



Social Independence

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 5

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand that Islam encourages us to be independent in our personal and social needs, where possible
- Discuss some examples of independence in personal and social needs
- Understand that a person who is independent and does not ask from others is liked by people, and a person who asks a lot is often not liked
- Understand that when it comes to Allah (SWT), we should ask Him for all our needs, big or small and that we get rewarded for just asking Him
- Understand that where it is necessary to seek help, we should do so
- Understand that when it comes to helping others, we should not wait to be asked

Self-Reliance and Independence

... وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ ۖ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

"... And consult them in the affairs, and once you are resolved, put your trust in Allah. Indeed Allah loves those who trust in Him." (3: 159)

The reality that self-reliance and independence in relation to our own needs is well established as a source of positive pride, success and maturity. This sort of self-reliance is highly encouraged in Islam and is actually a sign of having greater trust and hope in Allah (SWT) – such that a self-reliant person is closer in his relationship to Allah (SWT) than a person who depends on others despite having the ability to secure his own needs.

RECONCILIATION BETWEEN RELIANCE ON ALLAH (SWT) AND SELF-RELIANCE

There are several examples of how the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (as) have shown that self-reliance is not in contradiction to reliance on Allah (SWT) – if it is practiced within its limits. Have a look at this story.

Imam 'Ali (as) was once walking along the streets going about his own work and he happened to come across a group of people who did not seem to be engaged in work. Imam 'Ali (as) enquired further with them.

They responded: 'we are religious and we rely on Allah (SWT) for our sustenance. If it comes to us, we accept and are grateful. If it doesn't come to us, we bear hunger and

hardship patiently'. Upon hearing this Imam 'Ali (as) responded 'such is the nature of a dog. It eats when it finds food and remains hungry when it does not find anything to eat.' He then told them that he was the kind of person who is grateful when he has nothing, and gives away what he has when he does have it. A further point that can be taken from the Imam's advice is that we should not be idle and passive. We must be active and independent, but keep our trust in Allah.

Therefore, we must use the opportunities, blessings and will power that Allah (SWT) has given us to help ourselves improve both in this world and in the next world.

Imam 'Ali (as) warns us that:

“One who fails to make effort due to negligence or laziness will find his state to be one of deterioration and decline.”

EXAMPLES OF SELF-RELIANCE

When considering needs, it is important to understand where and upon whom the responsibility lies to secure those needs. Of course because we are talking about our individual personal and social needs, it is obvious that the responsibility lies on that individual.

Examples of such needs include something as simple as getting a glass of water or the remote control of the TV that is lying on the coffee table to as complex and sophisticated as finding a job, working and earning a living to pay your bills and fulfil your other needs.

As students, you are at stage where your major responsibility is to get through school and complete your



education. As such, all responsibilities within that lie with you. Therefore, you cannot give your homework to a friend to do or pay someone over the internet to write your assignment. These are things you must do yourself and you must apply your personal effort to achieve them.

Social needs are again as simple as asking someone to get something that you can get yourself. Many situations at home involve such situations where we tend to ask someone else to do something for us though we can do it ourselves, like asking your mum to make you a snack while you're sitting on the computer or Play Station.

As you grow older, another example would be driving. Some people are older and have families but they have not learnt to move around or drive. They expect someone to take them out all the time even if it is to do their own work. This creates a lot of inconvenience on the other person who has to stop doing what they are doing so they can do what you need.

DISADVANTAGES OF RELYING ON OTHER PEOPLE ALL THE TIME

In previous lessons we have learnt the advantages of self-reliance which include a greater sense of responsibility and maturity, as well as more independence.

Let us look at the opposite of these and consider the effects of too much reliance on others:

1. Ruins your reputation – people consider you incompetent and tend to stay away from you because you are always asking them to do your things for you.
2. Makes your life difficult – this happens regularly because you have limited your ability but have not limited your desires. Therefore, when people you rely on cannot help you and you cannot help yourself, you end up living a life of misery.
3. Causes inconvenience to people who you depend on – this is usually the case, because the people you depend on have their own needs to fulfil. If they have to stop or go out of their way to get what you need, it creates disturbance and therefore also leads to them avoiding you.
4. Makes you lazy and limits your intelligence and your skills. If you do not attempt things yourself, you will not learn and your skills and knowledge will remain limited.

DOES THIS MEAN WE SHOULD NEVER SEEK HELP?

Certainly not...Self-reliance also has extremes; if we are constantly seeking help from others this is disliked as it means we become dependent. At the same time if we are over-confident and never seek help we become arrogant and might make big mistakes! We have to ensure to keep to the middle ground.

THE LIMITS OF SELF-RELIANCE

As we mentioned above, self-reliance does not oppose reliance on Allah (SWT). Therefore it is important to understand that asking Allah (SWT) is in fact an act of self-reliance and it means that we are depending on Allah (SWT) only to give us strength and *tawfiq* (success) in securing our needs. It has been narrated in several *hadith* that God loves it when his servant asks Him for his need, even though it may be as small as the strap for his slipper. Other *hadith* have shown that simply asking Allah (SWT) for a need results in reward – even if the need is not immediately fulfilled. The reward is just for the act of asking Allah (SWT)!

However, when we do not have the ability or knowledge to secure a certain need, we must not remain stubborn and become arrogant by not asking someone who can help us. For example, if you are struggling in a particular subject at school, it is necessary to approach a friend or a teacher who can assist us.

The important thing to remember is that we must perform our part of the responsibility independently in as much as we can. Considering the example above, if a teacher decides to put in some extra personal time to help the student improve in that subject and gives them extra lessons, the student must put in appropriate effort and attempt those lessons with extra effort..

HELPING OTHERS

Self-reliance creates in us the responsibility to help others who cannot help themselves. In the Qur'an, Allah (SWT) has mentioned several times to give *zakat*, to be charitable, to donate etc. The Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (as) have also encouraged and practiced this very often.

Allah (SWT) says in the Qur'an:

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ...

"And maintain the prayer and give the *zakat*...(2:110)

There is an important note here to understand when it comes to the manner of giving or donating. The wording of 'give' in the Qur'an is used in such a sense that it means **'to give without being asked'** or to **'take the donation or money'** towards the recipient rather than the recipient coming to you.

This was displayed in the lives of all the Prophets and Imams (as). The common examples are those of Imam 'Ali (as) and Imam al-Sajjād (as) who used to go out in the night with sacks of food, money and other needs to distribute to the homeless, the sick and the poor. They would distribute in such a way, that they would not wake the recipient if they were sleeping or they would not even knock on the door.

Individual Challenge

For the next week keep a record of how many times you have asked someone to do something for you, even though you could have done it yourself. Examples could include: asking someone to fix you're a computer bug when you could have tried yourself, or asking someone to help you with a maths problem when you could have tried harder yourself, and so on...