

MODULE 5

Class Title: Haya - part 1

(1st part of a 5 lesson series)

Aim of Lesson: To look at the meaning & implication of the Islamic concept of *haya* in comparison with misconceptions about modesty in our society

Category: Scripture/popular culture

Lesson Format: Power point presentation & narration. Discussion

(Greeting to students) *Assalam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

(*Ta'awwudh*) *Aoodhubillahi min AsShaytanir Rajeem*

(*Tasmiyah*) *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

(*Du'a*) *Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli* (Surah At Ta-Ha 20: Verse 25-28)

Slide 1:

InshaAllah, today, we are going to start talking about what you see on the screen. We are going to talk about this topic and things related to it until what happens? Until it comes out of your nose and your ears.

Haya is one of the most fundamental concepts in Islam. Is anybody aware of what *Haya* actually means?

Students: Being shy, being modest, modesty

Slide 2:

The Prophet (pbuh) said that every religion has an innate character and the character of Islam is *haya*. This is narrated in Abu Dawood.

Slide 3:

As you all said, *haya* is loosely translated as modesty, shyness etc. We have discussed translation issues before. There are some Arabic terms, in the Qur'an and Hadith, which are impossible to translate exactly into any other language. There is a reason why Allah (swt) has chosen this language. In Arabic, one word can encompass an entire concept. To translate that into another language is just not possible. That is why it is extremely important to understand the concept. To understand one concept, one Arabic word, we will use many different English words, we will sit for class after class.

Slide 4:

This is what we are going to try to do today – understand '*Haya*'.

When I say 'modest', what comes into your mind? You know '*haya*' means modesty but when I say the word 'modest', what is the first thing that pops into your mind?

Student: Covered.

Student: Looking down.

Student: Down to earth.

Teacher: Someone who is looking down. OK give me words! You know this can be a lesson in English as well. You guys don't have any idea how to articulate your thoughts, yet it is a very important skill. How many of you are going to go to college, *inshaAllah*?

Most of you, right? One thing that college and school education should give you is the ability to articulate your thoughts in a few words. It is a very useful quality, a skill that you should learn! Enough of the English lesson. So when I ask what comes into your head as I say 'modesty', give me words! Which words and images come to your mind? Some of you have said covered ...humble.... sweet... down to earth... modest ...protected....

Student: Nothing comes to mind.

Teacher: Nobody has even thought about modesty!

Student: A good person.

Teacher: Ok a good person. Ok, you are finally thinking. We need to be a little quick on our feet here.

We call it *sharm o haya* in Urdu, right? But what do we equate with *sharm o haya* {shame and modesty}? Our understanding of modesty is generally shy ..bashful ...timid ..meek ...under-confident ...awkward . These are the synonyms of the word modest. I looked them up in the thesaurus.

The image that comes to our mind is of a good person looking down. Also, someone immediately said covered because the first thing that we equate with modesty, when we are talking about *Haya* in Islam is, oh my God, a *burka* [outer garment of women]. That is the first thing that comes to your mind; covering up! That is the first thing she said and that is the first and last thing that many of us think of *Haya* = (is equal to) covering. End of story.

These are misconceptions that we have in our head. They are the reasons we have to discuss the concept to death. It is very important to understand '*Haya*' clearly because this is an actual building block of Islam. '*Haya*' is a foundation stone of Islam. It is interesting that most of you associate *haya* with lowering one's gaze and covering up. You went straight for the jugular! which is fine. **But that is not the only aspect of haya.**

Slides 6-12:

Timid as a mousethis is the normal, contemporary concept of modesty that we have around us. Don't we say, "timid as a mouse?" Mousy, for a person who is a little shy and reserved. We say, "She is a mousy person" or you say, "Oh, she was such a mousy now she has become a model, all confident!" Camera shy right? Silly shy ..you see all these little cartoon things, little miss shy, yes! Has anybody seen little miss shy?? Absolutely silly and airheaded. This is Bashful from the seven dwarfs. The coy princesses. Look at their expressions. I love their eyes. Look at the eyes with the batty eyelids. Very filmy, I must say. And who can forget the scene from The Jungle Book? Mowgli leaves everybody behind and just follows a girl he doesn't even know. Look at how she is a little coy, ...a shy, little girl, just walking ahead. I am not saying that this is necessarily what is in your head but this is generally what people think of, when they think of somebody who is modest. Shyness is a thing that one associates with modesty, just like the *hijab* [head covering]!

These are the concepts that we have in our head.

