**MODULE 5**

**Class Title**: Framework of Righteousness

**Aim of the lesson**: To understand the framework of righteousness in Islam through Surah Al Baqarah verse 177

**Category**: Scripture

**Lesson Format**: Activity, Power point presentation and discussion

**Materials needed:**

**For 1st activity**

2 Slices of bread

Slice of cheese

Tomato sauce

**For 2nd activity**

Spaghetti – 20 pieces per team

Mini Marshmallows – 10 pieces

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)

Have you ever wondered that different people have different definitions of what a “good deed” is or what “righteousness” is?

Take Robin Hood. He stole money from rich people and distributed it to the poor and needy. Is that a good deed? Is that righteous?

(Majority of students say yes of course it is).

Ok. What about breaking your parents’ heart? Would that be good or bad?

Students: that would be very nasty, ungrateful, it would be sinful, we are supposed to respect and love our parents.

Right. And what do you think about a father leaving his child behind and moving to another city? Then that child being separated from his mother too, for a whole year - A small child.

Students: that is irresponsible, cruel, neglect of children,

Now let me tell you a few things. Ibrahim (as) who Allah (SWT) says is a friend of His (SWT) broke his father’s heart when he refused to follow his father’s religion. He also asked his father not to worship idols. His father was so heartbroken and upset with him that he asked Ibrahim (as) to leave and never return!

Was Ibrahim (as) nasty, ungrateful, sinful?

Scenario number 2: When Rasool Allah (saw) was ordered by Allah (SWT) to migrate to Madinah, all believers were ordered to do the same.

When Abu Salama (ra) and his wife Umme Salama (ra) returned to Mecca from Ethiopia and took their son Salama with them to go to Medina for *hijrah*, Umme Salama's family did not let her leave. Subsequently, Abu Salama left his wife and son in Mecca and had to go to Mecca by himself! To top it off, the family of Abu Salama took Salama from his mother in response to the things done by Ummu Salama's family. As a result of the deep sadness caused by the separation from both her husband and son, Ummu Salama shed tears for a year[[1]](#footnote-1).

Was Abu Salama (ra) cruel and neglectful?

As for Robin Hood and his merry men:

Theft is *Haraam* (forbidden) according to the Quran & Sunnah The Hadd [i.e. the legal punishment prescribed by Islamic law for a thief is to cut off the thief's hand. Allah (SWT) Says in the Noble Quran (what means):

“[As for] the thief, the male and the female, amputate their hands in recompense for what they earned [i.e. committed] as a deterrent [punishment] from Allah. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.” [Quran 5:38]

The Prophet (saw) said: “The hand (of the thief) should be cut off for (the theft of) a quarter of a Dinar or more.” [Al-Bukhari]

You see what we think of as righteousness or good deed depends on what frame of reference we are using.

Every human being needs a concept of virtue (value system) and adopts it to satisfy his/her conscience. Even thieves and swindlers believe in giving charity, going to a shrine or some “good deed” that is virtuous in their eyes.

Just as we have a physical need of food, water, and sleep, our inner personality needs a code of virtue regardless of how immoral we may be.

Among civilized people, we can identify 2 broad sections in society (particularly Muslim society). Each group has its own concept of piety or virtue.

Apparently 'religious people' - emphasis on religious rituals, dogma, and external appearance but their individual acts may be highly immoral. They say prayers, grow beard, have the appearance of strong practicing Muslims. But could be miserly, merciless, don't say the truth, cheat.

Apparently 'decent people' - prioritize personal integrity. Generally educated people who value honesty and personal decency. Not interested in religious rituals, dogma, and external appearance.

So don’t we need a frame of reference? How will I know what I “think” is a righteous deed actually righteous?

**Activity 1**

Note to teacher: Make a sandwich with cheese and tomato sauce

Show to students and ask what is this? They will say sandwich. You say no it is pizza. The ingredients are the same and I am saying this is pizza.

After few minutes of back and forth on pizza or sandwich – wrap up by saying. This is a sandwich because the person who invented pizza made it a specific way and I can’t just change that definition because I want to.

Who is the Creator?

Allah (swt). He swt is the only One who has defined for us a proper framework of righteousness and it is not upto you and me or Robin hood to redefine or make up our own idea about what is a good deed and what is not.

So where has Allah (swt) given us this framework?

In Surah Baqarah – Ayat 177. This ayah is called *Ayat al Birr* and we will try to understand it today.

**Slide 3:**

Read the ayah

**Slide 4:**

Read the translation

**Slide 5:**

So what Allah (swt) is saying in this long verse is giving us an entire righteousness framework – in detail.

