

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah,
most Kind, most Merciful



Surat at-Tawbah, 9:70

فَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ
وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

So it was not Allah who wronged them,
but it was they who used to wrong themselves.

Learning Objectives

- To define the terms *dhanb*, major sins, and minor sins
- To evaluate the extent of Shaytan's influence on us
- To devise strategies to protect ourselves from sinning and temptation

Key Words

ذَنْبٌ *Dhanb*
sin

ذُنُوبٌ *Dhunub*
sins

مُحَاسَبَةٌ *Muhasabah*
self-accounting



ACTIVITY...

Can you state any two sins and explain their harmful effects on our body?

- _____
- _____

State any two sins and explain how they can break down relationships between people.

- _____
- _____

State any two sins that have a negative impact on our soul.

- _____
- _____

WRONG

Ric

Keeping away from sins

A sin is any act of disobedience to Allah. In Arabic this is called *dhanb* and the plural is *dhunub*. Committing a *dhanb* is *haram*, and keeping away from a *dhanb* is *wajib*.

The reason why Allah forbids us to not do certain things and calls them *dhunub* is because they are bad for our body and soul. When we commit *dhunub*, we harm ourselves. Sins do not harm Allah but they reduce our chances of getting closer to Him and being successful in the Hereafter, unless we repent. That is why Allah says in the Qur'an:



Surat at-Tawbah, 9:70

فَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ
وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

So it was not Allah who wronged them,
but it was they who used to wrong themselves.

When a person commits a sin out of ignorance or forgetfulness or by accident, they harm their own soul. This harm can be erased and they can return their soul to its original state of purity by asking Allah to forgive them.

Some *ulama* divide sins into two groups: major sins and minor sins. They say any sin for which Allah has clearly promised the fire of hell as a punishment in the Qur'an (such as murder, *shirk*, etc) is a major sin. Thus, any sin that would not lead us to Hell but may have other ill consequences is a minor sin.

However, all the scholars agree that committing a minor sin repeatedly is a major sin. In other words, a person who commits a minor sin should not take it lightly but should immediately repent and ask Allah to forgive him.

Most Muslims will do their best to keep away from major sins like alcohol, adultery, and so on. The challenge usually is for us to keep away from what is seen as minor sins.



Rasulullah (s) was once travelling with his followers when he stopped at a desert where there was nothing growing. Rasulallah (s) asked his followers to go and collect wood. They replied that it was a desert – there was only sand around and it was not possible to find any wood in such a deserted place. Rasulallah (s) however insisted that they try and find some.

Off they went and sure enough as they brought back what they could find, there was soon a big heap of twigs and wood before Rasulallah's (s) feet. Rasulallah (s) then used this as a practical lesson and told them that sins are like these twigs that we do not notice at first. When we look at our lives it seems as if there are no sins we have committed. But it is only by searching our hearts carefully that we can recollect them all and ask Allah to forgive them. What Rasulallah (s) was teaching them was the importance of *muhasabah* (self-accounting).

Sometimes we forget to ask Allah for forgiveness or we treat some of the sins we commit as minor, and therefore we continue with our lives not realising how we have harmed our souls. A true *mu'min* must always do *muhasabah* before going to bed every night. *Muhasabah* means reviewing what we did in the day and if we realise we have committed any sin we should ask Allah for forgiveness immediately.

Shaytan also tries to make us delay *istighfar* and *tawbah* by telling us to wait until tomorrow, or Thursday night, or the month of Ramadan, or when we go for hajj, and so on. But of course no one knows when they will die and therefore *istighfar* and *tawbah* must always be done as soon as possible.



Faith in Action

Is it not better to self-account and find all our 'little' sins now, while we can still ask Allah for forgiveness, rather than on the Day of Judgement when it will be too late? *Muhasabah* should be done every day before going to bed, or after *isha salah*.

How much influence does Shaytan have on us?

We all know that Shaytan is our enemy and loves to see us commit sins so that we can all go to hell with him. Many Muslims believe that it is Shaytan who makes us do evil and commit sins. But is that really true?

Allah tells us in the Qur'an to be wary of Shaytan:



Surat al-A'raf, 7:27

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ لَا يَفْتِنَنَّكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ كَمَا
أَخْرَجَ أَبَوَيْكُم مِّنَ الْجَنَّةِ يَنزِعُ عَنْهُمَا
لِبَاسَهُمَا لِيُرِيَهُمَا سَوْءَاتِهِمَا إِنَّهُ يَرَاكُمْ
هُوَ وَقَبِيلُهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا تَرَوْنَهُمْ إِنَّا
جَعَلْنَا الشَّيَاطِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

O children of Adam! Do not let Shaytan tempt you, like he expelled your parents from paradise, stripping them of their garments to expose to them their nakedness. Indeed he [Shaytan] sees you – he and his hosts – whereas you do not see them. We have indeed made the devils friends of those who have no faith.

