

Modesty (al-Haya) in Islam: The Natural Disposition, Garment, and Guardian of Faith

Introduction

Modesty—*al-Haya*—is far more than a social custom or outward behavior. It is described as the natural disposition (*khuluq*) of Islam, an inner ethical quality rooted in faith (*iman*), and the “garment” of the religion. The discussion is anchored in the Prophetic statement:

رسول الله ﷺ (صلي الله عليه وآله) : إن لكل دين خلقا ، وإن خلق الإسلام الحياء

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: ‘**Verily every religion has a natural disposition and the natural disposition of Islam is modesty.**’

— Kanz al-Ummal, no. 5757

1. Authenticity and Source

The saying is attributed to Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa (peace be upon him and his family). Its authenticity is affirmed by its inclusion in respected Islamic compilations. The primary reference given is *Kanz al-Ummal*, no. 5757, along with *Mizan ul Hikmah*. Additional narrations include *al-Kafi*, *Bihar al-Anwar*, *Ghurar al-Hikam*, *Wasail al-Shia*, *al-Mahasin*, and *Tuhaf al-Uqul*.

The hadith is presented as a profound teaching that highlights the central role of modesty in the Islamic faith. It establishes modesty not merely as a virtue but as the very essence of the religion’s disposition.

2. Key Terms: *Khuluq*, *Shakila*, *Fitrah*, and *Haya*

The term “natural disposition” is understood primarily through the concepts of *khuluq* and *shakila*.

- **Khuluq** refers to an inner or spiritual quality, denoting a person’s inner character or moral disposition. Islamic ethical writings connect good character with qualities such as gentleness, courtesy, respectfulness, and modesty.
- **Shakila** is a pivotal Quranic term found in Surah Isra, Quran 17:84: “**Say, ‘Everyone acts according to his disposition, but your Lord knows best who is rightly guided.’**” It encompasses a person’s inherent nature, character, personality, and internal blueprint, often described as *malaka* or *zamir*. Actions are considered reflections of this internal reality.
- **Fitrah** is described as the inner guidance humans possess toward God, serving as an inner prophet guiding them toward happiness and representing a universal, unchangeable aspect of human nature. Islam itself is considered a “human nature-inspired religion,” built upon the natural needs and characteristics of humans.
- **Al-Haya** is commonly translated as modesty, bashfulness, or shame. It is identified as the natural disposition and defining quality of Islam.

The divine objective in Islam, is not merely to perform good deeds but to cultivate a divine disposition from which all good actions naturally flow. Character, or *khuluq*, is viewed as a gift from Allah, with some aspects being a natural disposition and others being a result of intentional effort.

3. Modesty as the Natural Disposition of Islam

The hadith “**Verily every religion has a natural disposition and the natural disposition of Islam is modesty**” establishes modesty as the fundamental

characteristic and inherent ethical quality that defines Islam. It is not merely a virtue but the essence of the religion's disposition.

The phrase "**natural disposition**" (*khuluqan*) refers to an intrinsic character or ethical quality that is deeply ingrained. For Islam, this innate quality is modesty. This implies that a Muslim's character should naturally reflect modesty in all aspects of life, as it is the defining trait of their religion.

This is further emphasized by the Prophet's teaching that "Modesty (*haya*) is whole the religion." Modesty is considered the very "mood" or "cloth" of Islam. It is not merely an outward appearance but a comprehensive moral quality that shapes a Muslim's entire being.

رسول الله ﷺ (صلي الله عليه وآله): الإسلام عريان ؛ فلباسه الحياء ، وزينته الوفاء ، ومروءته العمل الصالح ، وعماده الورع ، ولكل شيء أساس وأساس الإسلام حبنا أهل البيت

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: '**Islam is bare, and its clothing is modesty, its adornment loyalty, its valour good deeds, and its pillars piety. Everything has a foundation, and the foundation of Islam is the love for us, the ahl al-bayt (the household of the Prophet).**'

— al-Mahasin, v. 1, p. 445, no. 1031

This analogy conveys that just as clothing covers and beautifies the physical body, modesty serves as an essential covering for the internal self and the entire framework of Islam. It protects the faith from moral degradation and adorns it with spiritual beauty.

4. Modesty as an Inner Ethical Quality Shaping Conduct

Modesty is an inner ethical quality that profoundly influences a Muslim's understanding, conduct, and choices in every area of life.

