The page features two large, overlapping blue circles, one in the top right and one in the bottom right. Two thin blue lines cross the page diagonally, one from the top left to the bottom right, and another from the top right to the bottom left.

# **COURSE ON PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP (PDL)**



**Da'wah Institute of Nigeria (DIN)  
Islamic Education Trust (IET)**



Da'wah Institute of Nigeria (DIN)  
Islamic Education Trust (IET)

# COURSE ON PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP (PDL)

*“Allah will never change the blessings of a people unless they change their inner selves” (Surah Al-Ra’d, 13:11)*

*“Consider the human self and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be, and how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of Allah. To a happy state shall indeed attain he who causes this (self) to grow in purity, and truly lost is he who buries it (in darkness)” (Surah Ash-Shams, 91:7-10)*

*“The Day (of Judgment is) when neither wealth nor children will be of any use, (none shall be saved) except he who comes unto Allah with a sound heart” (Surah Ash-Shu’ara’, 26:88-89)*

The objective of this course is to help individual Muslims to become effective in fulfilling their purpose in life - being better people and being better vicegerents of Allah. Being better necessitates utilizing the latest methods in maximizing an individual's Islamic character and habits. This course, therefore, covers material from the foundational sources of the Qur'an and Sunnah, as well as the ideas of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in the science of personal development. Only those statements from non-Muslim authors that are in line with the Shari'ah of Islam have been included in this material.

Contents:

- I. General Concepts and Ideas on Personal Development
- II. Self Development (Jihad Bin-Nafs and the Victory over Self)
- III. Self-motivation and Habit-formation Techniques
- IV. Interpersonal Development (The Public Victory over Self)
- V. Sharpening the Saw (Self-Renewal according to the Qur'an and Sunnah)

## I.

# General Concepts and Ideas on Personal Development

**Personal Development** is the improvement of oneself in all spheres of one's life – struggling with one's inner thoughts and wrong beliefs, striving to perform all acts of 'ibadah perfectly, increasing in good deeds, securing healthy relationships with others, having positive and beneficial interactions with one's family, friends, work colleagues and non-Muslims, being able to think and plan well for one's present and the future, and maximising all one's inner resources for the best in this life and the Hereafter.

Personal Development involves more than just praying and fasting regularly. Allah says: *“Righteousness is not whether you turn your face towards the East or West, but righteousness is to believe in Allah, the Last Day, the Angels, the Books and the Prophets; and to spend your wealth out of love for Him on relatives, orphans, the helpless, needy travellers, those who ask, and the freeing of those in bondage; and to be constant in salah, to give zakah, to fulfil promises made, and to be steadfast in hardship, stress and peril. Such are those who have proved themselves sincere. It is they who are conscious of Allah.”* (2:177)

## 1. Effective people have Good Habits



Personal Development requires the cultivation of good **habits**. The Prophet (saw) said *“the deeds most loved by Allah are those done regularly even if they are small”* (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim). That is, the best of actions are those that become good habits! Likewise, the worst sins would be those done regularly, even if they are small! That is, the worst of actions are those that become bad habits!

Habits are potent forces in our lives because they are at work constantly and subconsciously. Everyday, they define *who we are* and determine *how effective we are*.

### How do habits develop?

One of the most famous Muslim scholars who developed ideas on habit-formation is **Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah**. In his book

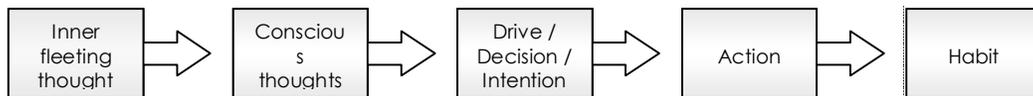
“You should know that the beginning of any voluntary act is *khawaatir* and *wasaa'wis* (plural of *waswasa*, which means concealed whisper. It is used in the Qur'an to describe the inner temptation of Satan: *“yuwaswisu fi sudur an-nas”*). These *khawaatir* and *wasaa'wis* lead to conscious thinking. Next, thinking will be transferred to or stored in the memory and the memory will transform it into a volition and a motive which will be acted out in real life as an action. Repeating the action leads to a strong habit. So eliminating an emotional or lustful habit is easier at an early stage before it gains strength.”

(Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Al-Fawa'id*. Beirut: Dar al-Nafa'is, 1981, p.173).

