



Modesty and Degradation Between Intellect and Sharia

The hardest choice between the
delicious fruits of human
behavior and its bitter spadices

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Title

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Introduction



What do you think, should we be modest or immodest? At first blush, this question seems strange; however, I want you to be patient with me so that I can recount to you what handles your inquiry and puts an end to your feeling of wonder, especially if you know that we, people, have been tossed about by those two titles. Between those two, we walk up and down like someone walking barefoot on shards of glass. He who proceeds through them at a steady pace, taking himself to the safety shores will inevitably belong to the first category. However, the one who encounters such a great number of shards will drag his bad luck staggering along enfeebled by his wounds. He will perish or almost perish, according to the number of those deadly shards that lodge into his feet. This man will be classified into the second category.

Lexically, the word modesty means decency and refraining from sins and misdeeds. He who purports to modesty has to always take his death into consideration, renounce the pleasures of this worldly life, control his head and mind as well as his belly and privy parts against the unlawful, and remember his death and disintegration. The lack of modesty is just the opposite.



There are two types of people: the first type is those who are ashamed of disgrace, desisting from sinning at old age, and having fear of Allah when they are alone with themselves in the unseen. The second type, which represents the majority, is those who are addressed by the mouthpiece of reason, common sense, and religion: If you do not have modesty, do whatever you want to.

Modesty is a shield and lack of modesty is an abyss



Modesty is a characteristic expresses the fear of exposing deficiencies, and guides man in the right destination that preserves his dignity and promotes his human entity. In other words, modesty is refraining from committing prohibited things for fear of dispraise and blame.

In this account, modesty is an initial commitment to the prevention of plights and scurrying to bring about reform and performing good deeds. He who has no modesty nothing but damage and plights may be expected from him, but the one who abides by the teachings of the heaven will dress himself in the gown of modesty and knows that Allah the Almighty is always watching him and



thus he distances himself from sins and wrongdoings which tear apart safeguards and remove blessings.

A sober-minded man is the one who dresses himself in a gown of modesty wherever he goes. He is modest in his clothes; he neither shows his beauties to strangers, nor wears (libas ushshuhrah) clothing of extravagance, softness, and temptation. He is modest in his way of walking; he neither hurries nor jumps. Rather, he walks at a steady pace, having prestige and dignity. He is modest in his words and his discussions with others as he neither shouts nor interrupts; rather he listens and answers soberly and calmly. He is modest in his dealings as he does not cheat or infringe the rights of others, particularly orphans, minors, and people with disabilities; instead, he deals with them kindly and passionately trying to protect his rights as well as the rights of others without denying these rights, violating them, and infringing them. He is modest in eating and drinking as he usually eats from what is nearer to him on the tablecloth, does not ask for foods away from him, refrains from eating on the street, and praises Allah for everything. He is always contented, thankful to the Creator and the creature, moderate in all his affairs, too far from gluttony, triviality, and impudence. To be modest is a great attribute and a praised position that cannot be attained except by a patient one who can tame himself to be benevolent and

charitable. It is an important attribute, which is in need of a dignified and proud soul that gives, but does not take, and when it takes, it only takes as much as it needs to be able to perform kind acts.

Modesty prevents losing face

The noble man preserves his dignity and cherishes his prestige, whereas the mean one has neither dignity nor prestige. In fact, no good can be expected from such a person. Thus, modesty is a remarkable attribute in the chase and generous people, whereas the lack of modesty is a mark of shame on the forehead of impetuous and mean people. A poet says:

If you have no fear of what nights may do

And feel no shame, then do whatever you want to

I swear by Allah, there is no good in life and years

When modesty from among people disappears

Man leads a good life as long as he is modest,

For the stem lives on as long as the bark protects it

As a manifestation of His mercy, Allah the Exalted addresses the wrongdoers among His servants in a Hadith Qudsi (Sacred Hadith), "My servant does not treat me fairly; when he supplicates me, I am ashamed of turning him down, whereas he disobeys me without any feeling of shame." (*Al-Dailami*, *Irshadul-Quloub*, vol. 1, p. 112)

The Modest is one of Allah's attributes; therefore, He, glory be to Him, loves the one who manifests the attribute of modesty in his behaviors, words, movements, and non-movements. The dignity is the dearest thing that man possesses in this life. Allah the Exalted has honored man, regarded him as more sacred than the Holy Kaaba, created him in the best stature, and bestowed mind, wisdom, and knowledge on him.

