

Falling Into Sin

IN TODAY'S SOCIETY, WHAT CAN ONE DO TO PROTECT HIS EMAAN, IMPROVE HIS CHARACTER AND BE THE MUSLIM HE WANTS TO BE?

As one of only two Muslims in a small Kentucky town one summer, it was hard not to notice the stares. Coming from a mostly Muslim setting, it was a difficult adjustment for the sixth-grader visiting Christian relatives. "I felt I went from being a perfectly normal, happy child with many interests and friends, to something akin to a monster." Everything about her suddenly became wrong; and so, beyond the eyes of the Ummah, some set about fixing her. "The funny thing is that I was taught to have a healthy respect for Allâh's revelations. And that, in part, is what they used against me. I was in a nightmare filled with emotional vampires and spiritual cannibals and I knew this was not the teachings of the honourable Prophet Eesa 'alayhis sallam. But I wanted to be liked and accepted."

The second-generation Muslim, and seventh generation American, left the town with her faith shaken in a God who could have put her through that, and in her belief in the inherent goodness and oneness of people. But mostly her emaan, her faith in Allâh now felt just beyond her reach. Her better instincts had been dulled. She'd done a few things she felt ashamed of and she sometimes lapsed into small bouts of depression. There was a small ball of anger eating at her gut. She didn't think she could ever tell anyone about her experiences. She just wanted to be left alone...

EMAAN

Your most valuable possession

In a time when faith in God is many times considered a weakness, where the relationship between cause and effect are bandied about as negotiable, emaan may seem like a fantasy at best, an albatross at worst. The line between right and wrong is deliberately blurred, redrawn and blurred again. Throughout time-ancient as well as modern-examples of what comes of the convolutions of mankind abound. Yet still we allow ourselves to be guided into the web of the true delusion: that in going against the blueprint for mankind that Allâh reiterates in the Qur'ân, we can cheat the fate our own hands wring, that among ourselves we make adequate lesser gods.

Anyone who contemplates the verses of the Qur'ân will find people are ultimately responsible for their own deeds. Allâh is not unjust to anyone, that the reason behind a person's deviations is one's own self. Deeds, by heart or limb, result in steadfastness or perversion. They are linked together in the same fashion a consequence is linked to its cause and an effect to its influence. And sometimes Allâh plots for you a course of hills, valleys and straight-aways that will ultimately make the legs of your deen-your emaan-lean and well-muscled.

Shoring up your Character

Allâh guides those who perform good deeds. And the more we do, the more guidance we receive. Likewise, evil doing feeds on itself. Ibn-ul-Qayyim said, "This is because Allâh likes good deeds and rewards on them, and abhors evil deeds, and punishes for them." Scholars have taken this truth and crafted the rule: "Recompense is according to deeds."

Here are a few Qur'ânic verses relating to the loss of guidance and decrease in emaan:

"So when they turned away (from the path of Allâh), Allâh turned their hearts away (from the right path)." [61:5]

"I shall turn away from My signs those who behave arrogantly on the earth in a wrongful manner. If they see all the signs they will not believe in them. And if they see the way of righteousness, they will not adopt that way." [7:146].

"And recite to them (Oh, Mohammed) the story of the one to whom We gave our verses (signs), but he turned them away, so Satan followed him up, and he became of those who went astray. Had he willed We would surely have elevated him therewith but he clung to the earth and followed his own vain desires. So his description is the that of a dog; if you drive him away, he lolls his tongue out, or if you leave him alone, he (still) lolls his tongue out." [7:175-176].

The last verse tells us that some even have knowledge, but instead of applying it, they choose to follow their

whims and worldly desires. In the end they lose their blessing and stray from Allâh.

The young girl was eventually ensconced within the circle of her Muslim community but she had changed. She felt disconnected somehow. "I always did good deeds and tried to be helpful. I made good grades. But I was trying to sort out my relationship with people and was trying to see myself. My anger had turned to hatred and I thought that feeling, that rush made me brave. But it wasn't my nature, to feed off of that kind of negativity. It wasn't who I thought Allâh wanted me to be. It wasn't what my family brought me up to be. I could never reach my potential holding on to that baggage. "There was a time when I feared nothing but Allâh. And now I had to admit that I feared what people could do when they discover you're different. Going to school, walking to the store, meeting new people, voicing an opinion..." The more she hid and tried to blend in, the more obvious it became that she was different. "I didn't gossip. I dressed modestly. I stood up for what I felt was right. I thought globally ... I achieved things and some people admired me. But that made me uncomfortable because I knew that any good that came my way or through me was the will of Allâh. I never really belonged. I had yet to really stand up for myself, to allow people to get to know me on my own terms. I had created something of a prison for myself that only I knew I was in." Everyone is solely responsible for his/her deviation. Allâh does not oppress anyone. Nor does Allâh turn away servants when they sincerely strive for guidance. Allâh is the most just. And He is the most merciful.

