**Modesty (Haya)**



**29.45.** Recite and convey to them what is revealed to you of the Book, and establish the Prayer in conformity with its conditions. Surely, the Prayer restrains from all that is indecent and shameful, and all that is evil. Surely God's remembrance is the greatest (of all types of worship, and not restricted to the Prayer). God knows all that you do.(1)



**24.30.** Tell the believing men that they should restrain their gaze (from looking at the women whom it is lawful for them to marry, and from others' private parts), and guard their private parts and chastity. This is what is purer for them. God is fully aware of all that they do.(2)



**24.31.** And tell the believing women that they (also) should restrain their gaze (from looking at the men whom it is lawful for them to marry, and from others' private parts), and guard their private parts, and that they should not display their charms except that which is revealed of itself; and let them draw their veils over their bosoms, and (tell them) not to display their charms to any save their husbands, or their fathers (and grandfathers, and both paternal and maternal uncles), or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands (both their own and step-sons and grandsons), or their brothers (and foster- and step-brothers), or the sons of their brothers, or the sons of their sisters, or the Muslim women and the women of good conduct with whom they associate, or those (slave-girls) their right hands possess, or the male attendants in their service free of sexual desire, or children that are as yet unaware of femininity. Nor should they stamp their feet (i. e. act in such a manner as to) draw attention to their charms (and arouse the passion of men). And, O believers, turn to God all together in repentance that you may attain true prosperity.(3)

**HADITH**

357. Abu Hurayra, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that **the Messenger of Allah**, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Belief has over seventy—or over sixty—branches. The best of which is the words, La ilaha illa’llah (There is no deity but Allah), and the least of which is removing an obstruction from the road. Modesty is a branch of belief.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Iman, 3; Sahih Muslim, Iman, 58).(4)

 As reported by Imran ibn Husayn, the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said: “Modesty only brings good.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Adab, 77; *Sahih Muslim*, Iman, 60).(5)

 **Modesty (*haya*)** or a sense of shame, like belief, prevents a person from committing evil and deters them from wrongdoing. Thus, modesty only brings good to a human being and it quickly becomes evident that it is altogether good. That is to say, irrespective of its source, a sense of modesty only brings goodness for the human being, from beginning to end. Unfortunately, there is an attempt in our day to debilitate this elevated feeling. Those who make an effort to show immodesty as a requirement of modernity and who dismiss it as nonsense, perpetrate the greatest evil against the human being. By corrupting their sense of shame and responsibility, they inhibit a person’s endeavor to perfect themselves.

1. **Allah** has cautioned both **Muslim women** and **Muslim** men separately concerning modesty and has openly revealed the manner in which they are to act in this regard:

Tell the believing men that they should restrain their gaze (from looking at the women whom it is lawful for them to marry, and from others’ private parts), and guard their private parts and chastity. This is what is purer for them. Allah is fully aware of all that they do. (an-Nur 24:30)

While this verse addresses believing men specifically, the verse below is directed at believing women:

And tell the believing women that they (also) should restrain their gaze (from looking at the men whom it is lawful for them to marry, and from others’ private parts), and guard their private parts, and that they should not display their charms except that which is revealed of itself. (an-Nur 24:31)

