

MODULE 1

Class Title: Greed

Aim of the lesson: To understand that wanting things is not a problem. Only focusing on wanting is greed and how it can be cured.

Category: *Tazkiyah*

Lesson Format: Power point presentation and discussion

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

(Taooz) 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:

Today, *inshaAllah*, we will talk about greed and how it can prove to be problematic for us.

Slides 2 and 3:

What is greed? (*discuss with students*)

Basically, greed is excess fondness of money and fortune. It is a selfish, excessive or uncontrolled desire for wanting stuff - money, wealth, food, or any other possessions or even power. I want, I want, I want syndrome. You want more than you need.

According to Erich Fromm, "Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction."

So you see what happens is you want stuff and even after you get it you want more and then more. You never get satisfied. It is a disease.

Slide 4:

Horrible things happen when people are overcome with greed. People may even kill each other when they are envious of, and greedy for, the possessions that other people have. They may feel that they deserve these possessions and can cause harm to others to gain them. People are always breaking into houses and stealing from other people in order to satisfy their greed for material wealth and possessions.

Slide 5:

Greedy people are like silk worms; what does a silk worm do? It wraps itself in a cocoon, and the more it entraps itself in its cocoon, the lower are its chances of being able to escape. Likewise, the more people want, the more their greed increases until they eventually die (of grief and dissatisfaction), just like a silk worm.

Slides 6 - 8:

Is it problematic to want more in life? Is it wrong to have different goals in life? No, not really. The problem begins when only money or worldly possessions become the focus of one's life. People, always greedy for more, never get tired of grabbing everything that comes their way. Nothing seems enough.

They are so focused on getting more that they don't even stop to appreciate what they already have. Many times death comes upon them unexpectedly and they never get the chance to enjoy the fortune they have accumulated.

Slides 9 - 10:

This is a common problem with greedy people- they don't enjoy what they have in this life and when they die, who enjoys the money and their hard-earned possessions? Their heirs! So, is there a problem with the heirs enjoying the fortune? No.... then what is the problem? The problem is that a greedy person doesn't mind committing a crime or a sin in order to gain more; this creates problems, not only for the people around him, but also for himself. By indulging in sinful deeds to gain more in this life, he sabotages his own Hereafter.

Slide 11:

Another problem with a greedy person is that he gives charity reluctantly; he doesn't share his wealth and if he ever does, he gives away very little. And, again, by hoarding money instead of letting it circulate in society, he causes problems for the people around him.

Slides 12 - 16:

I'm going to tell you a few stories so that we can understand how harmful being greedy is. Let's start with the story of an emperor and a beggar. There was an emperor who went for a walk outside his palace one day. As he was walking, he met a beggar with a bowl in his hand. The emperor asked him what he wanted...

First, tell me... how does an emperor speak? He speaks in a haughty tone, right?

"What do you want?" asked the emperor.

"Heh, heh, heh!" the beggar laughed. "You are asking me what I want as though you can fulfill all my desires!"

The emperor was offended. "Of course I can!" he said.

"Think twice before you make any promises to me," the beggar cautioned.

Now this beggar didn't seem to be any ordinary beggar; the emperor felt threatened.

"I'm a very rich and powerful emperor, don't you know?" he insisted. "And what can you possibly want that I can't give you?"

"Well, it's a simple desire... you see this begging bowl I'm holding? Can you fill it up with something?" the beggar said.

“Of course!” said the emperor, and ordered his *wazeer* {minister} to fill the bowl with money.

Slides 17 - 21:

The *wazeer* filled the bowl with money but immediately the money disappeared! The *wazeer* poured more and it disappeared again. Each time he poured the money, it would just disappear and the bowl remained empty. A huge crowd had gathered around the palace to watch this strange scene; the prestige of the emperor was now at stake.

The emperor, angry by now, roared at the *wazeer*, “I’m ready to lose everything I have but I’m not ready to accept defeat! Get everything I have in the treasury!”

So, what did the *wazeer* do? He brought gold and diamonds, pearls and rubies and many other expensive treasures... but the beggar’s bowl seemed bottomless, eating up everything that it was filled with. Finally, the treasury was empty and the emperor had nothing more to put in the bowl.

What do you think happened next?

The emperor dropped to the feet of the beggar and accepted defeat. He had been humbled and his tone was mellowed.

“Now, just tell me one thing: what is this bowl made of?” he enquired.

The beggar laughed, “It’s made up of the human mind and desires.”

This understanding can transform our lives. Did anyone understand what he meant by this? Why did he say that the begging bowl was made up of the human mind and desires?

Slides 22 – 24:

Let’s explain with the help of an example. How many of you have a mobile phone? Let’s say a very fancy new mobile phone has just been launched and you are dying to buy it. You ask your mother for it and you are very excited because you’re on the verge of getting it.

However, once you get it, your mind de-materializes the new mobile. You are very excited initially; you show it off to your friends, but eventually the excitement wears off. Can you relate to this feeling?