1. **Broad Scope:** Modesty is a broad moral quality that extends beyond clothing or outward reserve. It should manifest consistently as a moral disposition, rather than just a social custom.
2. **Manifestation in Conduct:** Modesty is expected to appear in speech, behavior, relationships, worship, and restraint from wrongdoing.
3. **Innate Moral Instinct:** Shame and modesty are associated with an innate human moral instinct. When an individual recognizes an act as indecent, an inward feeling of shame can arise. This instinct can be strengthened through righteous conduct and weakened through persistent opposition to it.
4. **Control and Organization of Behavior:** Modesty is a crucial aspect of a person's psychological structure and behavior, controlling and organizing physical and psychological actions according to religious law and convention. It is rooted in respect for human dignity and acts as a superior factor, not driven by fear or greed.
5. **Prevention of Ugly Actions and Promotion of Chastity:** Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) highlighted modesty's practical role, stating:

يعنى: أنه يكف ذا الدين ومن ال دين له عن- عن أنس اقل: اقل رسول هلا (صل
هلا عليه وآله وسلم): الحياء خير كله. القبيح فهو جماع كل جميل

From Anas who said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: **Modesty is entirely good - meaning: it prevents both the religious person and the irreligious person from committing unseemly acts, so it is the combination of all that is beautiful.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 12, Section 1, Chapter 110, Hadith 15978

الإمام علي (عليه السلام) : الحياء يصد عن فعل القبيح

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: '**Modesty prevents ugly actions.**'

— Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 1393

الإمام علي (عليه السلام) : سبب العفة الحياء

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: '**The means to chastity is modesty.**'

— Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 5527

Modesty is described as "entirely good," as it prevents both religious and irreligious individuals from committing unseemly acts, thereby encompassing all that is beautiful.

The explanation given is that it prevents both the religious person and the irreligious person from committing unseemly acts, so it is the combination of all that is beautiful.

The Hadith "**Modesty is entirely good**" (*al-Haya khayrun kulluhu*) is a concise and profound saying of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family), signifying the comprehensive and inherent virtue of modesty in Islam.

5. Two Types of Modesty: Intellect and Foolishness

رسول الله ﷺ (صلي الله عليه وآله) : الحياء حياءان : حياء عقل وحياء حمق ، فحياء العقل العلم ، وحياء الحمق الجهل

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: '**There are two types of modesty, modesty springing from the intellect, and a sense of shame arising from foolishness. As for the modesty of the intellect, it is knowledge, and as for the shame from foolishness, it is ignorance.**'

— Bihar al-Anwar, v. 77, p. 149, no. 75

عن أحمد بن أبي عبد هلالا، عن بعض أصحابنا رفعه اقل: اقل رسول هلالا (صل هلالا عليه وآله):
الحياء حياءان: حياء عقل. وحياء حمق، فحياء العقل هو العلم، وحياء الحمق هو الجهل

From Ahmad bin Abi Abdullah, from some of our companions, raising it up, who said: Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: **Modesty is of two types: modesty of intellect and modesty of foolishness. The modesty of intellect is knowledge, and the modesty of foolishness is ignorance.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 12, Section 1, Chapter 111, Hadith 15982

Modesty of Intellect

This type is associated with knowledge and wisdom. It guides an individual toward what is righteous and prevents them from performing ugly actions. It is a praiseworthy quality. Intellect (*aql*) is highly valued in Islam, considered a superior gift from Allah, humanity's "inner" prophet and guide, and God's "proof." When Adam chose the intellect, modesty and religion remained with him, indicating their close and inseparable ties to the intellect.

الإمام علي (عليه السلام) : أعقل الناس أحياءهم

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: **'The most intelligent person is the most modest one.'**

— Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 2900

الإمام علي (عليه السلام): العقل شجرة ، ثمرها السخاء والحياء

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: **'The intellect is a tree the fruit of which is generosity and modesty.'**

— Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 1254

رسول الله ﷺ (صلي الله عليه وآله): صفة العاقل أن يحلم عمن جهل عليه ، ويتجاوز عمن ظلمه ، ويتواضع لمن هو دونه ، ويسابق من فوقه في طلب البر ، وإذا أراد أن يتكلم تدبر ؛ فإن كان خيرا تكلم فغنم ، وإن كان شرا سكت فسلم ، وإذا عرضت له فتنة استعصم بالله ﷻ وأمسك يده ولسانه ، وإذا رأى فضيلة انتهز بها ، لا يفارقه الحياء ، ولا يبدو منه الحرص ، فتلك عشر خصال يعرف بها العاقل

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: **'The attribute of a man of intellect is that he is clement towards one who behaves rashly with him, overlooks the fault of one who wrongs him, is humble even towards one who is lower than him in rank, tries to get ahead of those above him in his quest for good. Whenever he wishes to speak, he contemplates if what he wants to say is good, he says it and benefits as a result, and if it is bad, then he keeps quiet and remains safe as a result. When a temptation arises before him, he holds fast to Allah and guards his hand and his tongue if he sees virtue in it, he seizes it, neither losing his modesty thereat nor displaying any greed. These are ten qualities by which a man of intellect may be known.'**

— Tuhaf al-Uqul, no. 28

Modesty of Foolishness

This type is linked to ignorance. It can manifest as an unhealthy shyness that prevents a person from speaking the truth, seeking knowledge, or performing necessary actions.

