

Islamic Academy of Coventry

Etiquettes of Using

Social Media

(1st Edition)

Maulānā Anwar Shaikh



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Etiquettes of Using Social Media

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Islamic Academy of Coventry
83-87 Cambridge Street
Coventry CV1 5HU

www.islamicacademycoventry.org

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Foreword

I begin with praising Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى, Lord of the Worlds and sending Peace and Salutations on our beloved Muḥammad Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ.

The religion of Islām is a complete religion. It is a religion which applies in all eras from the time of Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ till today and beyond. The beauty of Islām is that despite advances in different fields, Islām continues to offer solutions and guidance even to issues and scenarios which were not present in the time of Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ.

One particular field which has evolved greatly in recent years is the communication platform we use with one another on a local, national and international level. These have raised additional challenges to contend with, partly due to the rapid advancement and ever evolving nature of these platforms.

A combination of smartphones and apps, with the rise of super-fast internet connectivity has made us reliant of these devices. Having the ability to talk, message, browse and run your business through smartphones have made the mobile phone part and parcel of our daily lives.

This short booklet has been prepared to look at the effect social media is having on our lives, both positive and negative, and to learn some etiquettes from the verses of the Qur'an and Ḥadīth (narrations of Rasūlullāh ﷺ) which can be applied in the use of social media.

I will also share some advice we can implement in our lives and homes which will provide some additional safety. It is important that we learn these etiquettes and share with our friends and family.

I pray Allāh accept this contribution and make this booklet a means of salvation in these testing times, Āmīn.

Anwar Shaikh 27th Jumāda al-Thāni 1441 AH (22nd February 2020)



What is Social Media?

Social media is a tool used through the internet and mobile phones which enables a person to communicate.

This world is a world of means (Dārul Asbāb). Allāh ﷻ has given us various tools which we can use in our lives. The tools per se are not always bad, as many tools can have a dual purpose. They can be utilised for good and evil. But it is the reason behind using the tool which can sometimes be a problem.

If we take a knife as an example, it can be used to accomplish many useful tasks like preparing food etc. But at the same time, it can be used to harm others. This doesn't necessarily mean a knife should never be used. Rather it can be used but with safety precautions in place and with the correct intention.

Social media is also a tool which is used for communication and interaction. It can be used for good and bad. To make certain that it is not used for bad things, we need to ensure there are some safety measures put in place and that we adhere to certain etiquettes.

Islām has given us a set of safety measures which can be applied to social media. There are also other technological precautions we can put into place too.

We live in an age where the internet is available at our fingertips and further integration by various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp etc. into apps and websites are like a double-edged knife.

Due to the ability of reaching a wide audience very quickly, social media platforms can be very useful to spread good. However, despite the positive things which social media can be used for, there is also a negative side to it. The digital revolution has brought with it the ability to access lewd material with ease. Cybercrime is on the increase. Cyber bullying and online grooming are a major problem.

Before moving onto the etiquettes we can learn from the teachings of the Qur'an and Ḥadīth, I would like to cover some aspects regarding the impact of social media on people's behaviour, the exposure and coverage of social media and its widespread use.

Impact of Social Media

The way we interact with one another has changed dramatically and it's become extremely easy to communicate with people who we would never have been able to communicate with before.

One of these methods of communication is social media which has had a huge impact on society and its full impact is still unknown. It has become part and parcel of our lives. Once a person starts using

social media, it's very easy to become reliant upon it, so much so that it becomes a challenge to distance and disconnect from it.

Undoubtedly, social media is a powerful and ungoverned entity which has proven to change behaviours and perspectives.

Coverage

There are lots of statistics on the internet which show the coverage and wide use of social media across the globe and the numbers are huge.

As of January 2019, the population of the earth was 7.67 billion. Of these, 5.11 billion were mobile phone users and 3.48 billion were active users of social media.

If we compare this to the population of Muslims, there are around 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide.

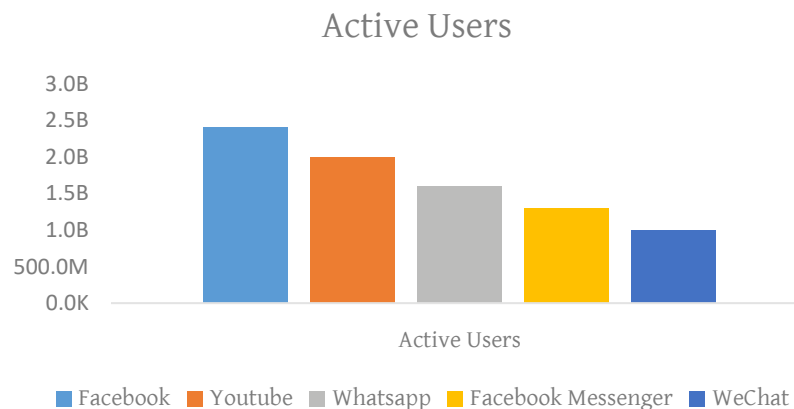
In January 2019, people spent an average of 6 hours and 42 minutes online per day and of this, 2 hours and 16 minutes were spent on social media¹

As of October 2019, according to a report released by Statista, the top 5 most popular social networks by active users are as below:

¹ (<https://thenextweb.com/contributors/2019/01/30/digital-trends-2019-every-single-stat-you-need-to-know-about-the-internet/>)

1. Facebook (2.4 billion)
2. YouTube (2 billion)
3. WhatsApp (1.6 billion)
4. Facebook Messenger (1.3 billion)
5. WeChat (1.1 billion)

Other popular platforms like Instagram (1 billion), Twitter (330 million) and Snapchat (210 million) didn't even make it into the top 5 but the numbers are still huge.