*Al-Fawa'id*, he says that anything a person does begins as an inner thought or *khawaatir* (plural of *khatirah*, meaning a fast, inner, concealed reflection, momentary notion or sub vocal thought). From this cognitive beginning, these fleeting thoughts, particularly negative ones, may develop through the following process into human actions and observable behaviour:

A lustful, sinful, or emotionally harmful *khatirah*, if accepted and not checked by the person concerned, can develop into a strong emotion or lust (*shahwah*). If this emotion is entertained or given credence; it may generate so much cognitive strength that it develops into a drive or an impulse for action. And if this impulse, drive or emotional motivation is not neutralized by its opposite emotion or resisting drive, it will be acted out in reality as external behaviour. Furthermore, if this behaviour is not resisted, it will be repeated so often that it becomes a **habit**.

This process may be visualised as follows:



Ibn al-Qayyim says it is thus easier to check inner fleeting thoughts than to fight an impulse, and it is easier to fight an impulse with an opposing motive than to change behaviour, and easier to refrain from an action done only a few times than to overcome a habit.

However, he states that Allah has created mankind weak (Surah An-Nisa', 4:28), and thus perpetually subjected to fleeting thoughts and satanic whispers. They are as unavoidable as breathing. This poses a challenge in that while one may be trying to deal with opposing a negative fleeting thought, emotion or intention before it becomes an action and habit, new fleeting thoughts continue bombarding one. Still, a wise person who has strong faith and self-control can accept the good *khawaatir* and repel the bad ones.

The best way to oppose a fleeting negative thought is to seek refuge in Allah: “*And if it should happen that a prompting from Shaytan stirs you up, seek refuge with Allah, for He is the One who is All-Hearing, All-Knowing*” (Surah al-A'arāf, 7:200).



According to Ibn al-Qayyim, the human mind is similar to a grinding mill which never stops, day or night, and always needs something to grind. Some people, who feed their minds with good thoughts and spiritual contemplation, are like those who put corn and wheat in their mills; they produce good flour. However, the mills of most people grind dirt and stones. When the time for making bread comes (in the Hereafter), each group will know what their mills have been grinding!

True Personal Development must be rooted in the remembrance of Allah. Actions and deeds can only be sound if they stem from sound internal notions, and these may only be sound if they have sound sources in the Message of Allah and His plentiful Signs in Creation.

“A meditative heart, which contemplates the grace of Allah and is mindful of the Hereafter, can easily detect the evil notions that pass through the mind as a result of the great sensitivity that the mind has acquired from long contemplation and continued remembrance. As soon as an evil notion passes through the mind, good sense detects it, confines it, and defuses its effect, just as a sound immune system in the body detects the intrusion of germs and antigens, which it then

besieges and destroys with specialised cells and antibodies. The psyche or soul of those who are constantly remembering Allah is like a protected fortress.” (Malik Badri, 2000, *Contemplation: An Islamic*

VA:



The Prophet (s) was the most effective person to have ever lived (Surah Al-Ahzab, 33:21)

*Psycho spiritual Study.*  
Herndon,  
IIIT,  
p.28).

This course entails how to develop good habits and change bad ones through effective use and control of our thoughts, emotions, and conscious actions. Specific techniques for this purpose have been selected from the vast guidance of the Qur’an and Sunnah, as well as some of the most successful methods presently used in the field of Islamic psychology and Personal Development.

## 2. Maturity develops in Stages

To begin developing good habits step-by-step, one needs to appreciate the role of gradualism and maturity. A useful classification of good habits is the 7 habits of human effectiveness mentioned by Stephen R. Covey (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, 1989, NY: Simon & Schuster). These have all been mentioned at various times, though using different terminologies, by numerous Islamic scholars, and include:

### **HABIT 1: BE PROACTIVE**

Taking responsibility for your life. Realising that every opportunity is a test of one’s ability to respond appropriately, with the freedom to choose given to one by Allah.

### **HABIT 2: BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND**

Defining your mission and goals in life. Having a clear direction and personal purpose in life in line with enjoining right and repelling wrong as a Trustee (*khalifah*) of Allah, using whatever gifts and resources one has been blessed with.

### **HABIT 3: PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST**

Prioritizing, and doing the most important things first. Having the courage and integrity to put one’s mission and purpose into practice through one’s decisions about what to do each day.