الإمام علي (عليه السلام) : قرن الحياء بالحرمان

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: **'Shame has been associated with deprivation.'**

— Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 6714

الإمام علي (عليه السلام) : الحياء يمنع الرزق

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: **'Shame prevents sustenance.'**

— Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 274

الإمام علي (عليه السلام) : من استحيى من قول الحق فهو أحمق

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: **'One who is ashamed of speaking the truth is a fool.'**

— Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 8650

رسول الله ﷺ (صلي الله عليه وآله): قل الحق، ولا تأخذك في الله لومة لائم

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: **'Speak the truth, and let no one's blame for obeying Allah affect you.'**

— Hilyat al-Awliya, v. 1, p. 241

Therefore, the "natural disposition" of Islam refers to the praiseworthy modesty of intellect, which is inherently good and prevents actions deemed unacceptable.

6. The Inseparable Link Between Modesty and Faith

Islamic teachings emphasize a strong correlation between modesty and faith (*iman*). It is stated that **"there is no faith for the one who has no modesty,"**. This indicates that modesty is not merely an optional virtue but a crucial component of belief, essential for a complete and sound faith.

إن الحياء من الإيمان والإيمان في الجنة، وإن الفحش من البذاء والبذاء في النار.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: **Haya' is from faith and faith is in Paradise, and obscenity is from obscene logic and obscene logic is in Hellfire.**

— Mustadrak al-Wasail by Mirza Husayn al-Nuri al-Tabrisi, Volume 12, Page 81

وابالسناد اقل: اقل رسول هلا (صل هلا عليه وآله): الحياء والإيمان في قرن واحد، فإذا سلب . أحدهما تبعه الآخر

And by the chain he said: Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: **"Modesty and faith are tied together, when one is taken away the other follows."**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 12, Section 1, Chapter 110, Hadith 15979

عن معاذ بن كثير، عن أحدهما (عليهما السلام) اقل: الحياء والإيمان مقرونان في قرن، فإذا ذهب أحدهما تبعه صاحبه

From Mu'adh ibn Kathir, from one of them (peace be upon them) who said: **Modesty and faith are tied together in one knot, so if one of them goes, its companion follows.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 12, Section 1, Chapter 110, Hadith 15969

عن أبي عبيدة الحذاء، عن أبي عبد هلال (عليه السلام) اقل: الحياء من الإيمان والإيمان في الجنة.

From Abu Ubaidah Al-Hadha, from Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him) who said: **Modesty is from faith, and faith is in Paradise.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 12, Section 1, Chapter 110, Hadith 15970

الإمام الصادق (عليه السلام) : لا إيمان لمن لا حياء له

Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said, '**There is no faith for the one who has no modesty.**'

— al-Kafi, v. 2, p. 106, no. 5

وبهذا الإسناد قال: قال الرضا عليه السلام: الحياء من الإيمان.

According to the same documentation, on the authority of Al-Ridha (peace be upon him and his family), **"Being shy is due to faith."**

— Uyun akhbar al-Rida (Vol. 1) by Shaykh Muhammad b. Ali al-Saduq, Book 2, Chapter 26, Hadith #23

The relationship is described as mutually dependent: when one is present, the other is also present; when one departs, the other follows. Modesty is considered a component of faith, a criterion for character, and a path to Paradise. The depth of one's faith in God directly correlates with their level of shame and modesty; the stronger the faith, the higher the modesty. Conversely, when faith diminishes, modesty is lost.

الحياء والإيمان مقرونان في قرن فإذا ذهب أحدهما تبعه صاحبه.

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (peace be upon him) said: **Haya' and faith are linked together, so if one of them goes, its companion follows.**

— al-Kafi by Shaykh al-Kulayni, Volume 2, Page 106

عن الفضيل بن كثير، عن ذكره، عن أبي عبد هلالا (عليه السلام) اقل: ال إيمان لمن الحياء له.

From Al-Fudhail ibn Kathir, from whoever mentioned it, from Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him) who said: **There is no faith for one who has no modesty.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 12, Section 1, Chapter 110, Hadith 15971

عن أبي عبيدة الحذاء، عن أبي عبد هلالا (عليه السلام) اقل: الحياء من الإيمان والإيمان في الجنة.

From Abu Ubaidah Al-Hadha, from Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him) who said: **Modesty is from faith, and faith is in Paradise.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 12, Section 1, Chapter 110, Hadith 15970

Allah Taking Away Modesty from a Servant

It is also related that when Allah desires ruination for a slave, He takes away modesty from him.