Addiction

Addiction to mobile phones and social media has become a major issue. The mobile phone has penetrated every industry and every area of life. With the roll out of super-fast 4G internet connectivity (with 5G on the horizon), unlimited data plans and the development of apps on a wide range of aspects, the dependency on mobile devices has never been greater.

While productivity may be increase with the ability to shop, bank and undertake many other tasks on the mobile phone, the attachment to mobile devices has permeated us so deep, that it is now difficult to continue with our daily tasks without a mobile phone.

Social media plays a part in fuelling this addiction. Because things can go viral very quickly on the internet, one sometimes feels the need to keep up with the latest of what's going on. This then leads to always checking the phone for any updates and mindless scrolling through timelines and stories. In reality, one is wasting their own time just to read and watch how others are spending theirs!

The World Health Organisation recently included "Gaming Disorder" in their draft of the 11th International Classification of Diseases (ICD) under mental and behavioural disorders. ICD Codes are used worldwide in health organisations to capture diagnoses of patients. Many recent games are made more interactive through internet connectivity and competing with other people online. Fortnite, which came on the scene in 2017 has become phenomenally popular with 45 million users in January 2018 increasing to 250 million in March 2019.²

Many schools have issued warnings regarding children spending a considerable amount of time on the popular game as this has led to

²<https://www.statista.com/statistics/746230/fortnite-players/>

children's exposure to aggressive behaviour and language online, children being bullied about their Fortnite characters, cyber bullying and even some children playing the game till the early hours of the morning which is affecting their concentration in the classrooms. In the U.S., there have been cases of parents sending their children to rehab clinics because they have become so hooked to Fortnite.³

Psychologists are now employed by gaming companies, so games are addictive by design. B F Skinner, a famous psychologist discovered behaviour can be controlled through the use of stimulus and rewards.

If we look at many games today, the same technique is used to keep you in the game. Rather than having one game which a person would 'clock', the new strategies used are by giving rewards to keep you in the game longer.

In the UK, the NHS has included treatments for Computer Gaming Addiction in children in its Long-Term Plan. The UK's first specialist clinic to treat children and young adults for gaming addiction opened in London and is part of the National Centre for Behavioural Addictions in London.

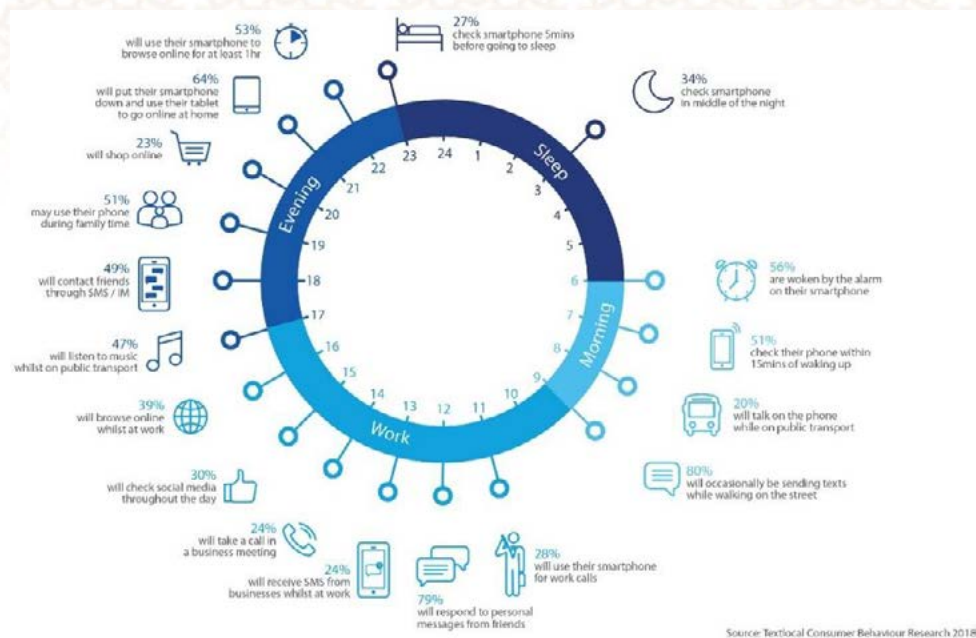
James A Roberts, a professor at Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business identified six signs of mobile phone addiction

³<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/fortnite-addiction-video-games-rehab-children-battle-royale-parents-a8665071.html>

1. Reaching for the phone first thing in the morning (How many people sleep with their phone next to their bed?)
2. Using your phone when you are bored
3. Increased time spent on mobile phone
4. Becoming anxious when one is separated from your phone (Would you go back home if you left your phone?)
5. People have complained about your phone usage e.g. spouse
6. Finding it difficult to reduce your phone usage

Doing a self-assessment using the 6 points above may be an eye opener!