Literally meaning reserve and shame, *haya* in the Islamic sense refers to fear of Allah, refraining from saying or doing anything improper or indecent, to describe one who, out of fear and awe of Allah, seeks to avoid displeasing Him. Indeed, every human being has an innate, Divinely bestowed sense of modesty. However, when this instinctive feeling of modesty is nourished and developed with the modesty at the essence of the religion of Islam, it forms the greatest safeguard against shameful or indecent acts. Alone, and under specific circumstances, it may be diminished or even utterly lost. If this innate feeling of shame is not combined with awareness coming from belief and expressed in verses like: “*Does he (who would impede the servant in his Prayer) not know that Allah sees (all that people do)*?” (al- Alaq 96:14) and consciousness of Allah’s constant oversight: “*Allah is ever watchful over you*” (an-Nisa 4:1), it cannot last long, for both its existence and its continuation depends on belief. The modesty of every human being changes in accordance with their degree of belief. Needless to say, just as Prophets are examples in every other regard, they are examples for humankind with respect to modesty also. Despite his body being afflicted with uncountable wounds and illnesses for years on end, Prophet Ayyub (Job), out of his modesty, did not entreat Allah to heal him, but instead was content with presenting his situation to his Lord and called out to Him, saying: “*Truly, affliction has visited me (so that I can no longer worship You as I must); and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful*” (al-Anbiya 21:83). When, according to one narration, Allah’s Messenger was at Al-Aqsa Mosque during the Ascension, and Archangel Jabrail asked him, “O Allah’s Messenger, ask the spirits of all the Prophets if there is any deity worthy of worship other than Allah,” the Prophet replied, “I will not ask them, because I have no doubt (as to the answer).” He thus demonstrated exactly what true belief and modesty entails.

[**MODESTY, SHYNESS, AND FEELING ASHAMED OF WRONG ACTS**](http://www.neicc.net/modesty-shyness-and-feeling-ashamed-of-wrong-acts/)

*Haya*, an instinctive feeling of shame combined with the modesty based on Islam, forms the greatest safeguard against shameful or indecent behavior.

**Prophet Muhammad**, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Every religion has a moral code. And the moral code of **Islam** is *haya*,” thereby emphasizing the importance of this feeling in the life of a Muslim. The following hadith also explains this crucial characteristic. ‘Abdullah ibn Umar reported that the Prophet came upon a man who advised his brother not to be too shy. The Prophet said, “Stop; *haya* comes from faith.” Another hadith says,

“Faith has seventy rays. The highest degree is to say *La ilaha illallah*, (“There is no deity other than God”) and the least degree is to remove something harmful from the road. And *haya* is one por- tion of faith.”25 This hadith was explained by Ibn al-Athir thus:

“Despite the fact that it is an inborn natural feeling, *haya* can al- so be gained and developed  with practice. *Haya* keeps one away from sins; it comes between a person and their sins. This means it has a function in a person’s faith. The hadith mentions that it is ‘one portion of faith.’ Faith includes the action of following God’s commands and avoiding that which He has forbidden. Thus, when *haya* causes a person to avoid sins, it becomes like a portion of faith.”26

*Haya* demands awareness of God’s Presence and thus the practic- ing of self-control or self-supervision. According to a narration of Ibn Mas’ud, the Prophet said, “Be fully conscious of God, as God requires you to be.” When someone asked,  “O  God’s  Messenger!  How  does God require us to be conscious?” He answered, “Whoever protects his head and what is in it, his stomach and the organs attached to it, who- ever is not attracted to the ornaments of the world, and does not for- get that death and decay follow has the *haya* that God requires.”27

To “protect the head” in this sense means to use the brain and its power to think in positive ways. The other organs should also be “protected” by avoiding forbidden things, not eating prohibit- ed foods, and not telling lies or using unpleasant words. The “or- gans connected to the stomach” are the sex organs, which must be protected by avoiding extramarital sexual contact. Thinking more broadly, hands and feet can also be seen as being “connected to the stomach.” So it can be said that the hadith teaches us to keep

the hands, arms, feet, and so on from committing sins. This is the meaning of “shyness,” or *haya*, in the sense God requires.

The feeling originating from faith which we refer to here must be distinguished from other characteristics that make a person tim- id, passive, or unwilling to step forward to fulfill their responsibili- ties. For example, it is not good for women to hang back out of “shyness” when it comes to education. If they do not have the op- portunity to learn from other women, they should not hesitate to ask a man who is considered knowledgeable in religious matters or in other areas. Indeed, if there is a religious question they need to know and they do not ask a man out of “shyness,” it will cause them to fail to accomplish their religious duties correctly.