Slides 16 & 17:

It is time that we changed our perspective of *haya*. *Haya* is not as simple as it seems: it is not shyness, it is not covering up, it is not being down to earth or a good person or pious or humble or content. That is not *haya*; that is not modesty. *Haya* encompasses all that and much more.

Slide 18:

What do you see, when you see a ray of light? What color do you see ...white? But how many colors does it really have? It has a lot of colors, doesn't it?

That is exactly what *haya* is when you put it through the prism of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. It has all these shades in it.

Slide 20:

Narrated by Abu Hurraira (ra), the Prophet(pbuh) said, "Faith (belief) consists of more than 60 branches (i.e. parts) and *haya* is a part of faith" [Bukhari].

Haya is a part of faith. *Haya* is something from the inside as well as from the outside.

Slide 21:

The Prophet (pbuh) also said, "*Haya* and *imaan* (belief) are two companions that go together. If one of them is lifted, the other one is also lifted." [Al-Hakim]

Slide 22:

Now the concept of *haya* in Islam is that you should have *haya* in your attitude, *haya* in your speech, *haya* in your worship, *haya* in your dress and *haya* in all your dealings with people. *Haya* is that feeling inside; that when you do something wrong, you feel bad about it. Does that happen? Do you sometimes regret, “Oh! I should not have said that ...” You get a prick in your conscience and that prick of the conscience makes you say, “I should not have done that.” The fact that you do not want to expose yourself in front of others is *haya*. By exposing yourself, I don't mean just your body...it includes your body but also you do not want to expose your weaknesses.

As a human being, you may have thoughts that are not totally pure. To put it in a very polite way, sometimes you think strange and impure things. You do not want to be exposed. You do not want anyone to find out about these thoughts because you know that they are not right! Just like you do not feel right about taking your clothes off in front of somebody....if you have some kind of *haya* inside you would feel thatthat I am not going to take off my clothes in front of everybody because what? You are exposing your body...So you see it is as exposing yourself ...and *haya* is something that keeps you from doing that. You don't want to do that because you feel bad about it.

And once the *haya* level goes, there is no issue exposing everything whether it's dirty thoughts, whether it is your body, or whether it is whatever....everything goes....right?

Slide 23:

Allah (swt) is Rehman and Rahim, the Most Merciful The Always Merciful. The greatest gift that Allah (swt) gave us is the gift of life. Look at what life is called in Arabic: '*Hayat*' and to preserve that *hayat*, Allah (swt) gave us *haya*. *Haya* and *hayat* have the same root.

Slide 24:

There is no life, no *hayat*, without *haya*; it is that fundamental. And if you want to understand it more, *haya* is like an inner, protective device that Allah (swt) has given us. Think of *haya* as a circuit breaker. Most home appliances come with circuit breakers. For example, this air conditioner over here, has a circuit breaker. So if there is an electricity surge, it will trip, saving the air conditioner from burning out. In Karachi, we are notorious for these surges of electricity and blackouts with no electricity. This goes on all the time. Do you have these little adapters and things in your electrical appliances, particularly in your computers? If you are not very careful, a little burst of extra voltage and your computer just goes. So you have these protective devices in appliances.

Slides 25-28

Think of *haya* as a protective device. Another protective device is a hard hat or a helmet. It is against the law to go on a motorcycle without wearing a helmet. Why? So that if you fall down, your brains do not smash on the sidewalk....Surgeons wear protective devices, do they not? ...They do it to protect themselves from germs and all sort of diseases. Firefighters wear protective devices. Car manufactures put seat belts in cars. It is a proven fact that seat belts save lives.

Slides 29-30:

(Note to Teacher: Play Haya – part 1 clip – Pinball car accident)

Watch this video. Do you know what happens to you in a car crash? Can you hear what he is sayingeven if you are going less than 15 km an hour ..your body is like a pinball bouncing off the wind screen. Why would you ever get in a car without putting on your seat belt? This is what this advertisement is saying. This is an ad from Australian television.

This is a picture of a woman who did not wear a seat belt...because a lot of times when people are in a car crash they do not die; they become paralyzed or go through a lot of pain. Car accidents are a horrible thing and seat belts can actually save you from all of that.