Deviation from the right path and the degradation of *emaan* are a result of one's own deeds and a reflection of one's own behaviour and character. Muslims must always be aware of that. They should assume they will face challenges sometimes and be ready to protect themselves and to heal and to grow. The first step towards achieving that is to know why and how does it happen. Most times it isn't the big wars that defeat a people, it is the little internal skirmishes which go unmet that eat away at character long before a clear enemy comes knocking on a half-opened door.

WHEN WE SLIP

Emaan is the core of all actions. It is the motivation necessary for a Muslim to accomplish whatever needed to lead a good life. Depending on the strength of his *emaan*, a person may or may not be able to abandon sinning, strive against his own desire and compel his soul to take heed.

The strength of *emaan* does not only show itself in the apparent deeds; true *emaan* actually fills and saturates the heart. Allâh's Messenger, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, pointed out "... three (factors), whoever has them will find the sweetness of *emaan*: that Allâh and His Messenger are more beloved to him than any thing else, that he loves a person solely for the sake of Allâh, and that he hates to revert to disbelieve, as he hates being thrown into hellfire." (Bukhari and Muslim) In another hadeeth, Allâh's Messenger, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam* said, "(He has) experienced the taste of *emaan*, who is contented that Allâh as his Lord (Rabb), Islâm as his religion and Mohammed as a Prophet." (Muslim).

We have to be certain that our *emaan* is deeply rooted into our hearts. A person may repent to Allâh, following the path of righteousness, yet *emaan* may not have entered his heart. So, at the first sign of destructive desires, doubts set in and convictions dissipate. Signs that this disease has entered the heart include rigidity of our hearts, courage in committing sins and laziness toward good deeds.

Balance *emaan* with Islâmic knowledge

Just as a person needs *emaan* for motivation, action and strength in the heart, he, likewise, needs knowledge, to do what is right, rectify his worship and purify his turning to Allâh alone. When *emaan* and Islâmic knowledge are deeply rooted into a person's heart, there remains no possibility for him to turn away from the path of righteousness. "The seizing of *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *emaan* (which has been reported in the authentic hadeeth) is not the seizing of knowledge," Ibn-Taymiyyah said, "For it is known that a person may be bequeathed with *emaan* even though he lacks knowledge. An *emaan* like this one could be snatched from his heart -like the *emaan* of Bani-Israel after they saw the calf. "As for the one bequeathed with both, knowledge and *emaan*, *emaan* is never seized from his breast and such a person never reverts from Islâm. Conversely, if one is bequeathed with Qur'ân alone or *emaan* alone, *emaan* can be seized and this is the reality. We have seen it often that the most to revert from Islâm are those who recite Qur'ân, without understanding or *emaan*, or those who possess *emaan* without knowledge and Qur'ân. But as for the one who has acquired Qur'ân and *emaan*, and hence obtained knowledge, for this one, *emaan* is never seized from his heart and Allâh knows best." (Majmou'a al-Fatawa 18/305).

The mere memorization of the Qur'ân and concepts does not mean one has acquired knowledge, especially since the Qur'ân is read by the *munafiq* (hypocrite), the *mu'min* (believer) and the illiterate. Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, "Knowledge is of two types; knowledge in the heart and knowledge on the tongue. So knowledge in the heart is the useful one while knowledge on the tongue is Allâh's argument against His servants."

Seeking Islāmic knowledge saves thoughts from turning to desires and sins because there is no spare time, and because those things pale in the face of the joy of the revelation of truth. He will be so engrossed in the pleasure of acquiring knowledge such that the chance of him looking for activities that may weaken his emaan or cause him to deviate will be minimum.

Slough the dead skin of sin Allāh says, "You counted it a little thing while it was very great in the sight of Allāh." [24:15] Some companions said, as reported by Anas, "You are doing deeds which you view to be finer than a hair, but we, in the days of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, used to consider them as major sins." (Bukhari).

Viewing sins as little things has adverse effects:

-The sins multiply in the sight of Allāh.

-The path of repentance becomes distant, since he does not anymore feel a need for it. It is the one who realizes its severity, adheres to making istighfaar (asking for forgiveness) and regretfully seeks repentance from Allāh who has his sin erased.