Our Prophet personally answered the particular questions of women, and also had his wife Aisha teach them in his place. Aisha had these notable words to say about women who showed no shame in seeking religious knowledge: “What good women the Ansar women were. Their bashfulness did not prevent them from learning their religion well.”28

One who wishes to be granted felicity in this world and the next must strive to have *adab* and *haya.* A person who has a sense of *haya* fears to  do wrong not only where other people can see them, but also when they are alone. Such a person has a healthy

spirit and a peaceful conscience. We can recognize them by their geniality, their humility, and their trustworthiness.

Qurra ibn Iyas said, “We were together with the Prophet. Someone spoke of *haya*: ‘O God’s Messenger, is *haya* part of reli- gion?’ they asked. The Prophet’s answer was, ‘*Haya* is the comple- tion of religion. Without a doubt *haya*, curbing the tongue, and chastity all arise from faith. These increase a person’s rewards in the next life, and lessen desire for the things of this world. But that which is given in the next life is greater than that which is lessened in this world.’”29

A person with *haya* does not have faults like lying, cheating, being dishonest, stealing, bribing others, holding a grudge, or slandering others. When someone loses the veil of *haya*, they no longer fear the wrath of God or feel shame about such things as stealing from the poor; such a person would not even be moved by the tears of the victims of hunger or disaster.

*Haya* indicates the strength of a person’s faith and their level of *adab*. *Haya* is the foundation of goodness and the basic element of every type of good. It is a barricade against sins that can destroy the heart. God Almighty says in the Qur’an,

Say, “My Lord has made unlawful only indecent, shameful deeds (like fornication, adultery, prostitution, and homosexual- ity), whether those of them that are apparent and committed openly or those that are committed secretly; and any act explic- itly sinful;  and insolence and offenses (against the Religion, life, personal property, others’ chastity, and mental and bodily health), which is openly unjustified; and (it is also forbidden) that you associate partners with God for which He has sent no authority at all, and that you speak against God the  things about which you have no sure knowledge. (A’raf 7:33)

In short, a **Muslim** should be extremely cautious in thoughts and acts, always guarding their tongue from speaking  wrongly, their eyes from looking at that which is prohibited, their ears from listening to the private conversations of others, and all their limbs from committing wrong acts.(6)

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) : His Modesty

In society, each person has a window—status—through which he or she looks out to see others and be seen. If the window is built higher than their real stature, people try to make themselves appear taller through vanity and assumed airs. If the window is set lower than their real stature, they must bow in humility in order to look out, see, and be seen. Humility is the measure of one’s greatness, just as vanity or conceit is the measure of low character. [1]

The Messenger had a stature so high that it could be said to touch the “roof of the Heavens.” Therefore, he had no need to be seen. Whoever travels in the realm of virtues sees him before every created being, including angels. In the words of Said Nursi, the Messenger is the noble aide-de-camp of God. He lowered himself to stay in the world for a while so that people might find the way to God. Since he is the greatest of humanity, he is the greatest in modesty. This follows the well-knowing adage: “The greater one is, the more modest one is.”

The Messenger never regarded himself as greater than anybody else. The only way he could be distinguished from his Companions was by his radiant face and attractive person. He lived and dressed like the poorest people and sat and ate with them, just as he did with slaves and servants. Once a woman saw him eating and remarked: “He eats like a slave.” The Messenger replied: “Could there be a better slave than me? I am a slave of God.” [2]

One time when he was serving his friends, a bedouin came in and shouted: “Who is the master of this people?” The Messenger answered in such a way that he introduced himself while expressing a substantial principle of Islamic leadership and public administration: “The master of the people is the one who serves them.” Ali says that among people the Messenger was one of them. When he and Abu Bakr reached Quba while emigrating to Madina, some Madinese who did not know what the Prophet looked like tried to kiss Abu Bakr’s hands. The only external sign distinguishing one man from the other was that Abu Bakr seemed older than the Messenger.

