

Eighteenth Rule

PRACTICING MODESTY AND HUMILITY

al-Khumeini (AR) writes the following about The Prophet (S),

The Prophet (S), whose knowledge was derived from The Divine Revelation, and whose soul was so great that it could predominate over the spirits of millions upon millions of human beings; who rejected all the practices and customs of the pagan Arabs; who shattered under his feet all the false creeds; abrogated all the scriptures and The Circle of Prophethood achieved its completion in his noble existence; who was the ruler of the world and The Hereafter, and who was the master of all the worlds, with the permission of Allah (SWT) Almighty - yet his humility towards the creatures of Allah (SWT) was more than of any other human being.

He hated to see his companions stand up in his respect; whenever he entered a gathering, he used to sit in the lowest place; he used to dine on the floor and used to sit on the floor and say, *'I am a slave of Allah (SWT). I dine like a slave and sit in the manner proper for a slave.'* Such, and better than what we have described, was the character and the modesty of this great personage.

A man who repeatedly exposes himself or herself in this world to the danger of sin should then always be careful not to approach the forbidden zone. This is what is explained as 'expressing humility' before The Almighty Allah (SWT). Truly,

O' servants of Allah (SWT)! You are like the sick, and The Creator of The World is like a Physician. The interest and welfare of the sick lie in those things that The Physician does in accordance with His Knowledge, not in those things that the sick crave. Surrender to God's Commands in order to join the ranks of the saved.
(Prophet (S))

We need to compensate our sins by lamenting and shedding tears in the court of The Almighty. Indeed, how many sins have been forgiven? How many have been converted to virtuous deeds? How many have been kept far away from the people? Allah (SWT) has been so merciful to us and we seldom show any remorse. The advice is to,

Restrain your soul from what harms it before death overtakes you. Strive to keep your soul free just the same way you earn to strive to earn your livelihood. For your soul is hostage to your deeds and only your efforts can set it free.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) similarly said,

The life of man does not amount to more than an instant. What is past is now non-existent; you do not feel its (actual) pleasure or pain. As for what is yet to come, you do not know what it is.

The true and precious capitals of your life are those few instants you presently enjoy. Master, then, your soul, and strive to redeem yourself and attain salvation. Be steadfast in enduring the rigor of worshipping Allah (SWT) and obeying His commandments, and preserve yourself from the pollution of sin and disobedience to Allah (SWT).

Whoever guards his heart from heedlessness, protects his self from appetites, and guards his intellect from ignorance, will be admitted into the company of the vigilant. Then he who guards his knowledge from fancies, his faith from innovation, and his property from the forbidden is among the righteous.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) continues,

Therefore it is necessary for the self to be in all states either expressing his gratitude or proffering his excuse for lack of gratitude. If this is acceptable to Allah (SWT) it is a favor upon him, and if not it is justice upon him. For every self it is necessary to work that it may succeed in its acts of obedience, and for its protection in its efforts to abstain from doing harm.

The basis of all this is recognition of total need and dependence on Allah (SWT), caution and obedience. The key to it is in delegating your affair to Allah (SWT), cutting off expectation by always remembering death, and seeing that you are standing in the presence of The All Compelling. This gives you rest from confinement, rescue from the enemy, and peace for the self. The means to sincerity in obedience is harmony, and the root of that rests upon considering life as being only as long as a day.

The Messenger of Allah (SWT) (S) said,

This world lasts but an hour, so spend it in obedience to Allah (SWT).

The door to all of this is always to withdraw from the world by means of constant reflection. The means to this withdrawal is contentment, and abandoning such existential matters as does not concern you. The means to reflection is emptiness (desire less), and the buttress of emptiness is abstinence. The completion of abstinence is precaution, and the door to precaution is fear. The proof of fear is glorification of Allah (SWT), adherence to obeying His Commands with sincerity, fear and caution, and holding back from the forbidden; and the guide to this is knowledge. Almighty Allah (SWT) said,

Those of His servants who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah (SWT).
(Qur'an - Chapter 35, Verse 28)

Another form of humility is in prayer and that one should stand before Allah (The Glorious, The Exalted), with a humble heart and in a state of meekness; as much as possible in a pleasing and soft manner of tongue, considering himself as destitute and nothing; and in this manner should present his needs and wants in prayer. It has been narrated that Allah (SWT), said to Prophet Isa (AS),

O' Isa! Beseech me like a poor and destitute who does not have any shelter except Me; beseech Me with a broken heart; in isolation and privacy remember me a lot; I love a servant who uses his tongue in a soft and pleasing manner, in a state of earthiness, but, of course with an alive and awakened heart and not with a sleepy and negligent heart; I like and appreciate My servant's endeavors in sending his heart broken sad voice and melody of his grief to My Ears.

