

# SEEKING COUNSEL

## Objectives >>>

### Students should:

- Be reminded of the importance of getting help and advice when required
- Understand from whom they must seek advice and the responsibilities of the person giving advice including expertise, honesty, trust and ability to keep a secret
- Understand that seeking advice from Allah (SWT) is always best. The easiest way to do this is to do Istikhāra
- Understand briefly the rules of Istikhāra

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 4

## SEEKING ADVICE

In the previous lesson we learnt of the importance of seeking advice when making major decisions in our life and the basic condition the advisor should have is that they should be an expert in the area.

In this lesson, we will go a little further and look at the various other conditions that a person giving advice must fulfil. We will also look at taking advice directly from Allah (SWT) with the help of Istikhāra, and also the best times to seek and give advice.

### IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING ADVICE

We know that people who are more knowledgeable and more experienced than us are always in a better position to guide us. This is because they are able to see many of the consequences of our decisions better than we can. By seeking advice, we are actually getting more knowledge and with more knowledge we can obviously make better and more profitable decisions.

Seeking advice also demonstrates a person's intellectual and social development. Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"He who consults with men of understanding, shows his development...."<sup>iii</sup>

### WHO SHOULD I ASK ADVICE FROM?

When seeking advice, we should go to a person who is an expert in the area we are seeking advice about. This is the main condition. The following narration from Imam al-Şādiq (as) clarifies the remaining conditions of a counsellor:

- Expertise
- Ability to keep a secret
- Impartiality
- Religiousness

A companion by the name of al-Ḥalabī narrates from Imam al-Ṣādiq (as):

*“Seeking advice from others is a virtue. If you do not do it, you will face a great loss. However, there are conditions. The first is that the person you seek advice from should have intellect (i.e. be an expert). Secondly, he should also be religious and impartial. Thirdly, he should also be a friend. Fourthly, you must divulge all the details to him, so that he knows your affairs as much you do. The counsellor should then keep this a secret and not divulge it.”*

We can see from this that a person giving advice must also be honest and trustworthy so that the advice given is given in our best interests.

## ISTIKHĀRA

The actual meaning of ‘Istikhāra’ is “asking what is best and proper from Allah, the Merciful” which in itself is a form of supplication. Reliance (upon Allah), leaving all of one’s affairs (to Allah) and having a good or favourable opinion of Allah are the requirements before one performs any supplication. This means that in all of one’s affairs, the person supplicates to Allah and sincerely asks Him to make his path easy and give him a good outcome.

The Istikhāra by supplication in all instances takes precedence. It has been recommended that before one performs even the smallest act, he start off by supplicating to Allah (SWT). In the narrations, it has been emphasized that this type of Istikhāra should be performed before every action, and is one of the reasons for the success of a person

The Istikhāra with the *tasbīḥ* beads and the Qur’ān is the final step after one still entertains doubts and uncertainty in his mind and should only be done after seeking the best from Allah (SWT) through *duā’*, thinking, weighing out the pros and cons, and requesting advice from others.

## RULES OF ISTIKHĀRA

As discussed above, the form of Istikhāra by the *tasbīḥ* or Qur’ān is only the last resort after fulfilling several conditions and still being in doubt. Therefore, before one does the Istikhāra through these methods, he must have fulfilled these conditions:

- Doing one’s own research and weighing out the advantages and disadvantages i.e. having as much knowledge about the facts as one can reasonably get
- Praising and Glorifying Allah and reciting the various *du’ā’* asking for the best outcome. One particular *du’ā’* is Imam Sajjad’s *du’ā’* in asking for the best outcomes. (*du’ā’* 33 in *Ṣaḥīfa Sajjadiyah*)
- Seeking Advice from others especially experts in the field

If one is still in doubt after these steps, then they can do an Istikhāra using the *tasbīḥ*, or the Holy Qur’ān.<sup>iii</sup> If one does undertake this form of Istikhāra, they must then stick to the decision they have made based on the Istikhāra, and should not ignore it.

## Review Questions

**Q1. When seeking advice from a person, we should go to someone who is:**

- a) Impartial
- b) Religious
- c) Both a & b

**Q2. Istikhāra by the Qur’ān and *tasbīḥ* is:**

- a) The last resort after asking advice from experts, doing research and praying to Allah for the best outcome
- b) Should be done in all situations where we have any doubt
- c) Should never be done at all

**Q3. When asking for someone’s advice on a particular situation:**

- a) We should only tell them part of the story
- b) We should tell them the full story so they can give us the right advice
- c) We should only tell them our side of the story

<sup>i</sup> “A Bundle of Flowers from the Garden of Traditions of the Prophet (saw) & Ahlul-Bayt (as) - Counselling”, Compiled by Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faghih Imani – available online at: <http://www.al-islam.org/flowers/>  
**Sheikh Mansour Leghaei-Lecture on Social Rules in Islam – Counselling**

<sup>ii</sup> [Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 105]

<sup>iii</sup> “Istikhara: Seeking the Best from Allah (SWT)”, by Muhammad Baqir Haideri – available online at: <http://www.al-islam.org/istikhara/>