وبإسناد اقل: اقل رسول هلالا (صل هلالا عليه وآله): ينزع هلالا من العبد الحياء فيصير ماقتا ممقتا، ثم ينزع منه الحياء ثم الرحمة ثم يخلع دين السالم من عنقه فيصير شيطانا لعينا

And with his chain he said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: **Allah removes modesty from the servant, so he becomes hateful and despised, then He removes from him modesty, then mercy, then removes the religion of Islam from his neck, so he becomes an accursed devil.**

Recommendation Of Modesty

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 12, Section 1, Chapter 110, Hadith 15980

7. Quranic Foundations: Surah Al-Isra 17:84 and Surah An-Nur 24:30–31

7.1. Surah Al-Isra, 17:84: Disposition (*Shakilah*) as Intention

Surah Isra, Quran 17:84, with the English rendering: **"Say, 'Everyone acts according to his disposition, but your Lord knows best who is rightly guided.'"**

According to narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt, the term "disposition" (*shakilah*) in this verse is interpreted as intention. This highlights that an individual's actions are fundamentally rooted in their underlying intentions, which are known intimately by Allah.

Several narrations emphasize the supremacy of intention over the physical deed itself:

الاعمال بالنية

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: **Actions depend on (are rewarded according to) intentions**

— Nahj Al-Fasahah

عن أبي عبد هلالا) عليه السالم(، اقل: اقل رسول هلالا) صل هلالا عليه وآله وسلم(: نية المؤمن خير من عمله، ونية الكافر شر من عمله، وكل عامل يعمل عمل نيته

From Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him), he said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: **The intention of a believer is better than his action, and the intention of a disbeliever is worse than his action, and every doer acts according to his intention.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 1, Section 2, Chapter 6, Hadith 95

اقل أبو عبد هلالا) عليه السالم(: إنما خلد أهل النار في النار، الن نياتهم كانت في الدنيا أن لو خلدوا فيها أن ،يعصوا هلالا أبدا، وإنما خلد أهل الجنة في الجنة ألن نياتهم كانت في الدنيا أن لو بقوا فيها أن يطيعوا هلالا أبدا. فبالنيات خلد هؤلاء وهؤلاء، ثم قال قوله تعالى: قل كل يعمل عمل شاكلته اقل: عمل نيته

Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him) said: **The people of Hell were eternalized in Hell because their intentions in this world were that if they were to live forever, they would disobey Allah forever. And the people of Paradise were eternalized in Paradise because their intentions in this world were that if they were to remain, they would obey Allah forever. Thus, by their intentions both these groups are granted eternity. Then he recited the words of Allah the Exalted: "Say: Everyone acts according to his own disposition" [Surah Al-Isra: Quran 17:84], saying: [This means] according to his intention.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 1, Section 2, Chapter 6, Hadith 96

عن أبي عبد هلا (عليه السلام): والنية أفضل من العمل، أَل وإن النية هي العمل، ثم قال. قوله تعالى: قل كل يعمل على شاكلته، يعنى على نيته

From Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him): **And the intention is better than the action. Indeed, the intention is the action itself. Then he recited the words of the Almighty: Say, each works (acts) according to his disposition [Quran, 17:84], meaning according to his intention.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 1, Section 2, Chapter 6, Hadith 97

- علي بن إبراهيم عن أبيه عن القاسم بن محمد عن المنقري عن أحمد بن يونس عن أبي هاشم قال قال أبو عبد الله (عليه السلام) إنما خلد أهل النار في النار لأن نياتهم كانت في الدنيا أن لو خلدوا فيها أن يعصوا الله أبدا وإنما خلد أهل الجنة في الجنة لأن نياتهم كانت في الدنيا أن لو بقوا فيها أن يطيعوا الله أبدا فبالنيات خلد هؤلاء وهؤلاء ثم تلا قوله تعالى قل كل يعمل على شاكلته قال على نيته

Ali ibn Ibrahim has narrated from his father from al-Qasim ibn Muhammad from al-Minqari from Ahmad ibn Yunus from abu Hashim who has said the following: "Abu 'Abd Allah (peace be upon him) has said, '**People of hell will remain in hell for ever because of their intention in this world to disobey Allah even if they lived here forever. People of paradise will live therein forever because of their intention in this world to worship Allah even if they lived here forever. Because of intentions these and those will remain therein forever. The Imam then recited**

the words of Allah, "Say, everyone does as he intends (shakilah). . . .," (Quran 17:84) the Imam said, **'It (Shakilah) means intention.'**"

— Al-Kafi (Vol. 2) by Shaykh Muhammad b. Yaqub al-Kulayni, Book 1, Chapter 43, Hadith #5

وعن الرضا (عليه السلام) أنه اقل: ال عمل إل بنية.

