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# TOWARDS TRUE HONOR

ARLEY LOEWEN

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# **IN THE NAME OF GOD**



## **AUTHOR'S FOREWORD**

We naturally love honor and fear shame. We want to live with honor as individuals, families and communities.

Yet honor is evasive, hard to achieve and so easily lost. What can we do to gain honor and keep a good name in our society? How can we experience value and respect in our relationships with one another?

We often wonder, what do people really think and say about us? What happens when someone else in our community gets more honor than we do? Can we get out of the quagmire of competing for honor? And so, our struggles with gaining honor and avoiding shame continue.

In this book, I engage with these questions. I urge us towards a new and higher honor where we go beyond the struggle for status and, rather, learn to genuinely honor one another. In this process, we discover that honor comes to the one who honors others. And more than that, we develop and enjoy healthy life-giving relationships with each other.

I write critically. I ask us what we mean by 'honor'. At the risk of generalizing too much, I criticize both the East and the West. Please bear with me. Sometimes you may feel I am too hard on Western, individualist cultures and too easy on collectivist, honor-shame societies. At other times, you may feel exactly the opposite. I invite you to read this study on honor and shame with an open heart as well as a critical mind.

Having related to Afghan society and studied Afghan-Persian culture since 1981, I am indebted to Afghans and Iranians who

have taught me much about honor-shame cultures. I have engaged with hundreds of Afghans in seminars on leadership. In recent years, I have developed these sessions to focus on “honorable leadership.” These sessions provided a forum for great discussions which have proven to be a valuable resource as I explore honor and shame in this book.

I include many quotes from Afghan and Iranian writers. Most of the translations are my own. While I tried to remain true to the original, I take full responsibility for any errors in translation.

The reader may notice that I have not been gender neutral in my use of personal pronouns. I intend this book to be translated into Persian, a language that does not have gender-specific pronouns. It would make translation difficult and awkward to require translating a grammatical nuance in English that does not exist in Persian.

I would be delighted to engage with you on honor-shame issues. There may be something you disagree with, or you would like to share an example that reflects the principles I try to communicate in the book. I look forward to receiving your comments after you have read this book.

Thank you,

Arley Loewen ([arley.loewen@gmail.com](mailto:arley.loewen@gmail.com))

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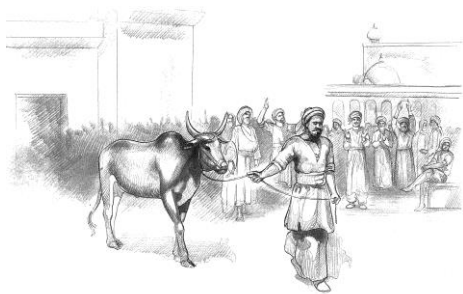
# INTRODUCTION

“You can do whatever you like, but do not ruin my reputation.”<sup>1</sup>

## ZAYER AND THE VILLAGE (A STORY FROM TANGSIR)

### *Is this how I can gain back my honor?*

Everyone knew Zayer Muhammad as the village hero. Years ago, he had fought against foreign rule to liberate his people. Now he had proved again that he was the people's



hero. The widow's bull had gone on a rampage in the palm grove. Only he could contain the enraged beast. The entire village

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<sup>1</sup> A word from many fathers, as they advise their sons and daughters.

watched him, with the bull meekly following him. The crowd shouted in approval, “Well done!” (*afirin*). Zayer savored the cheers.

But not for long. As he walked out of the palm grove, he felt deep anguish in his heart. Everyone coveted such affirming approval from neighbors and friends. But today, this was not enough for Zayer. His head hung low.

Earlier Zayer had wanted to purchase a home for his family, but in the transaction, four brokers had swindled 1,000 *toman* from him. Although it was a considerable amount of money for him – his life savings, to be sure – the money was not the issue. When he walked through the village, he no longer could hold his head up high, nor look anyone in the face. His good standing among his people had crashed. He had lost face. It was like a death to him.

Since I found out that they had gotten together to cheat me of my money, it was as if they had poured oil on my face and lit it. It’s as if they had beheaded my sons right in front of me.<sup>2</sup>

In the deal, others had gained the upper hand over him. He was no longer the champion in the village. Rather, he and his family were a laughingstock in the eyes of the swindlers and their friends.

Zayer Muhammad made one final attempt to reclaim his money, but the shaykh, one of the four who had swindled him, ridiculed him in the presence of others. Such insult was sufficient grounds for revenge. It was nothing less than social murder –

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از وختی که فهمیدم همشان برای خوردن پول من با هم دست بیکدیگر شدن، مثله اینه که نفت روم ریختن<sup>2</sup> و آتشم زدن. مثله اینه که بچه ها ما جلوم سر بریدن.

they had ruined his good name. With no name, his life was over. He had no choice but to restore his own name to have respect in the village. It was an act of survival, even if it meant killing others. He explained this to his father-in-law, Haj Muhammad:

Before the eyes of the people, I feel like cotton that somebody had pissed on. I can't lift my head up high before the people of the town. So this is what you call life? You think I can get my reputation back with something besides the bullet of a gun?<sup>3</sup>



Even though both his wife and his father-in-law tried to dissuade Zayer from his plan to avenge the swindlers, they could not, because they too subscribed to the same code. He needed to restore his name and honor. This was as important as life itself.

### ***The most important thing in life is a person's honor and dignity***

Two threats lay before Zayer: one was possible imprisonment or even the loss of his own physical life if he avenged his name. The second one was to lose his reputation. The latter was worse, and completely overshadowed his plan to take revenge, or in other words, to murder four men. Zayer considered it his responsibility to get back his honor because only then could he

<sup>3</sup> پیش چشم مردم مٹہ پنبہ شاشو شدم. دیگہ نمیتونم سرمو پیش اهل بوشهر بلند کنم. این شد زندگی؟ تو گمون میکنی غیر از گلوله، با چیز دیگہ میتونم آبرومو بخرم؟

and his family survive in society. He told his father-in-law:

In life, there is nothing as important as a person's honor and dignity, not even a man's life, not even his wife or his children. True, ... we must take care of them ... But not without my reputation. Is it right that tomorrow when my kids have grown up, people will say to them, "Ha, your dad was a coward, he couldn't make it."<sup>4</sup>

Zayer decided to take revenge on the four men who had cheated him. He killed each of them, one by one, in cold blood. In the process, he killed a fifth person and wounded a sixth, both of whom were women. How would that factor in his struggle to regain his reputation? The villagers knew that "a person shouldn't lift his hand against a woman, a woman is weak."<sup>5</sup> When his wife heard the rumor that her husband had killed a woman, she refused to believe it. It was a lie, she said, because, like the rest of the villagers, she knew that such a deed was below her husband's dignity.

Zayer's sensational escape from government officers left another person dead. By the time he returned to his village, a crowd of neighbors – much the same as those who witnessed his battle with the wild bull – were waiting to welcome him home as their hero. From all appearances, Zayer had successfully avenged his loss. But had he? There was only one dilemma. He was a hero, that was true, but now the law was after him. The law had clashed with his heroic deed. He could no longer stay in the village.

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<sup>4</sup> Quotes are from Sadeq Chobak, *Tangsir* (Tehran, 1936), 87-93.

در زندگی هیچ چیز نیست که بقدر شرف و حیثیت آدم برابر باشه، حتی خون آدم. حتی زن و بچه آدم. درسه که چشمشون بندس ماس و ما باید بفکر شون باشیم و زیر پر و بال خودمون بزرگ شون کنیم، اما نه بابی آبرویی. آیا این خوبه که فردا وقتی بچه ها مون بزرگ شدن مردم بشون بگن، باباتون نامرد بود؟

<sup>5</sup> *Tangsir*, 154.

رو زن نباید دس بلند بکنه. زن ضعیفه.

Earlier, in the palm grove scenario in the village, the spectators had affirmed his honor, and now again, the entire neighborhood rallied around his restored reputation. One of the officials who had been posted at Zayer's house to capture him when he showed up, stated to his colleague, "They're all praising him, they say he's a real hero. They say he really has guts. I tell you, he sure must have had guts to do what he did."<sup>6</sup>

In another conversation, the villagers admired his courage.

Muhammad, yeah, he got his money back with a bullet. What a man of nerve (ghayrat). This kind of nerve you'll find only among the Tangsirir ... Now, here in this place, no one's going to swindle another's money. From now on, no one's going to be cruel to anybody.<sup>7</sup>

Does this story, written in the 1920s, simply reflect traditional customs of chivalry and gallantry that clash with 21<sup>st</sup>-century values? Or how could six cold-blooded murders be justified for the loss of some money?

The story of Zayer, and its subsequent movie, illustrates how honor and the need to gain and maintain a good name have been a fundamental value in Persian and Central Asian society. The pursuit of reputation has dominated life. It has controlled the individual, the family and the tribe, as the bedrock of all decisions. It becomes the essence of life itself. There is no real life without honor. Such shame is almost a death, as the Pashtuns say, "Who is disgraced today is destroyed tomorrow."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Tangsir*, 200.

خیلی ارزش تعریف میکنند. میگویند خیلی جوانمرده. میگویند خیلی جیگر داره.

<sup>7</sup> *Tangsir*, 154-155.

محمد آخرش پولاش را با گلوله پس گرفت. بنازم بغیرتش ... اینجور غیرتا فقط تو تنگسیرا پیدا میشه ... دیگه تو این شهر، حالا حالاها کسی پول کسی را نمیخوره. دیگه کسی کسی بکسی ظلم نمیکنه.

### *The good name is the glass of life*

An Iranian literary critic Eslami Nadushan says, “The good name is the glass of life of a free man. If the glass falls to the ground, life is automatically over.”<sup>9</sup>

The anthropologist Bourdieu comments on how reputation is life itself, “The true man cannot be other than the man of honor ... In him, existence and honor are one. He who has lost his honor no longer exists. He ceases to exist for other people, and at the same time he ceases to exist for himself.”<sup>10</sup>

The ancient Greeks considered gaining reputation as the ultimate goal of life. They proudly said, “We are lovers of honor.” The Roman elite understood the purpose of life as running a race course in pursuit of honor.

### **Overview of Book**

In this study, we will explore in depth the phenomenon of gaining honor and avoiding shame. We will analyze how the pursuit of honor continues to govern much of life in Persian and Central Asian societies, and for that matter, the entire Middle Eastern and Asian world. Even in our increasingly digital culture, we need honor. We will see how honor is essential to human life. We will discuss key characteristics of honor and shame and how the drive for honor becomes a powerful force for good in society. At the same time, we will note how the fear of shame limits personal development and eventually becomes destructive.

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<sup>9</sup> Eslami Nadushan, *Dastan-e Dastan-ha [The Story of Stories]* (Tehran, 1351/1972), 98.

نام. شیشه عمر مرد آزاده است. اگر بر خاک افتاد، این عمر خود بخود بسر آمده.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The Sentiment of Honor in Kabyle Society,” tr. Philip Sherrard, in *Honor and Shame: The Values of a Mediterranean Society*, ed. J.G. Peristiany (University of Chicago Press, 1966), 212.

The main part of this study focuses on the struggles and challenges of gaining and maintaining honor. We will see how people may resort to dishonorable and shameful ways to avoid shame and maintain their honor. This becomes a twisted honor and is no honor at all. Such false honor frustrates relationships and hinders people from healthy living. Throughout this section, we will look at ways to gain and maintain true honor. What is honorable honor? How can we lead or manage with honor? How can we live honorably?

**We will look at ways to gain and maintain true honor. What is honorable honor? How can we lead or manage with honor? How can we live honorably?**

The book has a lengthy section to the family. We expect the family to be a place of honor, yet how much do we truly honor one another in the family? What would an honorable family life look like?

The study is interspersed with discussion questions that can be used for personal reflection or group discussion.

### ***No one noticed me!***

Imagine walking into a room where three of your friends are having tea. However, none of them acknowledges your presence. They just continue their conversation as if you were not there. It feels painful, to be ignored, almost as if someone has stabbed you. You want to hide or leave, wondering why you came. Then one friend looks at you, your eyes meet, he smiles and with a nod, invites you to join them. A sense of warmth and belonging floods through you. You feel human. That brief face-to-face connection has breathed life into your being.

The experience of not being noticed is like a social death. The



psychologist William James (d. 1910) wrote about the horror of being unnoticed by everyone else in society.

If no one turned around when we entered, answered when we spoke or minded what we did, but if every person we met ‘cut us dead’ and acted as if we were non-existent things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would before long well up in us, from which the cruelest bodily torture would be a relief.<sup>11</sup>

### ***I wish no one would notice me!***

My little granddaughter loves to play hide and seek with me. She tells me to count to ten, so she can run and hide. I pretend to look for her everywhere and then find her lying on our bed, with a pillow covering her face. When her face is covered, in her world, she has become hidden. Amazing creativity – she will even play the game in the car.

But then it becomes more than a game. A stranger meets my granddaughter, looks at her and asks her a question. She feels shy and looks away. She may cover her eyes, thinking that no one can see her and that she has become invisible.

This is not just a child’s play. For adults, it’s very serious. First, we struggle to be noticed and then we struggle to cover ourselves and hide.

We note two contrasting scenarios. Sometimes we feel that no one recognizes us. Why doesn’t anyone pay attention to us? We show off with the hope that somebody will notice us.

But then there are occasions when we hope that no one will notice us. We look around and wonder, was anyone watching?

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Alain de Botton in *Status Anxiety* (Pantheon Books, 2004), 8.

When we make a mistake or mess up, our first reaction is to hide the mistake. If that doesn't work, we want to hide. In English we would say something like, "I could just crawl into a hole." We wish people would not recognize us. Our faces turn 'red' (blush) which only makes matters worse. Perhaps blushing is an involuntary effort to cover ourselves, but it doesn't work.<sup>12</sup> How can we hide?

### **We Need Face! We Need Identity!**

To be human means to have face. Not just a physical face, but 'face' in the sense of identity. To have real face is much more than to recognize each other's eyes, nose and mouth. Our face represents who we are as persons.

Imagine if someone showed you a picture of their grandchildren's feet or elbows and said to you, "Look at my grandchildren. Aren't they adorable?"<sup>13</sup>

You would not accept it, because we know and recognize each other by our faces. The face is the most public and visible part of a person, immediately noticed by everyone. Our identity is intimately connected with our face—the front part of our head. In one sense our 'face' tells others who we are.

Our faces are an important expressions of our uniqueness. They are the gateway to and from ourselves. Through our faces, we learn to know the world and we become known to the world

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<sup>12</sup> The reason humans blush has baffled philosophers and scientists for centuries. When we're embarrassed our bodies release hormones that increase blood rate, probably to help us run or fight the immediate danger we're encountering. The increased blood flow makes our faces more flushed and redder. Some psychologists speculate that the blushing face may be an involuntary and non-verbal sign of remorse or apology for the mistake the person has made.

<sup>13</sup> Borrowed from the website, [www.honorshame.com](http://www.honorshame.com)

around us. Though our physical faces are not everything we are, they play a very important role in how we relate to others

As stated above, the drive to gain and maintain a good reputation (face, honor, good name) is a core value in Middle Eastern and Asian societies. This drive controls the individual, their family and much of society. It becomes the main force behind most decisions.

**Our faces are an important expression of our uniqueness. They are the gateway to and from ourselves. Through our faces, we learn to know the world and we become known to the world around us.**

Even if we don't express it, this drive is the air we breathe, the water in which we swim. Societies use many different words to describe this phenomenon of having a good face or a good reputation.

In English, we use terms such as reputation, honor, respect, good name, identity, shame, dignity, worth, prestige and status...<sup>14</sup>

Each term carries emotional and social significance with its own shades of meaning and nuances.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

- *Which word(s) would you consider to be the most comprehensive?*
- *Make a list of words in your language that relate to this theme.*

<sup>14</sup> In Persian societies, we have terms such as:

آبرو، عزت، احترام، نام نیک، نام و نشان، حیثیت، شرم، شرافت، حیا، ناموس، هویت، مقام، موقف

The most specific and frequently used Persian term to describe this phenomenon in society is *ab-i ru* (reputation).<sup>15</sup> It literally means 'bright face.' The face must shine. It cannot show or express pain.

We will see in this study that the way we want to 'face' society is with a good or 'bright face.' We don't want to blush or have a darkened face. We do not want to cover our face. That is a shame. Rather, with a 'clear' or 'bright' face, we can hold our heads up high. This shows that face is very much a public matter. Human life is the struggle to gain and keep one's face 'clean and 'bright.'

The opposite of a bright face is a darkened or a black face (*ru-siya*). This refers to the face of a person who is blushing or who has been shamed or disgraced, so he wants to cover his face or hide. He does not want to be seen. His head falls in contrast to someone with his head held high.

### ***Anything I do is for the good name***

The concept is also a persistent theme throughout medieval Persian literature as well as modern Iranian and Afghan short stories. A legendary warrior from the Persian medieval world, Samak Ayyar, considered gaining reputation as the highest aim in life. He belonged to a group of warriors and was engaged by an Iranian prince whose beloved had been captured by an enemy king. Samak vowed to fulfill the prince's desire, so began Samak's secret exploits and endless public combats by co-warriors. Samak

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<sup>15</sup> The word آب‌رو is a Persian compound, consisting of the two words 'water' and 'face.' Why 'water'? Water is more than liquid. In ancient Persian, it also meant something like 'bright' (*roshan* - روشن). (E.g. when water is spilt, Persians will often say, خیر است روشناییست (it's okay, it's bright.) In this sense, the term refers to having a bright and shining face, a clear or transparent face or a bright or shining face. In other words, a person with آب‌رو (reputation) has a good and bright presence in society.

says this about reputation:

I am a warrior with little to my name. Any work I do, I do for the sake of a good name, not for food. The work that I am doing now is so that I will have a good reputation.<sup>16</sup>

This warrior says that he does everything and anything for the sake of his name. And as we learned from the Zayer Muhammad story, some people will kill for the sake of face. Zayer realizes that neither he nor his family can face life if they don't have 'face.' Without face they cannot hold their heads up in society. Zayer must remove (or take away) someone else's face as if that is a way to restore his own face and his family's face.

We see how serious this phenomenon is. It is a matter of life and death.

### *Questions to discuss:*

- *Do you think it is acceptable to kill someone for the sake of a good name?*

<sup>16</sup> Faramarz Khudadad, *Samak-i Ayyar*, 6 Vols. ed. by Parwez Natil Khanlari (Tehran, 1362-64/1983-85), I:181. (From here on, reference cited as Samak).

مرد ناداری عیار پیشه ام. اگر نانی یابم، بخورم، و اگر نه می گردم و خدمت عیاران و جوانمردان می کنم و کار گر می کنم آن برای نام می کنم، نه از برای نان. و این کار که می کنم از برای آن می کنم که مرا نامی باشند.



# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **UNDERSTANDING HONOR-SHAME ORIENTATION**

**M**any of the terms for this phenomenon have become clichés. Because of this, it is difficult to clearly explain what we mean with honor, reputation and a good name. These terms are obvious and self-understood as if they don't need definitions.

In this chapter, we present three characteristics of the honor-shame phenomenon. Each characteristic describes honor from a different angle, though these terms overlap with each other as well. Instead of defining terms specifically, we will shed further light on this phenomenon through stories and experiences. We will use the various terms interchangeably in this discussion to highlight the multi-faceted ways the honor-shame mindset is played out in society.

## **A WORTHY NAME**

Do we have value and worth in our society? How important and significant are we to those around us? How much are we



worth to others and do we matter to them?

In the Western world, a sense of worth is much more an internal, psychological reflection, where we may wonder if we are worthwhile or worthless within ourselves. However, in the Asian and Middle Eastern societies, worth is relational. A person struggles with his worth in relation to the people around him. Instead of asking “what am I worth as an individual?” we would ask “how do others in society value me?”

### **An Interview with Tolo TV**

Years ago, during the Karzai government of Afghanistan, Afghan Tolo TV interviewed me for their breakfast show in Kabul.<sup>1</sup> The host asked me about my cultural and academic activities. I mentioned that I was writing a book on reputation. He immediately interrupted, “And as they say, ‘Reputation is more important than everything.’” It’s the air we breathe.

In many ways, the host was right. He agreed with what Zayer Muhammad said in the *Tangsir* novel when Zayer stated, “In life, there is nothing as important as a person’s identity and dignity, not even a man’s life, not even his wife or his children.”<sup>2</sup>

But how important is reputation really? Back in the Tolo TV studio, I quickly challenged this notion and introduced a short story by the Afghan writer Khalid Nawisa where the main character, a young woman called Hajro watches a wedding celebration next



<sup>1</sup> Breakfast show, *Bamdad-i Khush* with Reza Mehrdad, Oct 1, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> *Tangsir*, p. 92-93

door and dreams of such a day for herself. Her brother did not allow her to attend the wedding feast. She did not have enough value or weight as a person to mingle among other people. And more importantly to the brother, if she would come to the wedding, his value among the people would decrease. He had to ensure *his* worth and value in society. This meant that she must be kept away from public view and remain behind four walls.

So, is the brother's worth more important than his sister's worth? We will discuss later how gender is related to shame and honor and why it was considered honorable for a woman to remain hidden.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- *How important is reputation in your view?*
  - *Do you think a person's reputation is the most important value in his life? Is it more important than his own life, more important than his wife's or children's lives?*
  - *What should a man do when his reputation is in danger?*
- 

### **Reputation – Worth More Than Money!**

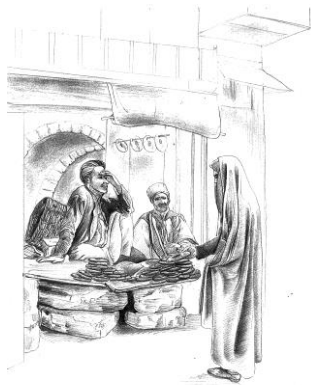
Reputation can be understood as capital (asset, value, worth), that which gives a person prestige and provides him with assets in public. An asset gives a person an advantage and power, allowing him to have influence among people. Other people more readily acknowledge and defer to such a person of worth. They listen to him, look up to him and offer him respect. It is not true that 'money can buy anything.' It is a person's name that gives the person power in his society. Without it, the person feels helpless, because others do not bother to pay attention to him.

Zayer Muhammad had established his reputation and confirmed it by defeating the mad bull. He could hold his head up high wherever he went. People admired him and he carried influence in his community. However, as if it were a ‘glass of life,’ reputation is also very fragile, something that a person can lose if he does not handle it carefully. Once his reputation had been shattered, Zayer feared that his influence would be gone forever. When reputation was broken, he knew it could be irretrievable and irreparable.

### ***My reputation is more important than anything else<sup>3</sup>***

So, spoke Sayyid Meran, the main character in the lengthy novel, *Mrs. Ahu’s Husband (Shawhar-e Ahu Khanum)*. Meran enjoyed his prestige as the head of the bakers guild in his city. His reputation had a direct bearing on his economic security. In public, this well-behaved man feared only one thing: a loss of reputation would hurt his ‘capital’ in society. Fewer clients would patronize his bakery shop if he did not have a good name, which would mean the end of his business. He is well-respected, married and four children to his name.

Then one day, an attractive young woman comes by to purchase bread. Meran learns that she is divorced and is in a vulnerable situation, needing help. Throughout the novel, Meran struggles between his desire to heroically help her and his emotions of love for her.



<sup>3</sup> Mohammad Ali Afghani, *Shawhar-e Ahu Khanum* [Mrs. Ahu’s Husband] (Tehran, 1372/1993), 235. From here on *Shawhar*.

Meran understands very well how honor and reputation are directly related to a person's financial well-being. His reputation is, in fact, his livelihood, for as he says, "I, who live off my reputation, know very well that I need society more than society needs me."<sup>4</sup> Reputation is like money that one earns from society: the more you have of it, the better you can function in society and influence others. Without it, a person cannot really survive in society.

### **Do I Inherit Worth or Achieve Worth?**

There are two ways to gain this asset of worth and reputation.

One's worth can be inherited or ascribed. This means that a person can receive or inherit his worth and value from his background, lineage, tribe and race. A person receives worth by being born into a worthy group or through proper connections or by belonging to a certain race or tribe or simply through age.

For example, if we are born into a certain religious clan, we have more worth than others because we are considered to be 'sons of the light.' Those outside this lineage are considered 'earthly' with a lower status. If we are born into royalty or an aristocratic family, we have status because our family has inherent or intrinsic status.

With ascribed status, there is little opportunity for upward mobility. Every person has been granted his lot in life, through fate or divine decree.

### ***Does God give everyone their own 'piece'?***

We were driving through Kabul in a taxi when I noticed some

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<sup>4</sup> *Shawhar*, 120.

منی که از قبل اعتبار و آبرویم نان میخورم خوب میدانم که بمردم بیشتر احتیاج دارم تا مردم بمن.

female beggars sitting in the middle of the street. I commented on how sad it was and wondered what kind of family life they may have. The taxi-driver perked up, “God has put each of us in a certain class, according to our capacity. God hands out privileges as we are able to carry them.”

Everyone has their lot in life, their piece of the pie.

This view of life leads to a cyclical way of thinking, as next year is the same as this year. All remains the same, certain people are inherently superior to others and others are inherently of less worth.

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, political philosophers like John Locke (re)introduced the idea that God has created all humans equal in the Western world. They argued that God gave the world to all humans and for everyone to enjoy. Rulers were not superior to others, and these ‘others’ were not destined to serve the superiors. Government was an instrument to ensure that all humans could enjoy the earth. This gave renewed incentive to what was understood to have value and worth. It gave the opportunity for “anyone to achieve anything” or “become like anyone else.”<sup>5</sup>

This worldview, which also birthed the industrial revolution, devalued *ascribed* worth and status such as lineage and family connections and opened the door for anyone to *achieve* status. “Now people realized that they could progress. Status was awarded in direct proportion to the (largely financial) achievements of each new generation.”<sup>6</sup>

Achieved worth comes through effort, education, winning a competition, or gaining wealth. A person earns a sense of worth

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<sup>5</sup> *Status Anxiety*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> *Status Anxiety*, 31.

through personal achievement or by distinguishing himself. This offers endless opportunities for humans, irrespective of their family, or social background. Their ascribed status that they have or have not inherited does not matter.

Although a world of opportunity lies before every person, at the same time, this way of thinking also creates an unease, because we constantly want to achieve more value. When we put aside our belief in fate and come to realize that destiny lies in our own hands, we must now try harder to gain honor. Indeed, life becomes an exciting adventure but also an endless struggle to perform better and to climb the ladder to success. We will discuss this in detail later, along with the many problems this can bring.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- **Why does achieved worth bring about restlessness?**
  - **If a shopkeeper has lost his reputation, why will customers stop buying from his shop?**
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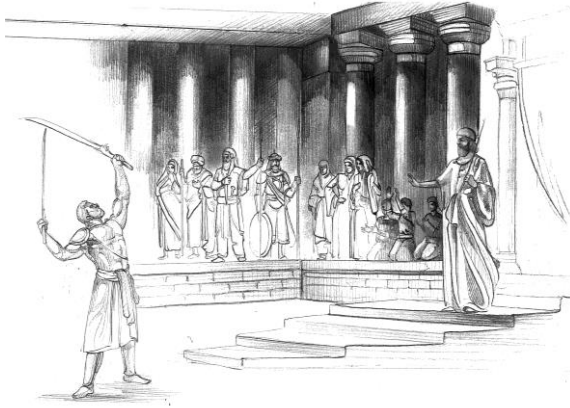
## **THE PUBLIC NAME**

Reputation or a good name is very much communal, not private or individual. It is the opinion that one's society confers upon a person. In fact, a person's 'good name' can only come from others. The good name is what other people think or say about a person. It is this 'public talk' that gives worth to a person.

### **Words of Praise – What Will People Say?**

The *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) is a well-known Persian epic poem from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The heroic warriors in the *Shahnama* lived very public lives. The most famous warrior is Rustam.

One of the Rustam stories shows how important it is to receive public praise. The Persian king had appointed Rustam to train Prince Siyawash as a warrior. After the training was complete, Rustam took the prince to the king's court where the young prince publicly showed off his newly learned skills. The royal



court offered words of praise (*afirin*). This praise certified that Siyawash was now a true warrior. He now had public significance and importance. This gave meaning to his life.

A person who receives the word of approval, “well-done!” (*afirin*), from others then has a good name in public. This word of approval is like an affirmation or pronouncement that the person has worth. The person is ‘well-spoken of’ by others. Such public praise adds to the person’s assets and increases his value. With more words of praise, more weight and more worth.

Without public praise, no one was impressed and affected by the warrior; and hence, no good name. If other people were in awe of a warrior, it would make the warrior truly great. People would admire the warrior, saying things like “the world will not rest because of Rustam,” and “his name will not disappear.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Shahnama*, 1:546.715.

The warrior Samak prided himself that the “warriors of the world do not sleep well out of fear of me.”<sup>8</sup> Conversely, to be considered unknown was a flaw for a warrior.

This drive to have a public name means that deeds need to be done publicly so that the doer can be seen and acknowledged. The public cannot praise what they do not see.