Text Local produced the following illustration as part of their article titled 'A day in the life of a smartphone user'.⁴



⁴ <https://www.textlocal.com/blog/2018/08/01/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-smartphone-user/>

Instant Gratification

The nature of mobile phones and having fast internet access has caused us to become used to having everything accessible instantly and at our fingertips. Because everything is 'available', it leads to a reduction in self-control and it's more challenging to resist temptation. This concept of instant gratification is also seen in children as they are now getting used to having things straightway and are making demands as such too.

Unfortunately, many times parents give in to the children just 'to keep them quiet'. How often do we hear children say to their parents "I'm bored!". Children as young as 7 now have their own mobile phones and iPad's and these devices are now the new babysitter. This is leading to them being deprived of many other social skills like socially interacting with others and self-confidence.

Psychological Impact

There are also psychological effects when using social media. This will depend on a multitude of factors, but it is important to be aware of them so one can ensure they minimise any impact.

Constant exposure to social media can affect a person's mental well-being, especially in children. People will often upload pictures of themselves on holiday, eating out, having a nice time etc. A person going through a tough patch in life, will view these through a very

different viewpoint and naturally will compare themselves to those online. This will affect the person mentally and can sometimes have dire consequences.

In April 2019, a 12-year-old girl from Warrington, UK committed suicide and the coroner said she was “emotionally overwhelmed” and influenced by her intense use of social media.

Exposure to indecent material, like violence and pornography, can have adverse effects on children. Many video games, which are increasingly competitive and immersive through online connectivity and social media usage, include violence and this causes a person to become desensitised to the content.

There has been a lot of debate on whether video games cause violent behaviour. This is following the rise in mass shootings in recent times, particularly in the U.S.

FPS (first person shooter) games have been around since around 1973. However, the difference between early FPS games and recent games is the advancement in high definition graphics. With virtual reality now becoming more popular, the line between reality and virtual is becoming blurred.

Crime

Crime has been impacted greatly through the use of internet, mobile phones and apps. This is both from a positive and negative perspective and from perpetrators and victims.

On the positive side, social media has been used widely for reporting and communicating crime, often in real time which has assisted in police investigations and dealing with crimes. There are plenty of examples in the UK and abroad, where criminals have been caught through photos which were shared on Facebook and Instagram.

On the negative side, cyber-crime and social media related crime has seen a massive increase. The Crown Prosecution Service mention a number of social media actions which are considered as Social Media Offences.⁵

- ❖ **Trolling**
- ❖ **Online threats:** this could include threats to kill or harm an individual or directed at an organisation
- ❖ **Disclosure of private sexual images without consent:** this is generally known as ‘revenge porn’. This also includes forwarding and re-tweeting without consent if the intention was to cause distress to the individual.
- ❖ **Online harassment**
- ❖ **Grooming**

⁵ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cyber-online-crime>

❖ Stalking online

There have been cases in the UK and abroad, where social media has been a major factor in an individual committing suicide. Some of these have also involved teenagers.

Now that we have some insight into the positives and negatives of social media and how it impacts us, let us look into the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth to learn some etiquettes.

Intention

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ mentions in a Ḥadīth:

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ⁶

“Actions are according to intentions”

The foundation of every action lies in the intention. Two people can perform the same action, but the intentions can be very different. Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى will reward a person according to their intention.

The first and foremost thing before using any form of social media or even the Internet, is to review the intention. Why am I on Facebook? Why do I use Twitter? Why do I post to Instagram? These are questions we must ask ourselves regularly.

The intention behind using social media should be to ultimately gain the pleasure of Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى. When online, we should ask ourselves why am I viewing this material?

When we are following someone on Twitter, ask yourself what am I achieving out of this?

⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 54 & Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim, 1907

Ta'qwā

After correcting the intention, the next most important thing is to exercise Ta'qwā.

Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى says in the Qur'ān:

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ ۚ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ⁷

“This book has no doubt in it. A guidance for the God-Fearing”

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ⁸

“O people, Fear your Lord”

One important aspect of Ta'qwā is to be conscious that Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى is watching you. The presence of Ta'qwā will enable a person to think twice about their actions.

Everything tweeted, posted and viewed online is known by Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى. Whatever good you post or tweet will be recorded in your good deeds. Whatever bad you tweet or post will be recorded in the bad deeds. Each person will have to answer to Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى on the

⁷ Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verse 2

⁸ Sūrah an-Nisā', Verse 1

Day of Reckoning for every action, every statement and every post. Before going on websites, think before you click.