-He is drawn to individuals similarly engrossed. This alone is among the major factors behind a person's deviation. Moreover, it results in him avoiding the gatherings where Allāh is remembered. As a result, opportunities that would otherwise help him remain steadfast on good deeds are missed.

-The sin becomes a hard habit to break. Even if the sins are minor, they gather around a person leading him to devastation, as Allāh's Messenger warned. Abdullah bin Mas'ood said, "Beware of viewing the sins as little for they gather upon a person till he is devastated and Allāh's Messenger, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, has coined a similitude for it as a group of people stopped in a desert and the cook among them arrived. So a person would go and bring one stick, and another one would go and bring one stick till they gathered many of them, lit a fire and brought to ripeness all that they have thrown in it." (Authentic, Ahmad)

Arrogance and pride are traps

These two attributes are among the worst for man to acquire. Arrogance and pride led Iblis (Satan) astray, although he was in the company of the angels. That happened because, Allāh tells us, "I (Iblis) am better than him (Adam). You created me from fire and him You created from clay." [7:12].

If one does not rid himself of arrogance and pride, an end similar to that of Satan is a sure result. But even a little part of them-especially if related to how one views one's worship-can very devastating to one's emaan:

-Claiming perfection leads one to not feel the need to improve himself through good deeds and other means of nurturing his emaan. But emaan as stated by scholars either increases or decreases. Therefore, it will certainly decrease when one does not work hard to increase it with a lot good deeds.

-Admiring one's own deeds results in the gradual relinquishment of worshipping Allāh, because worship is based on humbling oneself to Him and acknowledging that all the gratefulness is to Allāh and to Him alone. How could one be proud of his deeds while Allāh's Messenger, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, used to say, "None of you will be saved because of his deeds." They asked, "Not even you Oh Allāh's Messenger?" He said, "No, not even me, except that Allāh bestows me with His mercy." (Bukhari and Muslim)

-When one loses the fear of requital it becomes easy to forget about falling from the straight path. A sense of security in this aspect can be the first step towards falling a victim to it. Would such an arrogant person continually beseech Allāh for guidance and seek steadfastness on his path?

-Vanity leads to backbiting and rumour mongering. Moreover, whomever mocks his brother about a particular sin will not die till he himself succumbs to it.

As the little sister grew, she continued to work at healing and finally, through salah, good deeds and study was able to rid herself of much of the scars of the past. Though it was painful, she admits she learned some valuable lessons that helped shape her deen and character, strengthen her emaan and define her sense of humanity.

Tackle Tarbiyah with Joy

After a person has turned to Allāh in repentance, he leaves behind an enormous amount of evil ideas, perceptions and habits. It is not possible to get rid of all the past by a mere repentance to Allāh. A personal

training effort (Tarbiyah) is required to erase all the effects. An effort that ingrains the right ʿimaan and sufficient Islāmic knowledge to further pave the road with a firm foundation. Taking a quick look at the apostasy events that occurred in the days of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, much evidence supports this fact. Was there any among the Muhajireen or Ansaar who defected? Were there any defectors among those who witnessed the battle of Badr? Or the Ridwaan Pledge? Or those who accepted Islām in its initial phase? Were there any of those among the apostates about whom Allāh says, "Only those are the believers who have believed in Allāh and His Messenger, and afterward doubt not but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allāh. Those, they are the truthful." [49:15].

Most of the apostates/defectors comprised those who had just recently entered the circle of Islām and had not yet received the type of training that would instill ʿimaan and its branches in their heart. Mere repentance and an apparent change are neither the first step nor the last. In fact, it is only one step in the right direction, which is followed by putting in an effort to attain ʿimaan and taqwa. To attain ʿimaan and taqwa, find a group which assists through regular encounters. One cannot be expected to experience the fruits of brotherhood and sisterhood, when isolated and not practically involved with others. Find an appropriate example that can help one stand up against daily challenges by holding tight to the rope of Allāh altogether.

However, the being within a group must hinder one from developing his own formidable relationship with Allāh in the form of deeds far away from the sight of people. One must spend the effort in worship at night, charity, siyaam, seeking knowledge and so on. One must try to create an intuition of individual responsibility within himself as it is established in the Qur'ān, "Whoever goes right, then he goes right only for the benefit of his own self. And whoever goes astray, then he goes astray to his own loss. No one laden with burdens can bear someone else's burden." [17:15].

Furthermore, Allāh's Messenger, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, explains how a person is responsible and accountable for his own deeds by saying, "There is none among you but his Lord will speak to him without an interpreter. He will look to his right and will find only his deeds. He will look to his left and will find only his deeds..." (Bukhari & Muslim) All this and much more must make a person aware that his being in a group is good and recommended, but still it does not exempt him from the individual responsibility he has to account for on the Day of Judgment.

