LIVING THE THREE STEPS: MAJAHADAH (MAKING THE CHANGES)

It happens very commonly that when we attend a course or a lecture series, we become very motivated. However, we don’t take the essential next steps and that motivation accordingly dies after a short while. In order to break that cycle and be able to bring the real change, there are some important pre-requisites that we are required to meet. This lesson covers five of them in a brief way.

24 A few words are not enough to talk much about this great scholar of present. However, here is a modest overview of some of his services: Imam Omar Suleiman is the President of the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research and a professor of Islamic Studies at Southern Methodist University. He’s also the resident scholar of the Valley Ranch Islamic Centre, and Co-Chair of Faith Forward Dallas at Thanks-Giving Square, a multi-faith alliance for peace and justice.

Originally from New Orleans, LA, he began his journey of traditional Islamic learning in the year 2000 and has spent years studying in the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Malaysia, etc. Upon becoming certified in various traditional sciences, he completed a Bachelor’s degree in Islamic law, a Bachelor’s degree in Accounting, a Master’s degree in Islamic Finance, a Master’s Degree in Political History, and is in the process of completing his PhD from the International Islamic University of Malaysia in Islamic Thought and Civilization. His career started in his hometown of New Orleans where he served as the Imam of the Jefferson Muslim Association in New Orleans for 6 years and directed the ICNA Relief “Muslims for Humanity” Hurricane Katrina Relief effort. It was in this time that he was noted on a national level as being a strong advocate of community service, interfaith dialogue, and social justice. He co-founded the East Jefferson Interfaith Clergy Association and was awarded for his outstanding civic achievement by the Mayor and City Council of New Orleans in 2010. He then moved to Dallas and became the Resident Scholar of the Valley Ranch Islamic Centre in 2013 and more recently, Co-Chair of Faith Forward Dallas at Thanks-Giving Square. In Dallas, he has been a noted leader and voice for peace, and has partaken as a representative of the Muslim Community in many city functions. He has since been a guest at various national functions to share his experiences in community building.

Shaykh Omar most recently founded the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research which is a think tank that focuses on instilling conviction based on Islamic texts, and producing contribution. He also founded M.U.H.S.E.N (Muslims Understanding and Helping Special Education Needs), a non-profit umbrella organization serving the community to establish a more inclusive “Special Friendly” environment for our Brothers & Sisters of all Disabilities. Shaykh Omar has taught Islamic Studies at the university level since 2008. As a valued Al-Maghrib instructor, Shaykh Omar developed one of the most successful seminars “Behind the Scenes: An In-Depth Study of the Spiritual Practices of the Best Generations”. He also is one of the main features at our annual conferences and retreats: IlmFest and IlmSummit. In media, he’s one of the creators of the internationally acclaimed “Inspiration Series” which has reached millions of Muslims and Non-Muslims through YouTube and Islamic Television stations worldwide. He’s also known for his series on Quran weekly as well as his contributions to Hadith of the Day.
Change starts from you

Before we start our discussion, it is to be noted that the change comes only to those, who want it. There is no compulsion in religion. Allah swt will not force it upon you. You yourself have to decide to change. And then when you tread on this path, Allah swt will make it easy for you. When you would strive on the path of acquiring knowledge for the deen, He will make the path of Jannah easy for you. But it is you who have to decide to move. You have to identify the things in you that are required to be changed. We all talk a lot when we have to criticize others. But self-criticism, for the sake of improvement, is what is required. It shouldn’t be the case that we talk about how so much is wrong in the world, yet when it comes to our own selves, we are not willing to even spend a few hours of volunteer work. Start the change from your own self.

It is also to be kept in mind that when we start this journey, we should be concerned about how we are going. It is not our concern to point out the mistakes of our fellow travelers [unless we wish to help them with that]. Imam Hasan Al-Basri once said that ‘May Allah swt shower His blessings on the person who is too busy with his own faults to be worried about anyone else’s faults’. I need to make sure that when I return back from this world, I am prepared for my meeting with Allah swt and have a few things that I can proudly show him.

Let love be your guide

When you truly love someone, you would see him everywhere. We all know the story of newly-weds. The see the world around them to be all pink and red. Everything they see reminds them of their loved one – be it the wind, the darkness, the light, the day, the night and what not. If the love of human beings can be this powerful that the person is able to enjoy in the scorching heat thinking about his or her loved one and not be bothered, when the person is in such an internal state of love that he does not really bother about the outside – THEN how powerful would be the love of Allah swt! The power of this love is well-evident from the lives of our pious predecessors and the wonderful things this love made them too – the things that no ordinary human beings could achieve. That is the power of the love of Allah swt. If we make this love our guide, everything around us would start to make sense and would take us closer to Allah swt. On that other hand, we would perceive the very same things in a completely different manner if our hearts are not filled with the love of Allah swt.

