



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCE OF ISLAMIC ETHICS

Shaykh Saleem Bhimji | saleem.bhimji@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION to the Course

“The human being stands between two extremes of either being the lowest of the low – descending lower than the wild animals or elevating themselves to the zenith of perfection in which they surpass even the greatest of angels. The journey between these extremes takes place under the shadow of purification (*tazkiyah*) and ethics (*akhlaq*) – an obligation which all Muslims must pursue.”

INTRODUCTION to the Course

“The Islamic tradition has tens of sciences which a believer tries to master, however all other branches of knowledge a Muslim seeks will obstruct their path towards spiritual insight and reaching Allāh ﷻ if they are not carried out after having first purified and taken firm control of the soul. The theory of how this is carried out is taught in the Science of Ethics (*‘Ilm al-Akhlaq*).”

INTRODUCTION to the Course

"As akhlaq is the active practice of the virtues, morality and manners which Islam has laid down through the Quran and the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the believer needs to have an excellent understanding of this discipline."

INTRODUCTION to the Course

When 'Abdullah ibn Sinan asked Imam al-Sadiq عليه السلام:
"Is the human better or the angels?" The Imam
replied: "The Commander of the Faithful عليه السلام said,
'Allah, the Exalted, gave the angels **intellect**
without **desire**; He gave the animals **desire** without
intellect, and He gave **both** to the offspring of
Adam. So, a person whose *intellect* prevails over his
desire is better than the angels; while a person
whose *desire* prevails over his *intellect* is worse than
the beasts.'" (Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 60, Pg. 299, Trad.
5)

الإمام الصادق (عليه السلام) وقد سأله عبد الله بن سنان:
الملائكة أفضل أم بنو آدم؟ قال قال: أمير المؤمنين علي بن
أبي طالب (عليه السلام) إن الله عز وجل ركب في الملائكة
عقلاً بلا شهوة، وركب في البهائم شهوةً بلا عقل، وركب في
بني آدم كلتيهما، فمن غلب عقله شهوته فهو خير من
الملائكة، ومن غلبت شهوته عقله فهو شر من البهائم

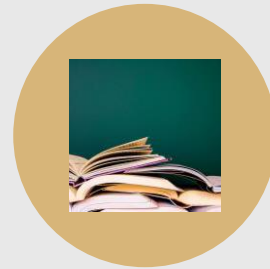
SESSION Outline



1
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
SCIENCE OF ISLAMIC
ETHICS



2
IS ETHICS RELATIVE OR
ABSOLUTE? THE ROLE OF
RELIGION IN ETHICS



3
MORAL EXCELLENCE IN THE
SUPPLICATIONS OF THE AHL
AL-BAYT ﷺ



4
A REVIEW OF PASSAGES OF
THE SUPPLICATION
MAKĀRIM AL-AKHLĀQ

SPECIFIC Technical Terms

1. **Khalq** (خَلْق): **Physical Traits**

- *Quran: "ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ" - Then We have caused it to grow into another creation. (Sūrah al-Mu'minoon (23), Verse 14)*

2. **Khulq** (خُلُق): **Spiritual/Ethical Traits**

- *Quran: "وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ" - And most surely you (Muhammad ﷺ) have the most exalted character. (Sūrah al-Qalam (68), Verse 4)*

REALITY of the
HUMAN
BEING



OVERVIEW of the Discussion

Science
of Akhlāq

Meaning of
the word
Akhlāq

Subject of
the Science
of Akhlāq

Benefits of
the Science
of Akhlāq

DEFINITION of the word Akhlāq

Science of Akhlāq

Meaning of the word Akhlāq

The word "Akhlāq" is the plural of "khulq" and it is defined as: "A fixed spiritual state (*malaka*) of the human soul which leads to the individual performing the appropriate actions related to the situation they find themselves in without the need to think or reflect on the action."

DEFINITION: Malaka (Disposition)

The disposition (*malaka*) of the soul is the source of everything a person performs spontaneously without thinking about it. *Malaka* is a property of the soul which comes into existence through repetitive practice and is not easily destroyed. A particular disposition (*malaka*) may appear in human beings because of one of the following reasons:

DEFINITION:
Malaka
(Disposition)

- 1. Natural trait:** Some people are “born” with ‘natural’ traits.
- 2. Habit:** Formed through continual repetition of certain acts.
- 3. Conscious effort:** Something actively done when required.

DEFINITION: Akhlāq and an Example

EXAMPLE:

A person who has the trait of generosity (*sakhāwah*) ingrained in his soul, would not need to think twice before financially helping in a worthy cause that they are told about or in giving their time for humanity.