While the **Muslims** were building their mosque in Madina, the Prophet carried two sun-dried bricks; everyone else carried one. [3] While digging the trench to defend Madina, the Companions bound a stone around their stomachs to quell their hunger; the Messenger bound two. When a man seeing him for the first time began trembling out of fear, because he found the Prophet’s appearance so awe-inspiring, the Messenger calmed him: “Brother, don’t be afraid. I am a man, like you, whose mother used to eat dry bread.” [4] Another time, an insane woman pulled him by the hand and said: “Come with me and do my housework.” He complied with her request. [5] ‘A’isha reported that the Messenger patched his clothes, repaired his shoes, and helped his wives with the housework. [6]

Although his modesty elevated him to the highest rank, he regarded himself as an ordinary servant of God: “No one enters Paradise because of his or her deeds.” When asked if this was true for him as well, he replied that he could enter Paradise only through the Mercy of God.

His Companions always asked for his advice or permission before any action. Once ‘Umar asked his permission to go for the minor pilgrimage. The Messenger allowed this, and even asked ‘Umar to include him in his supplications. ‘Umar rejoiced so much that later he would say: “If the worlds had been granted to me that day, I wouldn’t have felt the same happiness.”

Humility was one of the Prophet’s greatest qualities. As he attained a higher rank each day, he increased in humility and servanthood to God. His servanthood is prior to his Messengership, as seen in the declaration of faith: “I bear witness that there is no god but God; I also bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.” He preferred being a Prophet-slave to being a Prophet-king.

One day, while sitting with Archangel Gabriel, the Messenger mentioned that he had not eaten for several days. As soon as he said this, another angel appeared and asked: “O Messenger of God, God greets you and asks if you wish to be a Prophet-king or a Prophet-slave?” Gabriel advised him to be humble toward his Master. As humility was a fundamental part of his character, the Messenger replied: “I wish to be a Prophet-slave.” [7] God praises his servanthood and mentions him as a servant in several verses: When the servant of God stood up in prayer to Him, they (the jinn) were well nigh upon him in swarms (to watch his prayer) (72:19), and: If you are in doubt concerning that which We have sent down on Our servant, then bring a sura of the like thereof, and call your witnesses beside God if you are truthful (2:23).

After Khadija and Abu Talib died, the Messenger became convinced that he could no longer expect any victory or security in Makka. So before things became too critical, he sought a new base in Ta’if. As the townspeople proved to be quite hostile, he felt that he had no support and protection. But then God manifested His Mercy and honored him with the Ascension, raising him to His Presence. While narrating this incident, God mentions him as His servant to show that he deserves Ascension through his servanthood: Glory be to him, Who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing (17:1).

Humility is the most important aspect of the Messenger’s servanthood. He declared: “God exalts the humble and abases the haughty.” ‘Ali describes the Messenger in the following terms:

He was the most generous person in giving, and the mildest and the foremost in patience and perseverance. He was the most truthful in speech, the most amiable and congenial in companionship, and the noblest of them in family. Whoever sees him first is stricken by awe, but whoever knows him closely is deeply attracted to him. Whoever attempts to describe him says: ‘I have never seen the like of him.’(7)

[1] Said Nursi, Letters 2,315.
[2] Haythami, Majma’, 9:21.
[3] Bukhari, 1:111; Muslim, 2:65; Semhudi, Wafa’, 1:237; Ibn Sa’d, 1: 240.
[4] Ibn Maja, “At’ýma,” 30; Haythami, 9:20.
[5] Qadi ‘Iyad, al-Shifa’, 1:131, 133.
[6] Tirmidhi, Shama’il, 78; Ibn Hanbal, 6:256.
[7] Ibn Hanbal, 2:231; Haythami, 9:18.
[8] Hindi, Kanz al-‘Ummal, 3:113; Haythami, 10:325.

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