When a warrior was about to venture out on a dangerous exploit, he boasted what he would do and that “people will talk about it.”<sup>9</sup> A great exploit lay not in the feat itself, but in being able to elicit a public response from the spectators. A private victory or revenge was considered futile because no one had seen it, and therefore no one would talk about it.<sup>10</sup> There was no reputation to be gained from a hidden act.

When a warrior threatened to torture or kill an opponent, he frequently used the term *bi-alamat* (with a sign). He meant that his exploit would be visible. This would leave a permanent impression on others to serve as an example for society. Hence the well-known phrase, “a name and a mark.”

In many ways, not much has changed from the ancient and medieval periods. We all struggle to be noticed. We desire praise from others. When our boss or teacher says “Well-done!” we feel valued.

**We all struggle to be noticed. We desire praise from others. When our boss or teacher says “Well-done!” we feel valued.**

<sup>8</sup> *Samak*, 1:295-296. تا دانی که مرا سمک عیار خوانند، که مردان عالم از ترس من به شب نیارند خفتن.

<sup>9</sup> *Samak*, 1:80. اگر زندگانی باشد، تا جهان باشد از آن باز گویند. This statement is frequently repeated in the Samak story.

<sup>10</sup> In his study on Kabyle society (a Berber people of Algeria), the anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu points out that an act of revenge carried out anonymously is considered futile. “The Sentiment of Honor in Kabyle Society,” p. 205.



Now in our present online and digital world we even calculate praise from others. We can count how well we are 'liked' in comparison to others. As we will see, this creates tremendous anxiety as we become obsessed with the sound of the 'ding' (praise?). We think, "Someone has noticed me!" but it may have just been a digital, robotic 'like'!

### ***I am doing this to win praise!***

Sir Lancelot is a legendary character of English fame, a knight who served King Arthur and fought great battles, undertaking dangerous quests in the king's name.

Sir Lancelot too valued honor and praise from others. In one of his adventures, he helps a widow in her plight. He is indeed a hero (*jawanmard*)<sup>11</sup> as he cares for this needy person. Then he says to himself, "*I am a knight who labors through many realms to win worship [honor, praise].*"<sup>12</sup> In other words, he is doing this to be noticed and to gain praise from others.

But it is not only the medieval warrior who needs this public praise.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- ***Sir Lancelot does good to receive praise from others. Do you agree with his philosophy of life?***
  - ***How much should a person try to perform in order to receive recognition (and praise) from his boss?***
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<sup>11</sup> *jawanmard*: literally young-man in Persian. It is the overarching term for the hero, or a person who carries the virtues that give him good reputation.

<sup>12</sup> Sir Thomas Malory, *The Legends of King Arthur and his Knights*, tr. by James Knowles, p. 283.

## Why Should We Do Good Deeds?

This leads to a discussion of ethics. Why should we perform well and do good for others? Some say that it is our duty, given by natural law which we know inherently. Sociology would say that we received these laws through our community. Many who believe in the Creator God will say that the sense to do good is rooted in God's law which we know by inner conscience. This means that we do good in order to please God and receive rewards from Him. Or do we do good in order to receive praise from other humans?

We well know how a family will go into huge debt to prepare an elaborate funeral reception or wedding feast so that the neighbors and relatives will always speak well of the family.

This need to garner praise can become competitive and self-destructive. The Pashtuns say, "For him who would follow 'Pashtunwali' (code of honor), his wife will eventually gather the chaff." In other words, it can become very expensive to maintain one's good name. Someone who is not well-off and struggles to gain reputation can face financial difficulties and end up in poverty.

To be true, we all need encouragement. Words of encouragement are like public cheers that inspire a person to do even more good to others. However, seeking praise can easily become twisted and distorted. If we put too much value in hearing the word "well-done!" (*afirin*) and the praises of those around us, these sweet-sounding words can overshadow our actual living. Public performance becomes more of a reality and the approval is valued more than an actual deed. Eventually life becomes a show in order to impress others, whether or not the deed happens.

## **The Court of Public Opinion**

As we enjoyed the wedding feast in a small hall in Islamabad, Pakistan, the groom's brother moved from table to table, trying to greet each of the guests. As he spoke with me, he added, "I need to make sure everyone is happy and that no one will mock us after."

This praise or word of approval must come from the person's 'honor group,' that is, the community to which the person belongs. A person's good name and reputation are embedded in that person's honor group.

This means a person must behave according to what his group says is good or virtuous. Each person is judged by his group or society, who decide whether his behavior conforms to the group's standards. This group can be described as 'the court of public opinion' or 'the court of reputation.' The person's honor, worth and value are judged and determined by others.

As we noticed above, the consequence of living in this public court is that people are under pressure to please their group or community in order to receive acceptance and worth from them. They will also feel pressure to avoid displeasing others. They need to avoid judgment and shame.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- *Does good behavior lead to good reputation, or does good reputation bring about good behavior? Which comes first? Or can both be true?*
  - *How important is it for a person to live according to the public opinion of his social group?*
-

## THE FAMILY NAME

However, the good name is much more than public praise for an individual and goes far beyond worth and value for a person.

### *No one will play with my daughter!*

A child, born in any home, should bring joy. But there is a great risk. How will the child handle the family's 'glass of life'? The child holds an awesome responsibility in his hands. He has the potential to ruin the family's assets and reputation in society. This is well-illustrated in the Iranian novel, *Bamdad-i Khumar* (The Morning After).

The young 15-year old girl, Mahbuba, falls in love with a simple carpenter apprentice who works in the marketplace several streets from Mahbuba's wealthy home. Despite the different suitors her parents arrange for her, she is determined to marry this boy, although she has to keep it hidden from her family as long as possible. When her parents discover she has fallen in love with a carpenter boy, they are horrified. The family is unable to cope with their daughter's stubborn will. Her father refuses any conversation with her and her mother becomes hysterical. At one point, the mother screams at her daughter,

This little girl, Khujasta [Mahbuba's younger sister], innocent of everything that is going on, from now on, who will come to see her? Don't you think people will say, "Isn't she a sister to that creep? Is she worth her mother's hair?" Do you think anyone will come and visit us from now on? Who's going to knock at our door? People won't even allow their daughters to play with our Khujasta, or to even talk with her. They won't let their kids hang out with us. And they will never ask for Khujasta for any of their sons. It's

their right too. If I was in their shoes, I also wouldn't let my daughter hang around with such a shameless and ugly girl. Oh God, we're ruined!<sup>13</sup>

The family's accepted position among their peers is in danger. More important than anything else, the family must be able to find a husband for each of their daughters. Finding a suitable match for one's



children becomes one of the highest priorities for the parents. However, without a good name as a family, they will have greater difficulty in finding young men who will accept their daughters. Without this, the family would carry the stigma of having an unmarried child, which in their society would be seen as a curse.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Jane Austen story, *Pride and Prejudice*, when the youngest of the five sisters runs off with a soldier of low repute, the two older sisters, Elizabeth and Jane, talk together, "We are all tainted by association." The sisters wonder if they will ever be able to marry. They too wonder if any suitor will ever come to their door. The youngest sister's behavior directly affected the two older girls' well-being.

The individual must be concerned about his reputation because of its direct impact on his family, his neighborhood and his tribe. Before the individual ever builds up his own reputation,

<sup>13</sup> Fattaneh Seyyed Javadi, *Bamdad-e Khomar* [Morning After] (Tehran, 1374 / 1995), 97.

It is interesting that both, this novel and the much earlier novel, *Tangsir*, were highly criticized by the Iranian intellectual community. At the same time, both novels were highly welcomed by Iranian readers.

he already carries the weight of his family's reputation which he must maintain. He inherits the family's good name and must ensure that he does not soil that name. He keeps the good name for his children and grandchildren so that they too can hold their heads up high in society. In turn, he passes on his good name to the next generation. This is the family mandate – to continue the past and carry it into the future.

### **The Family Name Gives Identity**

Through family and kin connections, we distinguish people from each other. Without family and ancestry, we become isolated dots among billions of other dots. Every one of us needs affirmation that we belong to something or to a group bigger than ourselves; hence the gravitating power of the family. And, each family unit is in turn linked to other units. In this framework, we know ourselves and our value in terms of the group we belong to. We share the value that the group has. We belong to a group larger than ourselves, which gives us safety and security.

### ***Where do you come from?***

Questions like “who is your father?” and “where do you come from?” are common in honor-shame settings. The answer will determine how we are connected to others. This is more than a legal requirement for identity cards, passports and visa applications. It shows that we are not merely single dots on our own. We are not just “Robert [Ramin]” or “Susan;” rather, we have identity and a sense of worth larger than individual selves.

This value and identity are not primarily based on our achievements and accomplishments. Rather they lie in our father's name, our grandfather's name and the ongoing lineage of our past.

The family, then, becomes the foundation for human significance and belonging. The family holds the larger group name. It is this connection to the group name that gives every family member their value as well as meaning in life.

### ***He has no father!***

Without the information “the son of \_\_\_\_\_” or “the daughter of \_\_\_\_\_” a person has no connection and therefore little or no identity or worth. The person is rootless and therefore carries no name, no reputation. It is as if the individual does not really exist.

The phrase ‘without a father’ is a swear word in some cultures because it means the person is a nobody. Similarly, ‘a person who does not have a dinner table’ where he can sit together with family members is considered an orphan, someone with no roots or home.

The Afghan author Akram Osman reflects the despair of being rootless in the short story “The Roots of a Bush.” The main character, Nabi, was a tall, handsome young man. He was good and decent in how he treated others. But he remained a nobody because he had no family.

Nabi hailed from the root of a shrub. No one knew where he was from, not even he himself. Like a mushroom that springs up on the banks of a creek, he grew up on that lane. It was as if the ground had split open and he had appeared from beneath it.

Like a street boy without family and relatives, he wandered the market always looking for a day job to have something to eat. Although he was harmless, shopkeepers considered him a nuisance, someone they could easily make fun of.

The following conversation reflects the commonly held notion that a person has little worth if he is not part of a known group. The person is 'group-less,' without use to anyone, hence useless.

Khalifa Ghayas asked again, "Hey kid, where are you from?"

Nabi answered, "From the root of a shrub."

Khalifa Ghayas chuckled while the rest of the workers erupted with laughter. Khalifa started to mock him and said, "So from the root of a bush, eh? Which bush?"

Nabi smiled and answered, "From the root of a useless broomstick."

The laughter reached a peak and everyone began to mock and tease him. Khalifa Ghayas said, "Thank God, you're not alone. Everywhere you look there are shrubs and useless sweeping sticks. God has filled the world with bushes and broomsticks."

Nabi answered, "Yeah, I know I'm totally alone, just like a



broomstick you get from a bush, useless. Like a weed and a thorn in the eyes of people."



Khalifa Ghayas quieted down. He realized that Nabi wasn't speaking foolishly. He asked, "Hey kid, are your mom and dad alive?"

Nabi told him what his uncle had told him that his mother had died while giving birth, and his father, who deeply loved his mother, died of a broken heart a month later.<sup>14</sup>

Nabi represents those who have no significance in life because they have no family tree or background to speak of. Hence, society considers them of little significance. As a result, no one cares who he is or what he does. Why would one pay attention to a useless broomstick?

In the story, Nabi tried to achieve significance. He became a servant for an elitist household, who held ascribed honor because of their ancestry. The rootless Nabi was now 'grafted' into a noble family-tree, or so everyone thought. As it turned out, Nabi gradually realized that true honor goes much deeper than a family boasting in their so-called great heritage and vain achievements.

### **What's So Important About Genealogies?**

Genealogy, the science of determining lineage, family connections and relationships, becomes a means of confirming an individual's position in society. A genealogy shows how individuals are joined to an extended family. This provides both legal status and an emotional affirmation to the person. The genealogy tells us where we belong. Somewhere in this huge world, we are connected to something beyond ourselves and therefore, we are significant. We matter because we are connected to others.

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<sup>14</sup> Adapted from Akram Osman, "The Roots of a Bush," translated by Arley Loewen in *Real Men Keep their Word* (Oxford, 2005), 99-101.

Genealogy has always been important in traditional Asian cultures because the collective family of the past validates the present and offers identity to an individual. The Iranian scholar, Roy Mottahadeh states, “A great majority of men took a man’s genealogy, and the stockpile of honorable deeds that he inherited, into consideration both in estimating that man’s capacities and in assigning him a station in society.”<sup>15</sup>

Genealogy has always been important in traditional Asian cultures because the collective family of the past validates the present and offers identity to an individual.

The traditional warrior can help us appreciate this phenomenon as well. His heroic and often embellished history (genealogy) validated or legitimized his present status and sense of greatness. Although a warrior may have performed his feats as a ‘lone ranger,’ he was never great by himself. Every hero, in order to be great and have legitimate honor, had to be rooted in some worthy lineage. He had to have noble genealogy (*nasab*).

The Iranian warrior, Rostam counted on his distinguished lineage – at least, what he considered noteworthy – to be what made him powerful and honorable before other warriors. When he was about to challenge an opponent in battle, he uttered his standard battle cry, “I am Rostam, son of Dastan, son of



<sup>15</sup> Roy Mottahadeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, 1980), 101.

Sam, from Niram.”<sup>16</sup> Shouting his extended name was like an offensive and intimidating weapon. He carried the collective greatness of past generations of his family. When Rustam entered combat, it was as if his father, grandfather and ancestors were there with him in the battle arena.

### **The Weight of the Past and Future**

To this day ‘six generations’ refers to the collective family name that Persians carry in their lives. Conversely, if a person shames his family, others can threaten him with the fear that up to six generations of his ancestors will burn in hell because of the shame and curse he has brought upon the family.

#### ***My 100 years of reputation has gone with the wind!***

The term reputation (*ab-i ru*) is often used collectively, both in medieval and modern settings. An individual will say “*our many years of reputation*” or “*my reputation of 100 years.*” These sayings show that the individual carries the weight or burden of their family’s good name and reputation, which they must maintain at all costs in order to pass on to the next generation.

Carrying the weight of the past is an honor and delightful responsibility for every person in a family or tribe. But continuing traditions can also become a heavy burden that chokes a person’s freedom and choices. Individuals often sacrifice their own desires in order to maintain the collective good name of their family and tribe.

#### ***Honor by banning or honor-killing?***

In the 2001 award-winning Indian movie, *Kabhi Khushi,*

Kabhi Gham (Sometimes Happiness, Sometimes Sadness),<sup>17</sup> we see how important it is for the son to carry the family name into the future. In an early scene, Yash the wealthy father passes the responsibility of carrying the family name onto his oldest [adopted] son, Rahul. It is like an initiation ceremony, the father saying to his son, “I am handing this glass of honor to you, for you to carry from here on.”

Yash learns that Rahul wants to marry a girl from a lower social class. Yash is furious and vehemently objects to the marriage. The girl does not understand their traditions and cannot carry their name from the past into the future. Rahul is now considered soiled, and Yash disowns his son so that their collective good name will not be soiled by this unworthy girl. As always, the court of public opinion holds sway; what will others in our group think or say of us now?

As stated earlier, many people will sacrifice their desires for the sake of the family name. But if someone within a family chooses to follow his own desires as Rahul did, this stains the family name. The consequences of this can be very serious. The only way for the family to maintain its reputation is to remove the stain. This may mean formally denouncing the person who has overstepped a boundary, or it may mean killing that person, removing the dishonor in order to keep honor; hence it is called, honor-killing. We will discuss later how there is no honor in honor-killing.

### ***Does it matter what others think of you?***

On the other side of the spectrum, Western societies celebrate

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<sup>17</sup> *Kabhi Khushi, Kabhi Gham*. Directed by Karan Johar. December 14, 2001. Yash Raj Films, India.

the individual and his value and worth on his own. Because of our intrinsic worth as human beings, we are free to do as we please. At least in the ideal sense, we are not bound to the court of public opinion. We can do what we want to do and what we think is right. We hear this advice frequently, “It doesn’t matter what others think of you, as long as you don’t bother others.”

But in honor-shame societies, it *does* matter what others think of us and our family. Our honor comes from the community around us, and so it is very important how we present ourselves in our community.

Extreme individualism becomes unworkable, however, when we say that a person is responsible and accountable only to himself. This view stands in sharp contrast to the person from a communal society who is accountable to his honor group or the ‘village’ that he relates to and lives among. While this provides tremendous support, we will see how overwhelming life becomes when the decisions a person makes are based upon this question, “How will my family or honor group maintain their honor in what I do?”

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- *Should a person live according to the wishes of his family?*
  - *Is it better to sacrifice for the sake of the family or should the family give their children the freedom to choose their lot in life?*
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# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **STRENGTHS OF HONOR-SHAME ORIENTATION**

**W**e can easily oversimplify and stereotype people especially as we observe other cultures. Sometimes we criticize or demonize one culture and idealize or romanticize the other culture.

***Are you from a warm culture or a cold culture?***

One simple way to compare Eastern and Western cultures is to talk about warm versus cold cultures.<sup>1</sup> This is not about the weather, and ‘cold’ does not mean cold-hearted. We could also talk about informal or relational cultures where people ‘warm’ up to each other, in contrast to formal (orderly) cultures. The issue is about how people relate to each other and to work.

People from warm (relational) cultures emphasize aspects of

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Sarah Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar – A Guide to Understanding Hot and Cold-Climate Cultures* (McDougal Publishing, 2000). When we discuss cultural characteristics, we are not speaking about individual personality differences. In each culture, individuals carry their own traits, likes and dislikes.



life such as:

- Personal relationships.
- Making sure that there is a 'good-feel' in communication.
- People are more important than time and efficiency.
- Greetings come first, then work. First greetings (salam) and then the business (kalam).
- Community, which is more important than the individual.

People in cold (formal) cultures emphasize aspects of life such as:

- Tasks and jobs.
- Facts. Communication is to provide correct information.
- Time and efficiency are very important.
- Logic and order. We must emphasize what is right in contrast to the wrong, irrespective of who the wrong or right person is.
- An individual is more important than the group.

There are beautiful and unpleasant characteristics in both warm and cold cultures.

By observing the strengths and weaknesses of the honor-shame orientation, we are trying to consider both sides of this phenomenon. We want to understand the positive and negative experiences of people living in a society where honor is supremely important.

In the next two chapters, we will look at both sides of the honor-shame orientation. We will see how the honor-shame mindset builds healthy lives and strong communities, as members of the community really support each other. However, we also realize how individual life becomes restrictive when the honor-shame mindset is overbearing. We will see how living by honor

becomes a powerful motivator for good, but at the same time, it can also be a deadly weapon that leads one to destructive and harmful ways.

### ***Why is the honor-shame way so good?***

The following is a summary of many class discussions I have had with students in Central Asian cultures when we discuss the strengths of the honor-shame worldview.

In an honor-shame environment ...

- The honorable person receives a special role and status in society. He carries respect.
- People inherently know they have to respect and observe the traditions of the honor group.
- People refrain from doing deeds that are perceived shameful by the honor group.
- People enjoy relationships and networks. No one lacks references and recommendations, because ideally everyone is supported by everyone else for the good name of the honor group.
- Everyone wants to do good, that is, the good that the honor group considers to be good.
- The man of honor has real influence in society and his family. He is trusted and easily gains support to carry out his vision and goals for his community.
- Members of the society will be much more loyal to the honor group and carry a greater sense of responsibility to serve their family and community.
- People have the courage and energy to live sacrificially.
- People will want to live for the honor of God.

Each one of these strengths deserves further discussion, some

of which we will develop below.

## **RESPECT FOR OTHERS**

I've held many seminars on honor-shame orientation in Central Asian societies. When we discuss the strengths of this worldview, the two most-mentioned strengths are consistent, the honorable person carries respect in his community and has influence over others.

Honor means respect. When a person has honor, others respect him and (ideally) he will respect others. He will guard people's reputations and they will guard his. When there is respect, people are careful not to hurt, shame or destroy each other.

The flip side of respect is a healthy sense of shame. Shame becomes an internal security force that guards a person from doing shameful deeds. So, is shame a positive or negative emotion? Is it good for a person to have shame or is it better to have no shame? The word 'shame' has several connotations, not only in English but in Central Asian languages as well.

### **Disgraceful Shame**

#### ***Shame on you!***

A father says to his young son, "Shame on you!" after the boy has spilled milk. The boy will feel sad that he let his father and himself down. He will be disappointed with himself and even more so that others are disappointed with him. The boy experiences 'disgraceful shame' within himself, an emotion that he will want to avoid. He will be more cautious when he drinks milk next time. But when such shaming techniques become

harsh, the young boy will cower before his father in order to avoid disgrace shame.

This is the type of shame that people in Western cultures experience regularly, though primarily within themselves. However, disgrace shame in Eastern cultures is much more visceral because the shame becomes public disrespect.

### ***Comparing Western and Eastern shame***

We can contrast Western and Eastern shame in the following ways:<sup>2</sup>

- Western shame is private and personal, whereas Eastern shame is public and corporate.
- In Western shame, we evaluate our own lives and identity. We doubt ourselves and our worth. In Eastern shame, people around us give us a negative rating. We are worthless before others.
- Western shame is about losing self-worth; Eastern shame is about losing public worth. For this reason, Western shame is researched by psychologists, whereas Eastern shame is studied by anthropologists.
- The opposite of Western shame is self-esteem, where we feel good about ourselves. The opposite of Eastern shame is approval from the group where others thinking highly of us.
- The seedbed of Eastern shame is a communal culture, where the prying eyes of neighbors publicize a person's value. Western shame stems from too much self-reflection and feeling inadequate. The person devalues himself.

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<sup>2</sup> In email communication with Jason Georges, host of website [www.honorshame.com](http://www.honorshame.com) (May, 2014).

We all want to avoid disgraceful shame, whether it comes from an internal sense of worthlessness or from public exposure of our weakness.

## **Discretionary Shame**

### ***You have no shame!***

On the other hand, we may say to some naughty boys who are damaging a neighbor's house, "You kids have no shame!" These boys lack shame. They need discretionary shame, which is a positive quality that guards our behavior, especially in public. This sense of shame keeps us decent in our relations with others.

Discretionary shame protects us from experiencing disgraceful shame. It is our own security guard, an inner security force, which keeps us from doing shameful things.<sup>3</sup> A person maintains a sense of shame, so he won't be put to shame, or be ashamed. Or we could say that if we have no shame within ourselves, we will end up with shame before others.

Such discretionary shame provides a person with a necessary conscience. If a person really didn't care what anybody thought, he would be worse than an animal. For human beings, activities such as sexual intercourse and bodily elimination are done 'off-stage,' not before the eyes of others. It is this healthy sense of shame that keeps us from making these common acts public ones.

### ***Two aspects of discretionary shame***

We note two dimensions of discretionary shame. Because our reputation is important, we guard our own behavior. We are careful not to expose our privacy. We are careful about how much

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<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Albers, *Shame - A Faith Perspective* (Haworth Press, 1995), 8.

we reveal our emotions and inner thoughts.

At the same time, we guard the reputation of others. We respect others, being careful not to embarrass people in public. This respect keeps us from invading another's privacy and asking nosy questions. "The indiscriminate invasion into another's world of thoughts and feelings is not an inherent right of any human being."<sup>4</sup>

We don't want our inner world exposed. Because of this, we are careful not to expose the inner or secret world of the other person as well.

### **Private and Public – Where is the Individual?**

When something is private, we respect it. We don't touch it, and if it's our privacy, we don't want others to touch it. The honor-shame mindset helps us see that certain aspects of life belong to an individual alone. "They are his own and he shares them only with those whom he chooses. They do not belong to the community and they are not a public affair."<sup>5</sup>

The irony of those who advocate throwing off all restrictions and who say that a sense of shame hinders the individual to develop freely, is that if all of life were reduced to the public arena, the sense of being an individual is demeaned. As they say, the person spreads his tablecloth (*desterkhwan*) to everyone. Little remains special or private for the individual. If this were the case, the individual would have no space that belongs to himself that he can share with loved ones. The individual, then, would no longer be an individual. All has become public.

Of course, we continue to struggle with the never-ending

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<sup>4</sup> Albers, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Carl D. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure and Privacy* (WW Norton, 1992), xix.

cultural question: What is considered private, and what is public? How much should a person reveal about himself?

Here we note a further contrast between Western and Asian cultures. In honor-shame oriented societies, the person carries his privacy within his own being. He may have numerous private rooms in his emotional make-up, which are locked away, hidden from the public scrutiny.

However, in individualist societies, a person needs to experience privacy away from people. The Western person likes 'to get away from it all,' to be away from the hustle and bustle, or what used to be called 'the rat race.'

### **Who Should We Respect?**

As stated above, to have honor means that a person carries respect. People respect the person of honor. Conversely, this respect motivates the person of honor to value others, considering them to have worth as well. As others honor him, he too must honor others. The question is: does he only respect and honor those who have a good name in public? Does he only respect those whom he considers 'worthy' of respect? Countless women testify how they feel devalued and disrespected by the so-called men of honor.

We need to ask: why is there often less concern for human rights (human respect) in honor-shame societies where they place such high value on respect?

Here lies an irony: the honor-shame mindset propels the individual to respect others, yet many in the honor-shame world would say they are not being respected as individuals. They say that they are not being treated as human beings.

Instead of respect for all, this is selective respect, where people

respect those who have honor and influence in their honor group.

One of the most significant steps towards a truer and higher honor is this: to respect a human being because he is a human being, irrespective of his background, position, gender, wealth or fame. This is a call to extend our honor by honoring one another, even those deemed to have lesser value in society.

### ***Do you care for others?***

The chief medical doctor from the military medical hospital in Kandahar relates this story:

I watched two doctors mistreating a badly injured patient who was a Taliban fighter. My colleagues despised him and didn't even want to clean him up. I told the doctors that I would take care of this patient and they could go. I washed the patient's wounds, cleaned him up and cared for him. In a few weeks, he was released and was gone.

Months later as I was walking the streets of Kandahar, an area known for Taliban influence, a few Taliban were coming towards me. Fear gripped me. I knew their sort of justice was immediate and without questioning. I was known widely for working with the Afghan military. But as the Taliban came close, one of them walked up to me and said to the others, 'Leave him alone, he is a noble (*sharif*) man.' He embraced me. He was the Taliban I had treated in the hospital several months before.<sup>6</sup>

**Respect returns to the one who respects others. The honorable person is the one who honors others. This is true honor.**

<sup>6</sup> Story told to me by Philip Adams, November 2012.



Respect returns to the one who respects others. The honorable person is the one who honors others. This is true honor.

## GENUINE INFLUENCE AND TRUST

In her study on modern Iranian society, Faribah Adelkhah profiles the famous mayor of Tehran, Mr. Karbaschi. In the 1990s he launched an active construction program of local gardens throughout the city as public places for friendly social interaction. He was appreciated more as a social hero than as a political administrator. People said that instead of enriching himself, he served his city with acts of generosity and open-handedness.

Because of his good name, the mayor in Tehran had considerable influence. The citizens listened to him and he was able to successfully implement his vision for the city.

Stories of such public benevolence abound in both medieval and modern-day societies. Skeptics like to ask whether such benefactors are truly motivated by genuine care for others, willingly forsaking their wealth for the benefit of others.

Adelkhah claims that the mayor did not serve the city for selfish gain. His only gain was more reputation which gave him yet more influence. "Nobody can say that he makes any profit for himself except for his prestige and influence."<sup>7</sup>

A director with honor and dignity will have real influence in his organization and people will pay attention to what he says. If the manager of a development project has a good name in public, government officials will sooner heed his proposals because he carries respect. And of course, the project staff will be more likely to implement the project if their boss carries weight.

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<sup>7</sup> Fariba Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran* (Columbia University Press, 2000), 32-33.

Respect, trust and reputation work together and lead to loyalty and obedience. When people respect their leader, they will trust him. They will stay loyal to him and to others in their honor group. There is less rebellion, less threat of mutiny and greater solidarity within the group.

A father with a good name is proud to see his children carry that name onward. His children will look up to him and heed his word.

If the honorable person is a shopkeeper, it's simple: People will buy from his store because he has a good name. As we said, honor is capital, it provides 'income' for people.

In short, honor and reputation give charisma and magnetism to a person so that the people around him will naturally be drawn to him. They will trust him and vouch for him. They heed his word because he can be counted upon and he can count on them. This person of honor enjoys the support of the people around him. He 'has people' (*mardum-dar*) because he cares for and believes in people.

## COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

As we've noted above, honor-shame oriented societies are communal cultures because it is the community, that is, the honor group, that gives value and worth to individuals. This means individuals develop their identity and sense of worth and honor from their community.

### Enjoying the Community

A further strength of an honor-shame culture is that each individual in his honor group has a strong sense of belonging. No one is alone or isolated. Each person belongs to the larger

community. Together they are connected to the past, with common ancestors. The community supports everyone and subsequently, everyone is committed to supporting their community. This creates a tremendous sense of solidarity.

In this scheme of things, it is next to impossible to discuss the question, “who am I?” without first exploring the question, “where do I belong?” (who is my family). This belonging gives the person a sense of pride and peace. We know who we are because we know to whom and where we belong.

Such an interconnected community is filled with healthy, life-giving relationships. Members of the community, without thought of obligation or reward, come together to support each other. It becomes a healthy environment of mutual support. The following is a good description of such a village or honor group.