DEFINITION: Elaboration on Akhlāq - 1

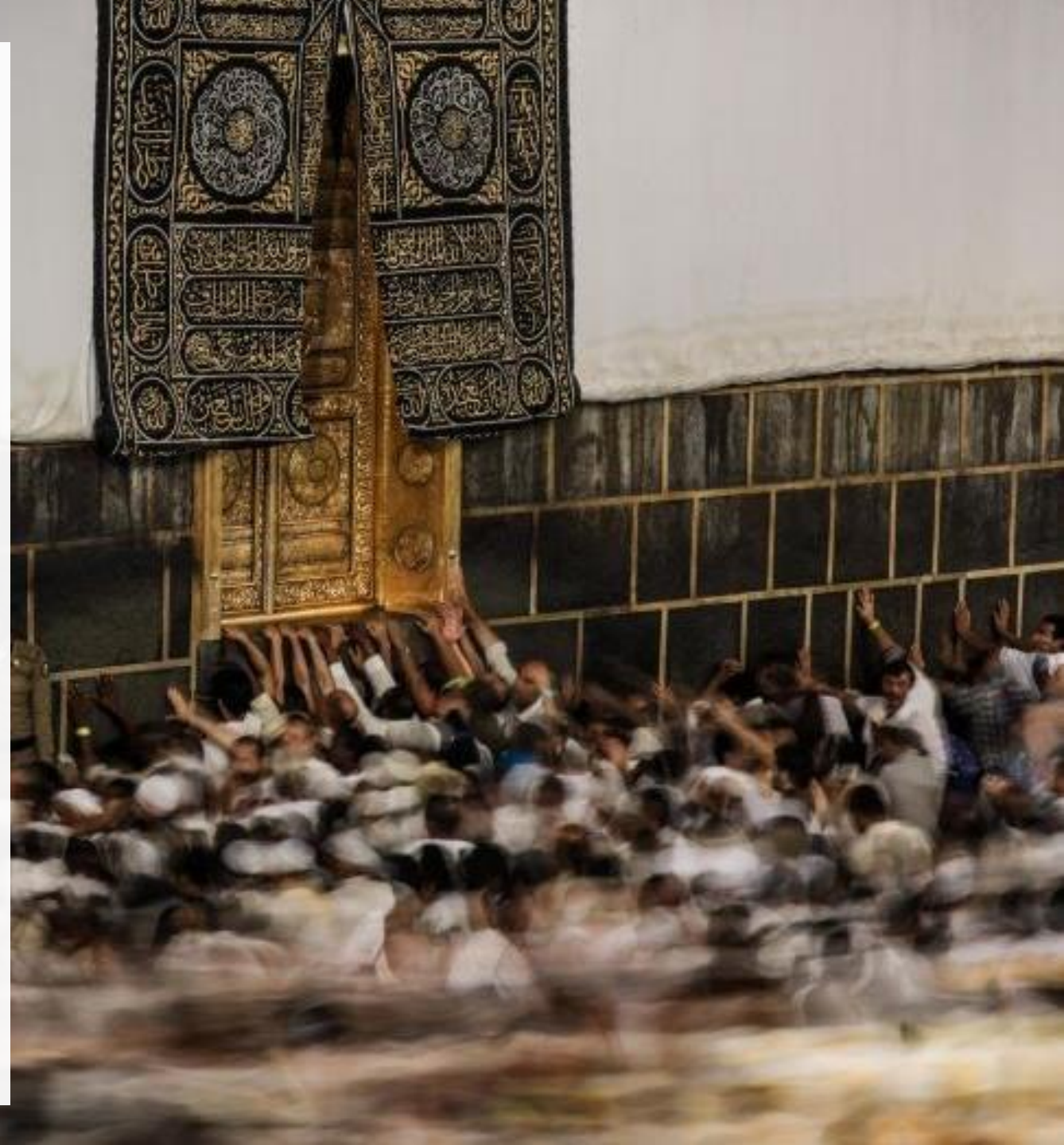
“Morality (*akhlāq*), then, is the inner face and reality of the person. If their morality is good, God-pleasing, and characterized by good qualities – as defined by Islam, their human face will be beautiful and Divinely touched, and if their morality is reprehensible, disliked, and characterized by vile traits, their inner face will be ugly and animalistic.”

DEFINITION: Elaboration on Akhlāq - 2

Sadr al-Muta'alliheen Shirazi, one of the Muslim philosophers, said: "At birth, the human being is an **actual** animal and a **potential** human being, and they determine their own destiny. Therefore, if they can control the faculties of lust and anger by following reason and the *shari'a*, and use them according to the command of Allāh and the intellect, then their inner face will become human. However, if they give in to their lust, their inner face will be transformed into a predatory animal, and if they submit to the power of anger, they will transform their inner-self into a satanic beast."