Slides 25 – 28:

What happens to you after you get the cell phone that you had previously been so excited about? The excitement is only in getting it, and once you’ve got it, the bubble of excitement bursts. Then there is emptiness again and you’re so bored in your routine that you look for ways to create some more excitement in your life.

Slides 29:

These beautiful reminders in *Qur’an* are to bring us back to reality; the understanding of the delusion that this World truly is so let not the Deluder (material things) delude you.

That's how we go from one desire to another and that's how we remain beggars throughout our lives. When one desire is fulfilled we want something else. When one goal is achieved you move on to a new desire. It's like a never ending cycle. Our mind keeps finding new desires.

Slide 30- 33:

Let me tell you another story, about a store that sold friends. Do you think it's a real story? No? Don't you wish there was actually a store like that, where you could place an order for a friend who has particular qualities and they could just **make** one for you? Wouldn't you love to have something like that?

Now let's start with the story:

Slides 34 - 40:

Written outside the store were instructions, as to how the store would operate. It said, "You may visit only once." There were six floors and the qualities of friends kept increasing as you ascended.

However, the catch was that you could choose a friend from a particular floor or you could choose to go up but you could go back down **only** to exit the building.

Once, a girl decided to visit this store because she was dying to find a good friend.

When she reached the first floor, she saw a sign which read, 'A fun loving, unique and interesting friend.' But she knew the qualities would keep increasing so she went on to the second floor.

On this floor the sign read, 'A fun loving, unique, interesting **and** attentive and adaptable friend.'

She went to the third floor, where the sign read, 'A fun loving, unique, interesting, attentive, adaptable **and** supportive and trustworthy friend.'

She was thrilled. What more could she ask for? At first, she wanted to stop here, but her desire got the better of her and she moved up.

On the fourth floor the sign read, 'A fun loving, unique, interesting, attentive, supportive and trustworthy friend who **also** sticks with you through both the good times and the bad times.' She was relieved that she had come up and not returned from the third floor.

She quickly went on to the fifth floor where the sign read, 'A fun loving, unique, interesting, attentive, supportive and trustworthy friend who also sticks with you through both the good times and the bad times **and** accepts you for who are even when you are being unreasonable.'

Do you think she stopped here? No, of course not! She took a minute to catch her breath and quickly moved on to the last floor.

There she read, 'You are visitor number 43630012 to this floor; this floor exists only to prove that people are impossible to please! Thank you for shopping at the Friends Store. Watch your step and have a nice day.'

How many of you would've stopped at the first few floors? I know I wouldn't have! You would've all done what she did, right? This is a built in tendency: to want more. So what's the lesson here? If you have enough, be satisfied with it. If you want to compare yourself with the people around you, look at those who have less than you.

Slides 41 – 42:

Now, the third story:

This one is about the Caliph Haroon Rashid. He announced that whoever had seen the Prophet (pbuh) in his/her lifetime be brought before him and he'd fulfill their desire.

A very old woman was brought before him. He asked her whether she had seen Muhammad (pbuh) in her life and she answered in the affirmative. So he asked her if she remembered any of the sayings of the Prophet (pbuh). She told him that the Prophet (pbuh) had once said, "When old age comes, two things become young: one is hope (lofty aspirations) and the other is greed."

The Caliph thanked her and gave her one hundred *dinar* {currency} as a gift. On her way back a thought crossed her mind and she turned back. When asked why she had returned, she inquired whether the Caliph was only going to give her this monetary gift once or whether he would pay her every year! The Caliph realized how true the words of the Prophet (pbuh) were. She desired more money and she also assumed that she would be alive till the next year, even though she was very old. Her greed made her turn back halfway to her home!

What do you think the Caliph said? The Caliph was a kind man and he promised to give her money every year. However, on the way home, the woman died. This tradition of the Prophet (pbuh) proved to be true; as our age grows, our greed can increase if we don't control it. We have to learn to control our greed from a young age. That's why we are having this class with you in Module 1.

Slides 43 – 49:

Let me tell you another story:

A man had lost thirty gold coins. He went to his friend, who was a very kind man and told him about his loss. This kind man's daughter found thirty gold coins when she was returning home one day. She told her father about it and he told her that they must belong to his friend.

The father happily went to his friend and informed him that his daughter had found the coins. As the man took the coins from his friend, he counted them and said, "Uh-oh! These are only thirty coins... I said forty coins were missing."

"But you said thirty!" his friend insisted.

The man replied, "No, I said forty and your daughter must've taken them. I'm going to the court to recover those ten coins!"

In court, he related a false story to the judge. The judge called for the girl and asked her how many coins she had found. She testified that she had found only thirty coins. The judge once again confirmed with the man that he had lost forty coins.

The smart judge concluded, “These thirty coins must not be yours then, as you lost forty. We’ll keep these thirty with us till somebody claims them. If someone finds forty coins, we’ll let you know.”

Upon hearing the judge’s verdict, the greedy man cried out; “okay, okay I lied! I had actually lost 30 coins.” But the judge had had enough and didn’t listen to a word the greedy man said in his defense.