Neighbors show up to help out when your workload is heavy, and you show up when theirs is. In a rich community, people are caught up in one another’s business, know each other’s secrets, walk with each other in times of grief, and celebrate together in times of joy. In a rich community, people help raise one another’s kids ... In these kinds of communities, the social pressure can be slightly [actually very] overbearing, the intrusiveness sometimes hard to bear, but the discomfort is worth it because the care and benefits are so great.<sup>8</sup>

We note the allusion to the darker side of communal life as well which can become very stifling instead of life-giving.

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<sup>8</sup> David Brooks, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for the Moral Life* (Random House, 2019), 267-68.

## Each of Us is Part of a Story

A person who belongs to a family is part of a larger story. He inherits the story from his family history, which he then continues. A person lives with significance, not because of who he is in and of himself, but because he belongs to the larger group, his family and the community. The individual embraces and experiences the collective joys and sorrows of the greater communal story.

Not only is the person part of a larger story, but his story is also a long story. When a person looks to the past, he sees his ancestors and when he looks to the future, he sees his children and grandchildren. As a parent and now a grandparent, he knows his life does not end with him. His connection to the future gives him hope beyond himself. His story continues here on earth in the lives of others, after his own life is over. He builds his legacy through his descendants.

Here then is true honor – to belong to a community and to a story that is both larger and longer than oneself. Although the focus on the individual protects the uniqueness and value of every human being, sadly the over-emphasis on the individual in the Western world has created a crisis of loneliness and a loss of community.

**Here then is true honor – to belong to a community and to a story that is both larger and longer than oneself.**

## The Value of Elders

In the summer of 2013, my wife and I visited an extended Afghan family in Australia whom we had met many years earlier in New Delhi, India. The children were now adults, successful in

their careers. The father was aged and severely handicapped with a debilitating mental condition. He couldn't talk and at times would utter embarrassing profanities. Yet the way the adult children honored and enjoyed their sickly father was astounding. Although it was very inconvenient for them, there was no thought of placing him into an institution.

This contrasts sharply with the many elders languishing alone in their rooms in senior citizen institutions in Western societies. Many feel unwanted, as if they are a burden to society and even to their families. True, there are many advantages to bringing seniors together, as they can enjoy each other's company, which may become their new 'honor group.' Yet, one wonders where Western individualism could end up with the increasing 'grey tsunami' of seniors who were born after WW2, in the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, the Covid19 crisis in 2020, which hit the elderly harder than the rest of society, has made it even worse for them. Many elderly were isolated in their senior homes, away from family support. Isolation and social distancing carry their own shame. One wonders, which is more valuable – health and convenience or family and community?

In honor-shame societies, elders maintain a strong sense of value and belonging, rather than being pushed aside because they no longer contribute to society or are a burden to others. Not only does an elderly father or mother have the weight of many generations behind them, they also experience the pleasure of transferring that weight to the generations after them. They enjoy ongoing participation in their children and grandchildren's lives. Instead of experiencing isolation or loneliness, elders are appreciated for their wisdom. They matter to their family and that is their honor.

Along with this honor, the elders experience financial security and support. Their pension comes not primarily from the government but from their children. This pension is not merely financial but is also personal, holistic elderly care from those who really care.

## **REPUTATION AND BETTER ETHICS**

### ***Our reputation is at stake!***

Ahmad and his family were guests at my colleague's house. Ahmad's children were throwing stones at the neighbor's wall nearby. Ahmad scolded his children, "Stop it! Our reputation is at stake!"

### **A Good Name Leads to Good Deeds**

The need to gain and maintain a good reputation motivates us to behave better. We pressure our children to be good so that we will have a good name.

Again and again, a father will advise his son or daughter who is about to leave home for college or embark on a career, "Do whatever you like, but make sure you don't ruin the family name." This mandate from the head of the family keeps the family and community in check. Because they need support from the community, members of the community will stay true to their community's traditions. This provides stability as everyone follows the expected norm. It works in the business sector as well. We can only keep our customers if our business has a good reputation.

### ***Should we do good for the praise of others?***

As we discuss ethics and reputation in seminars, frequently

someone from a more traditional setting will comment, “If a person does not have a good reputation, he cannot have good character and morals.” It does not take long, though, after some group discussion, until a participant will belt, “But that’s just showing off. It means we do our good deeds for the praise of others.”

People easily criticize this motivation to do good. On the surface it means we are merely living for the sake of others, to gain a good name in society. Our life simply becomes a performance.

Yet, there is a clear correlation between good reputation and good character. The need to gain a good name propels a person to be good and perform well in the eyes of his community. The teacher, shopkeeper or any professional, for that matter, needs to be well-spoken of. Furthermore, the person who has a good name will make sure he doesn’t slip or deviate from the ‘straight and narrow’ of the community path, in order not to blemish his name.

### **Good Deeds Leads to a Good Reputation**

Or is it the other way around? As we and our family do good, we will gain a good reputation. A person who is committed to living rightly and maintaining a good character will naturally gain a good reputation. If a person does good out of a sincere heart, others will notice.

Mother Teresa is world-famous and praised by people of all religions. She came from a poor background and dedicated her life to serving the poor because she loved God. She had no



desire to make a name for herself. Yet her years of selfless service gave her world-renown that continues to echo to this day even though she died in 1997. As a person is diligent to do good to others, sooner or later, he will develop a good name for himself.

In short, good deeds and a good name are two sides of the same coin. Each gives birth to the other. And again, the good is closely tied to what the person's network considers to be good. This becomes the honor code. If a person keeps the honor code, then he will have honor. At times the honor code may not be right or someone within the honor group opposes it. This can lead to serious dilemmas.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- ***What other strengths do you see in living by honor?***
  - ***What do you think comes first – the drive to live by honor, or the desire to do good?***
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### **FREE TO SERVE OTHERS**

In Western cultures much is made of the individual who lives for himself; he is encouraged to find himself, to believe in himself and to follow his heart's desires. The person makes his own decisions without outside influence (as if that were possible!). The person is not concerned with what everyone else says, nor does he have to answer to his family, tribe or society at large.

The individualist slogan is, "I am free to be myself!" We call this freedom. But is it?

In the honor-shame orientation, we have a cause that goes beyond ourselves. We are freed from the demands of self to live



for the sake of our family. We live for the good name of our community. And above all, we live for the honor of God.

When we live for the honor of the community, we can truly serve others because we are no longer occupied with our own affairs. We consider our community and its people as more important than ourselves. We are willing to forgo our rights for a greater cause.

While an individualist may say that this kind of life is bondage, the strength of living for honor is that a person is not enslaved to himself. He has a greater name than his own name. This becomes a further characteristic of honor and the good name. The honor-shame mindset means to have a cause greater than one's own life.

Living for a cause bigger than oneself is vividly portrayed by the warrior who battles for his nation and the people of his nation. He sacrifices himself for a cause that is greater than his ego, and in so doing he gains honor for himself.

However, this honor is double-sided. The warrior forgoes his desires and personal ambition to serve others, his ruler and his nation. In this way, he distinguishes himself from the rest of society. He gains a name by living beyond his own name. This makes him a hero, as he becomes bigger than himself, for he has thrown himself into the vision of a greater cause.

The strength of living by honor is to experience freedom from one's own desires and selfishness in order to live higher than and beyond himself.

We call this a commitment to a cause. "In our [Western] culture we think of freedom as the absence of restrictions. That's freedom *from*. But there is another and higher kind of freedom.

That is freedom *to*. ... Real freedom is not so much the absence of restrictions as finding the right ones.”<sup>9</sup>

If that higher cause is indeed an honorable cause, we see how a person can step towards higher honor. By committing oneself to a noble cause, a person becomes noble. The noble aim will rebound and shower the person with honor.

### **Magnanimity – To Have a Large Heart**

In the *Tangsir* story, Zayer Muhammad cared for others, especially for widows. His wife was bothered that everyone asked Muhammad for help. Without thought, he obligated himself to respond to people’s needs. When he had captured the raging bull, his wife admired him, though she also expressed concern.

The poor, unfortunate man, now during the Fast. At this time of the day, he’s come all this way to catch this mad bull. Everyone in the village who is doing nothing all day, not one of them could catch it. He’s always voluntarily obligating himself to help people, and if you talk to him about it, he gets upset.<sup>10</sup>

One ancient warrior said, “Whoever is not troubled by what someone [requests], is not a man.”<sup>11</sup> A person not stirred to compassion by someone’s plight was considered a wimp, certainly the opposite of true honor.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Second Mountain*, 58. Brooks critiques Western societies where people are obsessed with climbing the first mountain, finding their careers, personal success and self-achievement. Sadly, when they reach the top of the mountain, they find it unsatisfying. Is this what life is all about? The truly great person is the one who moves to the second mountain, from a self-centered life to an other-centered life. The second mountain is the life where one willingly lives beyond himself, for others.

<sup>10</sup> *Tangsir*, 49.

<sup>11</sup> *Samak*, 1:346. هر کرا سخن درد نکند، مرد نیست.

Unselfishness makes a person great. Selfishness weakens and shames a person. The honorable path is to serve others and to serve freely, with magnanimity, which means to have a large heart,<sup>12</sup> that is, to have room for others. In contrast, selfishness means to be small, with no room for others. It is to have a stingy heart that no one admires.

In the famous Titanic tragedy of 1912, as the so-called unsinkable ship was slipping into the icy dark waters, the brave sailors made sure



children and women got onto the lifeboats first. Perhaps it's the story of Hollywood, but one male passenger was later discovered that he had worn woman's clothes so he could save his life. He saved his skin but lived with the stain of shame for the rest of his life. He cared more for himself than for others.

Selflessness resonates with the traditional Sufi mandate to move on from the lesser *jihad* of physical warfare against other human beings to the greater *jihad* to war against one's carnal desires. The medieval mystic and poet, Attar from Nishapur of the 13<sup>th</sup> century said, "Desire for others more than what you desire for yourself."

### Consider A Higher Ethic

The supreme virtue is simply "to carry out the desires of

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<sup>12</sup> (magnus = great + animus = spirit)

people.”<sup>13</sup> This is seen as the highest ethic of a *jawanmard* (hero, champion), when a person no longer lives for himself, but throws himself into the arena of another person. He lives for that person’s well-being. He considers others just as, or even more, important than himself. He is concerned not only with his own interests but also the interests of others.

### ***I am at your service!***

This kind of serving means to seek the welfare of others, to want the best for the other. Common clichés in Persian society, such as “at your service,” “your sacrifice” and “over my eyes” are all expressions of this ethic. These sayings have become superficial and even pretentious courtesy, but at their roots, they express the beautiful ethic of the genuine hero (*jawanmard*).

In the Samak narrative, a group of warriors found themselves trapped in a village along with the villagers who had served them. Disaster lay before all of them. One warrior suggested they escape and leave the others. The leader in the pact called them to a higher ethic, “It is improper to leave others in danger and we escape. Since they sacrificed their lives for us, we will remain with them as long as we live.”<sup>14</sup>

This sacrificial commitment to others is reflected in the crisis in Thailand in July 2018 when 11 young football players and their coach were trapped deep inside a mountain cave for twelve days. The coach took less food and water for himself to make sure there was enough for the boys.

The spirit of magnanimity means that a person will be ready

<sup>13</sup> Samak, 1:351.

سر همه جوانمردی مراد مردم به حاصل آوردن است.

<sup>14</sup> Samak, 1:66.

در جوانمردی روا نیست که قومی در بلا رها کنیم و خود بیرون رویم. چون ایشان برای ما جان فدا کرده اند، تا جان داریم با ایشان خواهیم بودن.

to do the right thing even at his own loss. Japan is a good example. When the nation experienced the terrible earthquake and tsunami in 2011, international journalists expressed surprise that there was so little looting in the areas where infrastructure had broken down. Japanese see the honor of their nation as an ideal that is bigger than themselves. They will forgo their own needs and temptations for the sake of their nation's well-being and reputation.

Ideally, such honorable service is without hesitation or calculation. It is just what one does, without being told and without telling others about it, without expectation of reward and without others watching.

### *The ultimate service*

The ultimate act of service is to sacrifice one's life for someone else. We often call it the ultimate sacrifice because the person has paid the ultimate price. One medieval Persian treatise on manliness states, "A champion may be worth a hundred thousand *dirhams*, but when someone willingly puts his life in danger for someone else, that is true life." This is further reiterated, "He who sacrifices his head for someone else, even if that person is an enemy, is the ultimate champion. He has performed the greatest heroic deed possible."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Futuwwat Nama-yi Sultani*, 22.

هست جوانمرد درم صد هزار، کار چو با جان فتنه، آن جاست کار  
دیگر سر به دشمن بخشید و نهایت جوانمردی آن است که از سر جان برخیزد.

The traditional Persian words for soldier contain the notion of unreserved and absolute sacrifice. A *sar-baz* (soldier) literally means to play with one's head. The related term *sar-bi-dar* means one's head on the gallows. In other words, the warrior is willing to die for a cause bigger than himself. The common expression, *az khod gozashtegi*, literally means 'to pass by oneself,' that is, to give up one's rights. All of these terms speak of self-denial, dying to self or forsaking one's personal needs – for the sake of higher purposes.

While we may easily romanticize such selfless and sacrificial serving, it does not mean that a person must obliterate himself for the sake of others. The deeper, more well-rounded ethic is to develop an ethos of being other-centered. As we genuinely care for those around us, we experience an abundant life for ourselves. As we become large-hearted, the world around us grows larger and richer.

As we genuinely care for those around us, we experience an abundant life for ourselves. As we become large-hearted, the world around us grows larger and richer.

Is this not true honor?

Is this not true honor?

### The Negative Side of Serving Others

As we are freed from ourselves and privileged to serve others, we face an irony. We are never free from the requests of others. The hero or any honorable person who has availed himself to serve others is always in demand. His phone always rings, he has no end of texts, emails and appeals.

Endless demands and constantly feeling obligated to serve others lead to weariness and even negative attitudes. We can become cynical as we serve others because we feel people are simply using us for their own benefits and taking advantage of our desire to be large-hearted. One ancient warrior complained of his selfless service to others, “What drudgery this is, everyone who comes to me is caught in some snare.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, charity fatigue is nothing new.

Yet another paradox is that this selfless sacrifice and the

<sup>16</sup> Samak, 1:248.

این چه محنت است که هر که پیش من آید دل وی در بند گرفتار است و به عقاله مبتلا گشته است.

willing loss of personal gains become the means of gaining a good name and bringing more honor to oneself. And so, selfless service can turn into a self-centered or even sinister motive to show off one's superior 'selflessness.'

Adelkhah says such an ethic of public service and caring for others "allows [the hero] to get on the stage and build his life doing exemplary deeds to win attention from others and also to acquire self-respect. There is a certain theatrical side, or an element of putting on good appearances, to this conception of life."<sup>17</sup>

Yet, we humans long for genuine love and care from each other. In our modern world where both personal and corporate greed run rampant, especially in the digital world, we deeply appreciate the unsung heroes who whole-heartedly care for the welfare of others.

We need leaders who will think and serve beyond themselves. We need teachers who will desire the welfare of their students, politicians who will care for their constituencies, and shopkeepers who wish success to their customers and so on.

Are these not the ways of true honor?

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<sup>17</sup> *Being Modern in Iran*, 45.





# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **DILEMMAS OF HONOR-SHAME ORIENTATION**

**I**n my seminars, after reading and analyzing Zayer Muhammad's manifesto of honor where he says that "in life, there is nothing as important as a person's honor and dignity," I ask the class if they agree with the statement. Immediately, almost everyone responds with an emphatic yes.

However, as we discuss the various dynamics and consequences of the honor-shame worldview, after a few minutes someone raises a question or objects to what Zayer says. We soon realize that the drive to gain honor easily conflicts with other values.

***Why is the honor-shame way so difficult?***

- Living in an honor-shame milieu means people are burdened with responsibilities to ensure that they maintain their honor.
- Living with an honor-shame mindset creates pride and arrogance for those who have gained a good name in their

honor group.

- Living in an honor-shame milieu restricts people because everyone is being carefully watched by the honor group.
- When a person lives for honor, he won't bother to take part in small jobs and detailed work. He considers it to be below his dignity.
- In an honor-shame environment, a person cannot retreat from his position or commitment.
- People in honor-shame cultures are forced to forgo their own desires for the sake of others. They must sacrifice themselves.
- In an honor-shame milieu, people easily take advantage of those who have a good name in society. They will pressure the person with honor to do things he may not want to do, but he cannot say no in order to keep his reputation.
- There is constant competition for higher honor and more feelings of envy.
- People live in constant fear in an honor-shame milieu. They are vulnerable and insecure for fear of losing their reputation.
- People follow traditions and customs even when they don't want to.
- People in honor-shame cultures develop two personalities and live double lives, public and private.
- It is more difficult to make a decision in honor-shame societies because you always need to think, 'what will people say.'

From this list we can see how the struggle to seek honor and avoid shame is fraught with many dilemmas and challenges.

## FEAR – THE GREATEST CHALLENGE

When we analyze and critique the honor-shame worldview, the greatest dilemma is fear. It is so easy to lose honor, and once it's lost, it is almost impossible to regain honor. This creates anxiety, the fear of experiencing shame, losing public support and one's place in society.

This fear comes in various forms: fear of change, fear of criticism, fear of being insulted, fear of being laughed at, fear of being wrong, fear of not being noticed. It is a deep fear of losing one's worth and value before others. The horror that we do not matter to others, that we could be ignored and worse yet, that we could be the subject of insults and ridicule.

When we allow other people to decide how we should value ourselves, we will experience anxiety because our worth is wrapped up in the minds of others. We are never free from other people's thoughts, wondering what is going on in their minds about us.

The attentions of others matter to us because we are afflicted by a congenital uncertainty as to our own value ... we tend to allow other's appraisals to play a determining role in how we see ourselves. Our sense of identity is held captive by the judgments of those we live among.<sup>1</sup>

Herein lies honor's inbuilt irony. We must work so hard to gain honor and be so careful not to lose honor. But the irony is that this fragile glass of life does not lie in our own hands, but in the minds and tongues of others. It is what *they* say and think about us that counts.

The guard at our house in Kabul, Afghanistan was planning

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<sup>1</sup> *Status Anxiety*, 8.

his son's wedding. The fear of being ridiculed by others drove him to spend beyond his means. Farmers in rural Afghanistan live with one constant concern before them: "less I fall short before others."

My colleague at work told me, "I can tolerate almost everything, but the thing I cannot tolerate is to be insulted (disgraced)."

### **What Will People Say?**

This fear of losing one's reputation and public name leads to a cautious and conservative approach to life. When a person constantly asks himself, "what will others think or say," he is forced to look around him and wonder how others are responding to his conduct and words.

There is tremendous pressure to sacrifice oneself for fear of offending the family. A person needs to forgo his desires for the greater family honor. On one hand, the readiness to sacrifice for a greater cause is a strength of the honor-shame orientation, but at the same time, this pressure can be paralyzing. In order to avoid any sign of weakness or possible ridicule or criticism, a person is on guard less his real self is exposed. He will sacrifice his emotions, die to his desires and cover up any pain or lack as long as he can keep his good name before others.

In order to avoid the possibility of being laughed at, questioned or criticized, a person will develop a strategy to ensure his security. Simply stated, a person cannot be true to himself and to his own heart because he must be true to his good name.

It is better to accept and live according to the status quo. Indeed, in traditional cultures 'keeping tradition' becomes the highest virtue. For traditional Arabs the finest compliment for a

villager was to call him *Hafiz al-taqalid* (the man who preserves customs). “The peasant farmers have changed their masters, their religions, their language and their crops, but not their manner of life.”<sup>2</sup>

That may be a century ago, but today so much has changed. What will it be – continue the past and be safe, or dare to break free from tradition and explore new personal opportunities?

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- ***Should an individual be willing to sacrifice his desires for the greater cause (the greater good) of their family? their business? their society? their nation?***
  - ***What does it mean ‘to be true to oneself?’***
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### **Two Types of Fear**

We see two types of fears. In the East, one fears being shamed before others. It is the fear of losing reputation, which is overcome by restoring one’s honor. In the West, the fear of shame is private and personal. It means the loss of self-worth and the path to restore it is to rebuild self-esteem.

In the Western world, the fear of shame is more personal and self-reflective. Instead of fearing rejection and public support, there is self-doubt and the thought that ‘I am no good’ and ‘I lack from within.’ A person fears that he may be a failure to himself, of not being able to live up to his dreams.

At the same time, the fear of being left outside the circle (gang, peers) is as much a Western phenomenon as the Eastern fear of

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 31.

being rejected by one's group or family. This resonates with what C.S. Lewis wrote in his essay, "The Inner Ring," about social relationships, "one of the most dominant elements is the desire to be inside the local Ring and the terror of being left outside."<sup>3</sup>

## GROUP CONTROL

Because honor comes from one's community, a person will follow the ways of his community. In contrast to individualism, he doesn't really have an opinion of his own but is bound by his honor group, the court of public opinion. The person ignores his own views in order to please the community.

### I Have No Opinion of My Own!

A colleague from Tajikistan shared her struggles about living in her society, "I had no opinion of my own, I always followed what other people thought." In her environment she felt that other people were controlling her.

Group control, therefore, leads to a society of stereotypes where everyone is the same as everyone else.

This can be a safe way to live when we are immersed in our own community. We are what the community is. We are what the group is and we do what everyone else does. Our voice reflects the group voice and the group voice reflects our voice. We see ourselves and all of life through the group. In fact, we need other people to help us understand our own identity. Our conscience is an internal voice of the voices of everyone else in our group.

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<sup>3</sup> See C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (1973), 119. C.S. Lewis was an author and scholar of medieval English literature.

***Who am I apart from others?***

The philosophical question is: “Who am I apart from others?” If our identity comes only from the group we belong to, is it possible for an individual to have an identity and a sense of selfhood separate from other people?

In group control, the individual may need to ignore what he thinks is honorable or right in order to please the community. For example, he may disagree with child marriage, but because he needs to please the elders, he accepts their ways. He may not want to be dishonest, but in order to protect his own or his family’s name, he will hide the truth. He will be dishonest in order to gain honor.

The community demands that everyone in the group conform to the community. We may smile and say nice words because this is what is expected, but is this who we really are? Or is this simply a reflection of what the group expects?

***Who cares what others say?***

This is very different from how people think in individualist cultures, where everyone has a right to say and do as they wish, without pressure from anyone. In such an environment, the mantra “who cares what others say” rules supreme. There is little thought about how one’s actions may have repercussions on the larger community. Everyone can be true to themselves, or so we say.

However, in the honor-shame context, the court of public opinion directs the person’s way of life. In order to avoid shame for oneself or the group, the person will not rebel against the group. Everyone must live for the community and maintain the name of the community.



### ***Why Such a Lack of Psychology***

In this scheme of things, the individual self is not a matter of importance. In his study of ancient societies, Bruce Malina writes, “one’s unique personhood, one’s inner self with its difficulties, weaknesses, confusions and inabilities to cope, and one’s distinctive realm of hopes and aims are simply not of public concern or comment.”<sup>4</sup> Some of that ancient worldview continues in communal societies today.

Communal cultures find it difficult to study psychology, because it is the study of the individual self, the self’s thoughts, feelings and behavior. Since the self reflects the group, or is embedded in the group, no self is unique from the other selves.

### **Do We Have Freedom of Choice?**

Do people in honor-shame cultures experience the pleasure of personal choice? To choose may be the privilege of the wealthy, where one chooses what to eat for breakfast or what to wear for the day. Or is it also the privilege of being an individual? In an individualist orientation, one can decide and live differently than others. This is one important characteristic of freedom.

How does this value work out in an honor-shame culture where choice is rooted in group consensus? The person must live for the honor of his honor group, and so his decisions are based on what the group expects. We choose the good so we will be praised, and we avoid the negative in order not to be shamed. Michael Novak says,

For human beings as individuals, liberty is a form of self-control ... Most people are capable of self-government, only

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Malina, *New Testament Culture*, 64.

when the surrounding society supports them in that difficult task by shaming them when they stray too far and encouraging them with noble examples and daily inducements of praise.<sup>5</sup>

The freedom of personal choice assumes self-thought and the room for reflection, allowing a safe space for questions, criticism and self-analysis. A person has room to look at himself and address himself instead of simply reflecting the social ideal.

There is little room in communalism to think outside the group or to make mistakes.

## **TWO WORLDS – PUBLIC AND PRIVATE**

When a person is concerned about his public image, a mistake or failure is seen as shameful by those around him. Hence, the person will intuitively be slow to reveal any weakness. Like the child who covers his face in order to hide, the person will cover up his mistakes in whatever way possible. This leads to the public and the private world.

### **What is the Difference Between an Ideal and the Real Self?**

Groupthink leads to the loss of self and individuality. From another perspective, it tends to create two selves within a person.

One Sufi preacher of the 13<sup>th</sup> century wrote, “Deficiency is not worthy of the ‘real man’ (heroic man).”<sup>6</sup>

According to this statement, the real or public person must be an ideal person, without any lack. However, we all experience

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Novak, *The Universal Hunger for Liberty – Why the Clash of Civilizations is not Inevitable* (Basic Books, 2004), 30.

<sup>6</sup> نقصان شایسته (جو انمردی) نیست. Cited by Omar Suhrawardi in *Rasail-e Jawanmardan* (Treatises on Heroes) (Tehran, 1973), 163.

deficiency or failure in one way or another. What are we to do with our failures and weaknesses?

Because we need to keep the good name, we will hide our weaknesses, deny our failures or blame them on others. We are compelled to present a bright face to those around us. This ideal face may be quite different from our real or personal face. So, the 'real man' must hide his real face. Ironically, the real person cannot be real, so to speak.

This ideal self is what we aspire to be, the expectations we have of ourselves, as well as society's expectations of ourselves. The ideal becomes our profile, our façade, which hides the real. We pretend in order to cover weaknesses.

### ***Facebook or digital profiles***

This explains in part the unique popularity of Facebook, the fastest growing social media platform the world has ever witnessed. When we submit our profile on Facebook, we can easily create an image or an ideal face which is more to our liking, a version of 'who we would like to be,' rather than 'who we are.'<sup>7</sup> This ideal profile of ourselves connects with another person and his ideal profile. Two 'ideal selves' talk with each other, while the real persons, with their real selves, remain silent and hidden. In Persian terminology, we could call it 'digital ta'aruf' (digital courtesy or complimenting).



In a positive sense, courtesy (*ta'aruf*) is good and honorable

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<sup>7</sup> The word 'profile' comes from an ancient Latin word which meant to draw a line or to spin or thread something.

because we speak respectfully to one another. We honor others by speaking well of them, inviting them over for tea and generally deferring to them. It is considered rude to speak directly. However, the constant use of courtesy becomes pretense. It becomes a way to say one thing but mean another thing, presenting an ideal face which is not a real face.

Is this why it is difficult to maintain deep and trusting relationships in honor-shame societies? We hide our real self, fearing its exposure and all the while crafting an ideal self. My friend does the same. We trust each other with caution because we do not know which 'self' is now relating to the other.

This self-censorship often leads to mistrust and suspicion. Because a person hides his own inner or private world, he will wonder what the other person is *really* thinking. We become obsessed with 'reading between the lines' and second-guess the other person's words.

This then creates an emotional dissonance from oneself as well as from others. The individual or real self is isolated or hidden behind a series of masks, whether it is Facebook, courteous speech or boasting.

Whether ancient, medieval, modern or post-modern, we humans need to be accepted by our community. For this reason, we manage our face in whatever way necessary in order to have an acceptable profile. And so, courtesy and politeness (*ta'aruf*) become 'reputation management.'

The following Iranian story reflects it well.

### ***Mrs. Honor cannot lose her honor!***

In the popular Iranian novel, *Savushun* (The Requiem) set in WW2 when Iran was caught between the major Western powers,

corrupt government officials willingly traded weapons from one side to the other. An upper-class lady, remarkably called Mrs. Honor, is caught smuggling illegal arms. She realizes she is trapped. Her servant, whom she had employed to transport the arms, has been imprisoned. Mrs. Honor knows that if her servant speaks, the entire scandal will be exposed, and as a Persian idiom says, the ‘bowl of shame’ would come crashing down from the roof. With her honor gone, her capital as a person of influence in her social network would be gone.

Mrs. Honor needs to manage her reputation. She requests her friend, Zari, the main character in the novel, to visit the servant in prison and urge her to cover up the crime. She observes, “If she doesn’t tell it like this, our family will be ruined, our reputation of many years destroyed.”<sup>8</sup> Although written in satire, the motif is clear: one must hide and cover-up in order to maintain the public face.

We may already ask: how can one do a dishonorable deed in order to maintain one’s honor? Can dishonesty keep a person’s honor intact? In the novel, Zari reflects on the dilemma and says to herself,

“If you commit a sin but succeed, that sin is by consensus not a sin, but if you don’t succeed, then it is a sin and must be atoned for.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Simin Daneshvar, *Savushun* (Tehran, 1969), 173.

اگر این جور نگویید خانمان ما برباد خواهد رفت. آبروی چندین ساله فنا می‌شود. *The Requiem*, English translation by M.R. Ghanoonvar (Mage, 1990). [English, Kindle. Loc. 2720.] Simin Daneshvar is considered one of Iranian’s best-known fiction writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.,

<sup>9</sup> *Savushun*, 184. [English, Kindle Loc. 2896].