Go over the slide briefly.

Now let us look at each component separately

**Slide 6:**

Allah swt’s definition of Goodness **–** Allah swt explains that turning your face towards the east or the west is not all there is to righteousness.

Allah first commanded the believers to face Bayt Al-Maqdis, and then to face the Ka`bah during the prayer. This change was difficult for some of the People of the Book, and even for some Muslims. Then Allah sent revelation which clarified the wisdom behind this command, that is, obedience to Allah, sticking to His commands, facing wherever He commands facing, and doing whatever He orders, **that is the objective**. This is Birr.

Turning one's face towards the east or the west is mentioned here only by way of illustration. The actual purpose of the verse is to emphasize that being particular about certain outward religious rites, the performance of certain formal religious acts because that is what is traditionally the done thing is not the complete picture of righteousness - there is more to it.

So Allah begins by negating false understanding of piety or righteousness.

**Slide 7:**

Its amazing how Allah swt uses precise words to describe concepts and feelings in the Quran. Bir translated as righteousness is from the root word *ba ra ra*

Two very similar words are from the same root word. One is Barr which means land. Other is Bahr which means ocean or sea or body of water.

**Slides 8 and 9:**

Have any of you been on a boat or ship?

Is it easy and comfortable to stand on a boat? Are you sure footed?

No. its kinda nerve wracking actually. Because even when the sea is calm, there is constant movement and you have to balance yourself carefully. You don’t feel secure.

Someone who's at sea is completely lost or deeply confused – this idiom being at sea is used in the English language.

In contrast, when you are standing on land, even at the beach, you feel secure, sure footed, at ease. Isn’t that true?

So Allah swt has used the word Birr for righteousness because human beings have a sense of security, of being chill and cool when doing acts of righteousness. It is an inner feeling we have that yes! This is good.

When you perform charity, righteous deeds, and are pious, your soul is contented and happy - you have done good to fellow man, etc. You receive spiritual pleasure and satisfaction.

The mere performance of rituals does not give inner peace (barr), but if the spirit is present in the act, then you get the true reward - inner contentment and spiritual satisfaction.

**Slides 10 - 13:**

Now Allah swt begins telling us so ok Birr is … all these things listed in the ayah.

First thing is that one believes in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the book and the Prophets – before anything else *eeman*. And not random I believe in this not that kinda *eeman* – a specific *eeman* on Allah swt and on the fact that there will be a Last Day and we will be standing in front of Allah swt, and on all of the angels and on the book - the Quran, Allah swt’s last revelation to us. And on all the Prophets. These are the core parts of our belief.

So you see we cannot pick and choose here. I cannot say I have eeman on all Prophets except Yusuf (as) for example. I believe in angel Jibril but not that there is an angel of death.

This *eeman* is the foundation on which *al birr* – the righteousness will be built up on. There is a deep relationship between the two. So no matter what I do, how many acts of charity, volunteering at a school for the deaf and blind, helping the poor whatever – they will not be acts of righteousness minus *eeman*.

The highest reason for doing good is to make Allah swt happy which should be the first drive to do good deeds although the other reasons are also legitimate.

You might be thinking, what about all those people who do so many charitable deeds but do not have eeman, are not Muslim? What they are doing are simple good deeds – not birr. How Allah swt will reward them He knows best. What Rassol Allah (pbuh) has told us is this:

Anas ibn Mālik (ra) reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said: "When a disbeliever does a good deed, he is rewarded for it in this world. As to the believer, Allah, the Almighty, saves his good deeds to reward him in the Hereafter and provides him with sustenance in this life as a reward for his obedience." [Muslim]

**Slide 14:**

Read the ayah and translation

**Slides 15 & 16:**

Once we have our eeman sorted out, the 1st manifestation of it is that we will have empathy for all human beings. A person of eeman, a true believer cannot be hard hearted when he looks at others in trouble, suffering, sick or down and out. So what they do is that they spend – their wealth, their time, their effort – all the blessings that Allah swt has given them to help others.

And Allah says here they spend what they love! Not just give all old, used, rubbish stuff that you don’t like but stuff that you yourself are fond of. So say you are volunteering at an orphanage – your frinds have planned to go get together at the time of your shift, you would excuse yourself and go spend the time pledged at the orphanage. That is spending what you love. Get it?

And Allah swt has given us a priority list so to speak of who are those people that deserve our empathy and help. Close relatives. Now many times we hear “charity begins at home” but do we really practice this? You may not particularly like a close relative. Yeah. That’s possible. But if a relative – whether you like them or not – are in need of your “spending” you would spend on them. Period. That is a righteous deed.