### **HABIT 4: THINK WIN/WIN**

Having an "everyone can win" attitude as opposed to thinking that one can only gain at the expense of someone else’s loss, and vice versa. Loving for others what you love for yourself, and actively seeking a mutually beneficial outcome.

### **HABIT 5: SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND ...THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD**

Listening to people sincerely in order to understand the true feelings and reasons behind their perspectives, rather than listening only with the intent to reply.

### **HABIT 6: SYNERGIZE**

Working together to achieve more. Appreciating differences as being of the diverse creation of Allah. Building on individual strengths in a group or team so that the whole is superior to the sum of its parts, just as the reward for congregational salat is 25 to 27 times the reward of each individual’s salat.

### **HABIT 7: SHARPEN THE SAW**

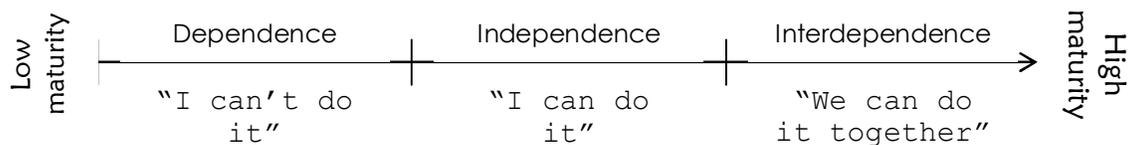
Renewing yourself regularly through consistent acts of self-improvement in the spiritual, intellectual, social/emotional, and physical dimensions.

✎ There is a natural order of maturity in the world. We each begin life as an infant moving from *dependence* on our parents to a sense of *independence* before coming to a mature

understanding of the *interdependence* of everyone and everything in the world around us. Allah has created the world with harmonious balance (Surah Al-Rahman, 55:7-9), and every living thing in pairs that live interdependently! (Surah Ya Sin, 36:36)

- ✎ In harmony with the natural order of maturity, the 7 habits are not independent of each other; they provide an incremental, sequential and highly integrated approach to the development of personal and interpersonal effectiveness.
- ✎ Personal development “is a process that unfolds itself step by step. You cannot expect to change all at once. This is against the laws of nature. The Prophet (saw) was always aware of this when he was dealing with his Companions. Whenever someone embraced Islam, the Prophet (saw) would not ask that person to do everything immediately. Instead, he would teach and expect that person to start fulfilling his obligations only as much as he could bear at a time. This gradual process of change is also clearly reflected in the manner in which the Qur’an was revealed over a period of 23 years. In all your efforts towards becoming a better Believer, you must bear in mind this principle of gradualism, otherwise you may try to attain the impossible, and when you do not achieve it, you may become frustrated.” (Khurram Murad, 2000, *In the Early Hours: Reflections on Spiritual and Self Development*, Edited by Riza Mohammed. London: Revival Publications, p.6)
- ✎ The development of Habits 1-3 are about Self-control, self-mastery, and victory over oneself i.e. having a high measure of independence (though not perfection).
- ✎ Habits 4-6 are about Creative Cooperation, public victory and skills-development that lead to interdependence.
- ✎ Living interdependently is the ideal for Muslims. “*A believer to another believer is like a building whose different parts reinforce the other*” (Sahih al-Bukhari). However, this building cannot be strong unless each part achieves its own internal strength.
- ✎ Habit 7 is about renewal, nurturing of continued development and of spiraling improvement.
- ✎ Mastering the 7 Habits moves us progressively on a Maturity Continuum from *dependence* (where many of us are now) to *independence* (when we are beginning to achieve self-mastery) to *interdependence* (when we realise that to achieve balance and true effectiveness, we must learn how to interact maturely with others).

Effective people rise above their conditions and circumstances to a level of maturity that is directed purely by Allah.



- \* *Dependence* is the paradigm of You – you take care of me; I blame you for the results.
- \* *Independence* is the paradigm of I – I can do it; I am responsible; I am self-reliant, I can choose. Independence is achieved through Habits 1-3.
- \* *Interdependence* is the paradigm of We – we can do it; we can co-operate; we can combine our talents and abilities and achieve something greater together. Interdependence is achieved through Habits 4-6.

- ✎ Interdependence is only an option for people who have attained independence. Interdependence has dimensions that are physical (self reliance combined with the ability to

work in a team), emotional (self worth along with fulfilling relationships), spiritual (through prayers and spiritual support), and intellectual (combining one's own ideas with the best of others).