Slide 31:

Haya is the seat belt that Allah (swt) has given us. That is what it is! It is a seat belt for our hearts and thoughts. Why our heart?? Because, many times, we think with our heart. Where do our actions originate from? How do actions originate? You think about it first and then you act.So a lot of time, if you have the seat belt of *haya* on, even though you may have a bad thought, you will stop it there. It is just like when your car jerks and you have the seat belt on. You jerk forward and then go back, don't you? The seat belt pulls you back. This is also what *haya* does... you have an awful thought... you might want to say ...be quiet teacher....then you think oh no no I can't say that. This means you have your seat belt on otherwise maybe you would say just that or walk out of the class...

Or you might feel really angry at your mother for some reason, really angry, boiling from the inside. Maybe she is not allowing you to go to your friend's house and you are desperate to go. You want to talk back to her. You want to say that I have done my homework and I want to go now! But something stops you and that thing is *haya*. So, *haya* involves each and every action of ours.

Haya is basically that feeling a believer has that he does not want to do something that is displeasing to Allah (swt). This is what *haya* is and it manifests itself in various different forms.

Thus '*haya*' is not a one-dimensional, simple, straight-forward concept. *Haya* affects each and every area of our life. Like a seat belt, it is our inner, protective device.

Slide 32:

And watch your thoughts they become words

Watch your words they become actions

Watch your actions they become habits

Watch your habits they become your character

Watch your character it becomes your destiny

So where does Allah (swt) want us to put the breaks on? Right here. Stop here, before you get into an accident. Otherwise be prepared for the consequences...

Slide 33:

From the words of the previous Prophets that people still find are

“If you feel no *haya*, then do as you wish.” [Bukhari]

The Prophet (pbuh) used to say that “If you feel no *haya*, then do as you wish”. Don’t we see that around us? The manifestations of *behayaei* [to be without *haya*/ indecency] are all around us ..

Modern culture declares that you should not say to children, “Shame on you!” One generation before me it was a very common thing. Everybody would be told that ...that shame on you why did you say that. Now, in the west particularly, people refuse to say shame on you to kids. Why not? Make them feel bad if they have said something bad! If your moms and your families tell you: *sharm nahi aati* [Aren't you ashamed?], it is a very good thing. In our culture, *Alhamdullilah*, it is a very acceptable thing for parents to say to their children. *Sharm nahi aati* [Aren't you ashamed?] or *sharm bei nahi rahi haye ankhoon mai* [Is there no shame in your eyes] Has your mother ever said such things to you?

Student: yes.

Teacher: It is an extremely positive thing to say “shame on you” because it reminds you of the innate character that Allah (swt) has put inside you! Allah (swt) has given us two powerful mechanisms which save our lives: one is *haya* and the other is fear.

There are many things that we don't do due to fear. I am not going to put my finger in this electricity socket. Why? Because I have this knowledge that it is going to burn and shock me and maybe even kill me. This knowledge leads to fear and stops my finger. However, a little child

will stick his finger right in as he can't relate to the fact that sticking his wet finger in the electricity socket will hurt him.

That feeling of fear is not there and as opposed to that, the feeling of *haya* is very acute in children. Most children do not want to expose their bodies to others. Exposing ourselves is a learned behavior. Most children like to be covered up. Think of the fetal position that we are born in. It reflects a desire for protection. It is a natural thing to be covered. We don't want to be in your face all the time. That is against the innate nature that Allah (swt) has given us, it is a learned behavior.

Modern culture promotes hiding and suppressing our natural *haya*. It is happening all around us. We are being socialized into suppressing our *haya*. The reason being the people who are modest are not actually held in very high esteem. Anyone with any *haya* in them is considered a liability. You have to be a little out there, you have to be a little brash, you have to be confident. All this means that you have to have a little less *haya*, a little less modesty.

Slide 34-36: Misconceptions about modesty

Modesty is equal to stupidity and dumbness. This is a common misconception. Some of you might not agree with it but it is a common misconception. "Oh God what a loser!" is what we think of the girl who is sitting quietly, minding her own business, in school with her head hung a little low and not talking too much to people. She is like "uh!" What is the matter with her? Such anti-social behavior!

Slide 37:

On the opposite end is the popular cheerleader. She is everyone's favorite. She is out there and smiling. She is confident. Her body language in quote unquote 'positive' because she is brash and in your face! These are the stereotypes that we see around us. We see this in our culture as well, it is not only western culture that we are talking about.

Slide 38:

Remember Clark Kent? He was boring, mousy, and shy. In other words, a geek! When does he become Superman? He becomes Superman when he sheds that conservative suit, when he takes off those glasses and when he wears a costume that shows each and every curve of his body. That is when he becomes Superman! Mr. Wow! This socialization happens to us without us even realizing it.