And from Al-Ridha (peace be upon him) that he said: **There is no deed except with intention.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 6, Section 1, Chapter 1, Hadith 7199

The term *shakilah* may refer to a person's nature or bent of mind, indicating that people's actions are a reflection of their characteristic mental and spiritual orientation. Another commentary describes action as being based on a person's mental attitude and shaped by the purity of their heart, thus drawing attention to the inner condition from which all conduct proceeds. Crucially, narrations attributed to Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) interpret *shakilah* as intention. This understanding establishes a direct link between a person's conduct and the underlying intention behind it.

The intention as the deed itself means that the true value and nature of an action are determined by the intention behind it. An action without intention is quickly forgotten, with only the spirit and life of the deed, which is the intention, remaining. The correctness of one's deeds is not about their abundance but rather their sincerity and truthfulness. This correctness is achieved through the fear of Allah, truthful intention, and good deeds. A sincere deed is one performed solely for Allah's sake, without desiring praise from anyone else.

Recording of Intended Good and Evil Deeds

أبي جعفر (عليه السلام): إن هلا تعالى اقل الدم (عليه السلام): أي آدم، جعلت لك أن من هم من ذريتك بسيئة لم تكتب. عليه، إفن عملها كتبت عليه سيئة، ومن هم منهم بحسنة إفن لم يعملها كتبت له حسنة، وإن هو عملها كتبت له عشر

From Abi Ja'far (peace be upon him): **Allah Almighty said to Adam (peace be upon him): O Adam, I have decreed for you that whoever among your offspring intends an evil deed, it will not be recorded against them, but if they do it, one evil deed will be recorded. And whoever intends a good deed but does not do it, one good deed will be recorded, and if they do it, ten good deeds will be recorded.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 1, Section 2, Chapter 6, Hadith 100

أبي عبد هلا (عليه السالم)، اقل: إن المؤمن ليهم ابلحسنة وال يعمل بها فتكتب له حسنة، وإن هو عملها كتبت له عشر حسنات، وإن المؤمن ليهم ابلسيئة أن يعملها فال يعملها فال تكتب عليه

From Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him), he said: **Indeed a believer intends a good deed but doesn't do it, so a good deed is recorded for him. And if he does it, ten good deeds are recorded for him. And indeed a believer intends an evil deed to do it but doesn't do it, so it is not recorded against him.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 1, Section 2, Chapter 6, Hadith 99

أبي عبد هلا (عليه السالم) اقل: إذا هم العبد ابلسيئة لم تكتب عليه، وإذا هم بحسنة كتبت له.

From Abi Abdullah (peace be upon him) said: **When a servant intends an evil deed, it is not recorded against them, and when they intend a good deed, it is recorded for them.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 1, Section 2, Chapter 6, Hadith 102

This underscores the immense value Allah places on righteous intentions.

The principle of disposition and intention can be applied to various situations. For instance, when asked about praying in synagogues and churches, Imam Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him) advised,

عن حكم بن الحكم اقل: سمعت أب عبد هلا (عليه السالم) يقول وسئل عن الصلاة في البيع والكنائس؟ رأيته ما أنظفها، قلت: أيصل فيها وإن كانوا يصلون فيها؟ فقال: نعم أما تقرأ القرآن " قل فقال: صل فيها قد. كل يعمل عل شاكلته فربكم أعلم بمن هو أهدى سبيال " صل إلى القبلة

وغير بهم ورواه الصدوق ابسناده عن صالح بن الحكم اقل: سئل الصادق (عليه السلام) وذكر نحوه. إال أنه ترك قوله. رأيتهما ما أنظفهما!، واقل في آخره. وصل إلى القبلة ودعهم قد

From Hakam bin Al-Hakam who said: I heard Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him) being asked about praying in synagogues and churches? He said: **Pray in them, I have seen them and how clean they are.** I said: Should one pray in them even if they pray there? He said: **Yes, haven't you read the Quran "Say: Everyone acts according to his own disposition; but your Lord knows best who is best guided in the path" [Quran 17:84]. Pray facing the qibla and ignore them.** Al-Saduq narrated it through his chain from Salih bin Al-Hakam who said: Al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) was asked, and mentioned similar to it, except that he omitted the words **"I have seen them and how clean they are!"** and said at the end: **Pray facing the qibla and leave them.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 5, Section 2, Chapter 13, Hadith 6148

This indicates that a believer's intention to worship Allah in a clean place, regardless of the differing practices of others, is acknowledged and guided by Allah.

7.2. Surah An-Nur, Quran 24:30–31: Lowering the Gaze and Guarding Modesty

Quran, Chapter 24, Verses 30–31, with the English rendering: **"Tell the believing men to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what they do. And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known**

what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed."

These verses address the principles of modesty, humility, and appropriate dress and behavior for both believing men and women. They emphasize the importance of self-control and the guarding of one's gaze and private parts to maintain dignity and purity in interactions.