اگر آدم گناه کرد و موفق شد، آن گناه بر عقیده خودش و دیگران گناه نیست، ولی اگر موفق نشد، آن وقت گناه، گناه است و باید جبران‌ش کرد.

Here sin is defined as that which is exposed. At times, we think wrongly and even deceive ourselves. We imagine that if another person does not see our sin, then in that case our sin is not considered sin. Though not a theological or legal definition, we see how honor and shame relate closely to sin. For Mrs. Honor, if she maintained her good name, there was no sin in her life.

### *It was my past unatoned for sins*

This longing for a positive profile in public relates directly to the deeper need in human nature to cover up mistakes in life or to make amends. In Khaled Hosseini's best-seller, *The Kite Runner*, Amir the main character in the story, reflects on his need to atone for his past sins from the very beginning of the story.<sup>10</sup> He must find a way to cover up his shameful deeds.<sup>11</sup>

Some bullies in the area had abused Hassan, the young son of their household servant and Amir had done nothing to stop it. For years, Amir is gripped with shame and guilt about this. He needs to make amends, cover it up, or make restitution. The challenge for Amir is this: can he remedy or set right his shameful past? Or will he only cover it up and hide it?

Sin and shame beg for a covering. Will walls or veils cover sin? What about speech and good words? Maybe good deeds? What covering can atone for sin and shame?

### **Why We Lack Autobiography?**

In honor-shame societies, people create walls to separate the

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<sup>10</sup> Khalid Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (Bloomsbury, 2003), 1.

<sup>11</sup> We could discuss in more detail what the author means with 'unatoned for sins,' as he puts it. The nuances to the word 'atone for' are many for Hosseini's story and for us today.

inner world from their public world. People have walls in their courtyards. Houses have two distinct areas – the private and the public. A person’s outward appearance can be a good covering and hide the person’s inner world. And of course, the common veil for women is like a wall around a woman’s body. An Iranian professor of literature Farzaneh Milani says, “Like walls that enclose houses and separate inner and outer spaces, the veil makes a clear statement about the disjunction between the private and the public.”<sup>12</sup>

The private must remain covered, sealed from the public. Milani discusses these two worlds and the shame of self-disclosure in her culture. “Modern Persian literature ... avoids voluntary self-revelation and self-referentiality, [thus] most Iranian writers have turned their backs on autobiography.”<sup>13</sup> Mino Southgate, a translator and editor of Persian short stories, comments on this lack of autobiographical self-expression, especially among men, in modern Persian stories, “I have not read a single author who attempts to give an insight into the father’s behavior.”<sup>14</sup>

Years ago, an Afghan intellectual and writer told me that the next book he would write would be a confessional (*itaraf-nama*), “We have lied, manipulated, killed, stolen ... we need to expose this.” However, such genuine autobiography challenges the need to maintain a positive profile in public. It could bring shame and disgrace. Even worse, it could be social suicide in the sense that such self-exposure could ruin a person’s place in his honor group.

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<sup>12</sup> Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words – The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse University Press, 1992), 23.

<sup>13</sup> *Veils and Words*, 202.

<sup>14</sup> Mino Southgate, *Modern Persian Short Stories* (Washington DC.: Three Continents Press, 1980), x.

Which then is true honor – a confessional? Or a good name in public?

Many people lament that government censorship silences an individual. However, ironically, out of fear of exposing mistakes, weaknesses or failures, a person will hide his self. Indeed, self-censorship

Which then is true honor – a confessional?  
Or a good name in public?

has a much stronger grip on people than any government restriction. Hence, the lack of autobiographies by Persians.

## SHAME AND VIOLENCE

Shame is a painful, negative emotion that is so visceral it's almost like physical pain. Shame hurts and every time a person is insulted or disgraced, it is like rubbing salt into the wound. If this is not dealt with, it becomes like a gaping, malignant wound and can lead to serious violence.

### How Shame Leads to Anger

Just as people will do almost anything in order to gain honor, they will do the same to cover their shame. If shame is not covered or 'made up for,' it must express itself in some other way.

The medical doctor James Gilligan studied the causes of violence, especially in the American prison system. When prisoners are insulted and disrespected, they feel shame because they feel so helpless. They have lost face and need to regain it.

We cannot *really* live without face. Something inside the shamed person pushes him to make up for this terrible pain and loss. When a shamed person sees that he has no way to cover the shame or insult and that he cannot gain dignity or value in any



way, he will lash out at others. Insulting words do not suffice. Having lost his honor, he must destroy another person's honor to restore his honor. Shame is killing him, so he must kill another to regain his own self.

The emotion of shame is the primary or ultimate cause of all violence, whether towards others or towards self. ... The purpose of violence is to diminish the intensity of shame and replace it as far as possible with its opposite, pride.<sup>15</sup>

### Can a Nation Be Shamed?

Shame can also affect an entire society and even a nation. In the study on social shame, James Jones connects the violence and bloodshed in Europe in the 20th century to the experience of deep national shame.

World War One was one of the bloodiest wars of human history that divided Europe between the Allies (Britain, France and Russia) and Axis (Germany and Austria-Hungary). About 20 to 22 million people died in this four-year long battle. After the war, Germany lay in ruins, its economy and military devastated and its weak government about to collapse. German soldiers returned home in humiliation, with nowhere to find fresh dignity or respect. As a society, Germany needed to regain its honor.

Jones analyzes several ways German society sought to restore their honor.

- **Scapegoating:** They found someone to blame for their shame. Earlier, in the 1917 Russian revolution, the communists blamed the rich and the middle-class. Here in Germany, army officers

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<sup>15</sup> James Gulligan, quoted by James Jones in "Shame, Humiliation, and Religious Violence," in *The Shame Factor – How Shame Shapes Society* (Cascade Books, 2011), 40.

and returning soldiers blamed Jews, socialists, and communists.

- **Anger:** Shame makes people furious. They must lash out at something in order to punish those who they feel shamed them. Germans were mad at everyone for their collective shame and in their anger, they were near to a major civil war.
- **Finding a hero:** Germans were ready to commit to someone who could give them a cause and restore their honor and national pride. One such angry officer was a young man - Adolf Hitler. As he



blamed the foreign victors, people rallied around him as their new nationalist leader. Being a gifted speaker, he convinced the society that Jews and other non-German races were to blame for German disgrace. He would make Germany great again.

As a result of this effort to cover national disgrace, our world experienced the horror of the Holocaust and World War Two. Six million Jews and five million other victims were killed in Nazi-controlled Germany.

We must not forget the retaliation of the Allied powers against the Germans and Japan that resulted in the death of up to 50 million lives. There is no honor in that!

Shame and the desire for national honor resulted in horrific bloody violence which only resulted in more shame. For decades afterward, Germans experienced a deep collective shame and guilt about the Holocaust. Germany's unprecedented openness to migrants in recent years may well be another effort to atone for their sins of the past.

### **Cycles of Shame in the Middle East**

A major reason for the present violence in the Middle East is rooted in the long history of a sense of humiliation experienced by Middle Eastern societies through colonialism and corrupt secular rulers. For example, although various factors have influenced the rise of violent Islamic radicalism in recent years, when members of the Muslim Brotherhood were tortured in Egypt prisons, their pain and humiliation screamed for amends. American journalist Lawrence Wright states, "Human-rights advocates in Cairo argue that torture created an appetite for revenge. ... [prisoners] held the West responsible for corrupting and humiliating Islamic society."<sup>16</sup> And so, someone must pay for this shame.

### ***America on her knees!***

In the novel, *Reluctant Fundamentalism*, Mohsin Hamid writes about his deep resentment at the West's condescending attitude toward the Middle East. When 9/11 happened, "I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased... the fact that someone had so visibly brought

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<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower – al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (Random House, 2006), 52.

America to her knees.”<sup>17</sup>

Sayyid Qutb, one of the leaders of modern political Islam, wrote about the painful humiliation Muslims have felt because of the birth of Israel and Western hegemony in the Middle East. When Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the caliphate in Mosul in June 2014, the ISIS magazine *Dabiq* echoed much the same sentiment.

O Muslims everywhere, glad tidings to you and expect good. Raise your head high, for today – by Allah’s grace – you have a state and Khalifah (that is, kingdom), which will return your dignity, might, rights and leadership.... The time has come for those generations that were drowning in oceans of disgrace, being nursed on the milk of humiliation, and being ruled by the vilest of all people, after their long slumber in the darkness of neglect – the time has come for them.<sup>18</sup>

This new caliphate galvanized disenfranchised young people in the West, who too were experiencing shame and isolation. Furthermore, the famous public beheadings by ISIS warriors in 2014 and 2015 was a statement to the world that now they were standing up to the Western bully. They publicly humiliated their prisoners by clothing them in orange coveralls like the prisoners of Guantanamo Bay, shaved their heads and forced them to kneel before the cameras, all symbols of shame.

The cycle of being shamed and then shaming the other continues.

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<sup>17</sup> Mohsin Hamid, *Reluctant Fundamentalism* (Anchor Canada, 2008) Kindle edition, Loc. 754.

<sup>18</sup> See *Dabiq*, Issue 1 (June 2014 / 1435). *Dabiq* is the name of the glossy ISIS magazine published for several years during the ISIS caliphate.

An important question here is this: what can be done to make up for our shame so that we don't lash out with insults and violence? We need to ask ourselves, how can we overcome shame and regain true honor when so much has been lost?

We need to ask ourselves, how can we overcome shame and regain true honor when so much has been lost?

***Questions to discuss:***

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- *What dilemmas have you experienced in your struggle to avoid shame?*
  - *Do you think a person's experience of shame justifies him to react in violence? How would this violence cover a person's shame?*
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# CHAPTER FOUR

## A DISTORTED HONOR

**T**his obsession with covering shame and gaining honor results in all sorts of competition for honor. In this quest, we resort to different ways to cover our shame and to restore our honor, depending on our cultures.

In my hometown in Canada, young men come together for an annual table-tennis tournament. They not only honor the winner but play through to the final loser as well, who becomes the 'mother of shame,' as they call him. He can only overcome that shame by taking the players to a restaurant and paying the bill. They promise each other never to reveal who is the final loser. All this is done in healthy fun.

Yes, in the sporting world such competition is normal. One team wins and relishes in their newly gained honor. The other team loses and can only 'lick their wounds' of shame, though often they will blame other factors for their loss. It is typically difficult for the loser to accept the shame of defeat.



In sports we accept this as healthy competition; it's win-loss and makes for great entertainment and builds social cohesion, as fans cheer for their home teams. It's not unlike the traditional tribes that fight each other, where everyone sticks up for their own. Indeed, sports is a benign war. And, of course, sporting competition makes for great business as well.

***I gave him a piece of my mind!***

In ancient societies a public challenge and riposte (quick, sharp response) was a common way to gain honor and shame one's opponent. When someone made a public claim and then faced an insult or criticism in a public way, that person was honor-bound to defend himself with a sharp and quick comeback, as we say in Persian, to give a teeth-shattering answer. Those witnessing the challenge and response will then decide who should get the honor. We could also call it 'push and shove' and if only these challenges and comebacks were just verbal, but they often get out of control.

Should human relationships function this way? Do we challenge and come back at each other, with one person winning and the other losing? Should we compete for honor in our relationships with one another? When someone gains honor in an office environment, does it mean that the others in the team lose honor or are insulted indirectly? My colleague returned from a managers' meeting disappointed, "The director praised each manager, but gave no word of approval for me." The currency of praise had been spent on others and none was left for him.

What must my colleague do so that he will also receive honor? Perhaps he should have tried hard to gain honor, or maybe it was that he had failed in his project. Or do we need to redefine what

true honor is?

## **CHALLENGES OF BEHAVIOR**

As the ancient Greeks that said, “We are lovers of honor,” we all want to experience dignity and honor in our lives. Every director wants to lead their organization with head held high. A manager needs to lead his projects with honor. A father, advising his teen-age children, says to them, “You can do what you want, but do not ruin my reputation.”

Yet at the same time, a father may resort to dishonesty or hide a deviant or disabled member of his family in order to maintain his reputation. A manager may coverup a failed project in order to maintain his good name. A teacher may insult his students to whitewash his lack of knowledge of the subject. And boys on the volleyball court may challenge and shout back in a ‘push and shove’ way to gain the upper hand in the game.

In this chapter, we will explore how our struggle for gaining honor often ends up short-circuited. We will discover that some of our ‘honorable’ habits may be twisted and dishonorable. We will ask how we can change traditional or twisted ways of honor and offer practical steps that we can take towards a higher and truer honor.

## **Duels, Bound Feet, Revenge, Suicide – Ways of Honor?**

Consider these practices, some quite dated, but practices that have been prevalent in nations around the world. Each of them for the sake of honor.

In the 1800s when a British gentleman faced an insult, he would challenge his rival to a shooting duel. Whoever killed the other person supposedly gained more honor. Thousands of

officials were killed because they refused to stand down. Even though they knew the practice was illegal, the church condemned it and society considered duels to be foolish, these gentlemen killed each other in order to gain honor.



It seems odd to us why educated and wealthy officials would resort to duels. We see again how important public opinion was for their sense of worth and value.

The dueler could not remain acceptable in his own eyes if those around him judged him to be evil, dishonorable, a coward or a failure, foolish or effeminate. So dependent was his self-image on the view of others that he would sooner die of a bullet or stab wound than to allow unfavorable assessments of him to go unanswered.<sup>1</sup>

In China before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a woman with very small feet (three inches!!) was considered beautiful and eligible for marriage. Girls at the age of three suffered excruciating pain after



their tiny feet and toes were tied tightly together. While today we

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<sup>1</sup> *Status Anxiety*, 108.

shudder at this practice and see it as utterly shameful, elitist Chinese society used to consider this as the way for their families to gain honor.

In Latin societies, a ‘machismo’ mentality even to this day refers to the tough man who conquers women and drinks hard. He has gained honor, but one can only imagine how this results in dysfunctional family life and untold pain for women.

The slavery system around the world, especially the Black slave trade in Britain and the Americas, was steeped in a twisted sense of honor. Landowners with more quality slaves were well-spoken of by their social network.<sup>2</sup>

The legendary Italian mafia went to great lengths to enact revenge for any group who shamed or hurt them in any way. The classic crime movie *The Godfather* (1972) reflects how generational revenge has no end, all for the sake of being considered strong and ‘manly.’

In traditional Japanese society, when individuals experienced shame, the way to regain a good name was to commit suicide. When a person could not pay back his loan as he had promised, the debtor would commit suicide to maintain his good name. We read of stories where people killed themselves if they had made a slight mistake in a public ceremonial event. “Suicide, properly done, will ... clear his name and reinstate his memory. ... The Japanese respect for it allows it to be an honorable and purposeful

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<sup>2</sup> The examples above are adapted from Kwame Appiah book *The Honor Code—How Moral Revolutions Happen* (W.W. Norton, 2010). Appiah ends his study with a discussion on honor-killings in Pakistan and shows that indeed, there is no honor in an honor-killing. He argues that only when we see immoral deeds as shameful, will these deeds come to an end.

act.”<sup>3</sup> If a Samurai warrior knew he would be defeated or killed, he would courageously kill himself before any confrontation.

To this day, in parts of the Middle East and South Asia, families will kill a sister or daughter because she has committed a dishonorable act. This is considered an ‘honor-killing.’ If the person has stained the family name, the only way to clean the stain is to remove the stain; that is, to kill the blemished person. Blood must be shed. “Killing a wayward woman is seen as an act of purification for the family and sometimes even not doing it quickly enough is perceived to be damaging to the family honour.”<sup>4</sup>

In cultures around the world, people have often pursued shameful and even immoral practices in order to maintain a good reputation. People use dishonorable means to gain honor. When people do this, someone will invariably lose and get hurt. What honor is there when the honor we gain results in another person’s shame, loss and pain?

### **School Grades, Husbands and Wives, Weddings – More Ways of Honor?**

The examples cited above are extraordinary stories that have become legendary and the subject of social critiques, novels and films. But consider these more common, everyday examples:

- Parents with power and influence are adamant that their children must receive high grades at school. The principal in one Emirate school required that teachers give ‘suggested grades’ to the headteacher, who then graded

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<sup>3</sup> Ruth Bennett, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword – Patterns of Japanese Culture*, (Houghton Mifflin, 1946).

<sup>4</sup> Amir H. Jafri, *Honour Killing – Dilemma, Ritual, Understanding* (Oxford, 2008), 21.

according to the children's parents' status. As for the principal's children, they invariably received the highest scores.

- Some university students feel they must make good grades at all costs and so will plead with their professors for favors. When a student in northern Afghanistan begged his English teacher for a better grade and it didn't work, he pulled out a knife saying, "In Afghanistan people have been killed for less than this." Fortunately, a few other students nearby were able to defuse the situation.
- A husband walks ahead of his wife because he feels it is below his dignity to walk beside her. He may not call her by her first name.<sup>5</sup>
- We know about the age-old dilemma of families going into unbearable debt in order to have a luxurious wedding so no one will speak badly of them. At one time, the Pakistan government had banned weddings in hotels. People responded by bribing police for permissions. As a result, the debts went even higher. Some countries have tried mass weddings at times to overcome this drive for expensive weddings.
- A university professor will ask very difficult questions in class or on an exam to ensure that students remember that the teacher knows more.
- The rural father in the Middle East has one fear in life – that he will not 'fall short before others.' He will do what is

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<sup>5</sup> Many years ago, several mujahidin (freedom fighters) came to my house in Islamabad and asked me to fill out a visa application form for Canada. They had been invited to Canada to speak about the resistance movement against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. I had to submit their names including everyone in their family. When I asked them for their wives' names, they looked embarrassingly at each other. It was shameful to speak openly about that which was so private.

necessary to ensure this never happens.

- A family hides their handicapped child.
- The director in a government ministry needs to meet with two of his managers, but he will not go to their offices, because it is below his dignity to 'step down' to a manager's office.
- Similarly, three managers who have comparable positions in a ministry need to meet, but they can't decide in which office. Each one thinks that if he meets in the other person's office the other person will receive more honor. As a result, they don't meet to make necessary decisions.
- A doctor, overwhelmed at the many patients he must see, will give preference to relatives and fellow clan members so he can maintain a good name with them.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- ***Describe a situation where you or someone you know was forced to go against a core value of life in order to keep their reputation?***
  - ***In what ways do people resort to dishonorable means to gain honor?***
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Here is the dilemma. People manipulate, flatter, wear masks, partner with the bad guys, threaten others, tell lies, use force in various ways, disrespect, disobey copyrights, resort to corruption, bribery and even violence and much, much more. All in order to maintain honor.

We want honor, but are we ready to be honorable?

## GAINING STATUS

I was standing in a long line outside the airport in a small city in Central Asia, waiting to check-in. As the line finally started to move, a white SUV with tinted windows turned into the parking lot and sped past the long line to the front. An elderly, white-bearded cleric stepped out of the vehicle and found his place at the front. Perhaps he was a VIP, a religious sheikh or a warlord. But no one questioned him.

He carried respect.

Some cultures see this as problematic. They try to make things more equal so everyone is on a level playing ground. They develop laws that treat all people the same, irrespective of status, wealth or power.<sup>6</sup>

On another occasion at the same airport, another Canadian NGO worker was waiting in the line inside the airport. Everyone was jostling to get ahead. A middle-aged local man, older than this Canadian, pushed his way ahead of the NGO worker in the line. The Canadian got noticeably upset and insulted him in front of others. The Canadian demanded fair or 'equal' treatment but he showed no respect. His dishonorable challenge gave him no honor.

## Should We Treat Everyone Equally?

### *Nothing is more unequal than equality itself!*

The ancient Romans believed that everyone had to know each other's place or position in relation to other people in their social

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<sup>6</sup> Even this is highly improbable. In egalitarian cultures, celebrities and sports personalities receive special status and respect because of what they have achieved. Wealthy people can easily purchase higher rank as well.



group. Everyone could not be the same as everyone else. If a position was confused, then no one would ever know whom to respect and whom not to respect. According to the first-century Roman philosopher, Pliny, “nothing is more unequal than equality itself.” If everyone was the same, an educated aristocrat and a slave would be on the same level. This would lead to an awkward imbalance in society. No one would know how to relate to the other. It was very important to maintain distinction between faces.

Status gives honor and hence, respect and privilege. If a person has a lower status, he will receive less respect, less privilege and less power. Without status, a person feels less worth.

The higher our status, the more our worth. We matter to ourselves and to others. The lower our status, the less our worth. We do not matter in the eyes of others. We are not important, and because of that, we do not have respect from others, nor any influence.

So, what is our rank in comparison to others around us? Whose face is more important? Which face shines brighter? Or should we all be the same? Should everyone be equal to everyone else? If everyone is the same, then no one is greater than anyone else. Who would get respect then?

We naturally want to have a better status, which will give us more value. We will enjoy respect and honor from others and nowadays, better privileges. We have this assumption that someone with higher status deserves more benefits and privileges. A person with higher status means he will have better income, more travel opportunities and perks along the way. He can sit at the seat of honor at a banquet and enjoy great meals. He will have more attendants serving him. Journalists will write about him and

his photograph will appear in the news more often.

So, who would not want more status? But is a life with more privileges true honor?

### **How Do We Seek Status?**

How can we increase our status in society, and gain more respect and influence in society? Is our status based on who we are as a person, our background and connections, or on the things that we own, our possessions, property and precious toys? This, of course, depends very much on our cultural group. There are generally two ways to get status.

One way to have status is to get it from others. Status is passed on to us, through connections to someone with honor (discussed in Chapter One). Another way to gain status is to achieve something that others don't have. We move ahead of others and outrank them in some activity. We have become successful in sports or attained a high education or become wealthy in our business. This type of status happens when we take risks and step out on our own. We take responsibility for our initiatives, and when we succeed, we gain honor from others.

Collectivist cultures have traditionally not encouraged 'achieved status' because a person would not want to stand out from their group, while in individualist cultures every person (ideally) has an opportunity to achieve. People are encouraged to step out and make a difference in life. The contrast between the two cultures is well described in the following paragraph:

In the modern world, a man estimates his personal worth in great part on the basis of his visible personal achievement – the *hasab* [credit] he alone has acquired. Muslims in [the ancient] period did not have the advantages of aspirin and

the modern psychological sciences, but did have the advantage of being sustained by something more than their personal achievements and by a lively sense of their relation to the unseen world. The *nasab* [connection] and *hasab* [credit] of their ancestors, no matter how humble, gave a man a niche in society that a man of another and different lowly ancestry might not have.<sup>7</sup>

But as we move from traditional and tribal communities to civil society and middle-class cultures, we create an opportunity to move ahead and in this way gain status. We read stories of a sports celebrity or a famous scholar who came from an impoverished background. Through hard work, practice (and good luck!), the person has become famous.

These examples become an inspiration for all of us to achieve more. But at the same time, when we have opportunity to succeed in these ways, we become more anxious and wonder if we may be losing out on something. We become concerned about our own importance, what we are achieving and how much income we get.<sup>8</sup> We worry about how we rate in life and always compare ourselves with others.

The traditional tribal elder is similarly anxious about his honor, but differently. He is very afraid less he falls short before his neighbors. For him, it is not about achieving something unique, but he must ensure he receives more respect than those around him.

### ***It's never enough!***

In middle-class society, where everyone has a chance to

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<sup>7</sup> *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, 173.

<sup>8</sup> *Status Anxiety*, 25.

achieve, much of life becomes restless for us. We have so many opportunities around us, we wonder if we can reach them. We also fear we may fall short before ourselves. This creates tremendous anxiety in us – just as much as for the tribal elder. As we have more possibilities, moderns have “a remarkable capacity to feel that neither who they are nor what they have is quite enough.”<sup>9</sup> Maybe we’re missing out on some golden opportunity where we could achieve more.

### **How Do We Show Status?**

When people have a higher status than others, they will use symbols to show the public what their position is and impress others in their group that they are worthy of respect. Certain titles like Doctor or Engineer evoke exceptional respect in some cultures. Brand name clothes or jewelry, Rolex watches, trophies, cushioned black furniture, SUV vehicles for warlords – all communicate status and position of honor.

The ancient Romans relished in their symbols. They showed off their status and achievements through statues of themselves or inscriptions in the public square that sang their praises. Clothes, friends and social gatherings also spoke of their position in society. The elite found new and resourceful ways to show the world where they stood in the pecking order. This would clarify to others how they should relate to these ‘higher’ folk.

The 14<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet, Shaykh Saadi criticized this obsession with distorted status.

The dignity of a human is in the person,

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<sup>9</sup> *Status Anxiety*, 25.

Lovely clothes do not make the person.<sup>10</sup>

Although we agree with Saadi's lofty ideal, we are socialized to embrace the status-consciousness and status symbols of our cultural world. A luxury vehicle shows up and we rise to attention. Someone of standing has arrived. Although we all say that a person's honor does not depend on wearing a Rolex watch or waxed shoes, yet we insist we must have these. Somehow symbols like these give us value and worth.

People may be poor, but they will spend hundreds of dollars on status symbols such as fancy mobile phones and watches, extravagant clothing and carpets. We work hard and spend much in order to be liked.

### ***How many likes did you get?***

Now with the digital revolution, we can quantify our status and influence. Digital platforms such as Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram are the fastest and easiest ways for human beings to connect with each other. Everyone is connecting with everyone from everywhere to everywhere.

What makes it so attractive is that we can count these connections, how many likes, hits, views our post has had in contrast with another person's post. The higher the number of likes, the more we are liked, and the higher our honor and prestige.

Is this not why we become addicted to the smartphone and the sound of the notification or ding? Each ding tells me someone

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<sup>10</sup> Some have sarcastically commented that Saadi's poem should be reinterpreted by simply moving the comma to the next word:

تن آدمی شریف است به جان آدمیت نه، همین لباس زیباییست نشان آدمیت

The dignity of the human is [not] in the person. Lovely clothes are what make the person.

thinks about me and increases my status. We feel we're gaining more honor with more likes, hits and views. We think we're popular and are influential when we have many followers and likes.

However, something else is influencing us. In the relentless pursuit for more likes, we become victims of social media conglomerates like Facebook and Google.



As we ceaselessly engage with our smartphones, we allow these mega-companies to observe us. Without our knowing, they use an endless variety of algorithms to collect as much information about us as possible. With this information, robots analyze and classify our behaviors and habits, and then they send ads our way. They know exactly when we feel a certain way and are ready to respond to our needs. Jaron Lanier, a digital whiz and writer of computer philosophy, critiques the digital culture he helped create. “The problem is relentless, robotic, ultimately meaningless behavior modification in the service of unseen manipulators and uncaring algorithms.”<sup>11</sup>

We are not gaining honor; rather we are being turned into a ding machine. And the only affirmation and reward we get is another tiny tick or sound.

### ***Status and snobs***

For the Romans enjoying high status, it was considered below

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<sup>11</sup> Jaron Lanier, *Ten Arguments for Deleting your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (Picador, 2018), 23.

their dignity to pay attention to those below them. To love someone of a lesser position would mean to identify with that person, and thereby become like him. A person of high status may be charitable to the poor, but he could never love the poor person.

This is the essence of snobbery. The English word originally meant ‘without nobility,’ that is, someone without high status or simply an ordinary person. Today it describes someone who looks down on those whom he considers to be of less value, without status. When we are snobs, we look down on a person that we feel has no value to us. When we meet a snob, we will either receive more attention or be ignored, based on whether we have value in the eyes of the snob.

As we hunger for recognition and status, we will do whatever is required by our social group to achieve such status. That is why we grope for status symbols, as they may communicate some form of achievement. Today, the number of texts, likes and number of views have become the latest symbols that rate our status and reputation in comparison to others. We count in our group because we have more counts than the next person. Though we won’t admit it, we may have become digital snobs.

### **Is There Another Way to Honor?**

Mahatma Gandhi, the founder of modern India, rejected all status symbols and made the humble spinning wheel the symbol for India’s people revolution.

In pietistic groups, status symbols are seen as vain and are strongly discouraged. People are not supposed to



embellish and aggrandize themselves. Rather, an unwritten principle of life tells them that they should be humble about their achievements and not show off.

Is there another way to define status? Is there a way to find peace from this ceaseless struggle for status and the sound of another text message? Can we give up false pretenses and grabbing for more privileges? Is there a better way to experience worth?

We must quickly clarify that to step away from the struggle for status and privilege does not mean we should resign to fate. Rather it means seeing worth and value elsewhere than the attention we get from others.

What if we turned the dynamics around? Instead of finding status by seeing how much attention or praise we can get from others, what if we defined status by how much we focus on others? What if we would try to give value and worth to others, instead of seeking this for ourselves?

David Brooks, a journalist for the New York Times and author of numerous books on character, morality and social issues, calls us to a new perspective in his latest book, *The Second Mountain*. He says the first mountain is where we climb for personal achievement, seek successful careers and pursue happiness. As tribal, communal societies move towards civil society and people place a stronger emphasis on individual achievement, they become excited about this first mountain. Here they have a chance to break free from group control and collective thinking. They can pursue honor as individuals and achieve status through their own initiative. They experience the thrill of individual freedom.