The Qur'an also clarifies that Shaytan cannot force us to commit sins. Instead, what happens in this world is that when we forget Allah, Shaytan is able to whisper ideas of sins in our ears and hearts. Then we think about it and feel tempted. At this point, we still have the choice to remember Allah and ask Allah for help and to ignore Shaytan. However, if we love the world and its pleasures, we will listen to Shaytan and he will continue to make the sin attractive for us until we go ahead and commit the sin. Then we realise what we have done and feel very sorry that we disobeyed Allah.

We have to remember that we are responsible for our actions. We cannot blame Shaytan for the sins we commit. Shaytan only acts like a broker or a salesman. He packages a sin, 'gift-wraps' it in our eyes and ears, and makes it look beautiful to us so that if we love the world more than Allah, we are tempted to go towards the sin:

Surat al-Hijr, 15:39-40



قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ
فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ
إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمْ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

He (Iblis) said, "Lord, because you have caused me to go astray, I shall make earthly things attractive to (people) and mislead all of them except Your sincere servants among them".



On the Day of Judgement, when we blame Shaytan for our sins, Allah will allow Shaytan to say he had nothing to do with it and therefore we will have to take the blame ourselves:



Surah Ibrahim, 14:22

وَقَالَ الشَّيْطَانُ لَمَّا قُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَعَدَكُمْ وَعْدَ الْحَقِّ وَوَعَدْتُكُمْ فَأَخْلَفْتُكُمْ وَمَا كَانَ لِي عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا أَنْ دَعَوْتُكُمْ فَاسْتَجَبْتُمْ لِي فَلَا تَلُمُونِي وَلُومُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ

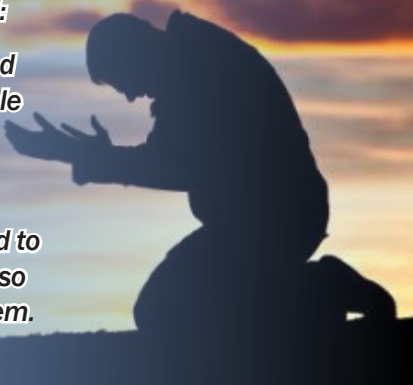
When the matter is all over, Shaytan will say: 'Indeed Allah made you a promise that was true and I [too] made you a promise, but I failed you. I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves.

We should therefore remember that Shaytan plays a role in sins but is not the primary cause of our sins. If Shaytan could force us to commit sins then it would be against the justice of Allah to punish us for something we have no control over. However, Allah can punish us if we disobey Him and refuse to do *istighfar* and *tawbah*, because ultimately the decision is always ours. We have the free will to act as we like in this world but we must know the role that Shaytan plays in our lives, the consequences of sinning, and how to protect ourselves from his temptations.



Imam al-Baqir (ā) said:

Allah does not demand anything from the people except two qualities: to acknowledge His blessings so that He multiplies it for them, and to acknowledge their sins so that He forgives it for them.



Turning to Allah for forgiveness

Asking Allah to forgive us for our sins and mistakes is called *istighfar*. Making a firm resolution not to sin again and turning back to Allah is called *tawbah*. This means when a person commits a sin repeatedly and as a habit and then decides to repent, they first do *istighfar* (ask for forgiveness) and then *tawbah* (turn back to Allah). *Tawbah* is therefore a higher state of repentance than *istighfar*.

A complete and most sincere change of heart and turning back to Allah is called *tawbat an-nusuhah* in the Qur'an. Allah takes pride in being the Merciful and Forgiving, and He assures us that if we commit a sin and then ask for forgiveness, He will most definitely forgive us:

Surah Aal Imran, 3:135



وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَغْفِرِ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

And those who, when they commit an indecent act or wrong themselves, remember Allah, and plead forgiveness for their sins; and who forgives sins except Allah?

Of course for our repentance to be sincere, we must also undo any harm we have done. For example, if we steal something, asking Allah for forgiveness is not enough. We must also return what we stole. If we do *ghibah*, we must ask Allah for forgiveness but also ask the person we have hurt for forgiveness as well. If we missed our *salah*, we must pay them back and also ask for forgiveness.



Faith in Action

Recite a *tasbeih* of *istighfar* every day by saying:

أَسْتَغْفِرُكَ اللَّهُ رَبِّي وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ

One of the best times to do this is in the early hours of the morning:

الصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْمُنْفِقِينَ وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ

[The people of *taqwa* are] patient and truthful, obedient and charitable, and pleading [Allah's] forgiveness at the times of dawn. (Surah Aal Imran, 3:17)



ACTIVITY...