Command for Believing Men (Quran 24:30):

The verse instructs believing men: **"Tell the believing men to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what they do."** (Quran 24:30)

- **Lowering the Gaze:** This command instructs men to avoid looking at things that are forbidden or considered private. It emphasizes avoiding looking at the private parts of others and generally casting down their gazes in humility.
- **Guarding Private Parts:** In this specific context, guarding private parts refers to protecting them from being looked at, rather than the general prohibition against fornication. This interpretation is attributed to Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (peace be upon him).
- **Purpose:** These instructions are presented as being "more decent and pure for them." The underlying purpose is to maintain the dignity of both men and women when they interact. Men are required to take the lead in respecting women by not engaging in or approving of any activity that objectifies or demeans a woman. This also involves observing a general philosophy of modesty in the heart and dress, wearing decent clothing, and avoiding activities and places that might lead them to witness what they should not.

و سئل الصادق عليه السلام: عن قول الله عز و جل: ﴿قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ﴾

فقال «كل ما كان في كتاب الله تعالى من ذكر حفظ الفرج فهو من الزنا إلا في هذا الموضع فإنه للحفظ من أن ينظر إليه.

Imam Jafar ibn Muhammad Al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) was asked about the saying of Allah (swt), the Exalted: **Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts; that is purer for them.** (Surah An-Nur, Quran 24:30).

Imam (peace be upon him) said: '**Every mention of guarding the private parts in the Book of Allah (swt), the Exalted, refers to guarding against fornication, except in this instance, where it refers to guarding them from being looked at.**'

— Man La Yahduruh al-Faqih (Vol. 1) by Shaykh Muhammad b. Ali al-Saduq, Book 1, Chapter 23, Hadith #235

Command for Believing Women (Quran 24:31):

The verse then extends similar instructions to believing women: **“And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof** [those relatives who fall within bounds of close relationship explained in the Quran]...” (Quran 24:31)

- **Lowering the Gaze:** Believing women are commanded to lower their gaze and refrain from looking at parts of men’s bodies that they are not permitted to see.
- **Guarding Modesty/Private Parts:** Women are also instructed to protect their private parts, except from those who are lawfully allowed, such as their husbands.
- **Display of Adornment:**
 - The verse states that women should **“and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof.”** This refers to beauty enhancements or adornments that a woman is allowed to display in public.
 - Interpretation of “what is apparent”: According to one interpretation, this includes items like clothes, kohl (eye makeup),

rings, henna on the palms, and the face. Another understanding suggests that anything below the scarf and besides the two bracelets should only be displayed to their husbands.

- The underlying idea is to protect a woman from being objectified or perceived solely as an object of a man's desire.
- **Drawing Veils (Khimar) Over Bosoms:** The verse instructs believing women to "**their headcovers over their chests.**" This refers to the obligation of covering the head and chest.
- **Broader Dress Code:** While specific to Quran 24:31, Surah Al-Ahzab, Verse 59 (Quran 33:59), also complements this by instructing believing women to "**draw the Jilbab over themselves,**" which signifies a loose outer garment.
- **Issues Highlighted in 24:31 Concerning Hijab:**
 1. Women should not reveal their beauties.
 2. Women should not stare or look at the opposite sex for sexual enjoyment.
 3. Women should cover their bareness from others.
 4. Women should avoid revealing their attractive features, even if they do not reveal their bodies.
- **Permitted Audiences for Adornment:** The verse continues to specify certain close relatives and other specific categories to whom a woman may reveal her adornment beyond what is apparent.

ويحفظوا فروجهم ذلك وسئل الصادق عليه السلام عن قول هلا عز وجل: قل للمؤمنين يغضوا من أبصارهم أزبك لهم فقال كل ما كان في كتاب هلا من ذكر حفظ الفرج فهو من الزان إلّا في هذا الموضع فإنه للحفظ من أن ينظر إليه

Al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) was asked about Allah's saying: "**Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them**" [Surah Nur 24:30]. He said: **Everywhere in Allah's Book where guarding private parts is mentioned, it refers to zin (adultery) except in this instance, where it means guarding against being looked at.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 1, Section 7, Chapter 1, Hadith 787

رسالة (المحكم والمتشابه) نقال من تفسير النعماني بسنده آلتی عن عیل بن عیل بن الحسین المرتضى في ويحفظوا فروجهم ذلك أزيك لهم معناه ال عليه السالم في قوله عز وجل: قل للمؤمنين يغضوا من أبصارهم، ينظر أحدكم إلى فرج أخيه المؤمن، أو يمكنه من النظر إلى فرجه ويحفظن فروجهن أي: ممن يلحقهن النظر كما جاء في حفظ ثم اقل: قل للمؤمنات يغضضن من أبصارهن. الفروج، افلنظر سبب إيقاع الفعل من الزان وغيره

Ali bin Al-Hussein Al-Murtadha in his treatise (Al-Muhkam wal-Mutashabih), citing from Tafsir Al-Nu'mani with his chain to Ali (peace be upon him) regarding Allah's saying: "**Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them**" [Quran 24:30], its meaning is that none of you should look at his believing brother's private parts, or enable others to look at his private parts. Then he said: "**And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts**" [Quran 24:31], **meaning: from those who might look at them, as mentioned regarding guarding private parts, for looking is a cause for committing zin and other acts.** Obligation Of Covering The Awrah And The Prohibition Of Looking At ...