- ✎ For this reason, the first 3 of the 7 habits are concerned with self-mastery, with the private victory of independence as the objective. Afterwards, the more public victories of teamwork and communication can be pursued by cultivating habits 4, 5 and 6. This process cannot be done the other way round. Jihad bin-Nafs is essential for effective interpersonal relations.

### 3. Appreciating Paradigm Shifts

- ✎ Your paradigm is the way you see things, your perception or mental image of the way things are, your point of view, frame of reference or belief about reality.

- ✎ We in reality see the world as *we are*, not as it is in reality.

- ✎ **How you see things affects your judgement of it, and your attitude and behaviours towards it.**

- ✎ “*You may dislike a thing that is good for you and you may like a thing that is bad for you*” (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:216).

- ✎ Our paradigms underlie many of our thoughts and actions.



#### PARADIGM SHIFT in the QUR'AN

*Story of Musa and Khadir (Surah Al-Kahf, 18:60-82)*

The paradigm shift occurs when Musa understands Khidr's reasons for doing what he did - the killing of the boy, the building of the wall, the damage to the boat. Musa moved from impatience and disgust to respect and humility.

- ✎ A change in paradigms can result in great change in a person's life and relationships

- ✎ A paradigm shift can turn mere tolerance and patience with someone into respect and appreciation of their circumstance.

- ✎ Paradigm shift is useful in appreciating the ethics of disagreement (*adab al-ikhtilaf*) in Islam

### 4. Focus on Production Capability and not just on

#### Production

- ✎ Consistent effectiveness depends on your capability to keep improving.

- ✎ This implies a healthy relationship between your input and the desired output.

There is a famous fable about a goose and the golden egg. The story begins with a farmer who one day looks in the nest of his goose and finds a golden egg. At first he thinks it must be a trick, but he takes it for valuing and discovers to his amazement that the egg is real gold! The following day, another golden egg is laid. The farmer can't believe his fortune. Day after day, he wakes up to find another golden egg supplied by his goose. But with the farmer's increasing wealth comes increasing greed. The farmer became impatient and was unable to wait another day for another egg. He had to obtain more immediately and so he went to his goose and sliced her open to grab everything else that was inside. In the process, he lost not just his eggs but his capacity to gain them again in the future. The greedy farmer focused only on what he wanted – more golden eggs. With more effort on taking care of the goose and ensuring its health, he could have had a constant supply of eggs for the rest of the goose's life.

✎ When we work towards success, we often focus on the egg. True success in Islam requires us to focus on the goose. The production of eggs will naturally follow.

✎ **A paradigm shift is required from a focus on output and efficient productivity to total habit-reform in order to achieve lasting success.** Otherwise, a person may learn techniques of human influence and be very good at manipulation with enough determination to achieve great fortunes, but may be a failure at his social relationships and end up a loser on the Day of Judgement. Another person may be very popular socially and an ethical businessman but deprived of physical fitness and good health to continue his business or social life for very long. Yet another person may want a better marriage yet never attains it due to focusing only on trying to change their partner's weaknesses. All techniques to get what one wants without improving one's personal habits are, therefore, unable to sustain one's success.

✎ Personal effectiveness is attaining one's character and capability goals and being able to sustain them, i.e., being able to sustain one's health, relationships, intellectual development, spiritual growth, through reform of one's thinking, intentions, control over one's emotions, and consistent actions.

*“Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change (what is within) themselves” (Surah Al-Ra'd, 13:11).*

## 5. Emotional Bank Account

✎ *“This heart has been created in such a way that it loves those who show kindness towards it” (Hadith by Baihaqi)*

✎ This concept is about building trust and **emotional/social capital**.

✎ In personal relationships, the emotions of human beings naturally operate through a bank account paradigm. Positive feelings in people are built up when good is done to them, when they are made to feel important, respected, appreciated and trusted.

✎ The more good that one does to others, the more **emotional investments** one is making in their emotional accounts. When bad actions or neglect are done to a person, even if they are not deliberate, **emotional withdrawals** are made from their account.

✎ Investments made into a relationship form an emotional reserve from which healthy interactions and returns may result. If regular investments are made to form a large account, even on days when withdrawals are made through disappointments and mistakes, these may be overlooked and the relationship will be unharmed.

