

Abu Mas'ūd narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:



What people have learnt of the teachings of early prophethood includes: If you feel no shame, then do what you want.⁽¹⁾

From the Qur'an

- ﴿One of the two women then came back to him, walking shyly.﴾ (28: 25)
- ﴿Such behaviour might give offence to the Prophet, and yet he might feel too shy to bid you go. God does not shy of stating what is right.﴾ (33: 53)

The Narrator

'Uqbah ibn 'Amr ibn Tha'labah, Abu Mas'ūd, was an Anṣārī companion of the Prophet belonging to the clan of al-Ḥārith ibn al-Khazraj. He was better known by his appellation and commonly referred to as Abu Mas'ūd al-Badrī. It is reported that he did not take part in the Battle of Badr, but he once stopped at a place called Badr and was named after it. He took part in the pledge given by the Anṣār to the Prophet at 'Aqabah. At the time, he was a youth of the same age as Jābir, which means that the two were the youngest of the Anṣār who took part in that pledge. He narrated a large number of hadiths. He is considered among the Prophet's companions who were considered scholars. He lived at Kufah. 'Alī appointed him as his deputy there when he left for Ṣiffin. He died in Year 41 or 42 AH, 662 CE,

Summary

People learnt certain values from early prophets, and these were passed on to later generations. One of these values is that a person who feels no shame may do what he likes. This means that a sense of shame stops a person doing many unbecoming things. Hence, when a person does not have that sense, nothing will stop him from doing what he wants.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 3484.



Message and Meaning



The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us that mankind passed on, from one generation to another, values that remain valid and will never be abrogated. One such value is summed up in the words: 'If you feel no shame, then do what you want'. This is something that is well known to be right, and it is universally accepted by sound minds. What belongs to such a category may not be discarded, abrogated or altered.



What this statement means is that a sense of shame stops people from doing many unbecoming things. Therefore, the one who has no sense of shame will have no restraint that stops him from doing what is foul or evil.



A sense of shame is a good characteristic to have, as it stops a person from doing something for which he may be censured or blamed. It is indeed at the top of good characteristics, as it enhances good manners and moral values. It is the pivot around which the branches of faith revolve. It is the evidence of faith and the motivator to develop good qualities and follow right guidance. It tells man to avoid what is bad and ensures the fulfilment of people's rights.



The most important and necessary aspect of shame is that one should be ashamed of oneself in front of God. This means that one should try to ensure that God does not see one doing what He has forbidden. This does not happen without very good and correct knowledge of God and putting such knowledge into practice. This is what the Prophet (peace be upon him) expressed by saying: 'It is to worship God as though you see Him, and while you do not see Him, He certainly sees you'.⁽¹⁾ This is what the Prophet meant when he made it one of the essential aspects of faith, as he said: 'Be sure to feel true shame in front of God'. The Prophet's companions said: 'Messenger of God, we are certainly shy, by God's grace'. He said: 'This is not what I meant. To feel true shame in front of God is to make sure that you keep your head and understanding sound and on the right course, and to ensure that your abdomen and what it contains are lawful, and to remember death and what it brings. Whoever seeks safety in the life to come will abandon the adornments of this life. Whoever maintains these is one who feels true shame in front of God'.⁽²⁾



To stress this, the Prophet (peace be upon him) states that modesty is a branch of faith.⁽³⁾ The Prophet passed by one man who was remonstrating with his brother, saying to him: 'You are always shy'. He almost meant that his shyness had harmed him. The Prophet said to him: 'Leave him alone. Modesty is a branch of faith'.⁽⁴⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 50; Muslim, 8. This is part of Hadith 19 in this work.

2 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2458.

3 Related by al-Bukhari, 9; Muslim, 35.

4 Related by al-Bukhari, 6118.



A sense of shame is of two types. The first is natural. This is a personal trait God grants to a person, making him naturally shy. His shyness stops him from doing wrong and encourages him to do what is good. This is one of the most precious things God grants any of His servants. It is a branch of faith, because it has the same effect as faith, preferring what is good and discarding evil. A person with such natural inclination may well rise to the standard of a good believer.



The other type is acquired: it may be derived directly from being a believer. For example, a believer feels shy of standing before God on the Day of Judgement, and he starts to prepare for that meeting. Alternatively, it may be the result of aspiring to the degree of *ihsān*. Thus, a person feels ashamed of being watched by God, who is certainly close to him. This is one of the highest qualities of faith.



Implementation

1

A sense of shame is a fine characteristic: it refines character and motivates a person to stick to good manners and fine values, and to steer away from foul deeds and evil. Therefore, Muslims should nurture and enhance their sense of shame.

2

Modesty is a characteristic of prophets. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was very modest. Abu Sa'īd al-Khudrī narrated: 'God's Messenger (peace be upon him) was more modest than a virgin who is still in her private room. If he disliked something, we realized that by his facial expression'.⁽¹⁾ Describing Prophet Moses, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Moses was a shy person. In his modesty, nothing of his skin was left visible'.⁽²⁾ We can do no better than to emulate prophets.

3

Whoever wants to be in Heaven should nurture his sense of shame. One of the greatest points about modesty is that it leads to Heaven. The Prophet said: 'Modesty is a branch of faith, and faith leads to Heaven. Vulgarly is an aspect of going astray, and going astray leads to Hell'.⁽³⁾

4

Modesty is the best of characteristics. Whoever adorns himself with it is praised by God and people. Whoever is devoid of it is disliked by God and people. The Prophet said: 'When modesty is present in any matter, it adorns it; and when vulgarity is in any matter, it detracts from it'.⁽⁴⁾

5

Modesty is a divine characteristic. It is enough for anyone who is modest that he acquires such a characteristic which applies to God Himself. The Prophet said: 'Your Lord is modest and generous. He disdains to see His servant raising his hands to Him in supplication and leaves him empty-handed'.⁽⁵⁾

6

Al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ said: 'There are five signs of misery: hard-heartedness, a fixed stirring eye, lack of modesty, eagerness for the pleasures of this world, and endless hope'.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 3562; Muslim, 67.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 3404.

3 Related by Ahmad, 10512; al-Tirmidhī, 2009; Ibn Mājah, 4184.

4 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 1974; al-Bukhari in *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 601.

5 Related by Ibn Mājah, 3865.