Tip: Nowadays, many websites have ads, etc. Use a browser which enables you to filter these out, so you don't view incorrect material by mistake. Use firewalls, filters etc. to try and minimise the risk of viewing something wrong because prevention is better than cure.

Keeping the computer in a communal area of the home is also very important as this will help curb any desires to view something incorrect.

Company

Allāh سُبحانهُ وتعالى says in the Qur'ān:

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ⁹

“O you who believe, Fear Allāh and be in the company of the truthful”

Our beloved Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ الرَّجُلُ عَلَى دِينِ خَلِيلِهِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَحَدُكُمْ مَنْ يُخَالِلُ¹⁰

“Abū Hurairah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ reported that the Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said, A man is upon the religion of his best friend, so let one of you look at whom he befriends”

We live in a digital world where people on the other side of the world are accessible at our fingertips. Companionship extends to companions and friends online too.

⁹ Sūrah al-Tawbah, Verse 119

¹⁰ Sunan Abū Dāwūd, 4833

Whether we accept it or not, we are influenced by the company we keep. Similarly, the online company we stay connected to can also influence our behaviour.

How does one ensure good company?

Here are a few starting points;

- What is the person's character like?
- Are they compliant with the Sunnah?
- Do they encourage you to do good deeds? (e.g. perform Ṣalāh)
- Are they connected to the Ulamā?

These become more challenging when a person is online as it's very easy to 'fake' a profile and personality so a person needs to be extra vigilant.

We find many cases of a person 'faking' their profile online to try and advance their own agendas. Researchers have written software to try and spot people who use social media posing as somebody else using different algorithms.

On the positive side, it is important to have good friends online and this should be for the sake of Allāh. By the grace of Allāh, there are many genuine scholars online too, so one can benefit from them if they can't benefit from them in person.

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

قَالَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ الْمُتَحَابُّونَ فِي جَلَالِي لَهُمْ مَنَابِرُ مِنْ نُورٍ يَغِيْبُهُمُ
النَّبِيُّونَ وَالشُّهَدَاءُ¹¹

“Allāh, the Mighty and Sublime, said: 'Those who love each other for the sake of My Majesty shall be upon podiums of light, and they will be admired by the Prophets and the martyrs’”

¹¹ Sunan al-Tirmidhī, 2390

Controlling the Gaze

One of the most important aspects when using social media is to control the gaze. There are many sins which can be committed with different parts of body, but many require a physical effort. Also, others may become aware of the sin you have committed. However, the sins committed by the eyes do not require much physical effort and quite often go unnoticed by those around you.

Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى says in the Qur’ān:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَرِهِمْ¹²

“Tell the believing men that they must lower their gazes’”

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَرِهِنَّ¹³

“And tell the believing women that they must lower their gazes’”

Men and women have both been instructed separately in the Qur’ān to control the gaze. Generally, instructions for men and women are not separate in the Qur’ān. But with regards to controlling the eyesight Allāh addresses men and women separately to show its importance.

¹² Sūrah al-Nūr, Verse 30

¹³ Sūrah al-Nūr, Verse 31

When using social media, it is very easy to look at the wrong thing. Even with all the filters, firewalls etc, all it takes is somebody you follow on Twitter to retweet somebody else's tweet which may be inappropriate and it appears in your timeline.

One should avoid websites that may have inappropriate content or links to inappropriate content.

If after taking precautions, one does view something inappropriate, one should close the application immediately and seek forgiveness from Allāh. To continue after that will be considered sinful.

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

لَا تُتَّبِعِ النَّظْرَةَ النَّظْرَةَ فَإِنَّ لَكَ الْأُولَى وَلَيْسَتْ لَكَ الْآخِرَةُ¹⁴

“Do not follow a look with a look, the first is for you, but the next is not for you”

If a person mistakenly sees something inappropriate, then as long as a person doesn't pursue it or look for a second time, he will be forgiven by Allāh.

¹⁴ Sunan al-Tirmidhī, 3004

Concealing sins

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

كُلُّ أُمَّتِي مُعَافَاةٌ إِلَّا الْمُجَاهِرِينَ وَإِنَّ مِنَ الْإِجْهَارِ أَنْ يَعْمَلَ الْعَبْدُ بِاللَّيْلِ عَمَلًا ثُمَّ يُصْبِحُ قَدْ سَتَرَهُ رَبُّهُ فَيَقُولُ يَا فَلَانُ قَدْ عَمِلْتُ الْبَارِحَةَ كَذَا وَكَذَا وَقَدْ بَاتَ يَسْتُرُهُ رَبُّهُ فَيَبِيْتُ يَسْتُرُهُ رَبُّهُ وَيُصْبِحُ يَكْشِفُ سِتْرَ اللَّهِ عَنْهُ¹⁵

“All the people of my Ummah will be granted forgiveness for their sins except those who publicise them. And (it means) that a servant should do a deed during the night and tell the people in the morning that he has done so and so, whereas Allāh has concealed it. And he does a deed during the day and when it is night, he tells the people, whereas Allāh has concealed it”

Committing any type of sin is disliked by Allāh, whether it's a major or minor sin. The believer tries his best to stay away from sins and if he does happen to commit a sin, then he should seek repentance straight away and he should feel ashamed of having committed a sin. Even worse is that person who commits a sin and rather than feeling remorse and regret he feels happy about it, he boasts to others about it. This prevents a person from being forgiven.