Such a creature has to maintain his human qualities preventing them from disappearance and decline. This process is the separating line between man's humanity and animalism, and can only be maintained by modesty. Modesty is to be satisfied with little and not to extend your hand to a mean person lest he reject you and insult you in the presence of enemies and friends. Man's living in poverty while preserving his modesty and dignity is better and dearer than living in richness under disgrace, contempt,

crushing of dignity, humiliation, and defeat. Man is nothing without his humanity, pride, and dignity. When these noble attributes are deleted from the pages of his life, these pages will be barren and lifeless, where neither good nor bounty is expected from them.

Let us learn modesty from our father Adam



Allah the Almighty says, ***“so when they tasted of the tree, their private parts became apparent to them and they began to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden”*** (Al-A'raf: 22). At that time, Adam did not have a sufficient experience in life; he had not been caught in the traps and deceptions of the Devil yet, and he had not known his lying and misleading. He had not been able to believe that Satan, after all his false and solemn oaths, would lay traps in his way: ***“And he swore to them both: Most surely I am a sincere adviser to you.”*** No sooner had they tasted of the forbidden tree than their private parts were exposed and their clothing of paradise, which is the clothing of the divine dignity, was stripped off. When they found themselves undressed, they both began to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden, despite the fact that there was no one with them to see them undressed. Their being ashamed of each other required them to cover themselves, even though they were married to each other. By my life, this is the acme of modesty and decency.



Refusal of humiliation, modesty, and decency are noble attributes that attract every zealous believer, as opposed to subservience, impudence, and shamelessness to which every grave sane person is disinclined owing to the adverse effects of these dispraised attributes on individuals and society. In this way, the prophets and their successors were able to reach the pinnacles of dignity by means of their modesty, decency, and keeping away from trifle and untruthful words and actions. Rather, they were living models of humbleness, gravity, and veneration that enter into the hearts without asking permission because these attributes are attractive not only to the people of religions, but also to everyone who deals humanely with others. Meanwhile, the one with self-esteem always keeps away from an impetuous and foolish person because the latter does not harm himself only, but he may harm his friends, companions, and those who are under his protection such as his family, children, and dependents. The immodest person brings shame on society and humanity and no one deals with him except those who are similar to him, according to the saying, "A birds of a feather flock together," which confirms that people who are alike tend to stick together. Therefore, the nature of a person with self-esteem and decency is inconsistent with that of a lowly and dissolute person and getting them together is as impossible as bringing two contradictories together.

Only those who tasted the sweetness of glory and dignity and were burned with the fire of humiliation and disgrace can understand this meaning.

Did Adam commit a sin?

The Islamic sources, both **naqli** (revealed knowledge) and **aqli** (rational knowledge) tell us that the prophets do not commit sins, and that the position of leading and guiding people is not given to those who commit sins and wrongdoings.

We know that Adam is one of the divine prophets, and on this basis, all that which was stated in the Qur'an about other prophets to whom disobedience was ascribed means **tark al-alawla**, which is the failure to choose what is more appropriate and right owing to the fact that prophets' disobedience is inconceivable.

Modesty is a prominent characteristic in the personalities of prophets. It is impossible for him who has such a characteristic to commit an absolute sin, as the faculty of modesty deposited in his proud and sublime soul prevents him from committing sins such as drinking alcohol, adultery, injustice and other vices that other people may commit.

According to what it is deducted from life histories and narrations, the moral dealing with the Creator and the creature instilled in the

soul of those who are associated with the heaven may unequivocally show that the prophets had reached such high ranks of faith that enabled them to stay away from absolute sins. This state is undoubtedly the fruit of modesty and chastity. For this reason, all of the prophets are characterized as follows: their bodies are tired because of their frequent worship and the hardships of conveying the message of Allah, while the people are at ease from them because of their sociability with friends and enemies. The one who has these two characteristics will inevitably sit on the throne of modesty, because he will please the people, and most importantly, he will please the Lord of people, which is the purpose of creation. The ultimate knowledge, understanding, and wisdom require that the will should be associated with good work to achieve happiness for human beings in both this world and the hereafter.