Also, it has been narrated that Allah (SWT), said to Prophet Musa (AS),

Whenever you beseech Me, you must be in a state of trembling with fear, being afraid of My Wrath put your face upon dirt by offering prostration; tell your mysteries with a broken heart and trembling with fear; let your heart die because of My Wrath; look towards Me in a state of frenzy (in My Love), like someone who runs away from the fear of enemy and cries for help and support. You too should cry because of fear of sins and seek My Help, because, I am the Best Helper for My Servants.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) narrated that *once an Angel riding al-Buraq and wearing a silk dress descended down to Earth for the first time and told The Prophet (S): "God The Almighty has given you the choice between being a servant and a Prophet, or a king and a Prophet, or humble." The Prophet noticed that Jibraeel (AS) was pointing to being humble. He said, "I choose being a humble Prophet." The Angel said, "Your rank near God will not be lowered as a result of this choice." Imam al-Baqir (AS) said, "This Angel carried the keys to the treasures on Earth."*

The Prophet of God (S) said - God The Almighty revealed to Prophet Daud (AS),

O' Daud, The closest people to Me in The Hereafter are those who are humble. The most distant people to Me in The Hereafter are those who are haughty.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said,

"God The Almighty revealed to Prophet Daud (AS) - why are you so quiet?" Prophet Daud said, "Your awe has silenced me." God asked, "Why are you so slim?" He said, "Your love made me slim." God The Almighty said, "Why are you so poor?" He said, "Standing up for your right has made me poor." God The Almighty said, "O' Daud! Why have you humiliated yourself?" He said, "Your indescribable Majesty and Grandeur has humiliated me."

God The Almighty said, "O' Daud! Now I give you the glad tidings that you will receive what you love The Day you meet Me. Associate with the people according to their own ways, but be separate from them in your religious issues. You will attain whatever you want from Me on The Resurrection Day."

A Brief Note on Kibr – an Important Sign of Modesty
Al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

Verily Kibr (pride) is its lowest degree.

Kibr is the name of a psychic state in which a person feels a sense of superiority and behaves the same with others. Its signs are discernible in his or her actions and its symptoms are clearly noticed by others by which they know that he is proud. According to al-Khumeini (AR), Kibr is something different from Ujb, and, as this vice is the offspring and fruit of the tree of Ujb. Ujb consists of self-love and conceit, and the meaning of Kibr is to consider oneself superior to others.

al-Khumeini (AR) further lists down six kinds of such a great sin,

1. Kibr because of possessing true faith and belief,
2. As opposed to it is the pride in invalid faith and false belief.
3. Pride because of good qualities and praiseworthy attributes.
4. Pride in moral vices and undesirable qualities.
5. Pride in one's righteous deeds and devotional exercises.
6. Pride in sinful and wicked deeds.

The Prophet (S) has said,

Never can the person who possesses a speck of pride inside his heart enter Paradise.

Al-Imam al-Baqir (AS and al-Imam al-Sadiq (AS) have also said something almost similar to this statement. In al-Kafi al-Imam al-Baqir (A) is reported to have said,

Honor is God's Robe and Pride is His Mantle; God Almighty will throw one who wants to acquire it into Hell.

Moreover, that too, what kind of Hell! The Hell, which is prepared for the proud, is different from the Hell into which other sinners will go. In a highly trustworthy tradition, Ibn Bukayr reports from al Imam al-Sadiq (AS) that he said,

Verily there is a valley in Hell for the proud called 'Saqar'. Once it complained to The Almighty about the intensity of its heat, and requested Him to relieve it for some time so that it may take a breath. As soon as it breathed, its breath filled the entire hell with fire.

A Brief Note on Hijab – The MODEST Dress for Muslim Women

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do.

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. In addition, O' You Believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss.

(Qur'an – Chapter 24, Verses 30-31)

Curse! Curse be on that woman who walks and reveals her beauty to men.
(Holy Prophet (S))

Hijab (veil, female covering; lowering down one's eyes) is yet another weapon for a believing male and female, although more relevant to females. It is a weapon, that when employed efficiently it will most surely over-power our enemy in much less of a time than other weapons that we may possess. It is very delicate in nature but can fight a great deal on our behalf and even sacrifice itself for us.

The Philosophy

Know that a woman has a strong desire to show off and display her beauty in presence of men. She always wishes to capture the hearts of men. However, this has to be avoided - for in Islam, a woman holds esteem respect of herself. Islam does allow one to do everything but not anytime. Depending on the situations, one is allowed to enjoy what she desires. This is because Islam aims at keeping everyone safe from committing an illicit act. In addition, beauty is one such element that can destroy the sincerity and piety of many people. For this reason, Islam has made it compulsory for a woman to cover herself and not reveal her beauty in the presence of men outside the family circle (na-mahram men).

In this world, it is natural for a human being to respond to stimulation, for any stimulus is bound to produce a certain response even if not desired. A beautiful woman is one of the most powerful stimulants in the eyes of men. A woman with her beauty revealed is a danger to any community for she lets men play with her in their dreams. As a result, these men start living in an imaginary world controlled by Shaytan, The Accursed.

al-Mutahhari (AR) wants us to understand that a man's attention to a woman is not based on bread and butter as one is satiated and satisfied after eating. To a man, a woman with her beauty revealed for everyone to admire and devour is a continuous stimulant with no satisfaction or satiation point. It is like adding fuel to fire, the result is increase in the intensity and severity of fire.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) once said that Shaytan everyday morning exclaims,

Today, the weapon of great benefit and success to me will be 'women'.

