating chemicals which flow through your blood, your liver is like a chemical factory, and your cells are all working overtime. These chemicals are sending messages to your body, your cells, telling them that the time has come to grow. Your body will start to change. Your muscles will become stronger, and bigger and you will start to get hair growing around your face, all over your body, at the abdomen, around the private parts, and under the arms. Your body will become more masculine.

Another important point about becoming baligh is that your nafs will start trying to misguide you through your desire. When you are baligh, any pictures, or anything which is about sex may cause you to become aroused. This is why we should keep away from rude magazines or television programmes, even rude jokes, because they cause our desire to grow.

To have sexual relations is a natural part of any human society, but only within the boundaries of marriage. Desire MUST BE controlled, if it is let free, it becomes LUST, which is a powerful force and can easily control a person's actions.

If we let ourselves be controlled by our desire, then we will ruin our soul. Our mind will become a slave to lust, and our life will be ruined. Why do we become Baligh?

We become baligh at an age when we should be responsible. Responsible for what?

When we are baligh, our body creates sperm cells which are stored in a liquid called semen. When girls become baligh, they produce another type of cell called the egg cell (or ovum). When a sperm cell and an egg cell meet, then this is called fertilisation, and is the beginning of a new human being. Those two cells will now fuse, to become one cell, and grow to become a child, who will have the characteristics of both the mother and father through both cells. So, we become baligh so that we are able to marry and have children. This makes sure that human beings carry on surviving.

We must however be RESPONSIBLE because certain things can cause us to lose control of our desire. Watching television programmes with rude scenes, reading books which cause

arousal, magazines, attending discos or "wild" parties. All these things can lead us towards the path of lust, and so should be avoided.

PERMISSIVENESS

This means to be too liberal, too free or too loose.

It is a moral judgement and is difficult to define, but can be explained as in the following notes. When people say that the western world is bad, what they actually mean is that the moral attitude is bad. The west itself technologically is very developed, but unfortunately there has been no parallel development within, in the morals. Whenever you walk down the main road you will see people walking with scanty clothing, you will see books and magazines in windows which reveal scenes which are sexually attractive.

This is also true in the case of television, where programmes often tend to provoke reaction and desires in their audience. When society becomes such that almost every aspect of it tends to cater for human desires (not needs), especially sexual, than that society is said to be permissive.

In Islam, a human being is provided with a quality by Allah known as "Hayah". This means modesty, bashfulness, nobility all in one word. It is this quality which is constantly under attack in the western world.

The reason why it is so easy to fall into the trap of becoming permissive is because there is a physical pleasure which attracts a person more and more, and it is very difficult to avoid or deny.

When a person reaches the stage of responsibility and maturity (baligh), he has changed his spiritual appearance as well as his physical one. His desires are loose now, he is attracted by things which did not bother him when he was a child. That is why Islam has made its rules wajib for those people who are mature, because they will require ways of cleansing themselves from the filth which enters their minds from outside.

If one takes no heed and ignores these rules, he will slowly become more like the thoughts that enter his mind until he will give himself totally up to his desires which will just waste his life away.

Examples of being permissive is dressing such that enough of your body is revealed to cause others to look at you, dressing with tight clothes so that the contours of your body can be seen, telling jokes which are crude, watching programmes which arouse your own sexual desires. Going out on dates to discos, or with girl/boyfriends, keeping loose relationships are all common examples of a permissive society.

The desires for companionship are not evil or wrong, but they have to be CONTROLLED within

the border of Islam. It is like a fire, if you use it properly, it is a great help to cook food and keep warm, but if abused, it grows and spreads until it becomes out of control and consumes everything.

The real test of a person is to let the self control the desires, and not the desires controlling the self. Permissiveness is one extreme of society, to be too loose, to be too free with your desires, the other extreme is celibacy, which means to never get married and to stop your desires all together. Both these are extremes, and Islam says that extremes are wrong. Islam takes the middle path of chastity, where you are allowed to fulfil your desires, but only within the boundaries of marriage.

Islam explains to us the concept of chastity which lies between these two extremes, and allows us to CONTROL our desire, rather than STOPPING them. Why does a society become permissive?

If you were given a locked box, and told that you should not look inside it for many years, you would always be curious of what is within. If that box was placed somewhere where it was easy to see, then day by day your curiosity would develop. If you were then given the key, and still told not to open it, you would feel a terrible urge to just unlock it when no-one was looking, and take a peek inside. Why?

In the western society, from a very young age, we are exposed to behaviour and scenes which only display the glamorous and provocative aspect of sex. Yet, at that age, we are told that this is not something for children. Then as we grow up, we become baligh, and have the ability to "unlock the box" in the example above. Since we do not know what is in the box, or we think the box contains untold pleasure, we are tempted to open it and experiment. This is the cause of permissiveness.