STORY on the inner-reality of Akhlāq - 1

Story of Imam ‘Alī ibn al-Husayn Zayn al-Abideen عليه السلام and Abu Basir in ‘Arafāt during the Hajj season



STORY on the inner-reality of Akhlāq - 2

Abu Basir:

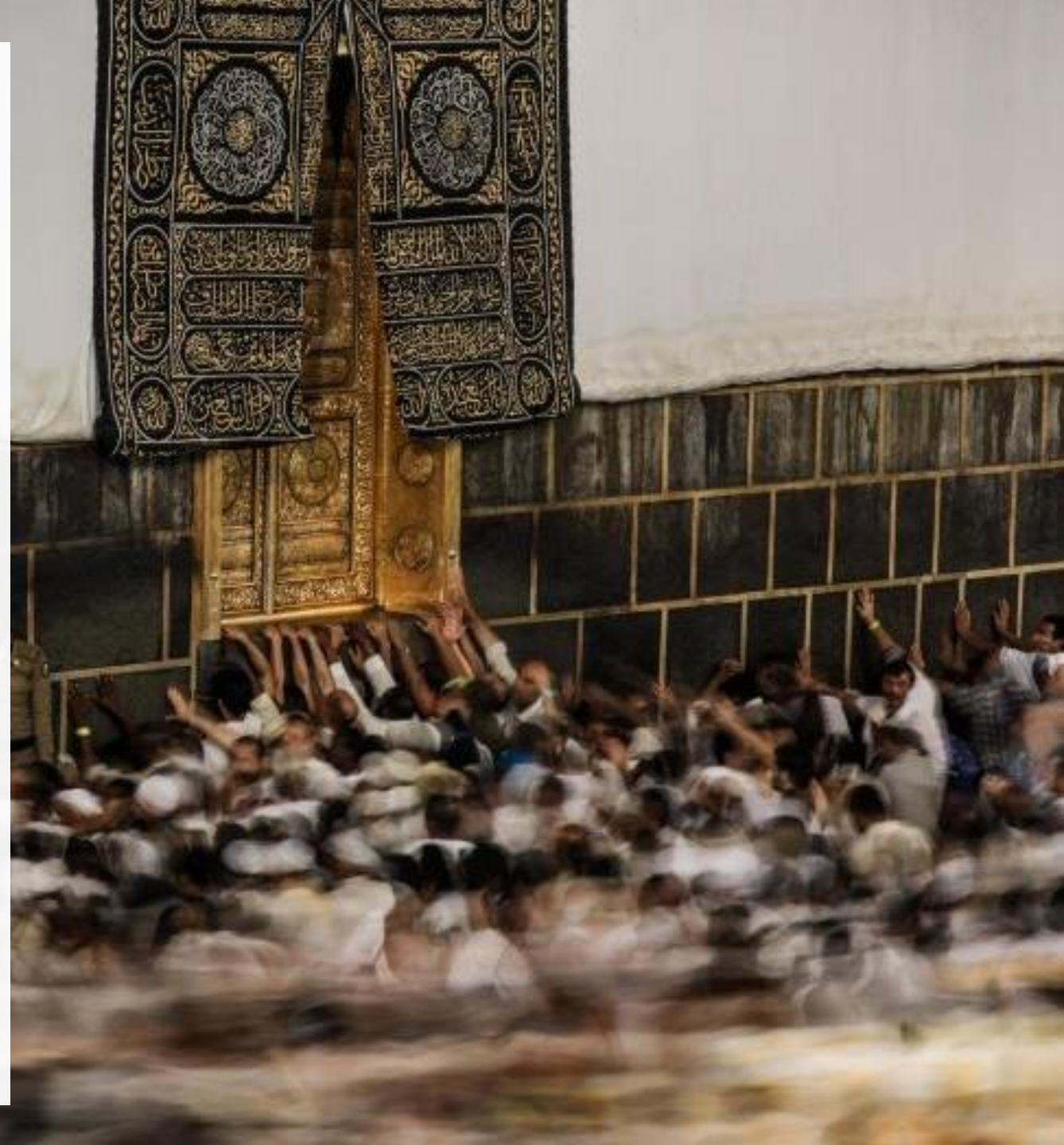
ما اكثر الحجيج و اعظم الضجيج

How large the number of pilgrims and how great is the sound (they are making!)

Imam al-Sajjad عليه السلام:

ما اكثر الضجيج و اقل الحجيج

How great the sound (they are making) however how few are the pilgrims!





SUMMARY of the Science of Ethics

In short, the Science of Ethics is a science that teaches the person how to become a person and how to live life for them to become a real human being - from the point of view of their outer face, as well as the inner face.