Types of modesty

To feel ashamed of Allah is to obey His commands and refrain from His prohibitions, whereas to be ashamed of people is to give everyone his right and refrain from infringing on people's rights securing the safety of their reputations and properties. The modest person can only be characterized by these two attributes

after he has worn the garment of modesty as a protective shield for his own self. It has been said that a person cannot give what he does not have, and the one who does not have modesty within himself cannot reflect it when dealing with his companions and with his creator as well. Based on that, modesty can be divided into three types:

1. Modesty towards Allah: it is to be ashamed of Allah in secret and in public through complying with His commands and refraining from His prohibitions. He who does not feel ashamed of Allah in public does not feel ashamed of Him in secret. The best type of modesty is to be modest towards Allah. This attribute was embodied by the prophet (Allah's blessings and peace be upon him and his progeny), as one of his companions said, "The Prophet was shyer than a virgin in seclusion, if he saw something that he disliked, we would see it on his face." (*Al-Mustadrak*, vol. 8, p. 465, H. 10024)
2. Modesty towards people: it is refraining from harming people and desisting from saying ugly things openly. There is nothing good in a shameless person. How can goodness be expected from one who does not protect his women's honor with a veil, does not fear his creator, and from his evil no one is safe.

3. Man's modesty towards himself: modesty keeps filling man with chastity and urging him to leave sins and wrongdoings even in seclusion out of feeling ashamed of himself. He who does something in secret and feels ashamed of doing it in public will regard himself as a worthless and lowly person. He will underestimate himself, a matter that is regarded as hidden hypocrisy. Man's modesty towards himself is one of the virtues owing to the fruit of belief that he conceals. It behooves man to be ashamed of Allah in secret as much as he is ashamed of people in public.

Results of modesty

Truly, the one who is characterized by modesty will reap the good fruits of it. He keeps enjoying a good reputation among his peers, making his way successfully amid the surrounding social noise of controversy, conflicts, and quarrel over the wreckage of the worldly life and the trivia of strife, in view of the fact that the chaste person is usually immune to them. Such a person may be the judge on whom the conflicting parties agree to resolve differences among them. People often resort to the wise person in order to resolve their disputes. His rule is effective for all parties for the common good without bias towards a group, a party, or a clan, because he is in no need of these names and titles, and how

can he be anything rather than that while he is rich in soul and nature? He who has such attributes will always intend to be in the right in all his actions regardless of any other considerations.

It is so great to safeguard the stomach and private parts from the forbidden, which is one of the outstanding qualities of modesty. Who does that will be satisfied with the sustenance that Allah specified for him after his quest and his movement to earn a good living and to live a decent life. He keeps enjoying the treasure of satisfaction, because he does not need any one of people in general and any one of mean people in particular. Rather, the other people huddle around him materially or morally. In fact, the habitual position of the noble and chaste person is to be a leading personality in social relations, because people usually feel safe with the chaste and devout person and entrust him with their properties and honor, but they do not do that with the greedy and dissolute one. The chaste person often leads a pleasant, peaceful, and content life, which is far from the concerns of fear, greed, and avidity. He spreads goodness and happiness wherever he goes. Here are some other good fruits that yield from his blessed life:

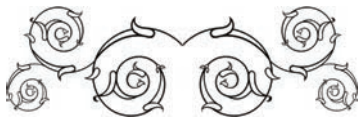
1. Modesty is a way to do what is good and beautiful, because modesty yields nothing but goodness for the modest person and his society. It is a means of doing every beautiful act.

2. Modesty hides faults, for whoever is clothed with the garment of modesty, his faults are hidden from people.
3. Modesty is adornment and brilliance, for it does not exist in anything but that it adorns it and it shines like the shining of modesty in a modest person.
4. Modesty prevents the modest person from performing ugly actions and helps him rise above all nonsense and trivial things, yearn for good actions, please viewers, and attract the hearts of lovers.
5. Modesty results in safeguarding the stomach and private parts from the forbidden. It is a state of moderation in them without any infringement on the rights of others. The origin of chivalry is modesty and the fruit of modesty is chastity.
6. Modesty leads to docility, clemency, fear of Allah in secret and in public, happy mien, forgiveness, love for people, thinking well of them, praising them, refraining from slandering any one of them, and avoiding evil, wrongdoing and aggression.