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 1, Section 7, Chapter 1, Hadith 789

These verses collectively emphasize the importance of modesty, self-control, and dignity for both men and women in Islam. They aim to prevent inappropriate interactions and promote a society where individuals are respected for their character rather than being objectified. The instructions for both sexes to lower their gaze and guard their modesty are foundational to maintaining purity and ethical conduct.

8. Practical Implications for Muslims

The inner quality of modesty manifests outwardly, shaping a Muslim's behavior, interactions, and overall way of life.

1. **Behavioral and Psychological Regulation:** Modesty controls and organizes physical and psychological behavior in accordance with religious law and convention. It inspires individuals to act in ways pleasing to Allah, fostering accountability and sincere worship by recognizing His constant awareness.
2. **Dress and Appearance:**
 - **For Women:** Islam emphasizes modesty in dress through the code of *hijab*, which includes covering themselves and avoiding the public display of their beauty and charms. This is a command from Allah for believing women and an example set by the Prophet's wives, serving as a means of recognition and protection.
 - **For Men:** Men are also required to practice modesty in their behavior, cover their private parts, and refrain from looking at women with lust.
 - **General Conduct:** The emphasis on modesty extends to avoiding excessive vanity in clothing, such as wearing overly long or flowing garments.
3. **Interactions with the Opposite Sex:** Modesty and chastity are central concepts that limit the type of relationships and freedoms individuals have. Believers are encouraged to cast down their looks and guard their private parts, which is considered purer for them, promoting a culture of respect and chastity.
4. **Upholding Truth and Shariah:** It is crucial to understand that modesty should not hinder the pursuit or revelation of truth and matters of Shariah.

رسول الله ﷺ (صلي الله عليه وآله): قل الحق، ولا تأخذك في الله لومة لائم

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: '**Speak the truth, and let no one's blame for obeying Allah affect you.**'

— Hilyat al-Awliya, v. 1, p. 241

رسول الله ﷺ (صلي الله عليه وآله): عليكم بالصدق؛ فإنه باب من أبواب الجنة

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said:

'Truthfulness is incumbent upon you, for verily it is one of the doors of Paradise.'

— Tarikh Baghdad, p. 11, no. 82

الإمام علي (عليه السلام) : من استحيى من قول الحق فهو أحق

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: **'One who is ashamed of speaking the truth is a fool.'**

— Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 8650

5. **Upbringing of Children and Societal Impact:** Modesty is considered vital for the upbringing of virtuous children. Islam warns against immodesty, as it is believed that a person who engages in immodest behavior or stares at non-mahram individuals cannot contribute virtuous progeny to society.
6. **Consequences of Losing Modesty:** When Allah intends ruination for a person, He may take away their modesty. Losing modesty can lead to the loss of faith and the inability to give virtuous progeny to society. Insolence, the antithesis of modesty, is considered the beginning of hypocrisy, schism, and disbelief.

Modesty and the Coming of the Day of Judgment

مثل الرافلة في الزينة من غير أهلها كمثل ظلمة يوم القيامة لا نور لها

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: **A woman who shows her beauty to the public is like unto the dark of the Day of Judgment, with no light**

— Nahj Al-Fasahah

و روى الأصبغ بن نباتة عن أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام قال سمعته يقول: يظهر في آخر الزمان و اقتراب الساعة و هو شر الأزمنة نسوة كاشفات عاريات متبرجات من الدين داخلات في الفتن . مائلات إلى الشهوات مسرعات إلى اللذات مستحلات للمحرمات في جهنم خالدات .

Al-Asbagh ibn Nubatah narrated from Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) that he said: I heard him say: **In the last days and near the Hour, when it will be the worst of times, there will appear women who are uncovered, bare, and flaunting themselves.**

They will outwardly belong to the religion but will be immersed in trials, inclined toward desires, hastening toward pleasures, and making permissible what is forbidden. They will dwell in Hell forever.

— Man La Yahduru al-Faqih (Vol. 3) by Shaykh Muhammad b. Ali al-Saduq, Book 3, Chapter 12, Hadith #5

وعن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال: من بهت مؤمناً أو مؤمنة بما ليس فيه، بعثه الله عز وجل في طينة خبال، حتى يخرج مما قال قلت: وما طينة الخبال؟ قال: صديد يخرج من فروج المومسات.