In private and without showing anyone else, think of any three sins which are frequently committed by yourself or your friends. What strategies can you adopt to help you keep away from these sins?

Write them down in your private diary or journal. Remember: never to share your sins with anyone.

Protecting ourselves from sins

There are several ways in which we can protect ourselves from sins.

- 1 We should acquire *taqwa*. *Taqwa* means to always be aware of Allah. Someone who is aware of Allah's presence at all times will not feel like sinning. Why do you think this is so?
We will learn more about *taqwa* in the next lesson.
- 2 We should avoid sins even though the opportunity for *istighfar* and *tawbah* is always there. The reason is that when we try hard to obey Allah and then make a mistake once in a while, we will rush to do *istighfar* out of shame and regret. But if we make a habit of sinning then our hearts will become hard and we will become too proud to ask Allah for forgiveness and soon we will find that even when we repent we are not sincere and we do it only half-heartedly.
- 3 We should not become proud of our good actions. It is reported in a *hadith* that Allah told Nabi Dawud: 'O Dawud! Give good news to the sinners and warn the pious people!' Nabi Dawud was obviously surprised to hear this. He asked: 'My Lord! What should I give as good news to the sinners and how should I warn the pious?' Allah replied: 'Give good news to the sinners that I will accept their repentance and warn the pious not to become proud of their piety.'
- 4 We should remember Shaytan's tricks and constantly ask Allah for protection against Shaytan's influence.
- 5 We must pray to Allah to keep us on the right path and help us overcome the temptation to sin.



HIGHER LEVEL

One of the greatest sins in Islam is to lose hope in Allah's mercy. No matter how many times we fall into sin and no matter how many times we have already asked for forgiveness, we must never stop asking Allah to forgive us once more. The only condition is that every time we ask, we must be sincere and say words of *istighfar* with the intention that we will not repeat the sin:

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ
لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِنْ رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ
الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

Say: 'O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not lose hope of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah will forgive all sins. Indeed, He is the Most-Forgiving, the Most-Merciful.' (Surat az-Zumar, 39:53)

Allah is too kind and too merciful to allow a person to beg Him and then to turn him or her away and refuse to forgive. If a beggar knocks on our door we feel bad turning them away empty-handed. How can Allah do that to us? If Allah did not want to forgive us then He would not even give us the opportunity or thought to ask Him for forgiveness. So whenever we find an opportunity and willingness to repent sincerely, we should also know that Allah has decided to forgive us once more.

Not asking Allah for forgiveness is a sign of pride.

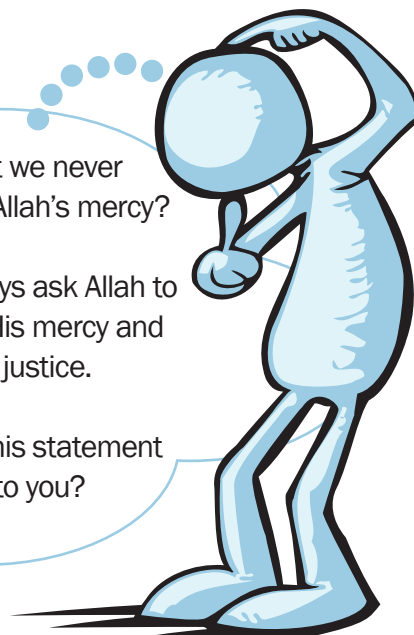
Allah loves to see His creatures ask Him for His forgiveness and blessings. To recognise that Allah is our master and we are His slaves is a sign of humility and it makes us pure and sincere. To refuse to accept that Allah is our creator and master is a sign of false pride, and stops us submitting to Allah. And it is this false pride that stops people from praying *salah* or asking Allah for forgiveness.



Why must we never lose hope in Allah's mercy?

We must always ask Allah to judge us by His mercy and not His justice.

What does this statement mean to you?



KEY POINTS

- 1 A sin is any act of disobedience to Allah. In Arabic, a sin is called *dhanb* and the plural is *dhunub*.
- 2 The *ulama* have divided sins into two groups: major sins and minor sins. Committing a minor sin repeatedly is a major sin.
- 3 Shaytan constantly tries to influence us to sin, but he cannot force us. We have *aql* and free will to choose our actions, and are therefore responsible for everything we do.
- 4 We must always do *muhasabah* and ask Allah to forgive us before going to bed every night.
- 5 Acquiring *taqwa* and not taking sins lightly helps us keep away from sins.





- 1 Why has Allah made certain acts sinful and *haram*?

- 2 What is the difference between major sins and minor sins according to some *ulama*?

- 3 What does *muhasabah* mean?

- 4 Explain any three ways in which we can protect ourselves from sinning.

- 5 How does Shaytan influence us and attract us to sins? How can we overcome Shaytan's tricks?