Imagine, a society that members naked and half-dressed women attending schools; women barely dressed in conversation with men; women with adornments covering their entire body trying to lure men into evil! This is where the women loose their respect and become the slaves of men.

Women should therefore, be careful not to include themselves among the army of Shaytan out to destroy the believing community. Muslim women should never advertise their beauty and always abide by the rules and regulations of the hijab. In this present world, hijab has certainly lost its purpose. Unfortunately, hijab itself has become a fashion and a woman wears it to enhance her beauty and appearance. In general, a Muslim woman should not include herself in this group with no faith.

Hijab and the Sacrifices in Karbala

The advise is to not play around with the scarf which you observe in presence of men. Remember, this scarf is not a piece of cloth but a result of great many 'bloody' sacrifices made by the respected women of Islam in Karbala. This scarf represents Lady Fatima (AS) and you walk with her flag whenever you put it on. Do give it as much respect possible and take care of yourself.

When Imam al-Sajjad (AS) was asked as to which experience hurt him most during The Tragedy of Karbala, his reply was 'al-Sham' in Damascus where the respected ladies were forced to parade in front of men without hijab.

Hijab and Judgment Day

The Prophet (S) once exclaimed that nearing the end of the world,

Women will be observing hijab, but will appear naked in the eyes of Allah (SWT)!

This because, she will be covered in adornments, deviates from her religion and indulges in illicit acts. She will fulfill her evil desires and turn unlawful acts into lawful ones.

The Ideal Woman

Concerning the best and most pious woman, Lady Fatima (AS) once said,

She neither looks at men. She also keeps herself far from men so that men do not see her.

When Allah (SWT) created 'shyness' together with its ten parts, it is reported by Aimmah (AS) that nine parts of that 'shyness' was given to women and only one part to men.

Further, it is reported that on The Day of Judgment, Lady Maryam (AS) will be brought forward in the presence of those women who were proud of their beauty and advertised it to men by either not observing the hijab or by observing the hijab with adornments thereby destroying the whole purpose of the hijab. All the women present will be surprised at the beauty of Lady Maryam (AS).

At this stage, Allah (SWT) will exclaim to the women present that Lady Maryam (AS) had the most 'beauty' in herself and she still preserved it. The women will have no reply and will have to face the consequences.

The Clothing of Hijab

The advise to a Muslim Woman is to *keep in mind that the hijab we have been talking about represents a cloth that covers your entire body and is not of different colors that may stimulate the attention of men. It should be as loose as possible and even the smallest part of your dress should be covered, lest some men get attracted to that small part of your dress.*

There is also a hijab for your voice, the way you walk, and the places you visit. Apparently, the great grand daughters of The Prophet (S) used to place fingers into the mouth near the tongue whenever they were confronted with men they had to converse with. This was because they did not have a desire to reveal their beautiful voices and reserved the whole beauty for their husbands. In addition, when you walk do not strike your feet on the ground to attract attention.

Observers report that Imam Ali (AS) never said salaams to young women or avoided greeting them. When asked about this, he replied that the reason was to try and refrain himself from hearing the reply of a young woman's beautiful voice – though Imam Ali (AS) was infallible and Shaytan could not even approach him. This is a lesson to all of us that there is a hijab of a woman's voice as well.

Lowering One's Gaze

When Prophet Musa (AS) was commanded to leave Egypt because of the fear he had of striking a person to his death, he came across two women lifting buckets of water from a well. He asked to help the two women and in return for his favor, the two women asked Prophet Musa (AS) to accompany them to their place of residence so that their father can personally return his favor. However, when they were about to leave, Prophet Musa (AS) requested the two women to remain behind and throw stones to the left or right until they reached home. This is how Prophets (AS) practiced abstinence and piety, and thus we have a lesson to all humankind.

There is nothing profitable than lowering one's gaze, for the sight is not lowered from things, which Allah (SWT) has forbidden unless the witnessing of majesty and glory has already come to the heart.

The Commander of the Faithful (AS) was asked what could help in lowering one's gaze. He said,

Submission to the power of Him Who is aware of your secret. The eye is the spy of the hearts and the messenger of the intellect; therefore lower your gaze from whatever is not appropriate to your faith, from whatever your heart dislikes and from whatever your intellect finds repugnant.

The Prophet (S) said,

Lower your eyes and you will see wonders.

Prophet Isa (AS) once said to the disciples,

Beware of looking at forbidden things, for that is the seed of desire and leads to deviant behavior. John the Baptist said, *I would prefer death to a glance, which is unnecessary.*

Abdullah (SWT) ibn Mas'ud (AR) said to a man who had visited a woman (who happened to be na-mahram to him) while she was ill,

It would have been better for you to loose your eyes than to have visited your sick person.

It is said that whenever the eye looks at something forbidden, a knot of desire is tied in the person's heart, and that knot will only be untied by one of two conditions: either by weeping out of grief and regret in true repentance, or by taking possession of what one desired and looked at. Moreover, if a person takes possession unjustly, without repentance, then that will take him to The Fire. As for the one who repents of it with grief and regret, his abode is The Garden and his destiny is God's Favor.