It has been reported that Abu 'Abd Allah (a.s) said: **One who accuses a believing man or believing woman falsely will be raised on the Day of Judgment by Allah in a messy substance unless he unsays it.** The reporter asked, 'What is this messy substance?' **It is pus flowing from the genitals of the unchaste women,** the Imam (a.s) replied.

— Kitab al-Mumin by Husayn b. Said al-Ahwazi, Book 1, Chapter 8, Hadith #2

و كل عين باكية يوم القيامة إلا ثلاث أعين عين بكت من خشية الله و عين غضت عن محارم الله و عين باتت ساهرة في سبيل الله.

"All eyes will shed tears on the Day of Judgment except for three types of eyes: an eye that wept out of the fear of Allah (swt), an eye that was lowered (in modesty) from what Allah (swt) has forbidden, and an eye that stayed awake guarding in the cause of Allah (swt)."

9. Modesty as the Garment of Islam

The significance of modesty is further underscored by the Prophet's teaching that **"Islam is bare and its dress is modesty."** This analogy conveys that just as clothing covers and beautifies the physical body, modesty serves as an essential covering for the internal self and the entire framework of Islam. It protects the faith from moral degradation and adorns it with spiritual beauty.

This profound analogy implies:

1. **Essential Covering:** Just as clothing protects and beautifies the physical body, modesty serves as a moral and spiritual covering for Islam itself and for the believer. Without this "dress," Islam is presented as "bare" or "bare," signifying a state of incompleteness or vulnerability.
2. **Protection Against Internal Ugliness:** As a dress conceals private parts and external ugliness, modesty acts as a curtain against internal ugliness, preventing a person from engaging in indecency and safeguarding their inner purity and dignity.
3. **Integral to Faith:** The teaching underscores that modesty is not merely an optional virtue but is integral to the essence of Islam and faith. It is a defining quality without which faith is deemed incomplete or even non-existent.

10. Character as a Gift: Natural Disposition and Intention

الاعمال بالنية

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: **Actions depend on (are rewarded according to) intentions**

— Nahj Al-Fasahah

عن إسحاق بن عمار، عن أبي عبد هلالا (عليه السالم) اقل: إن الخلق منحة يمنحها هلالا خلقه، : فمنه سجية ومنه نية، قلت. أفيهما أفضل؟ اقل صاحب السجية هو مجبول ال يستطيع غيره، وصاحب النية يصبر عل الطاعة تصبرا فهو أفضلهما

From Ishaq ibn Ammar, from Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him) who said: **Character is a gift that Allah gives to His creation; some of it is natural disposition and some of it is intention.** I asked: Which is better? He said: **The one with natural disposition is inherently that way and cannot do otherwise, while the one with intention perseveres in obedience through patience, so the latter is better.**

— Wasail al-Shia Vol. 12, Section 1, Chapter 104, Hadith 15917

محمد بن سنان عن إسحاق بن عمار قال: سمعت أبا عبد الله عليه السلام يقول: الخلق منحة يمنحها الله من شاء من خلقه فمنه سجية ومنه بنية فقلت: فأيهما أفضل؟ قال: صاحب النية أفضل فان صاحب السجية هو المجبور على الامر الذي لا يستطيع غيره وصاحب النية هو الذي يتصبر على الطاعة فيصبر فهذا أفضل.

Muhammad ibn Sinan narrated from Ishaq ibn 'Ammar who said, "I heard Aba 'Abdillah (a) say, '[Good] character is a gift that Allah bestows to whomever He wills from His creation. Some of it is a natural disposition and some of it is [adopted and] practiced intentionally.' I asked, 'Which of these two is better?' He said, 'The one who intends it is better. For verily the one who has a natural disposition is compelled to act that way and cannot behave in any other manner, whereas the one who voluntarily intends it makes himself remain patient in obedience [to Allah] and perseveres, so he is better.'"

— Kitab al-Zuhd by Husayn b. Said al-Ahwazi, Book 2, Chapter 3, Hadith #14

This narration distinguishes between a natural disposition that is ingrained and an intentional effort that is sustained through patience. The latter is considered better because it involves persevering in obedience.

11. Conclusion

Modesty (*al-Haya*) is presented as an overarching virtue in Islam, deeply integrated with faith and essential for personal purity, social order, and spiritual well-being. It is the natural disposition (*khuluq*) of Islam, the garment of the religion, and an inner ethical quality that dictates outward conduct.

The foundational hadith—**“Verily every religion has a natural disposition and the natural disposition of Islam is modesty”**—establishes modesty as the defining characteristic of the faith. It is linked inseparably to *iman*: **“There is no faith for the one who has no modesty.”** It is distinguished into the praiseworthy modesty of intellect, which is knowledge, and the blameworthy modesty of foolishness, which is ignorance. Practically, it shapes behavior, dress, interactions, worship, and societal well-being. It fosters a life of dignity, chastity, and obedience to Allah.

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