One of the stories that history narrates to us is that Imam Husain (peace be upon him) went one day to his orchard with his companions. In the orchard, there was a servant called Safi. When he got close to the orchard, Imam Husain saw the servant sitting and eating bread. Imam Husain looked to him

and hid himself behind a palm tree. The servant cut the bread into two halves, throwing one half to the dog and eating the other half. When he met him, the Imam said, "O Safi, acquit me of what I have done, because I entered your orchard without your permission." Then, the servant said, "You say this out of your virtue, generosity, and glory." Imam, then, said, "I saw you throwing half a loaf to the dog and eating the other half, so what does this mean?" The boy answered, "This dog looked at me while I was eating, and I felt ashamed of him. This dog guards your orchard from enemies; therefore we ate from your sustenance together. Here, Imam Husain cried and said, "I have emancipated you for the sake of Allah the Almighty, and I have granted you two thousand dinars of my own free will." The servant then said, "As you have emancipated me, I will stay to serve in your orchard." Imam Husain replied, "He who says something should confirm it with actions. I have entered your orchard without your permission; therefore, I have ratified my words and granted the orchard to you. However, some companions of mine have come here to eat some fruits and ripe dates, so please host them, and overwhelm them with your hospitality for my sake so that I return your favor on the Day of Judgment. May Allah bless you for your good behavior and politeness." Then, the servant said, "Since you have bestowed

the orchard on me, I have dedicated it to your companions and followers." (*Al-Mustadrak*, adapted, vol. 7, p. 120, hadith 8006). This story tells us that modesty brings about abounding goodness to the modest and to the other members of the community. Thus, owing to the blessing of modesty, the servant was released from bondage for the sake of Allah and became rich. Furthermore, because of his modesty, the servant did not take possession of the orchard exclusively for himself and for his family after his death; instead, he dedicated it to the Imam Husain's companions and followers. Thus, he gave priority to the public interest over his personal interest. What a blessed characteristic it is that brings a great benefit for the one who has it and for his relatives and friends.



Dispraised modesty

Whatever we talk about modesty and its positive role in renovating the existing social relations on the basis of justice and equity, the beauty of modesty manifests itself in some special resources, which relate to the vital needs of decent living without overkill or negligence within the benefits of individual and group in the cohesive social fabric. The one who is characterized as such enjoys all the requirements of pleasant life without infringing on others' rights. Nevertheless, if modesty became a bleeding wound, which is wide open to devour more, it would turn to dispraised modesty functioning as a cancerous gland that should be eliminated. With modesty, rights can be reserved; therefore, it cannot be a reason for denying the rights of others. In this context, the following negative situations can be monitored:

1. Modesty in seeking sustenance: because of modesty, one may refrain from claiming his rights, thereby preventing a living for himself and his dependents and creating a severe and difficult life for the people in his care who desperately need to live in dignity. With his foolish behavior, he deprives himself and his dependent children and women of their rights to live in the minimum

subsistence and chastity, and turns the virtue of modesty to a vice knowingly or unknowingly.

2. Modesty in asking about the rulings of religion: This type of modesty may deprive a person of learning about the religious rulings, a matter that may lead him to fall into the pitfalls of violating Sharia, particularly with regard to matrimony, major ritual impurity, menstruation, postpartum, and other matters upon which a lot of worship, transactions and other social benefits depend. His reluctance to learn about the religious rulings within these issues on the pretext of modesty is in fact slaughtering of modesty on the threshold of sin, which is contrary to the purpose of modesty that aims to clarify the rulings and adhere to the straight way of Sharia in preparation for happy life far from the disturbances of passion and the mazes of death.
3. Modesty in telling the truth: he who feels ashamed of saying the truth is a fool. This manifests itself in refraining from telling the truth out of being ashamed of an opponent because of family relationship, friendship, or a special interest. This act may lead to shedding innocent blood or looking down on the right of minors and people with disabilities. Being ashamed of telling the truth is

tantamount to supporting and bringing out vanity at the expense of truth, justice, and fairness. While doing this, he thinks that he is doing well, unaware of the fact that what he is doing is nothing but foolishness, because he wants to benefit others, but he actually harms them.

