

Abu Hurayrah narrated that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said:

- 1 Faith is seventy-something, or sixty-something, branches.
- 2 The best of these is to say 'there is no deity other than God',
- 3 and the lowest in rank is to remove a harmful object from people's way.
- 4 Modesty is a branch of faith.<sup>(1)</sup>

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

#### From the Qur'an

- ﴿True believers are only those whose hearts are filled with awe whenever God is mentioned, and whose faith is strengthened whenever His revelations are recited to them. In their Lord do they place their trust.﴾ (8: 2)
- ﴿Whenever a surah is revealed, some of them say: 'Which of you has this strengthened in faith?' It certainly strengthens the believers in their faith, and so they rejoice. (124) But as for those whose hearts are diseased, it only adds wickedness to their wickedness, and so they die unbelievers.﴾ (9: 124- 125)
- ﴿Before your time We never sent a messenger without having revealed to him that there is no deity other than Me. Therefore, you shall worship Me alone.﴾ (21: 25)
- ﴿It is He who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers, so that they may grow more firm in their faith.﴾ (48:4)

#### The Narrator

Abu Hurayrah 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ṣakhr al-Dawsī was from a branch of the Azd tribe. He embraced Islam in the year in which the Battle of Khaybar took place, i.e. Year 7 of the Hijri calendar. Abu Dāwūd said: 'Scholars of Hadith are in agreement that he was the Prophet's companion who narrated the largest number of hadiths'. He was appointed governor of Bahrain. He died in Madinah in Year 58 AH, 678 CE.

#### Summary

In this hadith the Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us that faith comprises many parts which differ in merit and importance. The most important one is belief in God's oneness and the lowest in importance is the removal of harmful objects from people's way. The other parts, including modesty, fall in between these two.



# Message and Meaning

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us that faith is like a tree with branches. Some of these are higher and more important than others. He mentions that there are seventy-odd branches. The Arabic word *bid'*, translated in the text of the hadith as 'something', refers to a figure ranging from three to nine. Thus, the text of the hadith means that faith is between seventy-three and seventy-nine branches.

The hadith mentions that faith is 'seventy-something, or sixty-something' branches. This is the narrator's doubt. That different reports give different figures should be overlooked, because the important point is that there are many branches of faith. Some scholars have tried to establish what these branches are, identifying the good deeds mentioned in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, but their conclusions are only good estimates.

2

The Prophet (peace be upon him) then explains that the best of these is the conviction that there is no deity other than God. This is not a mere verbal expression. It should be a conviction based on knowledge, sincerity, love, obedience and commitment, as well as rejection of any belief in anything other than God, the Exalted, and steering away from associating partners with God, whether openly or covertly.

This is the essence of faith. None of its other branches is acceptable unless this one is firstly and firmly established. God says: 'He who seeks a religion other than Islam [i.e. self-surrender to God], it will not be accepted from him, and in the life to come he will be among the lost'. (3: 85)

3

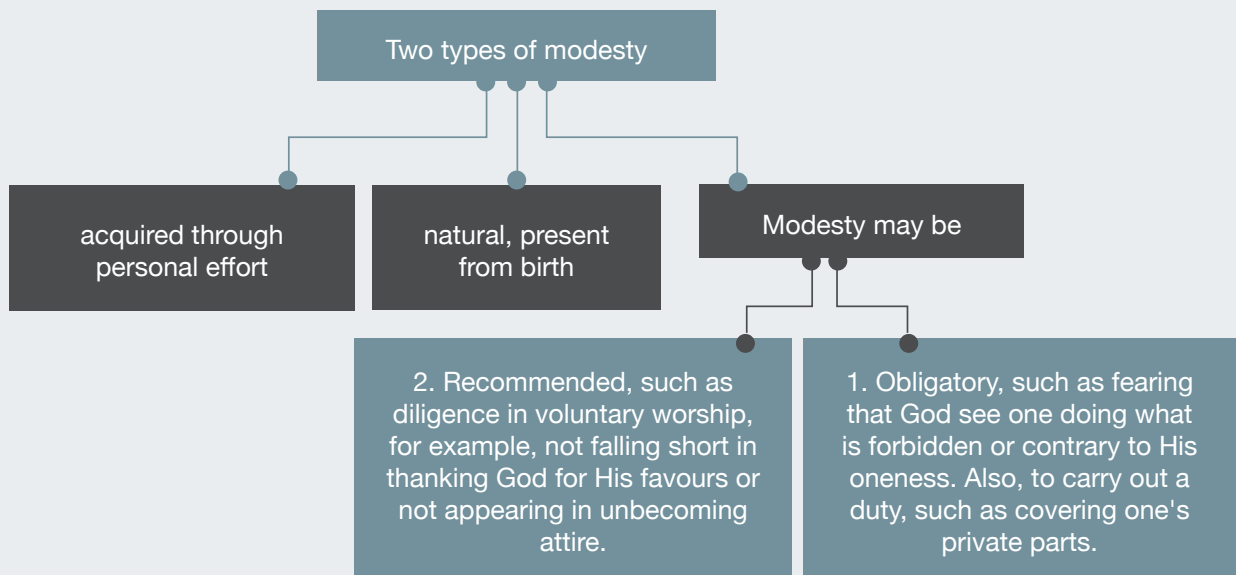
The least in importance among the branches of faith is the removal from people's way of anything that may cause them harm, such as thorns, stones, rubbish, nails, wheels or abandoned objects. If we are required to remove harmful objects from people's way, leaving such harmful objects on people's way is to be more diligently avoided.