Did you ever think of Superman in those terms? Have you heard of Princess Diana? Poor thing, she is dead now. When she was engaged to Prince Charles, she was nicknamed 'Shy Di'. You guys were probably not born then. She was very shy. She would have her hair cut so that it covered half her eye. She was always looking down with a diffident expression. She was dubbed

as 'Shy Di' by the media. After a few years of constant media exposure she changed. She shed her inhibitions and shyness. The press said that she has blossomed! Popular culture declared that she has come into her own and become a formidable woman. This was because, according to their standards, she was wearing low-cut gowns and adopting a 'model' look.

Slides 39 & 40:

The media is always presenting us with pictures of people who shed their modesty and become something to reckon with. While they are in their cocoon, they are losers. So if one can't really talk to people, 'loser!' is what we think.

Even parents do it to their children. They say, "Speak up!" or "I can't hear you" or "Aunty can't understand what you are saying!" or "Why don't you recite ABCD for Aunty?" While Aunty is least interested in hearing the ABCD! Parents do that to their children. Parents will say, "Speak up! She can't hear you.", "Why did you not speak up in class?", "Why are you not in the swimming gala?" or "Why did you not do this?" Sometimes we treat children as if they are race horses or something.

Why is that? Because anyone who is a little reserved is considered an oddity. I am not talking about anti-social behavior, like a person who locks himself up in a room and does not want to meet anybody. We are not discussing extremes here. Just somebody who is reserved, who does not chat all the time, who does not sit in somebody's lap and says OK I want to be your friend. What is wrong with being like that? Why are such people encouraged to 'come out of their shell'? Why does everyone push them to be more 'out going'?

Student 1: But some people are painfully reserved.

Teacher: I am not talking about extremes. I am talking about regular, normal people who don't want to be out there. People who are confident within themselves but who do not manifest it in an obvious manner. It is a misconception that speaking with a loud voice or screaming and giggling frequently or saying "Hi!" to everyone is being 'confident'. It is a misconception that being loud and making yourself visible to everyone is confidence. The opposite end of this misconception is thinking that anybody who is a little bit reserved, a little modest lacks confidence.

Student: If you are too quiet, you are looked at as being a bit freaky or stupid

Teacher: Exactly! Anybody who is a little reserved, a trifle shy or even slightly modest is viewed negatively. They are considered to be a little not with it. You know they have to be 'with' it to be acceptable.

All of you come to this class once a week. There are some of you in class who participate and

some who don't. There are some of you who speak in class and some who don't. It would be very unfair on my part to think that the ones who are not participating are stupid.

Student: OK, the quiet kids are not stupid but definitely shy.

Teacher: But how do you know that the one who is quiet and shy in front of you does not talk to anyone else either? Maybe they are very talkative with other people.

The fact is, even if you have known somebody for years, it does not mean that you really know them. It's as simple as that. You may know a person all your life, you may regularly spend time with them but does not mean that you know them. You probably go to school with 500 people. It does not mean that you know them. You don't know them! So don't be so presumptuous, assuming that just because the person is not talking to you or not being pals with you, there is something wrong with them. That is exactly the point I am trying to make over here.

We attach negative connotations to anybody who chooses not to be all brash and open in front of the whole wide world. Relate this to what you said about covering up. There is a stereotype, a pre-defined box that people put girls, who choose to cover, into. They choose not to expose their bodies and they are put into to a box because of that. We have no clue as to where they are coming from but that doesn't stop us from making all kinds of assumptions and from deciding that we 'know' them well.

Do not put people in slots. That is the greatest misconception of modesty that we have. I am so glad that you guys brought up this ridiculous discussion because it just proves the point! It proves the point that you put people in slots because of preconceived notions about modesty and shyness.

We are trying to look at this Arabic word *haya*: it does not include awkwardness and it does not include being under confident. It includes modesty, it includes shyness, it includes being reserved, it includes covering your body, it includes lowering your gaze...it includes all of that and more.

Slide 41:

Another very important misconception is that modesty is only for girls. This morning, I went on Google image search and I entered the word 'modest'. Not a single picture of a boy came up. I am serious. Try doing it yourself. Go to Google and put down 'modest' in the image search. No guy pictures, not a single one. Why is that? Because we automatically associate '*haya*' or modesty with girls. What was your first response when I said 'modesty' at the start of this class? Covered! The first word that came out was 'covered' and who covers, men or women?

In Islam, '*haya*' is a characteristic that is highly valued in both men and women.

