

Lecture Title: Practically Achieving Our Purpose through Akhlāq

1. Introduction and Objectives

Let us focus on **Akhlāq (Islamic Ethics)** and how we can practically achieve our spiritual purpose. By the end of this session, we will:

- Understand the **Science of Akhlāq** and its core areas of concern.
 - Analyze the role of **repetitious actions** in developing or omitting characteristics.
 - Explain the struggle between **internal forces** of the soul.
 - Define **Jihādun Nafs** (the struggle of the self) and its connection to ethics.
 - Reflect on a **practical strategy** for spiritual growth.
-

2. Defining Beauty: Khalq vs. Khulq

To begin, we must distinguish between two Arabic terms: **khalq** and **khulq**.

- **Khalq** refers to the outer shape or physical characteristics of a human being. In society, people often make shallow judgments based on this physical appearance.
- **Khulq** is an internal state or characteristic. The plural of this word is **Akhlāq**.

While we have some control over our physical beauty through lifestyle choices like diet and exercise, Islam teaches that **true value lies within**. We have significantly more control over our **spiritual component**, and our inner beauty can be enhanced by unrooting evil traits and developing good ones. For example, physical strength is a matter of *khalq*, but the **willpower to resist sin** is a matter of *khulq*.

3. The Science of Akhlāq

In Islamic Sciences, the **Study of Akhlāq** is concerned with two things:

1. **Understanding** which internal characteristics are good and which are bad.
2. **Learning strategies** to acquire good traits and stay away from bad ones.

It is important to note that both the outer form (**Ahkām** or jurisprudential rules) and the inner spirit (**Akhlāq**) are of extreme importance in Islam.

4. The Possibility of Change

Can we actually change who we are? While factors like family, friends, and society heavily influence us, we are not forced to be like those around us. The most important factor is our own **effort and motivation**.

Consider the story of **Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyād**, who was once a highway robber. Upon hearing a verse from the Qur'ān asking if it was not time for believers' hearts to become "humbly submissive," he chose to reform. He compensated his victims, studied under Imām Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, and eventually became a scholar. This proves that with a sincere desire and the help of Allah, anyone can change their internal characteristics.

5. The Internal Forces: Shahwah, Ghadaḥ, and 'Aql

To improve ourselves, we must understand the internal forces Allah placed within our souls:

- **Shahwah (Desire):** The force inclined toward beautiful and appealing things.
- **Ghaḍab (Anger):** The force that wants to escape or repel harmful and unpleasant things.

These forces are not inherently "bad"—they are necessary for survival, such as eating or defending oneself. However, if they are not used correctly, they can lead to jealousy, oppression, or forbidden lusts.

The force meant to control these is '**Aql (Intellect)**. Life is a continuous struggle to use our '*Aql* to steer *shahwah* and *ghaḍab* toward righteousness. This intense, prolonged struggle is known as **Jihādun Nafs** (the struggle of the self), often called the **Greater Jihad** (Jihādul Akbar).

6. Mastering the Soul: The Example of Āyatullāh Borūjerdī

A powerful example of this mastery is **Āyatullāh Borūjerdī**, who vowed to fast for an entire year if he ever spoke in anger. Once, after becoming momentarily annoyed with a student and telling him to "be quiet," he immediately realized his mistake. To rectify it, he publicly kissed the student's hand, gifted him a cloak and money, and fulfilled his vow by fasting for a year. This shows the extreme lengths scholars go to to **perfect their akhlāq**.

7. The Role of Repetition and Intensity

Traits are not "all or nothing"; they exist at different **levels of intensity**. For instance, love for Allah can range from a basic level (doing only *wājibāt* or obligatory actions) to the level of the *Awliyā'* (saints).

By **intentionally and consistently performing small acts**—like small acts of generosity—we make it easier for that characteristic to become part of our internal being. As we repeat these actions, our love for Allah increases, making worship a pleasure rather than a difficulty.

8. A Practical Roadmap for Improvement

To practically improve our interactions and inner qualities, we can follow three steps:

1. **Mushāraṭah (Committing):** Making an intention at the start of the day (e.g., after Fajr) to fulfill our responsibilities and treat others as Allah instructed.
 2. **Murāqabah (Mindfulness):** Staying cognizant and mindful of our actions throughout the day to ensure we follow our plan.
 3. **Muḥāsabah (Self-Accounting):** Reviewing our actions at the end of the day. We should thank Allah for the good we did and seek forgiveness for our slips.
-

9. Reflective Activity

To conclude, I want you to imagine your life over the past week is a movie.

- What **virtues** did you demonstrate naturally?
- What **negative actions** showed a lack of virtue?
- How can you **purify your intention**? As we saw in the case of "Madiha," doing something for the sake of Allah is more valuable than doing it just because it is "fun".

Homework: Fill out a chart identifying one lack of virtue you noticed this week, the event that helped you identify it, and a specific **plan for improvement**.

Are there any questions before we end?