¹⁵ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 5721 & Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim, 2990

It is extremely easy to post online about our activities. One should exercise caution of posting something which is an act of disobedience to Allāh and resulting in publicising the sin.

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

مَنْ دَعَا إِلَى هُدًى كَانَ لَهُ مِنَ الْأَجْرِ مِثْلُ أُجُورِ مَنْ تَبِعَهُ لَا يَنْقُصُ
ذَلِكَ مِنْ أُجُورِهِمْ شَيْئًا وَمَنْ دَعَا إِلَى ضَلَالَةٍ كَانَ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الْإِثْمِ مِثْلُ
آثَامِ مَنْ تَبِعَهُ لَا يَنْقُصُ ذَلِكَ مِنْ آثَامِهِمْ شَيْئًا¹⁶

“He who called (people) to righteousness, there would be reward for him like the rewards of those who followed him (therein), without their rewards being diminished in any respect. And he who called (people) to error, he shall have to carry (the burden) of its sin, like those who followed him (therein), without their sins being diminished in any respect”

When a person posts online, good or bad, and somebody follows it, copies or emulates it, the one who started it will also get a share of its reward or sin.

Messages can go viral online very quickly on social media, often unintentionally. Imagine if somebody publicised something bad and it went viral, then the sin will also be on the person who initiated it.

¹⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 2674

On the other hand, if a person does a good deed and people are encouraged by it then the person will also get a share of the reward.

The underlying reason why publicising sins is reprehensible is because it displays a lack of shame and guilt. When a person does something wrong, he will try to hide it due to being ashamed of being found out. However, with social media, this can become less so.

Photo sharing has become so popular with WhatsApp, Instagram etc that it almost becomes ritual to tweet and share the photo of you doing something.

Modesty

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

إِذَا لَمْ تَسْتَحْيَ فَاَصْنَعْ مَا شِئْتَ¹⁷

“When you feel no shame, then do as you wish”

This links to the previous point on publicising and concealing sins. Lack of shame and modesty often leads a person on having no remorse over sins and publicising them.

Hayā (shame, modesty), is an integral part of Īmān.

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said,

الْإِيمَانُ بِضْعٌ وَسَبْعُونَ شُعْبَةً وَالْحَيَاءُ شُعْبَةٌ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ¹⁸

“Faith has seventy odd branches and modesty is a branch of faith”

When it comes to social media, a lot more control and moderation is required to maintain Hayā. A person may be careful in what he posts or may not post at all. But it’s equally important to review who you are following.

¹⁷ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 3484

¹⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 9

You may be following a person who posts pictures of immoral behaviour. When a person is constantly exposed to immoral behaviour, it becomes normalised and a person becomes desensitised. Don’t just be careful about what you post on social media, be vigilant who you follow too.

Backbiting

Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى says in the Qur'ān:

وَلَا يَغْتَابُ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُّحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا
فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ¹⁹

“And do not backbite one another. Does one of you like that he eats the flesh of his dead brother? You would dislike it”

Backbiting is a major sin in the eyes of Allāh.

The definition of backbiting is related in the following Ḥadīth:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " أَتَدْرُونَ مَا
الْغَيْبَةُ " . قَالُوا اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَعْلَمُ . قَالَ " ذِكْرُكَ أَخَاكَ بِمَا يَكْرَهُ " .
قِيلَ أَفَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ فِي أَخِي مَا أَقُولُ قَالَ " إِنْ كَانَ فِيهِ مَا تَقُولُ فَقَدْ
اغْتَبْتَهُ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ فِيهِ فَقَدْ بَهْتَهُ²⁰

“Abū Hurairah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ reported Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ as saying:
Do you know what is backbiting? They (the Companions) said: Allāh
and His Messenger know best. Thereupon he (the Holy Prophet
صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: Backbiting implies your talking about your brother

¹⁹ Sūrah al-Hujurāt, 13

²⁰ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim, 2589

in a manner which he does not like. It was said to him: What is your opinion about this that if I actually find (that failing) in my brother which I made a mention of? He said: If (that failing) is actually found (in him) what you assert, you in fact backbit him, and if that is not in him then you have slandered him”

In summary, backbiting is when you speak something true about someone which he would dislike if you were to say it in his presence. This sin is extremely easy to commit. It's very easy to refer to somebody based on their appearance, character, looks etc which they may dislike if it was said in their presence.