The Prophet (pbuh) used to talk about Uthman(ra)'s *haya*. He (pbuh) married two of his daughters consecutively [when one died he married the other one] to Uthman(ra) because of his *haya*. *Haya* was Uthman (ra)'s outstanding characteristic for which he is remembered to this day.

This misconception, that modesty is only for girls, is all over the world. *Alhamdulillah*, there are young men, practicing Muslims, who do not raise their eyes and look at a woman. They stick out like a sore thumb. Somebody was telling me recently about a young chap who is 18 years old and he does not look at you. She said isn't that so weird? He just looks down when he talks to you and that is exactly how she said it because she can't figure him out! He does not look at you! The chap is 18 years old, he has a little beard and *Alhamdulillah* he is a practicing Muslim so he does not look at girls. He just does not look. He does not look at me! I am all covered in front of him! I am seriously telling you ...he does not look at me even though he is half my age. He is my friend's son. I do *parda* [cover] in front of him but he does not raise his eyes when he is talking to me. He says, "*Assalam alaikum*" but like (lowering gaze) this. This girl found his modesty so strange ...she called him weird and I bet you all will find it weird as well. The fact is, if you find a boy being reserved and having *haya*, he is automatically labeled as a 'sissy'.

Student: Yes. People would wonder what he's up to.

Teacher: Exactly. He is simply following the command of Allah (swt), he lowers his gaze rather than talk to girls. That is exactly what he is told to do in Islam. Yet people call him a ninny and a sissy or whatever.

The Prophet (pbuh) himself had a lot of *haya*. Allah (swt) has *haya* ...it is one of His characteristics. It is a very important characteristic to have making it imperative to understand it. We need to get away from thinking of it as shyness. Think in terms of the Arabic word '*haya*' Stop thinking about modesty and shyness and being reserved. Think '*haya*' and things will fall into place, *inshAllah*. It will take time to fall into place so don't give up.

Slide 42:

The dress code is extremely important in terms of *haya* . You see *haya* does not happen only from the inside. The way Islam works, internal and external manifestation of faith is essential! If there is no manifestation of faith, that means there is no faith! If there is no manifestation of *haya*, that means there is no *haya*...remember that! This is exactly the same think as *oh muje toh Allah tallah say dil say mohabat haye namaz nahi par naa* [I love Allah in my heart so I don't pray *salah*] My connection with Allah is somewhere - a mystic connection. I sit and look at the sunset and think of my Lord! Please remember that your faith, your *imaan* [faith], and your *haya* should manifest, if that isn't happening, then there is something wrong there. Something is not right.

Another thing is that modesty is not equal to only dressing conservative. *Haya* does not equate to your hemline alone. That is a misconception.

Slides 43-47:

Modesty is now a disease. *'The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders'*, which is a journal of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), has actually listed shyness as a disease. I am not joking! A person called Christopher Lane has exposed how it was actually done. His book, *'How Normal Behavior Became a Sickness'* [published by Yale University Press] describes how psychologists and psychiatrists collaborated to make shyness into a disease. This is the mindset that we are talking about!

When we think of modest or shy people as people with social problems as though they are sociopaths of some sort! When we think of reserved people as people with anxiety problems like a fear of talking to people! Then what happens is that you are given 'solutions' for these 'problems. Look at some of the books that are out in the market: *'Overcome Shyness'* *'Beyond Shyness'* *'How to Conquer Social Performance Anxieties?'* *'Talking with Confidence for the Painfully Shy.'*

Slide 48:

Now who is to decide who is painfully shy? And this cultural idea of being anti-shy manifests itself from a very, very young age. This is a children's picture book, "When you are shy and you know it then your face will surely show it, when you are shy and you know it, try to speak." This is a nursery rhyme which a child is socialized into. You are trying to suppress the child's natural *haya*.

Slide 49:

Look at what Islam says. Narrated on the authority of Anas bin Malik (ra), the Prophet (pbuh) said, "When lewdness is a part of anything, it becomes defective and when *haya* is a part of anything, it becomes beautiful." [Tirmidhi].

Lewdness is being vulgar. Lewdness is vulgarity and *haya* is beauty. This is the opinion of the Creator of Beauty, Allah (swt).

InshAllah, we will continue with *haya* next week. We will see what role *haya* plays in our lives.

Please do think about the role that *haya* plays in your life before you come in next week.

Du'a for end of a gathering) *Subhana Rabbika Rabbul Izzati 'amma yasifun wa salamun 'alal mursaleen, walhamdulillahi Rabbil 'alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *Assalam alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*