SUBJECT of the Science of Akhlāq

Science
of Akhlāq

```
graph TD; A[Science of Akhlāq] --- B[Meaning of the word Akhlāq]; A --- C[Subject of the Science of Akhlāq]; A --- D[Benefits of the Science of Akhlāq];
```

Meaning of
the word
Akhlāq

Subject of
the Science
of Akhlāq

Benefits of
the Science
of Akhlāq

SUBJECT of the Science of Akhlāq

Science
of Akhlāq

Subject of
the Science
of Akhlāq

The soul of the person.

WHAT is the Soul/Spirit?

Nafs (soul) and *Ruh* (spirit) used interchangeably in Islam. The soul (*nafs*) is that heavenly essence which employs the body and uses its various organs to attain its goals and purposes. The soul has also other names as spirit (*ruh*), intelligence (*ʿaql*), and heart (*qalb*) although these terms have other usages as well.

WHAT is the Soul/Spirit?

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ ^ص قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ
الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

They ask you (O Muhammad) about the soul/spirit (*al-ruh*). Say (to them in response): 'The soul/spirit is of my Lord's Command, and of knowledge, you have been granted only a little.'
(17:85)

BENEFITS of the Science of Akhlāq

Science
of Akhlāq

Meaning of
the word
Akhlāq

Subject of
the Science
of Akhlāq

Benefits of
the Science
of Akhlāq

BENEFITS of the Science of Akhlāq

Science of Akhlāq

Benefits of the Science of Akhlāq

The benefit of studying the Science of Islamic Ethics is to be able to recognize the good and virtuous attributes and learning how to achieve them. It also allows us to recognize the unpleasant traits and the way to prevent and treat them, and in case of infection, how to purify ourselves from them.

IMPORTANCE of the Study of Akhlāq

The Value of Good Morals in Islam:

The Ultimate Goal Behind Sending
the Prophets

QURAN and the Role & Priority of Akhlāq

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ
وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ

He it is Who has sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger of their own, reciting to them His Revelations, and purifying them (of false beliefs and doctrines, and sins, and all kinds of uncleanness), and instructing them in the Book and the Wisdom, whereas before that they were indeed lost in obvious error. (62:2)

QURAN and the Role & Priority of Akhlāq

Purification Precedes
Education

QURAN and the Need for Akhlāq

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا ﴿٧﴾ فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا ﴿٨﴾ قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن
زَكَّاهَا ﴿٩﴾ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَن دَسَّاهَا ﴿١٠﴾

And the human selfhood and that Who has formed it to perfection; and Who has inspired it with the conscience of what is wrong and bad for it and what is right and good for it: He is indeed prosperous who has grown it in purity. And he is indeed lost who has corrupted it. (91:7-10)



THE HADITH AND THE IMPORTANCE OF AKHLĀQ

The Major Jihād (Struggle)

HADITH and the Importance of Akhlāq

Imam Ali عليه السلام relates: “The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ dispatched troops [to a mission]. On seeing the returning armies from the battlefield, he said, ‘Blessed are those who have performed the lesser *jihad* and have yet to perform the greater *jihad*.’ When asked, ‘O Messenger of Allah, what is the greater *jihad*?’ The Prophet replied, ‘The *jihad* of the self, and added, ‘The best *jihad* is that of one who combats his own self that is between his two sides.’”
(Ma’ani al-Akhbar, pg. 160, trad. 1)

الإمام علي (عليه السلام): إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) بَعَثَ سَرِيَّةً، فَلَمَّا رَجَعُوا قَالَ: مَرَحَبًا بِقَوْمٍ قَضَوْا الْجِهَادَ الْأَصْغَرَ وَبَقِيَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْجِهَادُ الْأَكْبَرُ. قِيلَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، وَمَا الْجِهَادُ الْأَكْبَرُ؟ قَالَ: جِهَادُ النَّفْسِ. وَقَالَ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): أَفْضَلُ الْجِهَادِ مَنْ جَاهَدَ نَفْسَهُ الَّتِي بَيْنَ جَنْبَيْهِ.

CONCLUSION

1. The Science of Akhlāq is perhaps the most important study in Islam.
2. As the human is made of body and soul, just as it is important to maintain the physical body and protect it from harms, so too the soul must be protected from harms.
3. The human being can either descend to be worse than the animals or ascend to be even greater than the angels.
4. Akhlāq is not something which a person 'does', it is what they 'live' - good morals must be ingrained in the psyche.
5. Studying the Science of Ethics and then working to implement its teachings in our lives was the reason for the sending of 124,000 Prophets.

SESSION Two: Friday December 10th, 2021



2

IS ETHICS RELATIVE OR ABSOLUTE?
THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN ETHICS