Predominance of desires

Deviation from the right path is caused by one of the two factors- either doubt which has mixed with clarity and truth, or desires which predominated a person's heart and hence, deviated and obstructed him from the truth and obeying Allāh, a factor clearly noticed in our days.

The ones who repent and turn to Allāh are just as human as any one else- they desire as others do. The problem of lustful desires begins primarily with an evil look or idea and ends with flooded actions or an erupted volcano- leading a person to perversion.

You find a person following the path which pleases Allāh but once he sights something forbidden (e.g., a beautiful woman), a struggle in his heart begins; the light of ʿimaan is kindled within him calling him to repent and turn to Allāh. Eventually, the pitch of this call is reduced and the call of the desire rises. In this way, an immense struggle within begins. At one stage, the call of ʿimaan might predominate and he overcomes this hurdle, even if the dust of the sin might have touched him, which he immediately washes off with repentance and good deeds.

On the other hand, he might respond due to a weakness in ʿimaan and the light of desire rises and predominates, ensnaring his heart and obstructing any chances of turning to Allāh. As a result, he falls victim to the sin and can not turn to Allāh in repentance, which would raise him from this downfall. At this moment, he would say to himself, "You have already been affected by the dirt of sin, so you might as well keep on going. So many times you have tried to repent, but to no avail. You are weak, there remains no hope for you to repent, and your way is different from that of the pious!"

The ugly gut of excessiveness Whenever Allāh commands us to do something, Satan incites us to fall into either extreme- either exaggerating the act on one hand or be negligent and careless about it on the other. Even though the latter is a common phenomenon with many, Satan chooses to incite one towards the opposite extreme of exaggeration and immoderation. Accordingly, we have been warned against taking such an approach as Allāh says, "Say, O people of the scripture, exceed not the units in your religion." [5:77].

And Allāh's Messenger, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, said, "Beware of ghulow (excessiveness) in religion, for indeed, what devastated those before you was ghulow in religion." (Nisai) In another hadeeth he said, "Those who go to extremes (in preaching their religion) were killed and destroyed." (Muslim).

Being immoderate in worship is a deviation in itself, but nevertheless, it is not the end of the road. When a person takes the first step towards immoderation, he overloads himself in a manner while an easier path could have been opted for. One might be capable of enduring this path for some time, but eventually after recognizing the tiresome effort he had to sacrifice, he starts contemplating a retrieve. But here, the excitement which led him in the first place to chose the road of extreme immoderation will not be sufficient to return him to the road of balance and moderation. In fact, it will transfer him to the opposite extreme of negligence and carelessness. None of this overburdening approach is encouraged in Islâm since we should always remember that our deeds alone are not good enough for us to enter Jannah. Allâh's Messenger, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, clarified this by saying, "Be moderate and practice the same in proportion and know that your deeds will not make you enter Jannah and the most beloved deeds to Allâh are those which are regularly done even if they were little."

Choose friends wisely

There is no doubt that the company of friends influences the formation of our characters. For this reason, Allâh's Messenger, said, "A person is influenced by his companion's religion, so watch who your companions are." (Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi) This influence is acquired from two aspects:

1. The first is acquired in the company of relatives, neighbours, school and all those with whom a person is compelled to spend time. 2. The second type of influence is acquired within more religious company which is likely to meet those who are less concerned. Though they pray and fast, they are less serious in carrying the message of Islâm, dawah, sacrifice, etc. And if a person's faith is weak and is inclined towards desire and negligence, he will find comfort in this company.

The effects of this influence become apparent through certain factors that include doing things he never used to do before. He begins considering those on the deviated path as examples in life and as a result, he starts imitating them saying, "If he can do this, why can't I?"

He begins to please others at the expense of pleasing Allâh by performing actions never done before or abandoning some good deeds. He abandons, for example, praying sunnah, or starts showing up late for congregation salah, starts getting used to watching and hearing forbidden things- as a result, he even stops forbidding the evil. All this is no doubt a consequence of weak emaan and the influence of either a bad company or a group who are less serious with Islâm and more inclined towards desire.

STEADFAST

On the Path to Righteousness

Change can happen sometimes in the blink of an adjusted perspective. For many Muslims living in the West, it is simply the realization that it is just as hard to live in a self-styled prison of ego and desire as it is to strive toward the right path. Freedom of choice and religion only develops and grows when it is exercised.