But this mountain comes with its own troubles and pitfalls as



well. As Brooks says, “people climbing that first mountain spend a lot of time thinking about reputation management. They are always keeping score. How do I measure up? Where do I rank? ... we have a tendency to think, I am what the world says I am.”

As we climb to the top of this mountain we wonder, is this all there is? What if we fail in this climb? What if someone else gets ahead of me? We struggle, wondering where and how can we achieve more success, pleasures, privileges and honor. But then we ask ourselves, is life just about status, or gathering more status symbols?

Disappointment sets in. We don't qualify for a bursary. Our story is not mentioned in the TV show. We had to go into too much debt for our son's wedding. We did not receive the attention (and honor) we had expected. Something has gone wrong. We find ourselves in a valley of discontent and disillusionment.

Brooks presents a stinging critique of this obsession with oneself in Western society. Individualism is ruining Western civilization. Living on this mountain, people endlessly hope that someday “I'll get to where I want to go,” but it only leads to more loneliness, anxiety and depression.

But there is another mountain beyond the mountain of personal achievement and seeking status. There is something else to want where a person envisions things that are truly worth pursuing. They see a higher honor. People on this second mountain transcend themselves and begin to live for others. They become deeply involved in the lives of other people. They have moved from being self-centered to becoming other-centered. Here on this second mountain people find a different sort of status and position – an interdependent serving and caring for

one another. Here “you lose yourself in the daily act of serving others as [others] lose themselves in the daily acts of serving you.”<sup>12</sup>

Here on the second mountain, we honor one another. This becomes an upside-down way to achieve honor where we esteem another person and care for the other person’s life and interests. This is the life of *jawanmardi* (sacrificial heroism)

Here on the second mountain, we honor one another. This becomes an upside-down way to achieve honor where we esteem another person and care for the other person’s life and interests. This is the life of *jawanmardi*.

which we discussed earlier. Serving others, regardless of our rank, becomes another way to do life. It’s not symbols of status, nor status itself; rather it is the struggle to honor each other. In this ‘position of service,’ everyone gains.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

- ***How can serving others become an honor?***
- ***Think of ways you can climb the second mountain of living beyond yourself.***

### **WHEN OTHERS SUCCEED**

In the NGO world of development, we often talk about ‘capacity building.’

No society can develop if we don’t build capacity and train our younger generation. Every good teacher knows he must teach skills, character and knowledge, especially to younger persons, so

<sup>12</sup> All quotes in this section are from *The Second Mountain*, xi – xx.

that society will continue to grow. But often problems develop.

### ***Who gets the credit?***

A teacher notices that a student or colleague performs better or grows stronger in certain capacities. Suddenly he is gripped with concern, “What if the student becomes more successful than I am? He will get more credit!” Without realizing it, a sinister spirit takes root in the teacher’s heart. The teacher holds back some information and retards the development process.

I was attending a board meeting for a cutting-edge Middle Eastern media consortium. A young IT expert who was new to this board and the relationships among leaders, was asking others in the board why the key leaders in this network were not united. The IT expert asked one key leader, “Is money the problem?”

Hesitant at first, the leader responded, “No, it’s not money.”

“Then what it is?”

The leader answered, as honestly as he could, as his head fell with a sense of shame, “It’s about who gets the credit. That’s what it is.”

The underlying concern in both scenarios was about receiving credit. For the second one, credit would invariably lead to funding, which gives more honor and then more funding. The cycle goes on. We can’t allow the other organization to receive more credit than ours.

When someone else receives recognition or honor, it is difficult to feel good about it. When someone else gets more credit than we do, we may even think they have stolen our credit, as if there is only so much credit and honor to go around.

We call it jealousy or envy, though there are increasing shades of this emotion.

### ***Increasing shades of envy***

Envy can begin quite mildly but it can grow like a cancer and become extremely destructive.

I want more.

I want what others have.

I don't want others to have what I have.

I don't want others to have what I don't have.

I want others to have the ill-will that I have.

I want others to have more ill-will than I have.

### **Envy Hurts!**

The ancient Greeks described envy as an emotional and even physical pain when they saw someone else succeed and find good fortune.

### ***When my cousin buys land, I get a stomach-ache***

We normally envy those close to us. If someone in a distant land like Chile has become successful, it does not affect us, but if someone within our honor group gains honor, it is another story. We envy those that are most like us, those within our reach. The Koreans say, "When my cousin buys land, I get a stomach-ache."

Envy creates anxiety, an emotion that disturbs our spirits. When we harbor envy in our hearts, we do not relate well to others. Our performance weakens because our energy is spent on wondering about the other person's successes and whether there are ways to overtake that person, or even to hinder him. When we

feel pain because of another's gain, this envy robs us of joy and delight in others.

I've noticed this in participatory meetings. When someone of equal value has a turn to speak, others in the meeting find it difficult to acknowledge that person or appreciate his presentation. Their faces fall, they turn away and ignore the speaker. It's as if this speaker, now having the center of attention, has become successful, and the others 'get a stomach-ache' from it.

In order to remove the pain, we need to remove the cause of this pain. If we do not, envy will become dangerous and destroy our relationships with one another.

### **What is Limited Good?**

Anthropologists talk about a cultural practice known as 'limited good' or 'zero-sum' thinking, which says that there are only a limited number of goods. So, if there is any increase in goods, it means that goods have decreased somewhere else. If someone gets more money, it means that person has taken money from someone else. If someone gains advantage, someone else has lost his advantage. If someone wins, it means another loses.

In this scheme of things, when somebody gets more credit or honor, someone else has lost honor. This leads to jealousy. If another person is praised, what about us? For this reason, some leaders are reluctant to praise others, because it will mean that others feel they have been deprived of praise.

### **How Do We Express Envy?**

When we envy another person's gain, we express it in various ways. Our expressions of envy can be very subtle. We may not

even be aware of what is happening, except for the sense of unease and anxiety in our spirits.

- We tend to ignore that person. Since it is so hard to appreciate another's success, it is better not to notice them. Like at the meeting. When someone else is talking we ignore him. Because it hurts to see someone else succeed, we think that perhaps 'out of sight, out of mind' will work.
- We boast of our own (real or unreal) successes. We want others to notice *us*, and so we elevate ourselves. We try to embellish our accomplishments and make a greater name for ourselves by talking about what we've done. We easily see ourselves in a better light than we see others.
- We dishonor others by gossip and slander. The logic goes that if others are lowered, then we will appear higher! Again, it can be very subtle. With a real (or feigned) spirit of concern, we point out the failings of someone else. We inwardly rejoice when others experience problems.
- We develop a spirit of competition. Healthy competition can energize us to improve and work harder. However, a spirit of competition easily breeds suspicion and other forms of disorder.
- We begin to mistrust our co-workers. A teacher suspects that his colleague is trying to make a show for himself. When the two come together, each is envious of the other, each suspecting the other of a hidden agenda. Friendships die.

Jealousy has entered our world from ancient times. It's been part of the human race. The world's first murder, when Cain killed his brother Abel, was out of envy. Thousands of years later, we still envy other people, their positions, privileges and promotions.

## From Envy to the Evil Eye

Envy starts by *seeing* someone else's success.<sup>13</sup> As we see someone gain fortune, our eyes squint and narrow, very much the way we experience physical pain. We then express or exhale (breath out) this pain through our eyes again. Through the eyes, we wish evil for someone. This sinister look is like a curse on the other person. That is why the evil eye lurks everywhere because envy lurks deep in our hearts. The eye of envy becomes the evil eye.

We are compelled to guard against the evil eye – our own as well as the envious (evil) eyes of others. Daily life becomes complicated, with constant efforts to stop everybody from being envious of everybody else. Societies use various techniques, fetishes and prayers as special instruments to guard against the evil eye.

There is also the constant complaint of how bad things are. We are reluctant to express success or blessing, lest someone become envious of our success. In the first novel of the Cairo Trilogy, Naghuib Mahfouz, Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1988, describes everyday life of an urban shopkeeper in Cairo, Egypt. Aisha, the hapless wife of the main character in the story, is concerned about envy. So “to ward off the evil eye of jealousy, [she] never let a day go by without some complaint.”<sup>14</sup>

We say that eyes are the windows into the soul. What we see around us enters our inner world through the eyes. Then as we nurture this within us, we feed on it and express it through the

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<sup>13</sup> The English word ‘envy’ comes from the Latin word *in+vidia*, ‘to look over’ with a view to control or destroy.

<sup>14</sup> Naghuib Mahfouz, *Palace Walk*, translated by William Hutchins and Olive Kenny (DoubleDay, 1990), 19.

eyes again. If we live squinty eyed in greed and distrust, our body becomes a dark cellar. We spread darkness throughout our lives and to others. But if we open our eyes wide with a positive view of the world, in wonder and excitement, our bodies will be filled with light and joy. The good eye then leads to joy and our lives overflow with generosity.

### **How We Can Overcome Envy**

Here is the question: how can we overcome this malaise of envy that lurks in our hearts? Or must we live with this pain? Consider the following:

#### ***Developing self-awareness***

Envy starts when we see others becoming successful. We need to recognize this pain that is taking root in our hearts. We need to address this feeling. We acknowledge the emotion of jealousy. We tell ourselves that we will not allow this envious spirit to ruin our peace and destroy our relationships with others.

#### ***Building self-confidence***

When we are jealous, it means that we are not secure within ourselves. We need to realize that we are unique beings with distinct characteristics and qualities, as is every other human being. As we appreciate and practice using the gifts God has given us, we develop healthy self-confidence and learn to do well the things God has designed us for. When we do what we have been created for rather than imitate what our friends have been created for, we enjoy doing what we do, instead of wishing to be like others and trying to out-perform them.



### ***Seeing the big picture***

When we envy another person's success in light of our lack of success, we have a very small vision. We need to see the bigger picture and look beyond our own world, not at *who* is successful or *who* receives honor. If the community wins, then we will win; if the community loses, we lose too. True honor means to contribute to the success of the entire group, to seek the welfare of the larger community. When we see the big picture, we see honor beyond ourselves.

True honor means to contribute to the success of the entire group, to seek the welfare of the larger community. When we see the big picture, we see honor beyond ourselves.

### ***This is your honor!***

A great music teacher is the one whose students outdo the teacher. Parents wish that their children become more successful than they. A great leader is delighted when he can help others flourish. Others' success becomes the leader's honor and success.

The Persian poet Raziq Fani says, "When others flourish, I flourish, I enjoy the joy of others."<sup>15</sup> In other words, we rejoice with those who rejoice just as we weep with those who weep.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

- ***Which do you think is more difficult – to rejoice with those who rejoice or to weep with those who weep?***

### ***Sowing widely and reaping abundantly***

We can keep information and power to ourselves, enjoying the credit we get from this. However, as information and power stay with us, nothing grows. Everything remains limited to our own capacity. When we keep power to ourselves, we exclude others from growth opportunities and life stagnates. But as we sow and share our strength to others, allowing them to develop, we reap a harvest, and with the harvest comes joy. The more a person sows widely, the more everyone reaps. Everyone benefits in this way.

### ***Growing in humility***

In the ancient world of the Romans, Greeks and Persians, humility was not considered a virtue, because it conflicted with the competition for honor. But as we consider how to overcome envy, the great virtue of humility calls us to show interest in and esteem the other. Even more, humility is a fundamental characteristic for a leader who cares as much for the people around him as he does for himself.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- ***In what ways have you experienced envy and jealousy?***
  - ***How can we develop an attitude of “rejoicing with those who rejoice?”***
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## **HONOR AND DISTANCE**

In workshops in Central Asia, we often explore the various styles of leadership and how cultures appreciate different styles. We compare the strengths and weaknesses of an authoritarian (power, position) leader with a people (relational) leader.

Consistently, the people leader receives a better rating. Everyone wants a leader who likes being with his staff, sits down with them for a cup of tea, and even relates to them as a friend.

But after a few minutes of discussion, someone in the workshop blurts out, “But it won’t take long before we will have ripped such a leader into shreds.” Or, “If the director is too friendly, his staff won’t respect him.”

It seems dangerous for a director to be too close to his staff. For this reason, some leaders intuitively distance themselves from their staff in order to stay secure in their offices.

### **Position with Honor**

Some cultures naturally default to a top-down style of leadership. A director is credited with honor because of his position as director.

In one workshop at a college in northern Afghanistan during the early years of Karzai’s government, I had a pleasant introductory meeting with the professors who were working diligently in their new computer and language lab. We were ready to start the seminar with the students, but the professors needed to do one thing first.

They led me up a large stairway, down the hall, into a receiving room, and then into a large, office, with couches and chairs. At the far end of this great room was an immense desk, with a leather



armchair. Rising from behind the desk was a smallish man in a white suit, President of the College. He greeted me cordially but I

soon wondered, “Does he even know that we’re having a leadership seminar today?”

This president had honor. He carried respect, at least outwardly – because of his *title* ‘The President.’ But where was he located in relation to the actual college and the students?

We call this high power-distance,<sup>16</sup> where the leader remains separate from those he is leading. This distance is both physical and relational, expressed by attitude as well as behavior. Because the director is ‘higher-up,’ the staff tend to ‘look up to’ (respect) the director and the director tends to ‘look down’ (disrespect) the staff. The staff are obligated to respect their director and sometimes it seems as if the director is obligated to treat his staff with contempt.

### **Why do Leaders Want Distance?**

Why do directors naturally distance themselves from the people they lead? We came to the following conclusions at a workshop in Kabul:

- Distance creates respect. In fact, the more separation or distance between a director and staff, the more respect the director receives. It seems that the further the director maintains distance from others, the more power lies in his hands.
- Distance gives a director a sense of significance. He is ‘higher’ than others. He is busy with major issues and should not need to occupy himself with petty issues around him. This would demean him. It is deeply

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<sup>16</sup> See discussion on “power-distance” in Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations – Software of the Mind; Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival* (McGraw-Hill, 2005), 39-72.

satisfying to him that people must make an effort to meet him.

- Distance shelters a director from criticism. He can hide or cover up his shortcomings and failures if he is detached from his staff and clients.
- Distance keeps a leader disconnected from the needs, expectations and aspirations of people. If a leader gets too close to his people, he is obligated to work for the people's benefit. Staying aloof means he has fewer hassles to deal with.
- Distance helps a director keep secrets. He does not need to be accountable or open with the people. This, of course, breeds suspicion and more easily leads to corruption.

The issue of distance is relevant, not only for directors and managers but also for teachers, parents and anyone responsible for overseeing a group of people.

Should we remove distance? Although Westerners like to talk about equality or even egalitarianism, is it feasible that power is distributed equally? If we would all become equal, do we then settle for bland egalitarianism and sameness?<sup>17</sup>

We are left with the question; Does a leader's honor and influence rest on his distance from others and in being noticed and distinct from others? If so, how much should the distance be?

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<sup>17</sup> In the controversial and ill-fated work, *The Last Man on Earth and the End of History*, Francis Fukuyama discusses the struggle for honor in contrast to social universalism, where all humans are considered equal. He concludes that such bland universalism will lead to the end of human struggle. We lose passion and no longer struggle for recognition and honor. We become 'men without chests.' James Bowman in his *Honor: A History* (2006) argues that the West needs a revival of honor in order to go beyond the gentleman's notion of the just or fair way. Rather, we should be ready and willing to fight wars against our enemies – for the sake of honor. As I present in this book, there is yet another way to pursue honor.

How should power be distributed?

***Questions to discuss:***

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- *Do you think it's good that leaders are somewhat distant from their people?*
  - *What distance are you in relation to those you lead or manage?*
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**Top-Down Leader or Face-to-Face Leader**

Which should it be, top-down or face-to-face leadership? Is there more honor for a leader who uses an authoritarian style in relating to his people? Or does a democratic-style leader gain more honor? Consider these scenarios – which are more effective?

- Should a director give orders or consult with his staff and get their input?
- Should students stand up to show respect to their teachers or can they simply call their teachers by their first names?
- Should an older brother automatically be the head of the sibling group?
- Should children obey their parents or relate to their parents as friends? Should children learn behavior and conduct from their parents (directive, top-down) or from their peers (egalitarian, horizontal)?
- Should a manager be a boss or a friend?

The answers to these questions depend on what culture a person comes from. Some cultures are inherently top-down in how people relate to each other. For example, in hierarchical cultures, the oldest brother naturally has more responsibility and

more rights because he has had more years in life than his siblings. And the younger brothers, therefore, respect him and heed his advice.

In egalitarian cultures, relationships are less structured, distance is reduced between people of differing ages, wealth, experience or education. These are not determining factors as to who is in authority.

However, in top-down leadership, the director is not only more distant from those around him, but he naturally gives orders to his staff and the staff instinctively obey. In the business world, this contrasts with participatory management, where colleagues are invited to contribute to the decision-making process.

In the Western world, we have an abundance of teaching on servant leadership. In management courses, Westerners emphasize horizontal, 'on-the-floor' leadership, where leaders and managers develop friendly, positive relationships with those they lead.

But if honor depends on position, titles and status, and if directors naturally give orders 'from the top,' how can we practice servant leadership? Should a leader serve his staff, or should the staff serve their leader?

Here is the dilemma. When a director's honor and influence is directly related to his distance from his personnel, it becomes difficult for the leader to mingle with them and listen to them. He may lose his respect and hence, is no longer considered an effective leader.

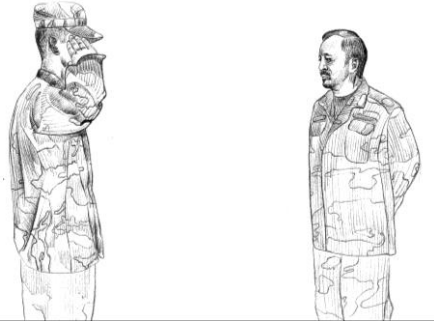
Is it possible to develop a healthy 'servant leadership' without rejecting 'top-down' patterns or must we adapt to horizontal, egalitarian ways?

### Questions to discuss:

- *How can a ‘top-down’ director also be a ‘people leader’ without losing his authority and honor?*
- *How can a director maintain his distance and influence, while developing healthy team relationship at the same time?*
- *How can a top-down leader give orders to his personnel with humility?*

### Should a Leader Control or Guide?

In a top-down culture, followers or staff easily respond to their boss in this way, “I’m at your command (*taba-ul-amr* طابع الامر). Whatever you say, I’ll do it.” Hearing these words, a director feels good, honored. His



staff member is obedient. And it appears he is willingly obedient, though what goes on behind the scenes in his mind may be another story.

People honor their leaders not only by respecting them, but also by *following* them. This means that in order for a boss to maintain his honor, he needs to ensure that his people do heed his orders and follow him. How should he maintain their loyalty? Should he control his staff, and if so, how much ‘control’ should he exercise? How should a manager express his authority or



implement his vision and goals to those under his supervision?

Every culture has its own understanding of how authority and leadership relate together. We normally learn about authority from our families, from the way our fathers related to their families and neighbors. We then continue these patterns in our own lives.

***Which is the better father and husband?***

Which list below describes the better father and husband?

**The equal father/husband:**

- Wife is equal, a friend
- Talks with children
- Disciplines by giving guidance,
- Children relate to him father as a friend
- Sees himself as a partner with his wife
- Peace through harmony
- Encourages independence in children
- Elders are on their own

**The ruling father/husband:**

- The wife must submit and obey
- Orders children
- Disciplines by threat and punishment
- Children respect him out of fear
- Sees himself as provider and protector
- Peace through conformity
- Family is dependent
- Elders are cared for by children

Most likely, a person from a culture where relationships are more egalitarian will prefer the equal father/husband. A person from a more hierarchical culture will think such a father appears weak. He will prefer the ruling father while the egalitarian mindset will say such a father is too harsh.

Should a leader be like an equal father or a ruling father to those under his leadership?

In many cases, staff simply like to be told what to do. It's much easier and safer that way. They are reluctant to participate in strategizing and planning, so they do not need to shoulder responsibility and become accountable. If they would initiate ideas, then they would also need to take charge of these ideas and ensure they are implemented.

Furthermore, a director enjoys giving directions. His word is important and is attended to. He carries weight. Many would say that it's much more efficient for a leader simply to issue orders. Why should one go through a complicated process of involving others, listening to their varied views and wondering how to implement them? It is a leader's duty and even an honor, to make decisions unilaterally without consulting others. If he listens to and negotiates with clients, it indicates weakness and hesitancy on the director's side. Moreover, much time is wasted.

So how does the director relate to staff members who have not followed orders properly or made mistakes? Should he rebuke them or resort to force, threats or insults in order to make sure the staff obey him and perform well in the future? Sometimes, the relationship between a director and staff sours because the staff feels that their director dominates them and cares little for their well-being. They feel like they are being 'bossed around' and treated like slaves with little value.

Other problems arise. Personnel feel undervalued and dishonored when their director does not show interest in them. The sense of loyalty weakens, and staff may begin to look for work elsewhere. The director will feel dishonored when his staff don't carry out his orders as he expects them to. In either situation, both staff and the director lose.

We see that a culture of high power-distance tends to devalue people.

### **Becoming a Caring Leader**

We want to see how an authoritarian or top-down leader can *care* for his personnel and yet ensure respect and maintain his honor.

The United Nations Charter of Human Rights argues for “the equal and inalienable rights” of every human being. We believe in the universal value and dignity of every individual because every human being is created by God. Humankind is *ashraf al-makhluqat*, the noble (great, dignified, valuable) creation.<sup>18</sup> This means that everyone is noble (*sharif*), every woman and every man, young and old, educated or not educated. Even the person who seems weak, small and insignificant in his eyes and in the eyes of his group has worth. Even those who are destructive to others have a spark of greatness within them. They too are creatures of God.

When we understand that every person in our sphere of responsibility has worth and value we will relate to them in that

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<sup>18</sup> In the English language, the word ‘human’ comes from the Latin word *humus*, which means ‘from the earth’ or ‘dust.’ So, here are two realities: Being created by God means we have unique value, but it also means that we are not God. “We are but dust” one of the prophets has said. This leads us to an attitude of ‘humility’ which comes from the same root, ‘*humus*.’ So to be human is to be truly humble before God.

light. We will genuinely care for them and give them value. Consider these questions in the discussion box below:

### ***Questions to discuss:***

- *If a director gives attention and honor to his employees, does he lose some of his honor?*
- *If someone who thrives on the privilege of leading a community development project moves ‘downward’ from a position of authority in order to sit with community elders and hear their stories, will he have lost some his respect?*
- *If a principal of a school tries to understand the issues that teachers struggle with and spends time with the teachers, will that principal be less effective as a leader?*

In each case, the leader has gained honor and respect in the eyes of others because he cares for his people and becomes involved in their lives.

We conclude that by stepping *down* towards other people, the leader has gained honor and stepped *up* in the eyes of those around him.

**By stepping *down* towards other people, the leader has gained honor and stepped *up* in the eyes of those around him.**

### ***That person thinks about me!***

When someone thinks about us, we feel encouraged and honored. Sadly, many people die emotionally and psychologically because they feel that “no one thinks about me, no one cares about me.”

Afghans say, “That person entered my story (*qissa*).” The word *story* is an interesting idiom to explain how someone cares for another person. “My story” refers to our life, our experiences, failures and successes. When someone doesn’t care for us, we feel devalued by that person, as if that person has slighted us. But when someone does care for us, we experience value and inner joy. That person has entered our world of experiences, failures and joys.

When our leader looks at us and establishes real eye-to-eye contact and asks, “How are you?” as more than a greeting or courtesy, how do we feel? Do



we not sense that he is treating us as a human being and not simply as an employee? He wants to hear from us and learn from our experiences. He wants to enter our story as he gives us his ear. He honors us by caring for our story.

Here is true honor, to honor another person by entering that person’s world.

**Here is true honor, to honor another person by entering that person’s world.**

This is the challenge for every leader: to care for the people he is leading by genuinely entering their stories and engaging with the issues they are dealing with. Not just leaders, but as we seek to develop healthy relationships with others, we need to learn the art of listening, asking questions and showing true interest in other people’s lives.

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**Questions to discuss:**

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- *As a leader or a manager, how can you honor others? How can you enter their stories?*
  - *Think of five specific ways that an organizational director can care for his personnel.*
- 

**How Leaders Can Close the Distance**

The challenge to close the distance, however, also includes practical managerial skills.

Leaders and managers need to engage very intentionally with their personnel. However, some directors feel that their honor rests in how much power they hold in their hands. They have little desire to close the distance and engage with their employees. Some leaders need to show that they are better than their personnel, and so it becomes threatening if staff show too much initiative. Leaders fear that if they allow or encourage too much participation, they may lose control of their own agendas.

Personnel in a project often struggle with relating to each other as a team. Ironically community-based societies often have difficulty developing healthy team life because of the honor-shame mindset. Because of the deep-seated struggle and competition for honor within a group, each member in a project or organization fears that the other members may get more recognition than they do. If someone has a better idea or moves ahead of the others, it means he has pushed the others back. It becomes a zero-sum relationship.

However, leaders that want to see their organizations grow do not want staff that are simply obedient to orders and loyal. Rather

they appreciate personnel who are proactive and keen to participate beyond the basic job description.

Here are a few practical ways for a leader to work with his staff and close the distance between him and his personnel as well as among the personnel themselves.

### ***Encourage ideas and initiatives***

Rather than simply telling personnel what they are supposed to do, a leader who is also a team-builder will encourage staff members to contribute ideas and suggestions on a new project.

Years ago, as I started a book publishing company in Afghanistan, my assistant was highly skilled in giving orders to staff. I called a meeting where I wanted to share with the staff my vision for good books for Afghanistan and ask for their ideas and input. I wanted their suggestions for books that would be good for the country. My assistant pulled me aside afterward and said, “Don’t tell them what your plans are. Just tell them what to do.”

This is the typical high power-distance where a leader keeps himself separated from his staff and often treats his staff with disdain.

However, personnel will become more motivated if they are encouraged to offer ideas and if they feel their ideas are listened to. Ideas from different individuals on staff should not compete with each other but should be held openly as positive contributions for the entire team. Ideas are not ways for staff to gain an upper hand; rather they are new possibilities for a better work environment and team performance.

It is helpful to have regular staff meetings where leaders not only speak *to* their staff but where they also hear *from* them. A leader cannot overestimate the power and value of listening to his

staff. This not only honors them, but it will in turn give honor to the leader.

### ***Ensure good three-way communication***

One of the basic problems in staff relationships is the lack of information and inadequate communication. Withholding information from staff keeps power with the leaders. On the other hand, when everyone knows what the organization is all about, the staff will experience a greater sense of belonging and ownership. This requires three-way communication:

- Leaders need to communicate with their staff. This again relates to distance. If staff does not know what their superiors are doing, they will lose confidence in them.
- The staff needs to report to their leaders. Leaders need to ensure that the staff *does* communicate with their superiors.
- Thirdly, the staff of one department needs to communicate with the staff of other departments. Departments often default to silo style of work. Each department is entrenched in their own world and cares little for the other departments. Again, staff struggle to gain honor for their own department and don't want other departments to get ahead of them and get more credit. However, the more everyone knows what the others are doing, the greater the sense that they are a team.

Leaders need to ensure this three-way communication is happening regularly.

### ***Be pro-active to everyone***

Because of a strong hierarchal culture, a leader may not be able to easily involve his staff in participatory management or



responsible initiatives. But this is no reason for abandoning staff to lounge around. There is little honor for a director when personnel are loafing at work. Or what should we say of the teacher who ignores students who are constantly loitering in the halls?

The director may need to give orders and clear instructions. He will then hold his staff accountable for carrying out his directions. He must ensure that the personnel are at work and that they have sufficient resources for their jobs.

All of this requires pro-active management by leaders. It means leaders must be involved in the lives of their staff. In short, leaders need to find multiple ways to reduce their distance from their staff.

## SELF-REFLECTION, EMOTIONS AND WEAKNESS

### *I'm not good enough, I'm not rich enough, I'm not smart enough*

In individualist cultures, people struggle with self-acceptance and self-esteem. They wonder if they're good enough. They feel weak and vulnerable. Brene Brown's famous Ted Talk, "The Power of Vulnerability" (2010) has garnered over 40 million views and is considered one of the top Ted Talks, as it resonated with Western culture. She spoke about the fear of being left out of the group and being disconnected.



And shame is really easily understood as the fear of

disconnection: Is there something about me that, if other people know it or see it, that I won't be worthy of connection?

... "I'm not good enough, ... I'm not thin enough, rich enough, beautiful enough, smart enough, promoted enough." The thing that underpinned this was excruciating vulnerability. ... I have a vulnerability issue. And I know that vulnerability is the core of shame and fear and our struggle for worthiness.<sup>19</sup>

In Brene's years of reflections and research, she concluded that we need to embrace vulnerability and struggle. She gave dignity to shame and weakness. This is who we are as human beings.

However, this can hardly be the case for the person of honor in an honor-shame environment. It is exactly what the honorable person needs to avoid. A Persian proverb says, "A man is he who flexes his muscles and keeps his mouth shut." He must always present himself strong and confident.

### **How Important is an Image of Strength**

In the traditional honor-shame world, qualities such as courage, self-confidence and generosity have been standard codes of honor. Furthermore, the traditional heroic warriors presented a public image of complete self-control. The heroic Rustam of ancient Iran should never reveal pain nor allow his face to be 'yellowed' or shed tears.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Brene Brown, "The Power of Vulnerability."