They are giving people. They don’t shy away from spending and happily, not with a grudge.

Orphans are on the margins of society. Can you imagine not having both parents or not having one parent? Yearning for love and attention. They deserve our time and affection as well as financial help. Rasool Allah (pbuh) has aid those who look after orphans will be close to me on the Day of Judgment.

*Al-Masaakeen*: psychological state where a person has lost heart & will to work. Can’t stand on his own feet.

*Ibn as-Sabeel*: traveler/wayfarer. It may even be the case that a wealthy person is in need of assistance while traveling.

*As-Saa’ileen*: In Islam, begging is discouraged – not fitting for human to place their honor before another human. Beg only to Allah. However, if someone asks for money, stretches his hand out, it is unworthy of you to refuse. If you cannot give, or don’t want to give, then at least be kind. This is the balance that Islam teaches us. Note: In some places, begging is a profession. Should not encourage this.

*Fi riqaab*: to get people free from slavery. Or these days pay bail for prisoners

All these sadaqat – if in form of money are other than compulsory zakat.

**Slides 17 - 19:**

The 2nd manifestation of righteousness or piety is worship.

Allah swt says they establish salah and pay zakah.

And this person also establishes salah and zakah. Faith is like a foundation of a building. First you see the person is very giving, a good charitable giving,

Salah means he prayed, he established it, their life revolves around the prayer. Salah doesn’t have to fit in your schedule everything else has to fit with salah. So righteousness is to pray on time no matter where you are – in school, in college, at a friend’s house etc.

You guys probably do not fall in the category of people who must pay zakah but in sha Allah as you get older, and Allah swt has given you wealth – you will pay zakah – as an honour as a means of worship.

**Slides 20 – 22:**

And they fulfill their promises.

So the 3rd manifestation of righteousness is dealing of honesty & integrity.

We have a promise with our own selves – to be honest and upright people, to take care of our bodies and our souls, to be of benefit to our own selves.

Then, all human relations are based on agreements. Not everything is written down formally. Parents and children have a implicit promise with each other. Friends do. That you will not betray each other’s trust for example.

If your school begins at 8 o clock and you are a student there then reaching on time is keeping an agreement or promise with the school.

And ofcourse we have a covenant with our Allah swt right? When we say I am a Muslim. I say La ilaha illallah what is that? That is a promise. That Ya Rabbi for me there is no God but You. I will not bow down to anyone, anything, any ideology, any culture but only to what You ask of me. It is a serious promise. Righteousness is that we fulfill it.

**Slides 23 - 25:**

And the last point is that they are patient in hardship and suffering; and when in battle.

So the 4th manifestation of righteousness is being patient and steadfast at all times. You don’t become frazzled and leave your salah during exam time. You don’t start backbiting about someone who posted something nasty about you – if it is a case of bullying – involve an adult or teacher.

You get the point? Whatever the situation on the outside, not matter how trying – righteousness is to be patient and steadfast. And don’t think being patient means you do not discuss a serious issue that is bothering you with anyone. Seek help from a responsible person. Lack of patience would be to post whatever on social media, scream and howl with friends – no use in doing that.

**Slide 16:**

Those are the ones that are really good. Those are the people of goodness, the people of taqwa. Now goodness is defined, you can fit injunctions properly, and everything has its place.

Let’s have a look at this chart one more time and recap our discussion.

And we will wrap up with an activity.

**Activity 2**

**Note to teacher**: form teams of students. Give each team 20 pieces of spaghetti and 10 marshmallows. And instruct them to:

make a tower as high as possible with the given material. Limited supply of material is available and you can only use these 2 things.

You have 15 minutes to build the tower

Rules: the highest tower will be the winner. Judge’s decision will be final

Note to teacher: you will see that most teams will go for height rather than having a strong foundation. Usually in this activity a seemingly short but secure foundation tower is the only one standing.

Debrief: get the students together and discuss how important the foundation is. The instruction was to make a tower as high as possible. Without a foundation a tower will simply not stand. Discuss the foundation of eeman in the framework of righteousness.

This activity is important for this session so make sure form the start that you have enough time for this activity and discussion afterwards.

(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*

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

1. Finally, her relatives showed mercy and allowed her to go to Medina and Abu Salama's family handed Salama over to his mother. Ummu Salama took her child with her and left Mecca to go to Medina. She reached Quba in the company of Uthman ibn Talha, whom she had met on the road and met Abu Salama there.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)