Things that lead to lack of modesty

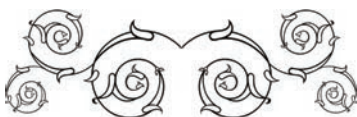
Lack of modesty is the very same impudence and boldness in committing ugly deeds and remaining indifferent toward committing religious, rational, and even customary prohibitions. Impudence, in this sense, is a dispraised quality that sound tempers hate, because the one who has this quality has put on the face of brazenness and cynicism. Furthermore, he began transgressing the limits of Allah the Exalted such as overt fast breaking in front of people in the month of Ramadan, drinking alcohol and its consequent ugly deeds such as harming and trespassing people, harassing the honor of their families, hurting neighbors, and other forbidden things. He who dares to disobey Allah the Exalted openly will definitely infringe on the rights of others without scruples of religion or conscience. His goal is to achieve the benefits that he aspires to by whatever means necessary, even at the expense of others. This kind of people can be seen from time to time in governmental departments,

workplaces, waiting lines where people stand waiting for their administrative transactions, ticket reservation, buying bread, getting food substances, or the like. Impudence, in this sense, is an actual source of concern and a real epicenter of corruption that should be eliminated in various ways to provide a quiet and appropriate environment for the rest of the society so that they enjoy their rights and carry out their duties without disturbances that may roil the atmosphere of freedom which preserve the rights of individuals within the social structure. He who usually resorts to impudence in dealing with others has accustomed himself to bad habits and traditions such as:

1. Asking people to meet his needs,
2. Committing sins repeatedly, especially in public,
3. Satisfying his greed and gluttony.

If he wants to refrain from such bad habits and to restrain his soul from falling into them due to their bad consequences that await him, which are in any case not in his favor, he has to be bashful and ask only those who deserve to be asked to fulfill his needs. He should ask the generous ones who save his honor, dignity, and reputation among the people. He also has to rein in the evil desires inside himself and unleash the desires of goodness and charity to be regarded as a charitable person who does good to

others instead of being a grumbling needy person. However, if he cannot be a charitable person, he has to grasp the handhold of contentment, as it is an inexhaustible treasure, as stated in the prophetic tradition. By doing so, he can eliminate the reasons that lead him to commit sins such as greed and gluttony, and he can also eliminate the sins themselves, because the content soul is satisfied with what Allah has predestined within the human quest for lawful gaining. He knows before anyone else that life will come to an end; therefore, he has to be ashamed of disgrace, to repent at old age and to fear Allah the Exalted when he is alone with himself. If he does not do that, he will be devoid of any good, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers.



❖ Conclusion ❖

It remains to be known that women, since she is the appearance of chastity, compassion, cordiality, and mercy, possesses most of the parts of modesty, because it is her gown and her shell that bring her to perfection if she wants to live free, dignified. The Messenger Muhammad (Allah's blessings and peace be upon him and his progeny) says, "Modesty has ten parts of which nine parts are in women and one part in men." (*Rawdhat al-Wa'edheen*, p. 460).

The first manifestation of modesty for women is to cover her charms and adornments from the eyes of al-ajnabi (a stranger — a non-Mahram). This is what is called alhijab alshar'i (religiously prescribed veil) to which Allah enjoined her with the aim of protecting her from the lowliness of evil-minded men. She is like a treasure, when she is not safeguarded well, thieves and traitors will stretch out their hands to her.

He who is divested of modesty has the audacity to do ugly deeds. It has been said that when a believer commits a sin, he feels as if he is hit by a stone on the head. Unlike the believer, when a hypocrite commits a sin, he just feels as if a fly settled on his face.

What a difference between the two positions! In fact, there is a great difference between the modest person and the immodest one. The modest person who feels conscience-stricken the moment he commits a sin and thus his conscience prevents him from persisting in committing more sins is a far cry from the one whose repeated sins increasingly drive him to relapse into the mud of injustice, guilt, and degradation.