[https://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_vulnerability/transcript?language=en#t-1196304](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability/transcript?language=en#t-1196304) accessed May 21, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> In one story in the *Shahnama*, the great challenge was to defeat Rustam. If the enemy could not do it on the battlefield, then they should do it by breaking his 'face.' The

We deeply admire both ancient and modern stories of daring champions. We enjoy stories of heroes who embrace all odds against them, dare to face great dangers and endure pain for a noble cause and do not grumble or whine. Yet, at times we wonder how much of this bravado may be a veneer.

The modern stories reflect a tension as courageous heroes struggle with weakness and experience pain. What happens when the honorable man faces loss? What should he do with failure or fear in his life? Can he admit it to himself and others? Is it possible to mix weakness with honor?

The confident hero in the well-known, modern Iranian short story, “Dash Akul,” could never reveal his feelings of love in public. As the local honorable vigilante, he had agreed to be the executor of the will of a dying man. But alas, Dash Akul falls in love with the dying man’s beautiful daughter. However, he cannot betray the trust the dying man has given to him. But then at night, he would wipe away his tears as he struggled with a hidden love that he knew he could never reach.

It was then that the true Dash Akul, the real Dash Akul with all his feelings and desires came out of



enemy king charged his warrior to do whatever he could to fill Rustam’s face with shame and get him to shed tears. The opponent and Rustam sparred with a hand-crushing duel to see who was able to endure pain without any visible sign of failure. Rustam proved himself to be above pain and concern.

He crushed the hand of the elephant one, from pain [Rustam’s] hand turned all blue He didn’t grimace and kept anxiety far from him, his valor shone like the sun.

بیفشرد چنگ سرافراز بیل، شد از درد چنگش بگردار نیل / نیبچید و اندیشه زو دور داشت بمردی ز خورشید منشور داشت.

the shell of codes of conduct and expectations which society had woven around him and the ways of thinking which he had learned since a child. Here [at night] he freely held Marjan close to his heart.<sup>21</sup>

If maintaining a good public face or image is essential, we will be pressured to perform positively regardless of the situation. We will make it appear as if we are performing well. An outward image of success and words of bravado become the veil that hides the inner world of suffering and weakness.

But an even deeper censorship is self-denial and self-deception. As the man keeps his personal life hidden, he loses touch even with himself. Not only does he deny his pain and weakness to the public, but he will also deny it to himself. He believes he is the person that he has profited in public. Denying that he is weak means that he must convince himself and others that he is strong. In so doing, he deceives himself.

Has this man of honor been true to himself? Is he even aware of what he is doing to himself?

## **Developing Self-Awareness (Emotional Intelligence)**

### ***Tell me the difference between heaven and hell!***

A Samurai wrestler asked a monk, “Tell me the difference

<sup>21</sup> Sadeq Hidayat, *Dash Akul*, 54.

همانوقت بود که داش آکل حقیقی، داش آکل طبیعی با تمام احساسات و هوا و هوس، بدون رودر بایستی از تو قشری که آداب و رسوم جامعه بدور او بسته بود، از توی افکاری که از بچگی باو تلقین شده بود، بیرون میآمد و از ادانه مرجان را تنگ در آغوش می کشید،

In the story, Haji Samad, a wealthy landholder had willed his estate and family responsibilities to Dash Akul. When the landlord died, Dash Akul had no choice but to accept the responsibility, almost as a sacred duty. He knew that “if a girl is entrusted to him for his responsibility, to take her for his wife would be to take advantage of his privilege ...” It was this dilemma that became his undoing.

between heaven and hell.” The monk responded, “You would never get it. It’s a waste of my time talking to you.” The Samurai flew into a rage at the insult, ready to tear the monk apart. The monk said quietly, “Well, just to let you know, that is hell.” Suddenly the Samurai quieted down and bowed in confession as he realized that his emotions had overpowered him. He stepped back, breathed deeply and spoke, “I am so sorry, sir. I wasn’t thinking.” The monk smiled and answered, “Now, that is heaven.”<sup>22</sup>

The Samurai had become aware of his own emotions and realized how uncontrolled rage was ruling his life and ruining him and others.

This awareness of our own feelings is like a ‘second-self’ within ourselves that watches us do what we do. This second self feels what we are feeling. As human beings, we have the ability to examine ourselves, to look at ourselves from outside ourselves, and “hover above [ourselves] ... aware of what is happening rather than being immersed and lost in it.”<sup>23</sup>

Take, for example, the emotion of anger. Self-awareness helps us recognize that this emotion is taking root in our hearts and wants to control our behavior. We can talk to ourselves and address this emotion. It’s like a mother telling her child, “Don’t go across the street, son!” We first acknowledge that we are getting upset. Secondly, we grab ourselves by the collar, so to speak. We pay attention to what is happening to ourselves. And thirdly, we hold the emotion in our hands and speak directly to it, “I will not allow the spirit of anger to ruin my personal peace and

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<sup>22</sup> Story from Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence – why it can matter more than IQ* (Bantam Books, 2005), 46.

<sup>23</sup> *Emotional Intelligence*, 47.

destroy relationships with others.”

Without self-awareness we easily become weak and childish, swamped or engulfed by our feelings. We allow our moods and emotions to take charge.

Daniel Goleman popularized the concept of ‘emotional intelligence’ (also labeled as EQ in comparison to IQ – intelligence quotient, that is, a person’s mental reasoning ability). He compared the two intelligences and discovered that often successful people may not necessarily have high IQ – an honor we think is so prestigious. Ironically, people with extremely high IQs are often not very successful in life. They may have learned to manage the most complicated mathematical equations, but they have not learned to manage their own emotions.

Emotional intelligence means to understand our feelings and recognize the impact that our emotions have on ourselves and those around us. Once we are aware of our feelings, we have a chance to manage them effectively. Furthermore, we are then able to understand other people’s emotions as well and subsequently be able to relate to others more cordially.

Goleman presents four levels of emotional intelligence.

- Self-awareness – looking at ourselves from outside ourselves
- Emotional management – addressing and handling our emotions
- Social awareness – becoming aware of other people’s feelings
- Relational management – relating to others with healthy social skills

Healthy emotional management, then, helps us to develop healthy interpersonal relationships. When we nurture healthy

relationships with those around us, we will gain and maintain more honor.

When we nurture healthy relationships with those around us, we will gain and maintain more honor.

### **Learning Self-Reflection**

It would be easy to think that our focus on emotional intelligence is a modern phenomenon, as another form of pop psychology. However, long before modern individualism and personal choice became the norm in egalitarian Western societies, ancient sages and prophets have spoken about this.

#### ***Do we know ourselves?***

The Greek philosopher Socrates popularized the concept, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” He is also credited for the simple axiom, “Know thyself.” A well-known hadith says, “Know yourself, then know God.”

The question is: do we *really* know ourselves? As we stated above, we can live in self-denial and self-deception, biased about ourselves, unaware of how our emotions affect our actions. An ancient prophet said this about our human condition, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”

Can a person of honor see himself and analyze his inner world? How can he become aware of both his emotions and actions – see himself, take off his hat and put it on the table and examine himself so that he becomes aware of the consequences of his thoughts, words and actions?

How can we engage in honest self-reflection?

### *Develop the conscience*

Conscience is a way to help us understand and listen to our inner world. Through our conscience we nurture self-reflection. We discussed earlier how conscience can be seen as the inner voice that speaks to the self. It's best to see the conscience as a combination of several voices: God's voice, the voice of natural law, the voice of those around us (society). A major challenge in self-reflection is to be able to discern between these different voices.

We can also look at the conscience at different levels.

- The first level is animal conscience when a person simply does the right thing and follows rules in order to avoid physical punishment.
- A second level is conventional conscience when a person makes decisions and follows rules because this is expected from them. It is the voice of society that directs his path and he follows it for immediate interest.
- A third level is principle conscience. At this level, the individual makes a choice because he knows it is right regardless of what the outside world says about it.

In self-reflection, we train ourselves to listen to ourselves and to God and become aware of the people around us. We talk all three 'voices' into consideration and through this, develop a sensitive conscience.



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**Questions to discuss:**

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- *How can you develop your conscience? Who will you listen to?*
  - *Is it better to listen to the voice of one's inner conscience rather than to the voices of people? If so, why do so many choose to listen to the voice of others?*
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**Develop double vision**

Most people don't take the effort to think. We may think that we are thinking, but we may simply be reflecting what everyone else is thinking. Self-reflection, however, calls for an intentional thinking *life* or what we call double vision. This means that we consider both sides of an issue and seek to understand the issue from the other person's point of view.

There are two extremes that we are faced with:

- To never listen to and always disagree with the opinions of people.
- To always listen to and agree with the opinions of others.

Sometimes it is good to agree with others and at times it is not good. The challenge is to know when to agree and when to disagree and when to refrain from judgment.

Some people are afflicted with a stubborn and obstinate spirit as if honor comes from always being right. Even when they know they are wrong, they will still maintain they are right. An angry husband once told me, "I will never ask for forgiveness, even when I'm in the wrong."

Other people always listen to and agree with the opinions of

those around them. They are afflicted by a need to nod in agreement to everyone, lest they offend someone.

What happens when others disagree with us? Are we able to see the other side?

To be able to see the other side requires intentional thinking, as an act of the will. This means that we step out of our world and enter the other person's world. Once we are in that other person's world, we try to look at and reflect on issues around us from that person's viewpoint. This is double vision.

### ***Practice journaling***

A practical way to help strengthen the art of self-reflection is to write down our thoughts. In journaling, we express our feelings on paper and write about our experiences, failures and fears



and successes and joys. We process the lessons we are learning with pen and paper (or computer).

Such self-reflection can be very liberating because through self-thought we can become aware of the problems that we may have created for ourselves and those around us. We become honest with ourselves. We face ourselves directly and talk to and with ourselves.

Yes, in public we may be forced to censor our failures and fears in order to maintain some form of public honor. However, the journal becomes our confidant (ham-dam) where we 'talk' about how we feel and openly express our concerns, fears, joys and doubts.

Journaling becomes a confessional, where we are free to admit our failures and fears without shame. This gives us the courage to admit them to others. The Afghan writer Khalid Hosseini, well-known for his best-seller novel *The Kite Runner*, uses 'self-reflection' in his novels. Such self-reflection gives a person the courage to acknowledge his wrong to the person he has wronged. In Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the callous and wealthy Jalil forces his illegitimate (*harami*) daughter to marry an older and undesirable man. Later in life, he writes her a long letter which she can read only after Jalil has died.



I regret that I did not make you a daughter to me. ... For what? Fear of losing face? Of staining my so-called good name? How little those things matter to me now after all the loss, all the terrible things I have seen in this cursed war ... so forgive me, Mariam, forgive me. forgive me, forgive me.<sup>24</sup>



It seemed that Jalil could not face the consequences of his failure in life. But how effective is a confessional after one has

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<sup>24</sup> Khalid Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (Riverhead Books, 2007), 359. In the lengthy novel, *Shawhar-e Ahu Khanum*, the main character Sayyed Meran writes a lengthy letter to his estranged wife, in which he admits that his life has been ruined. The tone of this letter, however, is less confessional. He still seems to justify himself.

died, genuine as it may be? Nonetheless, it is a step towards recognizing one's own failures in life.

### **Managing Emotions**

From self-awareness, we move on to emotional management, the ability to monitor and give direction to our emotions and impulses. This means that we not only pay attention to our feelings and analyze why we react the way we do, but we are able to adjust our emotions to the circumstances around us.

#### ***I lost my temper!***

We may say, "I *lost* my temper," or "Wow, did *he* ever make me angry!"

Both sentences may show some self-awareness, "I know I got angry." However, we betray a lack of emotional management with what we've just said. When we say that someone made us angry, we have unwittingly placed our emotions into the hands of the other person. We have become the victim and allowed the other person to decide how we should feel.

Yes, the other person does frustrate us and speaks or acts contrary to what we expect, but when we manage our emotions, we will not allow another person to control how we feel. Another person cannot make us angry! Rather we allow it to happen.

On a personal note, I remember, with regret, the times I 'lost my temper' and became angry in arguments with family and friends. Later, as I reflected upon these times, I experienced shame. I see there was no honor in becoming angry. When I 'lose my temper,' I lose my honor and gain nothing. I need to manage my anger.

We do become angry. When something negative happens,

perhaps the food is too salty, or it is not salty enough. Perhaps our colleague arrives late, or a co-worker forgets to pay back the loan he had promised, or someone criticizes us. When something like this happens, we feel a rush of emotions flood over us. Sadly, we don't stop to think about where these emotions have come from or what we should do with them.

The ancient Roman philosopher Seneca called anger a form of insanity because the angry person does not think about what he is saying or doing. He loses control of reason and self-thought. He speaks rapidly, calls down God's judgment on the other person or even damns himself. To speak without thinking is truly folly, if not insane.

Later the angry person may apologize and explain that he lost control. If he 'lost control' who was controlling him? Does this mean that someone else was in charge of his emotions?

Anger and fear are two emotions that tend to make us weaker and less honorable. When we face stress or something we disagree with, glands in our body release hormones so that our heart will pump more blood, preparing our muscles to run faster or to hit harder. Our body gets ready for the fight or flight responses. As more blood goes to the muscles instead of to the brain, we will not be able to think or speak as clearly as before. We slide toward folly.

Here is the question: Is anger involuntary, like a reflexive reaction? Or does one become angry because of the way one thinks, or rather, because of the way one does not think?

The emotion of anger is like an inner smoke detector. When a detector senses smoke, it 'realizes' something is wrong, and so the sound goes off as a warning. That sound, however, does not stop the smoke or fire. Someone must come intentionally to put out

the fire.

When we sense something is wrong, our heartbeat goes up, our nerves stand on edge – there is ‘smoke’ around. Now, how will we respond to this unease? How will we handle this increased heart pulse? Will we scream or lose control of our thoughts and words? This loss of control in the face of a problem is acting out in anger. The honorable way is for the second self to step in intentionally and manage the ‘smoke’ emotion and put it out. Even though we may feel very angry, we manage to keep our nerves calm.

### ***Think first. Manage your anger***

There is a difference between feeling angry and allowing this anger to take over.

It is good to analyze how anger works so that we can manage it better. As human beings, we have a wide range of feelings such as anger, joy, jealousy, peace and sadness. Some emotions are pleasant, others are not.

What do we do when we sense we are becoming angry? If we do not manage this emotion properly, it can become destructive and as we said above, we not only lose our temper, we lose our minds and our honor. We will say things and do things that we regret later, but it will be too late.

When you feel anger taking over your emotions, pull back. It is time you take control. Take a deep breath and breathe deeply again. This releases your tense nerves and gives you time to think before you speak.

Managing one’s anger, however, takes much more than a few breaths. Convince yourself that raising your voice or yelling in

response to someone you disagree with only worsens the situation. It will hurt both you and the other person.



Ask yourself, “What makes me angry?” There may be certain triggers or hot spots that stir your anger such as debates on politics. When you are about to enter a discussion on politics pull yourself away or tell yourself, “Okay, I’ll talk politics, but I will not allow myself to become angry. I’ll talk gently, quietly.” Often it is best to stay away from situations or discussions that frustrate you or make you angry.

Do you have a confidant (*ham-dam*) with whom you can share your frustrations openly? It is helpful to acknowledge your pain and frustrations, instead of living in self-denial and ignoring that which eats away at you.

Are you able to listen to the other side? This helps you understand the other side and you learn that your anger was unnecessary.

We need double vision in order to manage our anger.

### ***Ask for forgiveness***

Above all, can you ask for forgiveness? There are times when we need to acknowledge our mistakes and sincerely apologize.

This takes huge inner strength. We don’t think anyone needs to claim that he is always right. However, can a person of honor acknowledge that he is wrong?

Recall the movie, *Kabhi Khushi, Kabhi Gham*. Ten years after Yash had banned Rahul from their home because he had shamed them by marrying outside the family class, the family unit lay

shattered. Yash's heart-broken wife addresses her husband,

You know how Mother always says that a husband is a god. No matter what he says. No matter what he thinks. He's always right. ... But look at the mess. Our family is shattered. Then how does a husband become a god? My husband is just a husband, not a god.

We may not compare a husband to a god, but is a husband or father always right? When his wife confronts him, Yash tries to respond, but this time she won't allow it. She made her point and now he must reflect on it.

Later that evening Rahul enters the large family hall to see if he can make amends. Will his father, now aged and grey-haired, receive Rahul? Or will the father lash at him again, forever sealing the pain of separation? Yash doesn't move. But, then, aware that Rahul is in the hall, the elderly man slowly turns towards his son, takes a step and walks toward him. Note that the father takes the initiative.

As Yash starts to talk, he breaks down. In a rare scene of confession and brokenness, Yash, a man with status and prestige, weeps before his son and bares his soul. With his head bowed, words cross his lips that are next to impossible for a patriarch to utter, "I have grown old, my son. At least forgive me now. At least forgive me now, at least now."

The younger brother Rohan watches the scene. Yash reaches out to Rohan and they come together as a threesome. Yash admits to Rohan his own wrong.

Come here, my son. At times the youngsters in the house show the right way to the elders in the family. I kept you away from your brother for years. Please forgive me if you



can. Forgive me, forgive me.



In heavy sobs, Yash is about to fall over. The three embrace in a spirit of reconciliation. We see the father admit his mistakes. He acknowledges that elders can learn from the young.

Is this not truly honorable? To reach the point of acknowledging that we have done wrong and then taking the step to ask for forgiveness requires a genuine spirit of brokenness and humility – before Almighty God and before people.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- *Why are we afraid or reluctant to ask for forgiveness?*
  - *In light of the human quest for honor and the good name, what can we learn from this scene where the father asks for forgiveness?*
  - *What is more difficult – to ask for forgiveness from someone, or to forgive someone? Why?*
- 

### ***What is in your emotional cup?***

It's helpful to look at our emotions as a cup that fills up and either boils over with bitterness or overflows with joy. If our

healthy desires are met, our emotional cup fills up with positive feelings. We overflow with peace, happiness and good expressions. We relate positively to others.



However, if our healthy desires are not met, our emotional cup will fill up with negative feelings such as fear, shame, guilt, worry and grudges. Out of this cup will spill ugly things like bad words, curses, depression, insomnia, anxieties and even violence.

The challenge is to fill our inner life (emotional cup) with healthy emotions and experiences. Can we be inwardly strong enough so that when the environment around us is unstable, our cup is filled with peaceful emotions? If our workplace or family life is unpleasant, we need to keep these negative storms from entering our inner life.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- ***Discuss with your colleagues how you can fill your inner world (emotional cup) with healthy experiences.***
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### **Developing Social Awareness**

It is not enough to feel our own feelings and manage them well. In a healthy environment, we need to become aware of the people around us and how they feel. A healthy person *sees* other people and *feels* their feelings. This is social awareness, to understand the other person's emotions and then respond appropriately to those emotions.

Shaykh Saadi's famous poem relates to the need to become socially aware.

Human beings are members of each other,  
coming from one divine pearl in creation.

If one member suffers in pain one day,  
the other members also experience affliction.

If you have no sympathy for another  
person's struggles, you do not deserve to be called a human  
being.<sup>25</sup>



It is human to be socially aware. If a person cannot feel the pain of another human, that person is not a human, as the Persian poet says. Such a person is inhumane.

### ***Some people are tone-deaf***

Some people only see themselves and are unable to see others and their point of view. Such people are tone-deaf because they cannot hear the views of those around them.

Goleman says, those “who have no idea what they feel themselves, are at a complete loss when it comes to knowing what anyone else around them is feeling. They are emotionally tone-deaf. ... Confused about their own feelings, [they] are equally bewildered when other people express their feelings to them.”<sup>26</sup>

Without healthy social awareness, we will not be able to have healthy conversations and good interpersonal relationships. We will not know how to enter another person's world and care for

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که در آفرینش ز یک گوهرند  
دگر عضوها را نماند قرار  
نشاید که نامت نهند آدمی

بی آدم اعضای یکدیگر اند  
چو عضوی به درد آورد، روزگار  
ت کز محنت دیگران بی غمی

<sup>26</sup> *Emotional Intelligence*, 96.

him. We become self-destructive because we are absorbed with ourselves.

Here then is a social definition of cruelty. A person becomes cruel because he cannot feel someone else's pain. This lack of empathy becomes the root of much crime, injustice, rape, early child marriage and abuse in homes.

When a person hurts, abuses or tortures someone else and remains oblivious of the other person's pain, he is cruel.

When we become aware of how other people feel and think, we will value them and begin to care for them. We will have healthy and honorable interpersonal relationships.

This leads to true honor.

**When we become aware of how other people feel and think, we will value them and begin to care for them. We will have healthy and honorable interpersonal relationships.**

**This leads to true honor.**

### ***Overflowing with compassion***

We believe in God the merciful and compassionate One. When we say God is *rahman wa rahim* (merciful and compassionate), does it not mean that Almighty God sees the human situation? God feels our needs and genuinely cares for us. And so, when a human being overflows with compassion and care for others, he is pursuing a divine path. In a small way, he is imitating how Almighty God relates to humans.

When we become aware of other people's emotions, we begin to think of them. We put ourselves into their world and want the best for them because we see ourselves in their situation. We, of course, continue to care for ourselves, but as we step into their

boots, we practice the golden rule, “do unto others as we would do to ourselves.”

Another way to explain compassion is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. It is normal to want the best for ourselves. Self-interest is human. However, if we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, we will want good for our neighbor as well.

But who is our neighbor? We can easily excuse or absolve ourselves by thinking that the ‘other person’ is not our neighbor. The best way to respond to such an excuse is to ask ourselves whether we are good neighbors. In other words, are we neighborly to those around us? Do we wish good for them?

This ability to know how another person feels is relevant in many areas of life.

For example, consider someone who is in business and wants to make a deal with a client. An honorable salesman will think about his customers and want what is best for them. He wants his customers to experience a good deal so that they will return for more business. Honoring someone in this way becomes a mutual experience.

In a romantic relationship, the true lover truly cares for his beloved (friend) rather than simply pursuing his own wants and pleasures. Genuine love means to sincerely want the best for the other person. Such love and care do not take advantage of the other person.

An honorable husband needs to feel his wife’s feelings. Similarly, an honorable wife will ask her husband what his thoughts are or how he feels about a matter. In the family, parents should feel their children’s joys or sorrows.

A politician receives admiration from his supporters, but we

know how easily people turn against government officials. As soon as they find out that a member of parliament or any powerful official is in it for himself and not for the people in his area, they lose interest in him. No one can genuinely serve others if he is not aware of their situation.

Caring goes far beyond intellectual insight or public rhetoric. The intellect expresses itself with words. However, empathy and compassion go beyond words. It is not what you say, but how you say it and how you put words into action.

We express empathy not by talking about our emotions or feelings towards others, but by putting compassion into action. It may start with our tone of voice, gestures and facial expression, but we empathize with our actions, by genuinely entering the other person's world.

True honor, then, is to be socially aware of others and to care for them.

**True honor, then, is to be socially aware of others and to care for them.**

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **HONOR AND FAMILY LIFE**

I gave a short talk on “Honor and Gender Issues” for International Woman’s Day<sup>1</sup> at a college in Kabul. After briefly highlighting a few literary texts that reflect on honor and family matters, I challenged the audience with this question, “*What is more important, a man’s honor or a woman’s longings and desires?*” I concluded that Woman’s Day and honor issues need to begin in the home, around the dinner table (*dester-khwan*). Although the talk was much too short to do justice to this huge issue, later the dean of the college affirmed this reference to the home and added, “Yes, we men sacrifice women for the sake of our honor.”

Here is the irony and indeed, a dilemma. There is no real honor without family honor, but again and again we see that ‘men of honor’ struggle with honoring the women in their family. Why is it that an honorable leader finds it difficult, and even

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<sup>1</sup> The Soviet Union made March 8 a national holiday in 1917 for women’s freedoms. Subsequently, many countries adopted this holiday as well.



shameful to honor his wife?

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- ***Which is more important for men, family honor or honoring women? Why do men struggle with honoring their wives?***
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## **HIGH VIEW OF FAMILY**

### **Identity and Belonging in Family**

Football fans will remember the red flag in the final minutes of the 2006 World Cup Football game. It was Zinedine



Zadine's final game. One of the world's best football players, he and the French team were relishing in a win against Italy. But with only ten minutes left in the game, Zadine walked off the field in disgrace, his head fallen. He had deliberately headbutted an opposing player in total defiance of football protocol. His championship lay shattered in shame. Or was it?

***What he said about my mum, my sister is too painful to repeat!***

Many fans, to this day, see Zadine as a hero and his headbutting as an act of true honor. In an interview a few days after the game, Zadine said, "What he said about my mum, my sister ... too painful to repeat ...I am a man before anything

else.”<sup>2</sup> For Zidane, who grew up in a traditional Algerian family in France, the dignity of his mother and sister was of more value than the World Cup. Zidane’s core identity was not based on being an all-star football player (achieved honor), but in belonging to his family.

Zidane’s reaction reflects the high view of the family in honor-shame societies. He said in an interview with Esquire magazine, “I have an affinity with the Arabic world. I have it in my blood, via my parents. I’m very proud of being French, but also very proud of having these roots and this diversity.”<sup>3</sup>

### *Everyone knows your name*

Neighborhoods, schools, and religious centers offer some form of group cohesion. However, more than any other social unit, the family unit provides a person with a much stronger sense of belonging and value. Here in the family, you have a name, and everyone knows your name. Everyone is faithful and loyal to the family name, which means that ideally, everyone is faithful and loyal to one another.

The family, including the extended family, is the basic element affirming human significance.

This is one of the highest honors in life – to know that in our family, we have real value. Here we belong, we are accepted and experience significance.

**This is one of the highest honors in life – to know that in our family, we have real value. Here we belong, we are accepted and experience significance.**

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fESPK2cmjpY> Accessed January 16, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zinedine\\_Zidane#Early\\_life\\_and\\_career](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zinedine_Zidane#Early_life_and_career) Accessed May 12, 2020.

This is where a person can ‘let his hair down’ so to speak. We do not need to put on an air of pretense and wonder what they think of us. We are accepted into this group. We know the horror of being left outside one’s honor group. Even though families have their quarrels and fights, a family member is rarely ostracized by the family. Here along with others in the family unit, everyone belongs. Each person is connected to something bigger and more meaningful than just themselves. Therefore, we matter!

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- ***How do you remember this world champion football game in July 2006? Would you agree with what Zidane did?***
  - ***How important or significant is your family to you?***
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### **Security and Support in the Family**

The family provides more than value and significance.

When a baby is born, it is helpless. In fact, a human baby is much more dependent on its mother than most newborn animals. Without the support and protection of its mother, no infant could survive. As a baby grows, it faces a complicated society and a confusing world. In this chaos, the home, especially the parents, are a child’s best security and support for direction into an unknown future.

This support goes far beyond the mother’s milk and food, clothing and shelter until a child reaches maturity. This support continues as the parents give direction, as they (and sometimes grandparents) decide on their children’s future, careers and

spouse selection and even the names of their children's children. The sons normally continue their father's trade or career.

As the child, notably the son, develops and matures with support from his family, he eventually begins his own family unit, without cutting himself from parental support. His unit forms a sub-unit within the extended family unit. The mature child now provides support to his parents. As a middle-aged father, he will pro-actively care for his elderly parents as well as his own children. Even though this care can be a real burden for an adult son, he has no choice but to do so. Interestingly, this support becomes full circle as his own children ensure support for him and their mother.

In most Western countries as well as the former Soviet Union, governments have developed a social welfare system where the state (supposedly) provides support for all its citizens. This takes children 'off the hook', so to speak, as the government social system becomes the parent and cares for the elderly. From a communal perspective, it looks as if children leave their parents to grow old and fade away, out of sight and out of mind, with only an occasional, perhaps once-a-week or once-a-month visit.

All is not so dismal, though. Many seniors enjoy the company of other seniors rather than having to live with the constant noise and bedlam of their grandchildren. Moreover, grandchildren relish their weekly or bi-weekly visits to grandparents. For young children, nothing is more exciting than sleepovers with grandma and grandpa. So, while in the West, the social welfare system, increased personal wealth and individualism have made the multi-generation home unnecessary, many families experience the pleasure of the 'family gathering' and the larger extended family.

In many honor-shame societies, even if the government provides a certain amount of pension, parents are assured that reliable and moral support comes from their children. As parents ensure security for their young children, adult children ensure security for their parents. Children consider this an honor – to honor their parents by caring for them in this way. Hence, families experience well-rounded security.

However, to realize such security, the family needs to stay together. Everyone's future security depends on strong family cohesion. Hence, the obsession with the family name and family interconnection. Zadine's behavior in the football game reflects this.

When someone faces trouble, needs to borrow money, or is sick, the person will turn to the family. They know that here they will not be turned down. They don't need to fight government bureaucracy, or wait their turn, or hear the words, "Sorry, no room!" This is indeed an honor, to experience open, welcoming support from others in the family.