If we make this love our guide, we will be able to bring about the real sustainable change. This lesson is going to provide 5 practical suggestions in order to accomplish that.

5 Keys steps for change

1. Remove the poisons from your life

Remove the poisons that don’t allow you to change. Do you think you would develop the khushoo when your eyes have been all over the place all day? Do you think that Allah swt would ever allow you to have that relationship with Him if you spend most of your time on things that take you away
from him? Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim R.A. said that our heart is a space where if you have anything other than Allah swt, you will not be able to have His true love in there.

Once Imam Sufyan Ath-Thauri was asked about whether asking for forgiveness should take precedence or the tasbeeh or good deeds. He gave a beautiful reply. He said that if you have a dirty shirt, you don’t accessorize it; you clean it first. If your white shift has a big stain, you don’t worry about putting the $200 cufflinks first. You have to worry about removing the stain. Same is the case with us. We have to remove the poisons from our hearts. If we don’t, then our beautification would not work. The stains would take all the attention of those who see us. No matter what accessories we put on, this stain will ruin our personality and appearance.

2. An ounce of prevention is better than pounds of cure

Some people wait for the things to get really verse before they make any change. We have to realize that when the action acquires inertia, it becomes very difficult to stop it. Before that stage of high inertia comes, we there are various stages. We have to recognize these stages and early signs and accordingly prevent ourselves from going further. Here are the five stages that all the sins go through:

1. Initially, it is a passing thought
2. If you don’t rid yourself of that thought, it gradually becomes a settled thought
3. If you don’t break this settled thought, it becomes an intention to perform sin
4. If you don’t control yourself at this stage, the intention results in an action
5. If you don’t repent and keep doing that sin, it becomes a habit which then makes it very easy to repeat the sin again; the barrier of hesitation breaks.

We have to train our selves to a level that whenever a passing thought of some sin come to us or if our gaze catches something which it should not be looking at, we should immediately turn to istaghfar and seek forgiveness from Allah swt. Do not entertain the thought for sinning and do not let it settle down.
We have to keep in mind that if we do not ward away that passing thought and let it settle down, Satan would come to us and show us the benefits of that act of sin. It might be a temporary pleasure or a temporary benefit, but Satan would make us overlook the major side-effects that sin comes with.

If the thought stays in our mind for long, it gets transformed into the intention of doing the sin. If that intention is not uprooted and thrown away, it becomes an ‘Azeemah’ – a full determination to perform the sin. At this stage, one is so determined that he or she is able to overcome many internal and external oppositions.

If this stage is not cut off, one goes ahead with the action. If you repent at that moment and create that internal energy of remorse at your mistake, your state improves. However, if you ignore your condition and remain indulged in that sin, it would become a habit. The habits work in a way that they don’t just require us to think when going through the habit loop. We will just do them – sometimes without even knowing.

That is why we ask Allah swt’s forgiveness for the sins that we do knowingly as well as those that we do without an active awareness and because we have let them become our habit by not removing them from us earlier.

"I seek forgiveness from Allah, my Lord, from every sin I committed knowingly or unknowingly, secretly or openly, and I turn towards Him from the sin that I know and from the sin that I do not know. Certainly You, You (are) the knower of the hidden things and the Concealer (of) the mistakes and the Forgiver (of) the sins. And (there is) no power and no strength except from Allah, the Most High, the Most Great".

If you have developed a habit of certain sin, do not lose hope. There are various strategies for breaking the loop of bad habits. Some of the cures for that we have already discussed in this course.25

3. Do good deeds consistently, even though they are small

When a person goes to his or her, they wish to come back to the world just to offer to rakahs of salah so that Allah swt may forgive them because of this. So, while we are alive, we have to look for something that we are capable of doing and then do that consistently. Think big, start small. If you start with a plan that you can never execute, you would very easily get demotivated.