The Qur'ān equates this to eating the flesh of your dead brother. Just as a person is disgusted at the thought of eating the flesh of his dead brother, a person should be disgusted at thought of speaking ill of someone else.

Many engage in gossip and backbiting when talking amongst themselves. Many have conversations through WhatsApp and other social media platforms.

When taking part in these conversations one should be extremely cautious of not only posting something which may be termed as backbiting but also taking part in the conversation. To be party to those gatherings or conversations wherein backbiting takes place is also considered a sin. The same goes for social media too.

Time

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

نِعْمَتَانِ مَغْبُورٌ فِيهِمَا كَثِيرٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ الصِّحَّةُ وَالْفَرَاغُ²¹

“There are two blessings which many people waste:
health and free time”

Each person has a limited and fixed amount of time allocated in this world. Only Allāh knows how much time each person has been granted. Yet time is one of those gifts which is often unappreciated and hence wasted.

The value of time is realised once the time has passed. Some realise the value of time when old age sets in. Some realise the value of time when they have a near miss in their life. Some realise the value of time when they have been diagnosed with a serious life-threatening condition. Some realise its value when they are on their last moments.

However, the reality of the matter is, time is one commodity which no amount of money can buy you back even one second.

Social media can consume a lot of our time without us even realising.

²¹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhāri, 6412

Have we ever questioned ourselves how much of our time is consumed by social media?

How many times do we check our phones in a day even when there is no notification?

A survey conducted in the United States of America between March 2018 and April 2018 found that 45% of teens say they are online on a near constant basis.

Islām teaches us to use our time wisely as we will be questioned about how we used our time in this world. We have to try and get the balance right. Use social media to do good, to stay up to date with those things which are relevant, but at the same time, don't let it take over your life.

Lying

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

كَفَى بِالْمَرْءِ كَذِبًا أَنْ يُحَدِّثَ بِكُلِّ مَا سَمِعَ²²

“It is enough for a man to prove himself a liar when he goes on narrating whatever he hears.”

A major sin of the tongue is to lie. However, lying is not only restricted to speaking something which is untrue. Lying includes speaking, assisting somebody else in lying and circulating false information.

Imam Nawawi رَحِمَهُ اللهُ (the famous scholar), commenting on this Ḥadīth says, a person hears truth and lies. Hence, if he speaks of everything he hears, inevitably his speech will include lies.

Through social media, messages are received and read on a daily basis. Information and rumours can circulate extremely quickly. If we receive news through social media, we should investigate the source. Before forwarding it on, we should try and verify the information and if there is no doubt or one isn't sure, one should hold back.

²² Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim, 5

It's very easy and tempting to press the share button or to forward it on to multiple groups and to retweet, but if the news seems a bit farfetched, do not be hasty in pressing the button.

There have been instances when even the death of somebody is circulated through social media before they have died!

Jumping to conclusions

Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى says in the Qur'ān:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ²³

“O you who believe, abstain from many of the suspicions. Indeed, some suspicions are sins”

Messages can go viral, many times unintentionally, extremely quickly on social media. This can lead to lots of discussion, debate and speculation.

We are instructed in the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth about refraining from being suspicious of others and that it can lead to sin.

Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى says in the Qur'ān,

²³ Sūrah al-Hujurāt 12

إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ²⁴

“Indeed, some suspicions are sins”

The suspicion mentioned in this verse can also be interpreted as ill thoughts about others.

Try and give people the benefit of the doubt. Many a time, there are two sides to a story. To be suspicious without any evidence is disliked. In particular, when outwardly they are noble and have good characteristics.

²⁴ Sūrah al-Hujurāt 12

Fault finding

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said,

المُسْلِمُ مَنْ سَلِمَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ مِنْ لِسَانِهِ وَيَدِهِ²⁵

“A Muslim is he from whose hand and tongue the Muslims are safe”

In this Ḥadīth, we learn of a quality whereby others are safe from ourselves. What this means, is others do not come to harm because of our actions. This includes physical action and verbal. Verbal action includes what we post on social media.

Notably, Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ mentions the tongue before the hand. This is an indication that more harm can be done using the tongue than the hand. Verbal abuse can be worse than physical abuse.

It is easy to find faults in others when one actively searches for it. One just has to scroll through someone’s timeline to find something to have a dig at. We have to remember that nobody is perfect and if we point one finger at somebody, there will be many more pointing in return.

If we do come across a fault in somebody, as long as there is no harm to anyone else, we should conceal that fault. We can advise the person in private but do not publicise their fault.

²⁵ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim, 41

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

لَا يَسْتُرُ عَبْدٌ عَبْدًا فِي الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا سَتَرَهُ اللهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ²⁶

“The servant (who conceals) the faults of others in this world, Allāh would conceal his faults on the Day of Resurrection”

Make a habit of assessing one’s own shortcomings. Once you start being attentive to your own mistakes, you won’t have time to focus on others.

²⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim, 2590

Minding your own business

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

مِنْ حُسْنِ إِسْلَامِ الْمَرْءِ تَرْكُهُ مَا لَا يَغْنِيهِ²⁷

“From the beauty of a person's Islām is that he leaves what does not concern him”

This narration is considered to be one of the most fundamental narrations when it comes to etiquettes and behaviour.

It is extremely easy to get sucked in to the latest hype, debate or message which is going viral on social media.

The amount of information we are exposed to through social media is phenomenal. But our religion teaches us to not get involved in things which do not concern us.

The question is, what should our concern be?

Our primary concern should be what is according the religion of Islām. This includes the obligatory things like prayer, fasting etc. Does a person get distracted and immersed so much in social media that salah is overlooked? If this is the case, then one needs to prioritise salah over social media.

²⁷ Sunan al-Tirmidhī 2317

One's concern should be to take measures to prevent oneself from committing sins.

Role Models

Allāh ﷻ says in the Qur'ān,

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ²⁸

“There is indeed a good model for you in the Messenger of Allāh”

It is part of human nature to look up to somebody and to seek a role model. On social media we are exposed to many people. There is constant exposure to the lavish lifestyle of celebrities, film stars and sports personalities.

What we see of others' lives in social media does not always tell the full story. Generally, what we see about others are the good things. The achievements, the perfection, the selfies, having fun and enjoyment.

Likewise, we also share these types of things ourselves as we want to be seen as being successful.

²⁸ Sūrah al-Ahzāb, 21

Islām teaches us to adopt Rasūlullāh ﷺ as a role model. If we want to be successful, we must adhere to the principles and etiquettes taught to us by our beloved Rasūlullāh ﷺ.

Envy

Rasūlullāh ﷺ has said:

إِيَّاكُمْ وَالْحَسَدَ فَإِنَّ الْحَسَدَ يَأْكُلُ الْحَسَنَاتِ كَمَا تَأْكُلُ النَّارُ
الْحُطْبَ أَوْ قَالَ الْعُشْبَ²⁹

“Beware of envy, for envy consumes good deeds just as fire consumes wood or grass”

Ḥasad means envy. However, the deeper meaning of Ḥasad is to desire that someone else is deprived of something.

Through social media, the exposure to others lives has never been greater. This is because it is so easy to share videos, pictures and media content.

When digital cameras and televisions first became popular, there were scholarly debates on the permissibility of photography and taking pictures. Now you can't buy a phone which doesn't have a camera on it. Many phones have more than one camera.

²⁹ Sunan Abu Daud, 4903

In the 21st century, it's the norm to have a camera and share pictures. As more people share content online, we are exposed to the lives of others. We are exposed to lives of people who 'have more than me'.

The effect of constantly watching others have a good time can fuel jealousy and cause one to forget the good things in their own lives. One should be content with what they have, as enjoyment is not always experienced through materialistic gains.

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

لَيْسَ الْغِنَى عَنْ كَثْرَةِ الْعَرَضِ وَلَكِنَّ الْغِنَى غِنَى النَّفْسِ³⁰

“Richness is not having many possessions. Rather, true richness is the richness of the soul”

³⁰ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 6081

Sharing your content online

Sharing everything one does online has become like a disease today. We must be vigilant as there are predators online. This becomes all the more important when children post pictures of themselves and sisters posting pictures.

Let me give you a common sight today. A group of friends are going out to eat at the restaurant. The meal arrives on a huge platter presented immaculately.

What is the first thing people do? Get stuck into the food or to try and get that perfect angled shot? Even before the food is touched, how many photos are snapped of the food, of the people around the table with the food?

We then share this online; we don't know who is looking at that content. And even through the meal, many are still on the phone.

In November 2018, Frankie and Benny's decided to implement a ban on mobile phones in all their outlets. Their decision was due to some research which showed that 72% of children wished their parents should spend less time on their phones. 70% of children thought their parents enjoyed more screen time than them. We should be vigilant on what we post. Sometimes we might post a picture of us on holiday. This may give opportunity to a thief that this person is on holiday and his home is empty.

The obsession of capturing the perfect selfie has led to ‘selfie deaths’. A global study carried out by the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), revealed that between 2011 and 2017, 259 people were killed as a result of trying to take a selfie in a dangerous or high-risk place.

This included places like the tops of skyscrapers, disused chimneys and the edge of cliffs.

Viewing others’ content online

We constantly view other people’s lives through the eyes of the internet and social media. This can lead to jealousy and envy. When we are exposed to the wealth of others, to the ‘good time’ other people are having, this can have a negative effect. When this happens, people start comparing themselves to others and this leads to envy. This is a severe disease of the heart.

The term selfie has been around for many years but with the widespread use of social media, has become a common word used in everyday language.

Research on this topic is expanding but the question has been posed;

Do selfies hurt self-esteem?

Why do people take selfies?

Is it because one feels isolated when other people’s lives are exposed through the medium of social media?

“Selfitis” is a relatively new term which is used to describe those who have a habit of posting pictures of themselves online.