Family security and support is much more than financial security. Family is a sacred place, almost a divine sanctuary, which must be defended at all costs. A scholar on Iranian history, Nikki Keddie says, "The home has become a last line of defense against a West that has won out in political and economic spheres."<sup>4</sup>

This shrine of honor cannot be stained or shamed.

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<sup>4</sup> Nikki Keddie, *Women in the Middle East – Past and Present* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 2 and 13.

### *Questions to discuss:*

- *Should children provide pension and support for their parents, or is this the responsibility of the social welfare system?*
- *In honor-shame societies, adult children are obligated to submit to and take care of their elderly parents. Is this an honor or a burden?*

### **A Multi-Generational Setting**

In Islamabad, Pakistan our next door neighbors lived as three generations in one courtyard, grandparents, several married siblings and their children. We would see the grandfather walk with his three grandchildren to the market and buy each one of them an ice-cream. The children adored *Baba*. He was like a loving king to them. Their father, although he was 40 years old, continued to respect and even obey his 65-year-old father, who was long retired by now.

### *The love of honor never grows old*

Grandfather enjoys his old age, not because he is productive or useful in the marketplace, but because of the attention and honor he receives from his married children and young grandchildren.



In such a setting

aging brings honor and delight. An ancient Greek sage said this of old age: “The love of honor never grows old, and in the useless time of old age the greatest pleasure is not, as some say, in gaining money, but in being honored.”<sup>5</sup>

The honor of respect that elders carry in their old age means that they are accepted and appreciated for who they are. No one questions them. As elders, they have a huge influence. Children, young and old, will listen to and heed their elderly parents’ advice. Their word holds sway. Furthermore, their delight rests in the reality that their lives continue through the next generations, in the lives of their children and grandchildren. This is their legacy.

As for mothers and grandmothers, not having enjoyed public praise in their younger years, they now receive praise from children, especially their sons. This unqualified devotion that many sons give to their mothers creates an awkward conflict of loyalty.

### **Roles and Gender Clarity**

In traditional Asian and Middle Eastern societies, men and women know their distinct roles. Men rule the public domain, while women remain private, where they rule the domestic sphere.

Of course, this is a stereotypical description. With increased urbanization and the modern digital society, these distinctions have become blurred. Many women personalities in honor-shame

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<sup>5</sup> See Plutarch, *Moralia*.

[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/An\\_seni\\_respublica\\_gerenda\\_sit\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/An_seni_respublica_gerenda_sit*.html)

cultures have considerable influence in the public domain.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, the traditional division of labor and location based on gender is self-understood in the traditional setting, and it is not necessarily sexist. Each gender has their spheres of access and places where they are restricted. “In this world of separated space, men have free and unlimited access to the public sphere, while women are given limited access. Conversely, women are given free and unlimited access to the domestic sphere, while men are given limited access.”<sup>7</sup>

A curtain (*purda*) separates the public from the private. Modesty (*haya*) is essential in maintaining the two spheres. When women go out in public, they must carry the curtain with them – the veil. Moreover, men must keep their gaze down and women must not draw attention to themselves. The Koran has laid this out clearly and this text is well-known.

Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them. Lo! Allah is aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands ... And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment ...<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Khanum Dr. Shagufah, Director of the Department of Persian Literature at the National Institution of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan, who supported me in my graduate studies in the late 1980s. Also, Khanum Dr. Raihana Popalzai, Chair of the Women’s Council of Kabul University, who later became Vice Chancellor of Kabul University, facilitated my leadership training seminars for numerous years, 2005 to 2012. She believed in capacity building for students.

<sup>7</sup> Pat Kraye, *My Mother’s Sons* (William Carey Library, 2013) Kindle edition, Loc. 393.

<sup>8</sup> Quran 24:30-31.



Honor is directly related to maintaining this separation between the two genders and how the two genders relate to each other and who can be seen together in public. Men and women visiting with each other is a controversial issue in many honor-shame cultures.

In the Western world, however, gender issues have gone very differently. Men and women are not supposed to be different. Girls should not feel strange among boys and boys should not be different from girls. We are supposed to be the same and odd as it seems, nowadays, in some circles, gender is not supposed to be based on one's biological hormones and organs.

But this does not work. The two genders are different from each other. To consider gender distinction as a mere social construct and created by human cultures blurs the diverse worlds of male and female and the honor that each gender can experience in their special roles.

We need to celebrate gender clarity as honorable and rooted in the natural order of things and as God-given. The distinction between boys and girls is good and it is this distinction that provides the basis for marriage, the union of a man and a woman. Gender clarity is a blessing, not a problem. The problem is gender discrimination when one gender is deemed less worthy than the other. In other words, when women are seen as less honorable and less intelligent than men. It is this patriarchal mindset that is the shame.

## **DILEMMAS OF THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY**

Although the traditional extended family provides tremendous stability, we need to ask the question: Is the traditional family a happy one? If it is stable and secure, at what

expense? And do the members of the family really experience value and honor in their homes?

### **Where Fathers Rule**

In ancient Roman society, fathers ruled as kings over their homes. They could even sentence their children to death. The Chinese compared fathers to an emperor. In ancient and medieval cultures around the world, a father held sovereign power over the family.

Male power and authority were always equated with honor, and it remains the case in traditional honor-shame societies to this day. The family with an authoritative father appears stable from the outside. The children give honor to the father so everyone can hold their heads high in the community. But is the outwardly stable family a peaceful haven?

### ***I don't have a single, happy memory of my father***

Many Middle Eastern short story writers and film producers have reflected on the other side of the so-called secure family. Sadly, but true, we often hear of belligerent, angry fathers. Not infrequently someone from the Middle East has confided in me, "I don't have a single, happy memory of my father."

The prolific Afghan writer, Rahnoward Zaryab profiles an angry father who neglects to take care of the walls around their house, but constantly shouts at his family and fights with the neighbor. Eventually, the walls crumble and to everyone's horror, one child lies buried underneath the wall. The walls become a metaphor of the father's angry spirit and his domineering control that has silenced the child.

Especially in modern urban settings, we see how family

restrictions clash with many other values. The father's rule limits the children's freedoms and keeps them from pursuing their own desires. As the children grow up, they want to decide on their lives for themselves, whom to marry and what career to choose.

The discussion in the section on honor and power-distance directly relates to the father-family relationship. The father feels he must secure his honor by being a strong, controlling leader. That is what he has learned from his father and others around him. Is it possible for a father to maintain his role as a confident, honorable leader in the home but, at the same time, remove the restrictive walls and gently and genuinely care for his family? In other words, can we bring strong confidence and genuine care together?

Is it possible for a father to maintain his role as a confident, honorable leader in the home but, at the same time, remove the restrictive walls and gently and genuinely care for his family?

### ***Questions to discuss:***

- *While we should honor our fathers, should a father have the right to rule his family?*
- *How should a father relate to his family, to his wife and children?*

### **The 'Garden-View' of Marriage**

The concept of honor in traditional honor-shame societies is not only rooted in power and authority, but it is also patriarchal and sexist. The male rules and holds the honor in the family. We need to explore this briefly.

### ***Why is female chastity so essential for male honor?***

A man's wife and his daughters, indeed all females in the family, know that they are the means to enhance male honor in public. They carry the male's honor in their bodies. That is why female behavior is so very important.

Since the 1960s, with the widespread sexual revolution, Western societies have thrown off the traditional values of sexual propriety within the bounds of family structure. While sexual boundaries have been challenged since time immemorial and various elitist groups have 'privileged' themselves with so-called sexual freedoms, for the average honor-shame family the standard of virginity for girls before marriage and chastity for all women is an absolute. The honorable man of the household must ensure that all women in his 'domain' are chaste and upright so that he can maintain a good name in society. One Pakistani anthropologist states, "The chastity and good name of a woman are the most sensitive points of honour in Pukhtun society ... a woman's acts reflect her husband's status and honour."<sup>9</sup>

We need to ask ourselves, why has female chastity been so essential for male honor?

In honor-shame societies, a man continues his reputation through his public deeds and his seed (that is, his posterity), specifically his sons. This becomes the basis of the patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal worldview. Without sons, a man's good name would not continue. The purpose of marriage is to procreate sons so he can continue his reputation in society. It is the womb of the woman by which he bears a son. The woman is seen as a garden whose body belongs to the man and whose main function in life is to bear fruit, that is, to produce a son for her

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<sup>9</sup> Akbar S. Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society* (Routledge, 2012), 202.

husband.<sup>10</sup> This garden-like womb must not be soiled by another gardener, for if it is, the identity of the child will be uncertain. Jafri says, "Purity of bloodline bestows honour and this explains the onus on the chastity of women."<sup>11</sup>

Although the in-depth study on marriage by John and Vera Mace, *Marriage, East and West*, is somewhat dated and does not discuss Muslim cultures, the similarities are striking and relevant. It is worth quoting this lengthy section to explain the garden view of marriage.

The all-important function of the woman [is] to give her husband sons. A man wanted sons above all else, but he wanted his own sons, not those of some other man! The womb in which he planted his seed must not be contaminated by any alien seed. This might lead to falsification of the family line, which would bring down upon all concerned the curse of the ancestors.

A man, therefore, was entitled to exclusive rights over the sexuality of the woman he married. He must be able to rely upon her completely in this respect. A girl who would consent to have sex relations before marriage rendered herself unfit to be any man's wife ... Her husband would never be able to trust her out of sight. He could never be certain that the children she bore were his, and truly of the family seed. Such a wife would be worthless for the fundamental purpose a wife existed to serve.<sup>12</sup>

In Islamic societies, the law for remarriage (*idda*) refers to a

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<sup>10</sup> Note that the word 'husband' in English is an agricultural term, reflecting a similar concept in traditional Anglo-Saxon societies.

<sup>11</sup> Jafri, *Honour Killing - Dilemma, Ritual, Understanding*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> David and Vera Mace, *Marriage: East and West* (Dolphin Books, 1960), p. 43.

woman's waiting period after divorce before she can remarry in order to determine if she is pregnant and consequently to determine whose child she bore.<sup>13</sup>

With this concept of marriage, it is understandable why chastity and modesty for the woman are an absolute demand for the on-going reputation of the family and by extension, the community. Similarly, marriage becomes a contract of purchase ('*aqd*') whereby the husband-to-be is given ownership of his bride.<sup>14</sup> It is not without reason that the key issue on the wedding night is the proof of the bride's virginity. In traditional cultures worldwide, the blood-stained bed sheet of the wedding night was self-understood evidence she had been a virgin, that no other man had touched her and therefore the reputation of her family had been maintained.

From a modern perspective, this is a clear double standard and conveys sexual discrimination, that the men in the household are not required to hold to the same moral standards as the women. However, this does not mean that the male is necessarily promiscuous. His sexuality is controlled through fear of violating another man's daughter or wife. The man will remain faithful to his wife, not primarily because of his devotion to her, but because he dares not transgress into his neighbor's 'garden.'

This understanding of sexuality and gender clarity has given stability and security for the family for centuries, although at the cost of countless girls whose dreams have vanished as they became victims of this so-called family honor. We also know that

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<sup>13</sup> Fatimah Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (John Wiley and Sons, 1975), 39ff.

<sup>14</sup> Shahla Haeri, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Iran* (Syracuse Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 23-48.

men who travel away from their neighborhoods no longer fear such transgression. As the proverb goes, "If you want to get to know someone, travel with them."

### Where Veils Bring Honor

Gender clarity becomes gender discrimination when the male's public honor is dependent on female seclusion and the covering. The more secluded a man's wife(s) and daughters are, the more honorable he becomes.

The great fear in many traditional societies is sexual disorder (*fitna*), that women will become sexually promiscuous. Women cannot be trusted, the men say. For this reason, the head of the house enforces chastity by restricting his womenfolk from public life.

In the lengthy Persian novel about family life, *Shawhar-e Ahu Khanum*, the main character is considered honorable because he strictly enforces the veil. "This was also one of his manly characteristics. When he strictly enforced restrictions for women [in his household], his respect in the eyes of the public increased."<sup>15</sup>

In her study on male domination in Middle Eastern society, Mernissi reflects the same idea, "The man's prestige is embodied in the seclusion of his female relatives. A man whose wife wanders around in the streets free is a man whose masculinity is in jeopardy."<sup>16</sup>

The woman is seen as embodying shame and as we've said

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<sup>15</sup> *Shawhar*, 186.

اینهم یکی از اخلاق مردانۀ او بود که اگرچه زنها را بسختی محدود میکرد احترامش را در نظر همه کس بالا می‌برد.

<sup>16</sup> *Beyond the Veil*, 90.

earlier, shame cries for covering. And it is the man's responsibility to ensure that this shame is covered and kept silent. As Milani says, "Just as a wall of fabric surrounds her body, so a wall of silence encloses the details of her life."<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, the man's honor lies in his ability to leave a good name for posterity. But this is only possible if the man is publicly recognized as being able to control all that pertains to him: his land and all the women and other dependents in his household.

Herein lies the dilemma of honor in gender issues. The man is required to restrict his wife and daughters in order for him to experience honor in public. It is as if the man receives honor by dishonoring his wife.

Instead of gaining honor by dishonoring, men need to consider pursuing honor by honoring the females in their families.

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Instead of gaining honor by dishonoring, men need to consider pursuing honor by honoring the females in their families.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

- ***In what ways can a husband honor his wife within the traditional framework of a husband-wife relationship?***

### **Where Mothers Control**

We hear much of the common tension between a mother and her daughters-in-law. Even though it is a stereotypical concept,

<sup>17</sup> *Veils and Words*, 23.



an Afghan comedian Zalmai Ara often begins his show with the regular respectful, courteous greetings and then, “Now, let’s start with mothers-in-law.” Why are mothers-in-law the brunt of so many jokes, and worse, why does it seem that they are a cause of so much unhappiness in homes?

A woman knows that after marriage she has one duty – to provide sons for her husband. This is her supreme worth. The more sons, the more her value and honor. Throughout her life, the mother pours her affection and kindness upon her sons because they have given her the position of honor she enjoys.

However, when she can no longer bring more sons into the world, her purpose has been served, and so she is shelved. Some men will then pursue another wife.

But the mother maintains her worth by ensuring her sons’ loyalty to her. Since she has given her heart and soul to raise her sons, they will give everything for her. The sons are convinced that devotion to their mother is a divine calling. Nothing can rival this. However, when a son marries, he is now faced with two allegiances – to his mother and to his young wife. The mother now has a rival on her hands. How will this dilemma be played out?

The son's attachment to his mother and the mother's dislike to the new bride is a main cause of marriage frustrations. Yet this tension is often accepted as normal. Here are some common axioms on this issue.

- It is impossible for a mother-in-law to love her son’s bride.
- You cannot boil two goats in the same pot (proverb from Azerbaijan).
- This is our cultural mandate – to love our mothers.
- It is unjust if we do not care for our mothers.

Some say that the two loyalties are inherently different from

each other and the tension is exaggerated. Yet this division of loyalty to the mother and to the wife creates numerous dilemmas.

A young couple has migrated to the West and they are now earning some income. The husband feels that he must support his family financially. His wife wants to support her family, but he restricts her from doing so. Which of the two families is a priority? Tensions arise.

There is also a tension between love and intimacy. The man cannot be intimate with the woman he loves (his mother) and he cannot show emotional affection with the woman with whom he is intimate (his wife).<sup>18</sup> A related problem in many multi-generational families is the common family room which prevents the husband and wife from experiencing their own privacy and enjoying intimacy. What is the honorable way forward in such dilemmas?

Is it possible for a mother to see her role from a different light? Rather than interfering between her son and daughter-in-law, could she encourage them to appreciate each other? As a young mother, she had the honor to bear sons and daughters. Now she has the opportunity to see her son and daughter-in-law enjoy the same honor.

The honor of bearing children who are loyal to their children is multiplied by enjoying grandchildren. We can experience true honor as we encourage and enjoy healthy relationships in the multi-generational family.

**The honor of bearing children who are loyal to their children is multiplied by enjoying grandchildren. We can experience true honor as we encourage and enjoy healthy relationships in the multi-generational family.**

<sup>18</sup> *Beyond the Veil*, p. 69-70.

## Where Two Universes Coexist

Is there a culture anywhere in the world that does not celebrate the wedding day? The Indian author of the massive novel, *A Suitable Boy*, begins the story with a wedding where the mother of the groom says to her daughter, “You too will marry a boy I choose.”<sup>19</sup>

Simin Daneshvar began her much-appraised novel *Savushun* (The Requiem) with the joyous occasion of a wedding as well. Celebration is in the air, but alas, the music following the wedding song, is the sound of battle drums!<sup>20</sup> The foreboding allusion symbolizes one of Daneshvar's major themes in her writings – the frustrations within the family.

### *Most marriages in our country are unsuccessful*

Pashtun women speak of the wedding day as the day when sadness entered their lives.<sup>21</sup> While getting married is an obsession in most Asian societies, Daneshvar describes marriage in this way:

Most marriages in our country are unsuccessful. Two individuals with two different backgrounds, education, and customs have to endure one another for a lifetime. Well, this very tolerance creates hatred.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, the husband-wife relationship varies from culture to culture as well as from home to home. However, the view that

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<sup>19</sup> Vikram Seth, *A Suitable Boy* (Little, Brown & Company, 1993), 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Savushun*, 9 [English, Kindle. Loc. 265.]

<sup>21</sup> Benedicte Grima, *The Performance of Emotion among Pashtun Women* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 52-57. In her study, Grima argues that ‘sadness’ is a badge of honor for women in Pashtun society.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted by Milani in *Veils and Words*, 194.

“a man’s wife is his honor” (Arab proverb), links the woman’s behavior to the husband’s reputation. The man has been given the responsibility to place demands on the woman and ensure she upholds his reputation by her conduct. The woman must carry this burden of behavior because she is female. In a strange twist, the woman’s shame for being a woman, which she must cover, becomes the man’s honor.

In this way, the man maintains his power and control over his wife. It is patriarchal oppression as women are treated as a “sex class,”<sup>23</sup> Gender distinction has become gender discrimination.

This discrimination creates a chasm within the marriage relationship as if the husband and wife live in sexually divided universes. They struggle with relating to each other intimately because they are in different worlds. To this day, many ‘honorable’ husbands consider it below their dignity to express companionship and emotional intimacy with their spouse. It is difficult for an honorable husband to show interest in his wife. The Iranian cultural and literary critic, Nadushan, writes about the conjugal relationship.

There was no equality between the two sexes to generate love. Generally speaking, with the view a man held of a woman, he considered it below his dignity to feel obligated to satisfy her. ... His fulfillment was bound with domination and possession ... This was called enjoyment.<sup>24</sup>

The distant husband is not necessarily an angry husband; in fact, he can be quite benevolent. However, since he sees himself as superior and ruling the public domain, to pay attention to the private domain would compromise his strength and honor.

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<sup>23</sup> Jafri, *Honour Killing – Dilemma, Ritual, Understanding*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted by Milani in *Veils and Words*, 142.

Modern literature from Persian societies has often belittled marriage because men have lived by a different standard than the demands they place on the women in their household. Yet, both husband and wife crave intimacy and companionship.

This longing is repeatedly expressed in the various genres of modern Persian literature. The renowned Iranian poet, Forough Farrokhzad (d. 1967), who was tragically killed as a young 33-year-old, eloquently expressed her longing for deeper relationships. Though some argue that her poem "The Wedding Band" is an attack on marriage, with the wedding band as a symbol of institutional servitude, one can feel her longing for a faithful husband that never came true and her heartbreak of unfulfilled hopes and dreams.

With a smile, the little girl asked  
"What is the secret of this wedding band  
Circling me tightly on my hand?"  
Years later, one night a sad wife gazed at that golden band,  
And saw in its glowing design wasted days, wasted  
In the hope of a husband's loving hands  
Anguished she cried out loud, and said:  
"This luminous and glowing band  
Is the band of tyranny and commands."<sup>25</sup>

Farrokhzad sees traditional marriage as tyranny and Nadushan calls it domination and (male) pleasure.

We need to see how honor and happiness can come together in the home.

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<sup>25</sup> Farrokhzad, "The Wedding Band," quoted by Milani in *Veils and Words*, p. 194-194.

### Where Men Wear Veils

Why the desire for intimacy, but such a distance between husband and wife?

We see that the man's sense of manliness which he carries about in society hinders him from enjoying emotional intimacy with his wife. His manliness forces him to cover up any pain, weakness or failure. His manliness, therefore, becomes a veil that hides his inner world of emotions and feelings. He finds it difficult to be vulnerable to his wife. Both husband and wife are hidden (veiled) from each other. The woman's actual veil – a symbol of "respect, virtue and pride" for her – keeps her hidden from him. From the man's side, his sense of public honor forces him to hide from her.

We read many modern stories where a man is caught between the dilemma of personal love and public responsibility from which he cannot escape. Ultimately, he loses both his *ham-dam* (friend, confidant) and himself. What makes his loss so torturous is that he cannot reveal his pain to anyone.

Akram Osman has depicted this dilemma in his stories, "A Man of His Word" and "When the Reed Blooms Again."<sup>26</sup> In the first story, the main character Sher dreams of meeting Tahera, the girl next door, but when Tahera's three brothers find out of Sher's secret desires, they are enraged. After some fights and bloody noses, the brothers 'forgive' him. Sher is unwittingly trapped into becoming an 'adopted brother' with the family of the girl he loves. This means that Tahera becomes his 'sister.' He is forced to deny his love for her because as a young man of honor he can never break the promise of 'brotherhood.' At Tahera's wedding where she is given to an older man, Sher covers his pain and tortures

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<sup>26</sup> *Real Men Keep their Word*, pp. 1-23 and pp. 24-39.

himself to maintain his composure.

That night, Sher chewed his fingernails till they became bloodied, but he made no slip nor was he caught off guard. No one knew what took place in his heart that night; however, while the musicians were singing the song, “Walk softly,”

Tahera slowly walked away from Sher ... to the house of the old and fat general whose stomach stuck out further than his nose.<sup>27</sup>



Honor wins while his heart loses, but is this honor?

In the second story, Akbar, known as the local champion (*jawanmard*), is obliged by the cruel governor to go on a dangerous mission. The governor exploits Akbar's sense of honor and chivalry. Akbar leaves his sorrowing wife and three-year-old child who wait for his return home, but he cannot tell them where



and why he is going away. He lives in a sexually divided universe which means he cannot share his thoughts with his wife and express to her that he will miss her and their son. He becomes a victim of his own manliness.

<sup>27</sup> *Real Men Keep their Word*, 18.

***A 'real' man is expected to be self-contained***

Just as Akbar's wife is helplessly locked away from Akbar's public world and unable to express or follow the desires of her heart, he too can never reveal the desires or struggles within himself. Milani presents a penetrating analysis of the psychological consequences of keeping one's inner world hidden.

Captive of the image they present, they are poised to keep honor in view and their virility intact. Concerned with their *Mardanagi* [manliness], they seem to form a barrier as solid and as forbidding as a veil around their private selves. After all, a 'real' man is expected to be self-contained, in charge of himself and surroundings, serious, invariably ceremonial, remote, given more to thoughts than emotions. Crying, getting emotional, are for women and little girls, as is confiding.<sup>28</sup>

Refusing to expose one's personal feelings and at the same time being unable to enter the private world of another leads to a veiled society. Both husband and wife are locked away in loneliness and unable to understand themselves or the other.

***Do you want to hear more truths? Then listen!***

In the novel *Savushun*, the author frequently highlights the struggle for intimacy between Zari and Yusuf as they talk about their experiences of the past few days. Zari realizes how isolated they are from each other, how different their concerns are, and how separated their two worlds are from each other. "Zari was sick with worry. What a difference between what she had on her mind and what he had on his! No one knows what's going on

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<sup>28</sup> *Veils and Words*, p. 201.



inside anyone else's head."<sup>29</sup> As they argue, Yusuf tries to call it off, but Zari cries out, "Do you want to hear more truths? Then listen!"<sup>30</sup>

She had wanted to tell Yusuf about her problems, but because she feared he would get angry again, or just not listen, she simply 'put up with' Yusuf.

He was too idealistic and demanding for her. She says, "I didn't want to make it worse. It's always like that ... to keep peace in the family."<sup>31</sup>



Would it not be an honor for the husband to enter his wife's world and the wife to enter her husband's world? While enjoying their gender distinctions, the two worlds need to move closer together.

**Would it not be an honor for the husband to enter his wife's world and the wife to enter her husband's world?**

## Where Women Use Coping Techniques

In this sexually divided universe, men cope by wearing their veil of manliness around them. Women learn a variety of survival mechanisms relating to their detached (veiled) husbands or when they are forced to live with restrictions placed upon them by the head of the house. In one way or another, women find ways to exercise control over their lives.

Though it is a stereotypical and disdainful description, the

<sup>29</sup> Savushun, 116 [English, Kindle, Loc. 1840].

دل زری مثل سیر و سرکه میجوشید. او کجا بود و این یکی کجای کار؟ هیچکس از دل هیچکس خبر ندارد.

<sup>30</sup> Savushun, 131 [English, Kindle, Loc. 2084]. میخواهی باز هم حرف راست بشنوی؟ ... پس بشنو،

<sup>31</sup> Savushun, 129 [English, Kindle Loc. 2055].

نخواستم خشمگین ترت کنم. همیشه همینطور است ... برای حفظ آرامش خانواده ...

nagging or complaining woman is a constant dilemma of traditional families. It will not go away by ignoring the issue.<sup>32</sup>

As we saw in the Savushun novel, Zari felt her husband did not pay attention to her. In many cases, when a wife feels that she is not being listened to or valued by her husband, she begins to nag. She knows she cannot just go out and do the things she wants to do or buy what she desires without her husband's approval. By nagging, she hopes her husband may pay attention, or at least give in to her. This technique gives her a form of control when she feels powerless.

In her effort to create further space for control, she may resort to deception and hiding. She puts aside some money or she sneaks out of the house when she thinks it might be safe. She keeps secrets on her phone if she is fortunate enough to have one (and the husband, of course, keeps his secrets as well). Even though risky, these actions give her a sense of freedom she does not otherwise have. She finds a new world opening up to her.

For some women, submission and obedience become their honor and doorway to a much-compromised freedom. Krayser describes this in his study of Pashtun sexuality.

Abiding by the limits is translated into their being virtuous. Their virtuous lives allow their husbands to relax some of the limitations they place on their wives. These women's behavior has also built trust within the community so that their communities have been relaxing some of the

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<sup>32</sup> During the Covid19 lockdown in spring 2020, many families were not prepared to be together in their homes 24 hours a day. The Malaysian government tried to help and advised women to stop nagging their husbands during the lockdown. The backlash was so quick they quickly apologized for their misguided advice. See <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/02/asia/malaysia-womens-advice-controversy-coronavirus-intl-scli-hnk/index.html>. Accessed June 27, 2020.

restrictions placed on other women.<sup>33</sup>

For many women, although restrictions are oppressive and abusive, they come to see this as normal. Some have little education and do not have the opportunity to participate in family decisions. They live in fear of making mistakes and learn to cower and withdraw in order to survive. Silence and shame are their world.

In other homes, the traditional controlling father is turned on its head, with the female becoming the domineering head of the house and the male almost as servant and victim. In Khaled Hosseini's novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the two main characters Laila and Mariam come from very different backgrounds. Mariam's father was the stereotypically cruel type and her mother, the victim of abuse. Laila's parents, on the other hand, were the exact opposite. Her mother was a domineering woman who doted on her two sons and ignored her daughter and her frail, 'intellectual' husband. Defying cultural norms, she was the one who had proposed to him. He was "a man who had no convictions,"<sup>34</sup> although he saw himself as progressive and liberal as he parroted cliché-like maxims on women's rights. This home, too, was far from pleasant.

Women may gain power through these various coping techniques, but in the end, they bring more unrest and frustration in the home. Men, misusing their power in their efforts to build stability in their homes, are short-changing themselves and sadly, dishonoring the family unit.

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<sup>33</sup> Kraye, *My Mother's Sons*, Kindle Edition, Loc. 472.

<sup>34</sup> Khaled Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, 108 and 136.

## MARRIAGE – A NEW UNIT

We have raised numerous dilemmas of family life in honor-shame societies. We now turn to some possible ways to bring honor and joy together as an integral part of the family unit.

In my short novel *Bloodstains*, an elderly man Baba Sharif, offers advice to Akram, a long-time family friend. Although Akram would never reveal his family problems to Baba Sharif, he is forced to open up to him. Baba Sharif chances upon Akram and his wife arguing with each other. Now the problem has become public. And indeed, Akram who frequently yells at his wife is frustrated at her constant nagging. Baba Sharif talks at length with Akram,

My wife, our children and I ... we belong to each other in a special way. We are our own unit, a new 'arena.' I promised myself that I would make this a healthy and happy arena. More than anything else, I would pay attention to it. I couldn't live in two worlds at once, in both my parents' world and that of my own family.

We love our parents, of course. They gave us life and supported us while we were young. And when we grow up, we support them. That is our duty and honor. But when you get married, you start another family—you, your wife and your children.

Look at these streets around us, hundreds of homes here in these buildings. Each home has its family unit. There are grandfathers and grandmothers, uncles, aunts, cousins and other extended relatives. They may even live in the same place. But every person belongs to one basic unit—father, mother and children. Like a circle within a larger circle. In

this street there are hundreds of such basic units, some are happy, others are not.