4

The Prophet mentions that modesty is one of the branches of faith. It is a personal trait that encourages good works and avoidance of what is wrong and unbecoming. This may be a personal trait which a person should nurture and retain, or it may be consciously acquired through self-training. Modesty is a feeling which a person recognizes within himself, even if only on some occasions. Its outcome which sums up its significance is to ensure that God does not see you where He has forbidden you to be and does not miss you where He has bidden you to be.

All this confirms that faith comprises verbal expression, practical action and inner conviction. When we say, 'there is no deity other than God', this is a verbal expression of what we believe in. It is followed by what we do in practice to confirm it. The removal of harmful objects from people's way is a practical action. Modesty is something that is placed within oneself but its practical effects are seen through action.





# Implementation

1

Abu Hurayrah was a companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and a distinguished scholar. He became governor of some important cities in the Muslim state. Nevertheless, he combined humility and soft-heartedness with voluntary worship. Do we show the necessary humility as we enjoy what God has given us of knowledge, position or wealth?

2

Faith is the most important thing, and it is what God requires of His creation. However, it is broad, having many branches. We should learn these and should work diligently to improve ourselves doing what God requires of us in the areas marked by these branches. We must not limit ourselves to some branches and ignore others.

3

Some people criticize others for neglecting some branches of faith, forgetting that they themselves may neglect other branches. Some people are keen to do well in some acts of worship, such as prayers and fasting, but they neglect others, such as good manners and attending to the needs of their families. Some may place their emphasis on good manners and ignore the duty of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is evil. All this should make us more gentle with others and take stock of our own action according to the standards of divine law.

4

Faith has different grades, with some lower than others. All these grades are parts of the faith which is loved by God, but we should not focus on the lower grades, neglecting the higher ones. There are more than seventy grades between the highest and the lowest. Hence, our effort and financial contribution in regard to the top grade is more important and more rewarding. Therefore, we need scholars so that we learn more of the Qur'an and the Sunnah so as to become fully aware of the priorities of faith.

5

The best of all branches of faith is the declaration: 'there is no deity other than God'. We, therefore, need to learn its meaning fully and how to make it a full reality in our lives. We must say it with hearts full of love and submission, ready to accept all that it requires of us in belief, verbal declaration and action.

6

Removal of harm from people's way may involve different types of action in people's daily life, including the removal of what may cause harm to people or vehicles, such as stones, nails, pieces of tyres, etc. whether one takes action to remove it oneself or speaks to the responsible authority to remove it.

7

Since the removal of harm from people's way and other places is a part of faith, then to refrain from placing such harm is a good action, while harming people with any type of object is a bad deed. Harm is a general word which may include what is physical and what is abstract. It, thus, includes things like throwing away tins and what is left in them, disturbing noises, foul smells, driving with no consideration to other road users, wrongful parking, etc. Moreover, since the presence of harmful objects in people's way is unacceptable, then by contrast, it is recommended to make things easier for people on their way, such as placing ways for relaxation

at intervals, such as a canopy or an umbrella, or services stations on highways. The following hadith illustrates this meaning, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) says to his companions. 'Beware of sitting by the roadside.' They said: 'Messenger of God! We cannot dispense with our sitting places, as we sit to talk together.' He said: 'Since you refuse, you must give the road its due right.' They asked: 'What is its right?' He said: 'To lower one's gaze, refrain from what causes harm to anyone, return greetings, enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong.'<sup>(1)</sup>



God rewards the removal of harm from people's way, although people do not live on the road, and they may only pass through rapidly. Needless to say, the removal of harm from places where people meet and stay is more important. Such places include workplaces, schools and places of learning, as well as homes. Cleaning the family home is particularly important because it ensures that members of the family are comfortable. Mosques are even more important, because they are God's houses which He has ordered to be built. We, therefore, should ensure that this type of good deed is done in our daily lives.



Since the removal of harm from people's way is an aspect of faith, its removal from people's hearts is more important. This is accomplished by educating them, removing their doubts and evil thoughts and clearing their anxiety and depression.



Modesty is especially mentioned as a branch of faith because of its effects. It is a trait that encourages many good characteristics and stops bad ones. It may be present in a person's mind but he does not feel it; and it may weaken and die without this being felt, particularly if it dies out gradually when it is surrounded by many aspects of impudence and vulgarity. Therefore, we should watch this trait within ourselves and nurture it.



Modesty is not a negative action such as being shy at what one might have done. It is a positive trait encouraging doing what is good and refraining from what is bad and evil. A person may feel ashamed of himself in front of God because He has given him knowledge and he has not spread that knowledge, or He has given him wealth and he does not give to charity, or He has given him a facility or easy expression and he does not use them in advocating God's cause. By contrast, a person may not feel ashamed at exposing what God has ordered to be covered of one's body, or at openly doing what is forbidden, or betraying a bad characteristic such as cowardice, stinginess or laziness.



The best form of modesty is one's modesty in front of God. To explain this meaning and how it is demonstrated in life, we quote: 'I recommend you to be ashamed in front of God as you may feel ashamed in front of a pious man of your own people'.<sup>(2)</sup>

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 2465; Muslim, 2121.

2 Related by Ahmad in *al-Zuhd*, 46; al-Bayhaqī in *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, Vol. 6, p. 145.