The mistake that is made, is that sex is not discussed in its moral framework. Sex is not dirty or wrong, but at the same time it is not to be displayed and performed as a show. Since western society displays sex as exciting and daring, without responsibility and love then youngster who are coming to grips with this new emotion are bound to experiment. This may seem enjoyable in the short term, but very quickly they will find themselves slaves of sexual .desire, and not masters. This concept will be discussed in detail in a later note

CHASTITY

To be chaste means "Abstaining from immoral or unlawful, from sexual intercourse, to be pure, virgin, decent of speech, restrained, pure in taste or style, simple." - The Concise Oxford Dictionary.

This is the opposite of permissiveness which has been discussed earlier. Islam puts great

emphasis on chastity and it is this aspect, among others which is under attack in the western world. Why should we be chaste ?

We should be chaste in our every action by not doing immoral or unlawful acts, by not using foul words. We should regard these things as wrong and avoid them.

Islam also tells us that until nikah (marriage) is recited, all relationships which can lead to intimacy between two people are disallowed. A person's chastity is a gift given by Allah. It is a sign of purity and noble character. It is a very prized and personal possession. When a person marries, he/she enters a new stage of life. The bond of marriage is cemented by the couple sharing something that is personal and intimate to them. This helps to secure the marriage from breaking during future ups and downs and helps to make it endure.

If people do not guard their chastity, and treat sexual relationships as casual, then they are losing the higher purpose which Allah has made, the sharing of something very intimate which binds the two people.

If it is treated as easygoing and as enjoyment with any partner, then the sensitive side of the relationship will be closed off. Allah has made the human being from several elements, one is the physical element with the five senses of touch, taste, sight, smell and sound. Then He added a whole new level to human beings, he gave them thought and understanding.

If we treat our most private parts without modesty, and go and abuse them carelessly, we will gain a physical pleasure, but we will lose all the "love and contentment" which our mind can give us.

Thus if we just be permissive and have sexual relations whenever the urge arises, we will be lowering our dignity from the intellect to the animal/physical element of our life, and will be missing out in the real sense of living.

What is wrong with being unchaste ?

It is a well known fact that once a physical sense is stimulated by an object, it will require more of that object the next time, to reach the same level of stimulation.

ie If I drink alcohol, I will lose physical control over my body. The next time it will take even more alcohol to make me reach the same level of drunkenness, the next time even more... and so on.

Similarly, if I concentrate in sexual activities just for pleasure, the next time I will do more and more until I am addicted and cannot stop. Thus if we are chaste in our every action (especially sexual), and treat them as something "sacred" not to be squandered, then we will attain a level of discipline that will make us strong, determined and able to achieve anything which we put our mind to. Why is it difficult to be chaste ?

The western society has lost all concept of spiritual life. They have closed the eye inside them and have concentrated totally on physical pleasures. Sex is something which is made into an open pastime, an enjoyment. This attracts our desires and makes us want to join in. Almost all pleasures are orientated about this idea, parties, videos, books, magazines, discos, film, t.v, cinemas. Then we ask what is wrong with having girl/boyfriends. If they can do it, why can't we.

Would you ask a person who 'shoots drugs', "if you can do it why can't I?"

No you would not, because you can see that he is damaging his mind and body by doing so. It is only because we can not see the long term effects of being unchaste that we ask the above questions. Our elders who have watched and seen these effects warn us, but we call them old fashioned. If we knew what they did, there is a guarantee that we would never even think of following our desires and having sexual relations other than those allowed by Islam.

How can we be chaste ?

Being chaste does not mean keeping locked up away from the west and not even listening to what they tell you. It means listening to everything they ask you and following that which is right and not doing that which is wrong.

Only by listening to them can you decide what is right and wrong. It also means not letting your desires carry you away to commit something which you know might give you physical pleasure, but on the higher level, will make you lose out.

We can be chaste by avoiding telling dirty stories or rude jokes, by not watching films/tv which display other peoples private parts and so cause arousal, by not allowing our relationships with people of the opposite sex to get too close, and by generally asking ourselves in our heart, "Am I doing this because my desires are telling me , or because my intelligence is telling me." If it is because of desires, then don't do it. If it is because of intelligence, then do it and you will enjoy yourself much more, physically and spiritually.

The path to enjoying life truly is very difficult, and is balanced on both physical and spiritual pleasures. It is like climbing a mountain, only when you reach the summit, can you look around you and see how fresh everything is. And when you look down below, you see everything from a different point of view. You see the maze of life from above, the paths which confused you while you were in the maze are now suddenly clear and easy to see.