25 In order to obtain further insights into the science of making and breaking habits, you can also watch the ‘Power of Habits’ Workshop by iCAN. You can either search for it with the phrase “The Power of Habits – Training Course” or use the link below:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI1aD03UEhqoesmW9Y35q2KQ_Yyu5khQ
You may not be able to change the world at this moment, but you can certainly do something with your community. You may not be able to feed all the starving people in the world at this moment, but you can certainly do something about the starving people in your locality. Do good, even if it small; do it consistently. That is why the Prophet ﷺ told us:

أَنَّكُمُ الْأَفْقَّهُونَ مِنَ الْأُمَّةِ مَنْ أَذَاعُوا مِنَ الْأَمْرِ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَا أَنتُمُ الْأَفْقَّهُونَ مِنَ الْأُمَّةِ إِلَّا كَانُوْنَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَذَاعُوا إِنَّ فِيٰٰنَ

Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace, and blessings be upon him, said, “Take up good deeds only as much as you are able, for the best deeds are those done regularly even if they are few”.

The story of Imam Ahmed and the baker

Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal was one of the most famous scholars of all times. He was so loved that his funeral was attended by 1.3 million Muslims. It was his habit to go to various circles of knowledge and visit various teachers and students. Once he was traveling to Ash-Sham (present-day Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan). In those days, there were no cameras, photographs, and Facebook and people generally did not know each other by face. While he was traveling, night fell and he decided to stay in the masjid during the night. When he was laying there, the guard for the mosque came and asked him to leave as he did not recognize him. The humble Imam did not ward him by telling him that he was the Imam of Ahlus Sunnah, the great Ahmed Ibn Hanbal. He rather presented to him his situation that he was traveling and did not have anywhere else to stay. The guard did not accept this and asked him to leave so that he could lock the mosque. The Imam left and slept the door-steps of the mosque. When the guard saw that, he dragged him by his legs and threw in the middle of the road.

A baker was seeing all this from his bakery across the road. He invited Imam Ahmed to come in which he accepted. Imam Ahmed observed that this man was continually in the dhikr – Subhan Allah, Alhamdulillah, Allaho Akbar. While he was busy making the doughs, he did not waste a second and remained busy with the dhikr. Imam Ahmed asked him about what he has received from Allah swt for the state he is in [i.e. constant remembrance]. The man said that I have never made a dua or a prayer accept that Allah swt has accepted it – except one dua. The Imam asked him, what dua it is. The baker said that I made a dua that I should be able to meet the great Imam Ahmed. Tears came to Imam Ahmed’s eyes and he hugged the man and said, “Allah has dragged Ahmed by his legs and dropped at your door-step”.

This is what we get when we are regular in our good deeds and when we don’t consider any of our good deeds to be too small. We should keep doing whatever we can, consistently and with the purest of intentions; and this will pave the way for our success.

4. Think Progress

How many times do we see sisters who do not want to wear hijab by thinking that ‘I don’t even offer my prayers on time, how can I wear this?’ or ‘I feel like a hypocrite when my other things are messed
up while I wear the hijab’. We also hear many people who don’t go to hajj saying that ‘I work in haram; how can I go to hajj when I know I will be doing this again when I come back’. This is the thinking that Shaytan wishes for us to have. He wants us to go backward. Rather than gaining more good things, he wants us to strip ourselves of any good deeds that we already have or we wish to have. Why not fix your prayers and keep wearing the hijab? Why not fix your sources of income and do the hajj too? Why do we make an assumption that we can’t leave the bad but we are fine to leave the good? This is not how things should work. We should think progress and progress forward.

5. As you become a more religious person, excel in manners too

Many times it happens that we try to become religious, we start seeing so many faults in others. This makes us angry and results in bad behaviors. This is really not what Islam teaches us and if we engage in such acts, we really have to work on implementing Islam on ourselves. As become more religious and more practicing, we should be highly concerned about our character. Our beloved Master ﷺ was sent for the perfection of manners and Akhlaq; if we claim to be upholding his sunnah, we have to become a reflection of his great khuluq and great manners. We should become more compassionate and more loving as we become more practicing. We should remember that hadith about that woman who used to perform all her duties but did one wrong thing – she was abusive to her neighbors. The Prophet ﷺ told about her that she is in the hell-fire as she has no good in her. All that she was doing was superficial. The real beauty is the beauty of inside. We have to work on our Akhlaq to be able to keep our heart sound and return back to our Creator in this state.

CONTEMPLATION TASK FOR LESSON 33

As a contemplation task for this lesson, ponder about some of the pollutants or poisons in your life that are hindering your way towards becoming a better Muslim? Make a plan regarding how you can remove them from your life.