There is no doubt that the diagnosis of the causes behind an individual's deviation is a primary step towards treatment. But what is the cure?

Concentrate on tarbiyah (constant self-development) particularly from the spiritual aspect. See everyday challenges as an opportunity to exercise truth, patience, good deeds, courage and constancy. One is encouraged to nurture his emaan by performing righteous deeds as Allâh says, "O you who believe, believe in Allâh and His Messenger..." [4:136] Usually, emaan is present in the hearts of people but still, they are encouraged to nurture and increase it.

Be sincere and truthful to Allâh

Ikhlaas (sincerity) is a privileged characteristic for those who seek Allâh's pleasure. Its absence displaces a person's deeds, and it is a requirement by everyone as Allâh says, "And they were commanded not, but that they should worship Allâh, making their religion sincere for him and offer salahs perfectly and give zakah and that is the right religion." [98:5] Ibn-Al-Qayyim, may Allâh's mercy be upon him, further clarifies the effect of Ikhlaas and truthfulness on a persons perseverance on the path of Islâm. He said, "A person experiences difficulty in abandoning (bad) habits and customs only if he does so for the sake of other than Allâh. As for he who abandons them truthfully and sincerely with his heart, he does not experience any difficulty except in the first attempt, to be tested whether he was truthful or not. So if he remains a little patient during that difficulty, desire would not last any longer."

Being fearful of an evil death

A sincere believer must be overwhelmed with the fear of dying in a state that would displease Allâh. This was the condition of the righteous predecessors- due to a constant fear of an evil death while in a state of Islâm since, if a person falls victim to a sin, a state of negligence and transgression, it overpowers his heart and mind. Falling Into Sin

A state in which his light is extinguished, and his vision blocked- a moment when no reminder would benefit here, death might surprise him. He would die in a state that would attain the wrath of Allâh. Therefore, one must always be fearful of an evil death and hence, use every moment in a manner that pleases Allâh, even though uncertain whether it is accepted by Allâh or not. He says, "And those who give that which they give (good deeds) with their hearts full of fear (whether accepted or not) because they are sure to return to their Lord (for reckoning)." [23:60]

Duaa (supplication)

Supplication is a Muslim's refuge and resort when he is encountered with hardship in this world. One must always turn to Allâh and seek His assistance. Allâh's Messenger used to supplicate, "O rotator/turner of the heart, make my heart steadfast on your religion." (Tirmidhi) And he also used to say, "O Allâh, increase my knowledge and do not let my heart deviate (from the truth) after you have guided me and grant me mercy from You. Truly, you are the bestower." [3:8] These and many other forms and occasions of supplication makes one realize his need to invoke Allâh for guidance searching for its causes and abstaining from all that blocks a persons urge to obtain it.

Persistence in doing good

The best of deeds and the most beloved of it are those which a person does constantly as Allâh's Messenger said, "And the most beloved of deeds to Allâh are those which are regularly done even if they were little." (Bukhari & Muslim) Regular persistence in doing good deeds eventually becomes a habit and a part of ones daily life after an initial struggle to practice it. This persistence in good deeds (salahs, charity, siyaam, and thikr...) will make one live in the light of steadfastness and righteousness, and far away from deviation and its causes.

Advice and counseling

When someone starts showing the signs of deviation, he must be immediately advised, as it is one of the rights on a fellow Muslim. Jabir bin Abdullah said, "I made a pledge to Allâh's Messenger to offer salah, pay zakah and advise every Muslim." (Bukhari & Muslim) Counseling one another was the trend practiced by the companions of the Messenger of Allâh and if any of them showed any signs of weakness, they would never hesitate in advising him. This must be our case. We must not ignore anyone at the time of his weakness in emaan, because such ignorance is a way of assisting Satan against our brother.

Participating in the dawah work

There are many fruits obtained doing dawah. One who strives in seeking guidance for people is certainly guided by Allâh. The one, who calls people to do good deeds, will in turn be motivated to perform the deeds he is asking people to do. Being involved in dawah keeps one from acts that might result in deviation. There is a sweetness of emaan a person feels when he observes people turning to Allâh instead of observing things forbidden by Him.

After spending some time pondering over this problem and its causes and remedies it is clear that emaan is a blessing for which we each must strive. If it is missing, it is we who misunderstand or underestimate the power of our relationship with Allâh. We must acknowledge the great value of strong emaan. It is a lifelong challenge we must accept with joy. And for those who succeed, they will be the first to acknowledge that it is not due to their mental agility or consistent efforts as much as it is a bounty from Allâh, a bounty that deserves to be protected and cared for in our hearts and in our lives