Slides 50-51:

So, what’s the moral of the story? Honesty is the best policy and greed won’t get you more, you’ll only lose out on what you already have. A greedy person is a loser in this world and the next!

Have you seen people on flights or in restaurants? They take tissues, butter, toothpicks and all other sorts of random objects and stuff them in their bags. Once they get home, they either throw these away or put them in drawers and just forget about them. The sad part is that they don’t use them. They take things to satisfy their greed and not because those things are needed. Even rich people do it! It’s so sad to see us Muslims do this and it’s a common thing amongst us. This is sheer greed.

Slides 52-53:

This greed is a projection of fear. Fear of what? The fear of not having enough in the future; the fear of becoming poor. Thus, people feel the urge to accumulate all the little things they can and as much as they can. Some people sacrifice their today for tomorrow and that tomorrow never comes. So the greedy man never becomes rich.

Slides 54- 56:

He has everything. He has the whole world at his disposal but he remains poor. He’s got everything but he can’t enjoy it because his greed won’t allow him to and he wastes his whole life accumulating. This is the end result of a person’s greed. Then what happens? Eventually he dies and doesn’t get to use those things. He led a tough, difficult and insecure life, constantly thinking he needs more money.

Slides 57:

Think about the short time span you are on this Earth. Is the greed you have for something belonging to someone else really worth the moment of pleasure that you will derive from it if you should get it?

Slide 58- 60:

The thing with greed is that it doesn’t start out on a large scale. You don’t wake up one morning and think of robbing a bank because you need money... it doesn’t happen that way. Instead, sins start out small. You don’t even realize you’re getting trapped in sin.

Anger can be the foundation for greed as well. People can be angry at themselves first, for not having enough money or a pretty face or a nice car.

At first, they are angry regarding themselves, but then they begin to envy others, thinking that other people are born with silver spoons in their mouths and don't deserve what they have been given.

Jealous thoughts enter their heads, "How come they get to go on vacation every year while I have to work and save up just to have lunch with my friends? It's not fair!"

In this manner they go on and on.

Slide 61:

What are we supposed to do when such thoughts cross our minds? What is the first thing to do? Does it happen to you? You need to stop such thoughts from entering your minds. You have to stop thinking that way- it's not going to help you. You might be right in thinking others are lucky, but if you allow these thoughts to grow and fester, you'll be the one left holding the shorter end of the stick. Such thoughts won't help you in getting what you want and will only make you inclined towards getting it the wrong way.

Slide 62:

Another tried and tested way is that when you feel you are tempted continuously by something and despite trying, one feels obsessed with craving a certain kind of vacation, material object, etc etc, in that case its very helpful if you look at people below you in wealth like perhaps a friend , a servant, a neighbor or a relative who doesn't have what you have. This immediately brings a feeling of gratefulness and envy fleets. However it by conscious and continuous effort that you retain that feeling of *shukr* for things you have and *sabr* for what you hope to attain either in this world (when Allah swt deems it appropriate) or in Hereafter where rewards are unlimited and infinite.

Slide 63:

We have to repeatedly remind ourselves that we momentarily exist in this world. These people, who have more than us, are not going to take their things with them to their graves. Everything will remain here, on this earth and we're not going to live here forever.

It's fine to save up a bit of money. There's nothing wrong with saving money but we can't take anything with us when we die. Saving is not a bad idea, but saving it because you're afraid you won't have enough in the future isn't right. It's not going to help us in the Hereafter.

Allah (swt) is not going to say, "All those who went to Europe last year will go to *Jannah* {Paradise}." Allah (swt) is not going to decide our fate this way.

So... may Allah (swt) help us recognize even an inkling of greed that we may have within us, and help us to defuse it at this stage because it's very small now and we can kill it. So, what are we going to do?

Everyone say it! Yes, we're going to kill it!

(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*

References for Teacher:

Purification of the Heart, signs, symptoms, and cures of the diseases of the heart, Translation and commentary of Imam Al Mawlud's *Matharat al Qulub*, Hamza Yusuf, Starlatch Press, ISBN 1-929694-15-6

Hadith references:

Ibn 'Abbas and Anas bin Malik (ra) reported: Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said: "If a son of Adam were to own a valley full of gold, he would desire to have two. Nothing can fill his mouth except the earth (of the grave). Allah turns with mercy to him who turns to Him in repentance".

[Bukhari and Muslim]

Narrated Hakim bin Hizam: I asked the Prophet (for some money) and he gave me, and then again I asked him and he gave me, and then again I asked him and he gave me and he then said, "This wealth is (like) green and sweet (fruit), and whoever takes it without greed, Allah will bless it for him, but whoever takes it with greed, Allah will not bless it for him, and he will be like the one who eats but is never satisfied. And the upper (giving) hand is better than the lower (taking) hand." [Bukhari :: Book 8 :: Volume 76 :: Hadith 448]

Ka'ab ibn Maalik (ra) reports that the Prophet (pbuh) said, "If two hungry wolves are released amongst a flock of goats they will not cause as much harm, as greed of wealth and greed of status causes to the Deen of a person." (Tirmidhi)