In 2015, research was done by Penn University on “*Let me take a selfie: Exploring the psychological effects of posting and viewing selfies and groupies on social media*”

Some findings out of the research were:

- Viewing others' selfies was negatively associated with self-esteem
- Frequent selfie viewing behaviour may trigger one's jealousy so as to decrease one's self-esteem and life satisfaction

Think before you tweet, post....

Rasūlullāh ﷺ has said:

كُلُّ كَلَامِ ابْنِ آدَمَ عَلَيْهِ لَا لَهُ إِلَّا أَمْرٌ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ نَهْيٌ عَنِ مُنْكَرٍ أَوْ ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ³¹

“The speech of the son of Ādam is against him, not for him, except for commanding good, or forbidding evil, or remembrance of Allāh.”

Everything we tweet and post is known by Allāh. Those posts in accordance to the teaching of Allāh and His Prophet ﷺ, will benefit a person in the hereafter in the form of rewards. This includes encouraging others to do good and preventing others from evil.

³¹ Sunan al-Tirmidhī, 2412

Those posts not in accordance to the Allāh's teachings will be a source of burden on the Day of Reckoning when one will be questioned about them.

Breaking Relationships

Rasūlullāh ﷺ has said:

لَا يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ قَاطِعٌ³²

“The severer (of ties) will not enter Paradise”

Human beings are social beings. They interact with others and this is part of life. People have different personalities, views, opinions and characteristics. This will inevitably lead to some differences between people. This is part of human nature. However, when there are differences between family members or friends, it can be more challenging to deal with.

We must refrain from expressing our views which may cause a problem between other people's relationships. To do so on purpose is extremely sinful as can be gauged from the narration above.

Unfortunately, certain individuals are intent on breaking up relationships between people, and many a time this is due to envy or hatred. One must distance themselves from such people and not retaliate on social media. This will only make matters worse.

³² Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim, 2556

Bad Language

عَنْ عُقْبَةَ بْنِ عَامِرٍ قَالَ قُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ مَا التَّجَاةُ قَالَ أَمْسِكُ
عَلَيْكَ لِسَانَكَ³³

“Uqbah ibn ‘Āmir رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrated, "I said: 'O Messenger of Allāh! What is the means to salvation?' He said: 'That you control your tongue”

In the Ḥadīth, we are encouraged to control what we say and this narration indicates it is the means to salvation. This is because there are numerous sins which can be committed verbally which can have negative effects.

Many times, conversations take place on social media similar to how a person would converse face to face. These types of conversations are also included under these types of narrations and one needs to be careful of what one says.

Just as one should not use foul language verbally, one must refrain from using it online too. Sometimes it is easier to use bad language online as it may seem more harmless or because it maybe abbreviated. However, one will still be accountable to Allāh.

³³ Sunan al-Tirmidhī, 2406

Forgiveness

Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ has said:

كُلُّ بَنِي آدَمَ خَطَّاءٌ وَخَيْرُ الْخَطَّائِينَ التَّوَّابُونَ³⁴

“Every son of Ādam commits sin, and the best of those who commit sins are those who repent”

As we go about our business whether online or offline, make a habit of seeking forgiveness. When we are offline, it may be somewhat easier to control what we see and hear but when we are online it is much more difficult.

Sometimes, we see advertisements which may have inappropriate content. These are out of our control. It is easy to get involved in backbiting, lying, slandering etc online without actively taking part.

Hence, before and after one goes online, read Istighfār and seek forgiveness from Allāh for any shortcomings that one may got involved in.

³⁴ Sunan Ibn Mājah, 4392

Practical Advices and Preventative Measures

In addition to the lessons we can take away from the teachings of Islām, there are some practical points responsible adults and individuals can act upon

- Understand the dangers and risks of going online
- Educate children about internet safety
- Don't make friends with people you don't know online
- Don't share personal information online
- Take care of posting pictures online of yourself
- Learn about firewalls and privacy settings on computers, phones and applications
- Use parental management software so inappropriate content is filtered out
- Keep computers in a communal area e.g in the living room
- Keep devices out of children's bedrooms
- Have dedicated family time which doesn't involve technology or internet
- Limit time used on technology and devices

#InfectiousSocialMedia

Social media has spread everywhere,
From WhatsApp to the Twittersphere

Technology has spread like an infection,
People have with it an addiction

Your first thought as you wake up in the morning,
Is to check what Twitter has been trending

Tweet, tweet, tweet your phone goes,
Realising you've been attacked by your foes

Snap, snap, snap selfies you take,
Posting until your fingers ache

You press the upload button in despair,
Still deciding whether it's fair

But now you realise, it's too late,
Because you have already met your fate

Now the billions can view,
What you had the guts to do

Now your heart fills with regret,
Your mouth quickly dries with dread

Now you know your deed is wrong,
The chance to be forgiven, you long

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By Muaaz Shaikh

Etiquettes of Using
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www.islamicacademycoventry.org
email: admin@islamicacademycoventry.org

83-87 Cambridge Street
Coventry CV1 5HU