There is one thing that can make your home a better place. When the knot between a husband and wife is tied well and is strong and healthy, then the home will be strong and healthy. But that knot must be tied with real care. If you love someone, you will care for that person. If you care for your children, wouldn't you also care for their mother? Do you ever think about how you can make her happy? Listen to her? Do you let her talk to you without always answering back?

You must cling to this unit, one man and one woman coming together, in body and in spirit. That is the only way your family can be happy.<sup>35</sup>

### **We Humans are the Noble Creation**

We do not want to emulate Western ways with soaring divorce rates and where many couples ignore the marriage covenant. Furthermore, a redefinition of sexuality and a crisis of gender confusion are threatening healthy family life in Western societies. At the same time, we reject the restrictive responses where women must be silent and covered (physically and emotionally). We also reject the machismo ways where men often consider sexual conquest as 'manly' and honorable.

What are we left with?

We said earlier that all humans have 'face.' They carry inherent honor because they are created by God. They are noble

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<sup>35</sup> Adapted from Arley Loewen, *Blood Stains – A Novel Afghan Story* (Rahmat, 2013), 48-51.

creations (*ashraf-e makhluqat / karam*) in the eyes of God. This is the highest source of honor for humans and is foundational for healthy marriage relationships. Both male and female are noble (*sharif*), of equal value and worth. The woman is not of lesser value nor of lower intellect. This means that God has honored the woman as much as the man from the beginning. It may sound simplistic, but every husband needs to acknowledge that his wife is noble (*sharif*). He is special and so is she.

The second reality is that God created two genders, male and female. They are not the same. They complement each other in life and depending on culture, they carry distinct roles from each other. We need to encourage this rather than trying to make them be the same.

**We gain honor when we stand on these two realities, that both male and female carry honor, and their distinctive roles as male and female are both honorable.**

We gain honor when we stand on these two realities, that both male and female carry honor, and their distinctive roles as male and female are both honorable.

### **Husband and Wife are Life Partners**

In traditional cultures, couples were much more connected with relatives and were therefore an integral part of their communities. As we urbanize and move away from the extended family scenario, the marriage relationship becomes more private and less attached to the community. This puts the husband-wife relationship more at risk. The two are left to themselves, to focus on each other, without the support of the extended family and community. Can the two sustain this pressure on their own?

If they live in sexually divided universes, it will be difficult to experience emotional intimacy and well-being. How can the two come together?

The Persian term for a spouse, *ham-sar* (ham + sar; literally: co-head), is an appropriate term for the marriage relationship. Can a husband see his wife as his *hamsar*, as his life partner? She is not a possession in his hands to confer honor to him and to provide him with sons. Rather she is his *ham-sar*, *ham-sharik* (literally: co-partner), a *ham-dam* (confidant) and *ham-rah* (fellow-traveler) on the road of life by his side. In the same way, the wife needs to see her husband in that way. He is her *ham-sar*. The husband is her companion and she is his.

**As mutual companions, husband and wife ennoble each other.**

As mutual companions, husband and wife ennoble each other.

The husband loves his wife as his partner in life and in so doing, he ennobles her to be the woman she is meant to be. The husband will express his love in multifold ways. Instead of expecting to be served, he will serve. Instead of demanding, he will give. Instead of restricting, he will encourage his wife. Every husband is committed to protecting and providing for his wife. This is his honor. But love goes beyond protecting and providing. To love her means that he will treasure her and care for her as his partner in life.

The wife's need for security and peace is much deeper than being protected and provided for. She experiences security when she is assured that her husband is fully committed to her and he will lead, protect and provide in the spirit of love. In this environment, she will trust her husband and be devoted to him, rather than simply be dependent on him.

Similarly, the wife is called to give dignity to her husband. As she serves him, she will build up his reputation. Instead of nagging, she will seek to please him. Instead of demanding more, she will listen to him. Her delight comes by honoring her husband rather than complaining and nagging for her wants and needs. Instead of belittling him, she will seek to trust and respect him. She will publicly and privately esteem her husband and boast about him to her friends and to their children. As she honors him, honor will return to her as well.

When a husband comes home from a long day of work, will he lose honor or his authority if he spends 30 minutes listening to his wife and genuinely paying attention to her? When a wife gives dignity to her husband by intentionally listening to him, the home will not only be stable, but also carry a fragrance of beauty.

In this relationship, the two become suitable companions to each other, partners in life, serving one another and sharing the challenges and blessings together. In this way, the two, husband and wife, walk the honorable path of marriage together.

Honor in the family is rooted in a permanent and loving commitment between the two life partners rather than in external pressures from society. Both are free, not to fulfill their own desires, but to serve and love their life-partner through sickness and health, through richer or poorer situations.

**Honor in the family is rooted in a permanent and loving commitment between the two life partners rather than in external pressures from society.**

The family unit becomes a place of security and trust for both spouses. Moreover, this unit then is ready to serve those around them. The family unit becomes a healthy space for relatives and



the community around it. We are back to the extended family circle, each unit serving the larger body.

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- *Extended family: Is it possible to focus on the small tri-unit of father-mother-children in the context of the larger family of grandparents and relatives?*
  - *Spouses: What if you spend thirty minutes a day talking together, asking each other about the day? What would happen if you as a husband intentionally listen to your wife or you as a wife, genuinely show interest in your husband?*
- 

### **We Need More Than Love**

The beauty of two human beings becoming one in marriage is truly an amazing wonder. Sadly, many marriages do not experience this beauty. Nevertheless, who does not imagine nor long for such oneness? The songs and poetry of thousands of lovers in cultures around the world show how universal love and love stories are. Farhad is willing to hack his way through the mountain to gain his beloved. Majnun will wander the desert in desperate longing for Layla. The modern movie industry, with its endless stories of romance, creates fantastic love stories, though often with little concept of marriage. Passion flourishes, and we often hear, “Love is all that counts.” But is that true? What do we mean by love? And why does this love often dissipate after some time?

In the Persian culture, when someone “falls in love” (ashiq), the person is completely overwhelmed with love and loses control of his emotions and mind. Just the fleeting glance of his beloved’s eyes makes a young man’s heart throb to such an extent, that he

may even become physically sick. In many people's minds this love (*ishq*) has little to do with marriage. You can be married and never have become an “*ashiq*,” or you may become an “*ashiq*” with someone other than your spouse after marriage.

This intensely emotional love becomes more desperate if love is not requited. A broken-hearted lover threatens to harm himself because his beloved will not accept his love. If such a person would commit suicide some say, “He sure must have loved her!” This is nonsense. He has killed himself, leaving the ‘beloved’ wondering what she should have done differently. In one sense the man took revenge by killing himself. The beloved must now live with a nagging guilt that perhaps she was responsible for killing him. True love would not bring such pain to the person they love.

Indeed, there is a difference between the two words for love, *ishq* and *muhabat*. To be sure, love should include emotion and longing; however, it must go deeper than feelings. True honorable love is stronger, deeper and more powerful than any *ishq* we read about in romantic love stories. The call for the husband to love his wife and the wife to love her husband takes us to a much deeper relationship.

**True honorable love is stronger, deeper and more powerful than any *ishq* we read about in romantic love stories. The call for the husband to love his wife and the wife to love her husband takes us to a much deeper relationship.**

We note several important truths in this love.

First, to love someone means to want the best for that person. Love does not seek its own; rather loves wishes good for the other. The husband will want the best for his wife and the wife will want

the best for her husband. They will want to build each other up so that each can flourish and be successful.

Second, love is commitment. Love can be a beautiful word, but unless there is a permanent commitment, love becomes fickle and meaningless. It becomes little more than a temporary experience. Spousal love says, "*I forsake all else and am totally devoted to you.*"

When there are tough times, financial tension or sickness, spousal love keeps on loving, because this love will desire the best for the other person – always. Commitment means to be faithful to each other and to constantly serve the other – both husband and wife, "till death does them part." Such commitment dispels fear and suspicion in a relationship and makes possible an environment of trust and peace in the home.

The wife does not fear her husband and the husband does not suspect his wife. She is completely faithful to him and he is fully devoted to her. This ongoing commitment and trusting each other leads to deep peace and joy in the home. Here is the beauty of such love that is rooted in committed and loyalty. Rather than merely falling in love and possibly falling out of love, the two experience an ever-increasing circle of love and joy which overflows to others in the household.

How should a husband and wife express their love to each other?

### **Learning Different Love Languages**

The young husband was very dismayed. Having recently married, the couple considered themselves modern. They prided themselves that they had left traditional ways behind. The wife enjoyed a professional job out of the home with an international

organization and the husband was a professor at a small college. Everything seemed to be going well, but neither the husband nor the wife was content. They weren't connecting with each other and frequently fell into arguments.

***Of course, I love my wife. I provide for her and protect her***

The husband said to a close friend, "Of course I love my wife. I provide for her and I even let her have a job. What else does she need?" This, after all, is the definition of a good husband, to provide and to protect. He continued, "I don't know what her problem is. I buy her lots of great gifts (flowers, clothes, gold) and I let her visit her family, but she keeps on nagging me."

***My husband never has time for me. I think he's bored with me***

The wife had similar complaints. She shared with one of her friends, "I cook food for him and wash the clothes when I come home from work, even though I'm tired. I feel like I'm serving him day and night, but my husband never has time for me. I think he's bored with me."

It is not only in the traditional rural family where the husband and wife live in two separate worlds. In many urban settings, where honor-shame values hold sway, the couple struggles at connecting with each other. The husband may even feel embarrassed to spend time with his wife and the wife finds it difficult to respect her husband.

The wife is expected to be a good housekeeper, be loyal to him, serve him and meet his sexual needs. The husband is expected to bring in enough money so she can buy the clothes and make-up she wants and have the opportunity to visit her family.

Yet, neither of them experiences fulfillment. They are not content, and sadly some spouses begin to look elsewhere to meet their emotional needs.

How can couples go deeper than simply a providing and serving relationship? Are we content just to survive in the marriage and fulfill the traditional expected roles? What does it mean for an honorable man to really love his wife? What does it mean for a wife who believes her cultural calling is to respect her husband, to truly honor him?

It sounds trite to say that they should just love each other more. The husband wants to love his wife, but it's as if he does not know how to love her. The wife tries to love her husband, but it seems her efforts go nowhere. Both have run out of energy to love.

Marriage counselor Gary Chapman compares this energy to a 'love tank.' It is our emotional center. If this emotional tank is full, then it is easy to express love. We will spontaneously overflow with love. But if the love tank has nothing left in it, we have no emotional energy to love.

***What can I do to energize my spouse so he/she will overflow with love?***

Here then is the challenge for both husband and wife. Their goal should not be to get the spouse to fill their own love tanks. Rather, each one should seek to fill their spouse's love tank. The husband should seek to fill his wife's emotional center and she fills his. They both need to be creative and insightful, asking themselves, "What can I do to energize my spouse so he/she will overflow with love towards me?"

Gary Chapman has popularized the idea of “love languages,” Although presented from a Western individualist perspective, this model can be helpful in honor-shame cultures as well. All human beings have the capacity to love one another, but we express this love differently because we have different personalities.<sup>36</sup>

Love languages, such as the ones listed below, are practical ways to love our spouse.

- Words of affirmation
- Spending time with each other
- Serving one another
- Giving and receiving gifts
- Physical nearness and touch

### ***Questions to discuss:***

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- ***Which ways of expressing love do you think your spouse would really appreciate?***
  - ***Which love language would you appreciate?***
- 

### ***Speak words of affirmation***

Husbands and wives communicate with each other in one way or another. We talk about what’s needed from the market, plans for the day, concerns regarding our children, health issues and much more. The question is: how do we talk to each other? Are we aware of the power of the tongue, its power for life and death?

When you ask your spouse for something, how does it come

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<sup>36</sup> Chapman focuses on the psychological analysis of trying to find out what love languages a husband and wife prefer. In this study, we present the love languages as ways to practically express love to each other.

across? In a demanding or requesting way? Our words, *what* we say and *how* we say them, can either communicate love or the lack of love. With a kind request you can pave the way for a loving response from your spouse, but a demand will produce an angry response and choke the relationship.



Words and honor are closely related. Through words we bring honor to ourselves and those around us. At the same time, through words we can shame ourselves and bring shame to others by insults and accusations.

When a wife speaks words of affirmation to her husband, he becomes more confident and this fills him with energy to love her. He deeply appreciates when she speaks to others with a sense of pride in him. When a husband responds to his wife with gracious words, she will overflow with joy. Instead of mocking or belittling her, he admires and praises her.

Here is an odd phenomenon. We easily speak with courtesy (*ta'aruf*) to outsiders and strangers but often we find it difficult to speak graciously to those in our household. Positive words will lead to positive relationships with each other. In this way, we can be sure the marriage will become healthier.

Here are some practical do's and don'ts for husbands and wives as they speak to each other:

- Say 'thank-you' to your spouse. (Have you ever thanked your husband? Your wife?)
- Speak encouraging words to each other.
- Look for ways you can affirm your spouse with positive words.

- Be careful about criticizing. Such words easily become stinging.
- Do not be sarcastic. Such words bite and can be poisonous.
- Do not belittle your spouse.
- Do not bring up old hurts.
- Write a love letter or love poem to your spouse.
- Compliment your spouse in front of your children or friends.
- Remember the tone of your voice is very important.
- Do not nag. (Nagging drains the love tank very fast!)
- If your spouse speaks angrily to you, remember that a kind word turns away anger.

**Honor each other with words of respect for one another.**

Honor each other with words of respect for one another.

### ***Spend quality time together***

One husband complained to his life coach (mentor) that his wife was indifferent to him. When he would come home, she hardly greeted him and didn't care to talk with him. His coach asked him, "What time do you come home?" He responded, "I don't know. After work I go out with the guys, first to the gym and then we have tea and talk. Maybe at 9 pm or so." The coach advised, "For a few days, try coming home an hour earlier. Drink tea with your wife instead. And just listen to her."

A week later, the man confided to his coach. "I can't believe the change! She actually cuddles up to me now!"

Another practical way to express love to your spouse is simply to spend some time with her. This is more than just being in the



same room and watching TV, though that may be a good start. It means to give attention to your spouse, to listen carefully to her and show interest in how she spent her day.

Many women are forced into silence and passively comply because their husbands do not listen with real attention. On the other hand, many men are wearied by the frequent nagging and complaining they feel they have to endure when they come home from work. Some men might think it's easier to come home later in the evening.

How can we move away from icy silence or longwinded nagging to delightful conversations where both husband and wife enjoy talking with each other? It is good to ask questions about the day. We often listen only long enough to give advice, rather than seeking to understand. In order to listen well, give your ear to your spouse and keep eye contact as she is talking. Listen to each other's feelings and hold back from interrupting.

And then, when you talk, do not just give answers, but rather share your own feelings and thoughts in a friendly spirit. Are you ready to open yourself in this way?

Establish a time during the week, every day if possible, when each of you shares a few things that happened that day and how you felt about them.

Even though you have different roles in the family, there are things you can do together: Take walks together regularly, make memories together, laugh together, cry together, discuss issues together.

From time to time, do something special with each other, watch a good show together, go out for coffee or tea, visit some friends together where

**Honor each other by spending quality time together.**

you both enjoy the friends.

Honor each other by spending quality time together.

### ***Serve each other practically***

Love should be practical. Love is something we *DO* for another person.

When you do things for your spouse that you know your spouse would like you to do, you are making her happy. As the husband serves his wife, he will fill her love tank.



These acts of service require thought. You will need to plan the tasks and give your time and energy to finish them. This is how you show love to your spouse. It's not automatic but requires an act of the will.

Make a list of things that need to be done around the house, maybe things that need to be fixed or built. Or ask your spouse to make a list. Make lists for each other. Try to get these things done without your spouse reminding you and nagging you about them.

Wives, prepare a special meal for your husband. Make an effort to keep the bedroom attractive and clean. Maybe mend clothes ahead of time.

Nagging is a terrible habit. Every husband wearies of being nagged. He feels he is being micro-managed. Instead, try to get things done before your wife complains about unfinished tasks in the house.

Remember the 'words of affirmation' above. We don't want to

demand acts of service. When you demand things, you are forcing something on your spouse which stops the flow of love. When you request things, you give your spouse the opportunity to respond with a willing act of service.

This brings true honor in the family: when husbands and wives serve each other. “Those who are great, serve each other.”

**This brings true honor in the family: when husbands and wives serve each other. “Those who are great, serve each other.”**

### *Give special gifts*

A gift speaks much more than the gift itself. When your spouse buys you something special, you realize that she was thinking of you. The gift speaks loudly and clearly, “Wow, he was thinking of me!”

We are not suggesting expensive gifts of jewellery or fancy clothes. Rather, small gifts are visual symbols of love and care. It’s the thought that counts and is expressed in small gifts.

It’s helpful to have a list of ideas of what you think your spouse appreciates. I’ve often asked my daughter, “What is something your mom would like?” My daughter understands the love language of ‘giving gifts’ and has often helped me with good gift ideas.



I don't care much for greeting cards or chocolate, but I know my wife loves chocolate a lot. And over the years I've learned to appreciate and enjoy chocolate as well.

We honor each other when we give and receive gifts that communicate care for one another.

We honor each other when we give and receive gifts that communicate care for one another.

### ***Be close to each other***

Touch and physical nearness is another kind of gift we can share with each other. Touch can communicate hate or love. With the hand you can either hit or caress and cuddle.



Research tells us that babies who are held, hugged and kissed, will develop healthier than those who are left alone for long periods of time. Adults need the gift of touch as well. Most adults enjoy hugs just as much as children do.

When we talk about the gift of touch, we do not mean physical intimacy, though physical intimacy needs to be expressed in such ways that both the husband and wife please each other. This is the subject of another important study. Rather with the gift of touch we mean the gentle, physical expressions that communicate thoughtfulness towards the other person.

To be true, conservative cultures are cautious about communicating care and thoughtfulness through touch. But, at

the very least, we must end all violent touch. There is no place for hitting your spouse. You do not love someone whom you hit.

Here are some ways that you can communicate love through gentle touches:

- Sit close together.
- Hug each other before you leave for outside work.
- Hug each other when one of you comes home.
- Walk side-by-side instead of the husband walking ahead of his wife.
- Hold hands at home.

**Honor each other with gentle expressions of touch.**

Honor each other with gentle expressions of touch.

***Questions to discuss:***

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- *Do you think these love languages are feasible for your culture?*
  - *As we look at the different practical ways to express love to your spouse, which ways do you think would work for you?*
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**How Should We Honor Our Children?**

As parents, how do we relate to our children? Do our children appreciate us and enjoy being with us? Or are they afraid of us? Do we talk *with* them, not just *to* them? Do we ask them questions about their day in school – not out of suspicion, as if they’ve done something wrong or if someone has done wrong to them, but because we care for them and are interested in their lives? When they talk to us, do we take the time to listen to them?

When parents care for their children by showing interest in their lives and talking with them, the home becomes a joyful peaceful space, especially around the dinner table (*desterkhwan*).



At the same time, parents need to provide boundaries for their children. Children must obey their parents. The happy family is where parents are in charge and the children know this. In our efforts to overcome the stereotypical harsh fathers and nagging mothers, we often spoil children by treating them as if they were little adults and by letting them do as they please. Parents are responsible to provide structures and borders for children, so they know what their limits are.

This is the parent's job. If parents do not do this, they mistreat their children and dishonor the entire family. It brings shame to parents when young children show little or no respect for their parents. It is a disgrace when children demand that their parents serve them and even yell at them if they don't. Children need to know that their father and mother are the bosses and that children must obey them. Be sure your children respect and honor each parent. Parents should stand up for each other.

However, to ensure that our children obey us, we as parents must not exasperate and irritate them. We have the sacred duty to train and teach our children the ways of the truth. We cannot do this simply by orders and lectures, nor do threats help in training.

Raising children requires a multifaceted approach, not simply being nice to them. Parents should consider the following ways to train their children:

- By being an example to them. Show children how they must live by the way you live. Eventually, our children will do as we do, not as we say.
- By teaching them. However, remember that young children cannot digest too much information. In their early years, they need simple instructions of ‘yes’ and ‘no.’
- By disciplining them. Provide clear boundaries for children, what they can and cannot do, what is wise and foolish, honorable and disrespectful.

As we engage with our children in these ways, we are truly loving them and giving them value. When parents firmly but gently require their children to honor the parents, both the parents and the children are happier. This makes the family healthy. The challenge for parents is to maintain a healthy balance between guiding their children and being gentle with them.

When parents firmly but gently require their children to honor the parents, both the parents and the children are happier.

***Questions to discuss:***

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- *Who is in charge? Are you the boss, or are your children the bosses?*
  - *In what ways do parents exasperate or frustrate their children?*
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# **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

**STEPS TOWARD HIGHER HONOR**

**A**s humans we all need honor, but in our incessant struggle to gain honor we can slide toward dishonorable ways in order to keep our honor. In this short book, we have explored various ways towards a higher honor, in our relationships, our organizations and projects, as well as our families. We have asked ourselves if we can gain honor honorably. We have discussed different steps we need to take to move towards a new and indeed, better and truer, honor.

In short, we need a different way of thinking about life, ourselves and our relationships with each other that will help us towards truer honor.

### **Honor in the Beginning**

When we go back to the origins of the world, we see that humans are different than the rest of the animal world. We call humans the ‘noble creation.’ They are created “in the image of God,” crowned with glory and honor from the beginning of life.

Theologians have discussed at great length what this divine image and noble creation means for human beings.

Humans are noble in that we are God's vicegerents (*khalifa*) here on earth, with a mandate to care for and rule over God's creation. Humans have a unique purpose on earth. We work with our hands and minds. We create, invent and make new things and with these new things we build other things.

Furthermore, we are noble in the sense that as humans we can think, feel and make decisions. Humans create and imagine new things. Humans enjoy beauty and engage in complicated speech (talk) with each other. We tell stories, we dream and make plans about future possibilities. We think in the abstract. Yes, animals can feel and respond in various ways. But humans experience a depth of life that is qualitatively different than the animal world. Humans are creatures of worship, we form communities and socialize together, with unique care for other humans. We have a capacity to love other humans beyond the family structure. In short, humans have unique value and worth. Every human being has ascribed honor given to him by God.

The very first step of living with true honor means that we recognize the inherent and fundamental dignity and worth of every human being. If we can't get this right, we will easily resort to dishonoring ways, of one type or another.

The very first step of living with true honor means that we recognize the inherent and fundamental dignity and worth of every human being.

### **Fallen into Shame**

Because of this inherent value for all humans, when we disrespect a fellow human being we have in one sense

disrespected the Creator. When we insult another person, we have insulted a facet of God's honor. When someone kills a human being, it means that he has ended the life of someone to whom God gave life. Such a person has destroyed an aspect of the divine.

It is tragically true that sometimes humans are worse than animals. How is it possible that the noble creation is also so ignoble? How can the beauty of human life become so ugly and tragic? We love, but we also hate. We create, but we also destroy. We plan, but we also deceive.

The awesome story of humankind's honor soon descends and spirals into shame and more shame. Hafiz of Shiraz writes, "I was an angel, and Paradise above was my home. It was Adam that brought me to this earthly ruin."<sup>1</sup>

Whether we interpret this poem from a mystical perspective or as a moral narrative, if we are honest with ourselves, sadly we humans have lost much of our goodness and honor. We have soiled ourselves and lost face. Disgrace and shame have covered the human race. Our heads are fallen, and our mouths are shut. We have given many examples in this book and could give a million more examples of human shame. Sadly, in order to make up for our shame, we humans will cover or hide our shame and try to (re)gain honor in any way possible, even if it is counterfeit honor.



We boast about how good we are, hoping this will bring us more honor. We claim our group is superior to other groups and manufacture false honor in order to cover our group shame. When our attempt to boost honor for ourselves does not work, we will attack the honor of others. We gossip and insult others, tearing down their honor so we can have more for ourselves. We abuse, hate and fight and make war ... and the story goes on and on.

Just as we need to recognize the universal honor and dignity of all human beings, we need to recognize universal shame that has come upon humankind.

One of the complex questions of the human condition is: how can we cover human shame and restore our honor as well as the honor of others? Is there a way to remove shame in an honorable way?

**Just as we need to recognize the universal honor and dignity of all human beings, we need to recognize universal shame that has come upon humankind.**

### **The Miracle of Love**

Consider the difference between a ‘somebody’ and a ‘nobody.’ Physiologically we are all ‘bodies’ and spiritually, we are all ‘somebodies’ because we are God’s noble creation, each one with a unique identity.

But in social terms, we have become somebodies and nobodies. Some have status and some do not. The ‘nobody’ is without status. He is ignored by others and even invisible to others. Such a person has little self-respect because he receives no respect from others. The ‘somebody’ is noticed and receives respect, usually because he carries some form of status and honor

as we've discussed in this book.

When we give attention to someone who has no status nor worth, that person becomes alive and begins to feel like a real human being. When we value a person, who feels he has no value, that person begins to experience value and worth in his life. This is what it means to love another person. When we offer genuine respect to others, even to those who experience shame, we will experience true respect ourselves.

Some years ago, I was talking with a taxi-driver in Kabul about the need for caring and valuing people. He became quiet and then said, "I'm 52 years of age. In all my life I've only felt like I was a human being for 17 days. I had been in the army and was injured. They sent me to the Soviet Union and in that hospital, the nurses really cared for me."

By the time he finished his story, both of us were almost in tears. Had life been so rough to him? Had he never experienced any value and care from his family, neighbors and friends? Had no one ever paid attention to him? Had no one ever loved him?

I have a good British friend who grew up in a very dysfunctional home. He was often alone. When he became 'of age' and joined a youth organization that served the poor, he met a young lady whom he began to like. He noticed that she liked him too! They fell in love with each other. He said to me, "When she began to love me, I felt like I had become a human being!" Someone had noticed him and paid attention to him. This gave him a sense of honor, real honor. And with this honor, he could not give honor to others.

To love someone means to recognize that person as truly human. Consider this definition of love:

a kind of respect, a sensitivity on the part of one person to another's existence. To be shown love is to feel ourselves the object of concern: our presence is noted, our name is registered, our views are listened to, our failings are treated with indulgence, and our needs are ministered to. And under such care, we flourish.<sup>2</sup>

When we love someone, we recognize that person as truly human. It means to relate to that person with care and attention. As for the person receiving love, when we are recognized and cared for, we become alive and become transformed.

To love another person is to truly honor and value that person. Yes, honor may come to us as we 'rise to the top' and achieve great things. However, there is an even higher honor when we step out to *care* for others and value them. This type of honor is not based on how many people follow us, how many people praise us or how many privileges we may have. It is an honor that sees the privilege and delight of valuing others. While we naturally crave credit for ourselves, we will experience true honor when we can give credit to others.

**We will experience true honor when we can give credit to others.**

This needs to happen in all sectors of our lives. However, the greatest challenge remains in family relationships. When husbands and wives value each other, when we honor the family unit as the highest priority, we will flourish, as will our children.

We said earlier that the traditional warrior abandoned himself in order to be occupied with affairs other than his own. He considered this calling as more important than himself. This

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<sup>2</sup> Status Anxiety, 6.

becomes the highest ethic of a human being – when a person no longer lives for himself only but raises himself beyond himself. He becomes a true *jawanmard*, throwing himself into the ‘other’ person, for the other person’s benefit.

This does not mean that we obliterate ourselves for the sake of the other. We are not talking about drowning or losing ourselves in the group or being forced to ignore ourselves for the sake of others.

Rather, as we care for others and value them, we live with a new set of values. Here, on the second mountain, we see the world and people around us differently. As we value others, we experience joy and love in return. There is no greater honor than freely giving honor to others. This increases our own honor. As we delight in others around us, we create more delight for ourselves, and both the one giving honor and the one receiving honor will flourish. We conclude that the truly higher honor is to honor one another.

**We conclude that the truly higher honor is to honor one another.**



**VOCABULARY**

*ab-i ru* - reputation

*afirin* - Well done!

*ashiq* - someone who is in love

*ashraf al-makhlūqat* - the noble creation

*az khod gozashtegi* – to sacrifice, literally: to pass by oneself

*desterkhwan* - table-spread, tablecloth, dinner table

*fitna* - chaos, sexual disorder

*ghayrat* - zeal, nerve, guts

*ham-dam* - confidant, literally: co-breath

*ham-rah* - fellow-traveler, literally: co-road

*ham-sar* - spouse, literally: co-head

*ham-sharik* - partner, literally: co-partner

*harami* - illegitimate

*hasab* - credit

*haya* - modesty

*idda* - law for remarriage

*ishq* - passionate love

*itaraf-nama* - confessional

*jawanmard* – literally: young-man, hero, champion

*jawanmardi* - sacrificial heroism

*khalifa* - vicegerent

*mardanagi* - manliness

*mardum-dar* - has people or followers

*muhabat* – love, kindness

*nasab* - connection

*purda* - curtain

*qissa* - story

*rahman wa rahim* - merciful and compassionate

*ru-siya* - black face

*sar-baz* - soldier

*sar-bi-dar* - one's head on the gallows

*sharif* - noble

*ta'aruf* - courtesy, politeness

*taba-ul-amr* - under command