- ✎ To build a relationship, one needs to ensure that **emotional deposits** far outweigh emotional withdrawals.
- ✎ When a person within a relationship behaves over-emotionally, it is often because either too many emotional withdrawals have been made from their account, or too few emotional deposits have been made to their account. This is more often the case in **intimate relationships** (such as between husband and wife, or parent and child), where a lot of emotional transactions take place on a daily basis, and where the emotional strength of a relationship is often taken for granted.
- ✎ It is often assumed that **the closer you are to a person**, the less it matters whether one makes major deposits or withdrawals.
- ✎ A person's emotions towards you are a measure of how much emotional investments or withdrawals you have made in the relationship.
- ✎ The Emotional Bank Account operates in the background all the time but as a Muslim, what one does for others should be done not just as an investment for this world but ideally **selflessly to earn Allah's pleasure**.
- ✎ **Doing good should not be a loan to others**, with the expectation that doing good will be done back to you. *"We feed you seeking Allah's Countenance alone. We ask no reward nor thanks from you"* (Surah Al-Dahr or Al-Insan, 76:9).
- ✎ Deposits in an Emotional Bank Account take the form of an act of kindness, helpfulness, understanding, thoughtfulness, respect, compliments, appreciation, visits, gifts, courtesy, acknowledgment of one's mistakes, apologies, etc.
- ✎ Withdrawals take the form of threats, broken promises, insults, lack of showing appreciation, neglect, insensitivity, and apathy towards a person's feelings.
- ✎ Deposits must be made in **the currency that will be appreciated**, i.e., the other party's frame of reference, *not yours*. "One man's meat is another man's poison." For example, if an emotional deposit is to be made to a wife, it must be done in a way that is meaningful to her. If offering to assist with the housework may make her extremely happy and cared for, it would be a large deposit. If serving a husband's guests without being asked to would make him feel respected and important, it would also be a large deposit. However, if an action such as watching television together would be a deposit within the husband's frame of reference, it may not be for the wife. Therefore, a husband who watches television with his wife may assume he is making a deposit, but it does not register the same way for his wife. She may instead prefer him to spend that time having a conversation with her about her day. Deposits must be made within the other's frame of reference for it to be credited.
- ✎ The Prophet was known as "**Al-Ameen**" (The Trustworthy) by everyone in his society, even Non-Muslims. He earned this reputation through his lifetime of good deeds and character that established hefty emotional investments to everyone he knew.
- ✎ The Prophet (saw) also built **emotional accounts with Non-Muslims** and encouraged others to do so through gift-giving and gift-receiving (Sahih Al-Bukhari). Take, for instance, his actions towards his Jewish neighbour who would persistently throw rubbish in front of the Prophet's home. On each occasion, the Prophet (saw) merely cleared the rubbish away, and on a day when the rubbish stopped coming, the Prophet (saw) visited his neighbour to see if anything was wrong. Such patient and considerate actions earned the Prophet (saw) a

healthy emotional reserve in the heart of his neighbour, so much so that his **single visit** touched the neighbour enough to become Muslim!

👉 **Khadijah** (RA) devoutly believed in the Prophet (saw) and supported him through some of his most painful days in the early part of his mission. Her emotional deposits were so great that he noted to Aisha long after Khadijah's death that Allah had never blessed him with a better wife, for she was his supporter when the entire world was against him. For the rest of his life, the Prophet (saw) never forgot her and continued to be moved by any reminder of her.

👉 What you sow is what you reap. The more you sow the more you reap. If you stop sowing, you'll stop reaping (or only reap weeds!)

👉 The Prophet (saw) said, *“Do not dismiss certain acts of kindness by deeming them to be insignificant, even if (it is that) you meet your brother with a smiling face”* (Agreed upon). Smiling is a sadaqah and a very significant emotional deposit.

👉 Make deposits according to people's own references and priorities.

👉 Major withdrawal has to do with breaking of promises and major deposit is the ability to **sincerely apologize**

👉 Do not underestimate the negative impacts of small things done regularly to someone, whether good or bad. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud warned, *“Avoid the sins which are considered insignificant for their example is like that of a people who stopped by a river and every member collected a piece of wood until they had enough to make a fire to cook their bread. These (light) sins can be very destructive once combined in an individual.”* (Ahmad, cited in Sheikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali, 2002, *Don't Worry, Relax & Be Happy*. London: Al-Firdous Ltd.).

👉 Half-apologies, covering up the truth and manipulation are also huge withdrawals.

👉 Be careful of **making promises**.

Promises generate

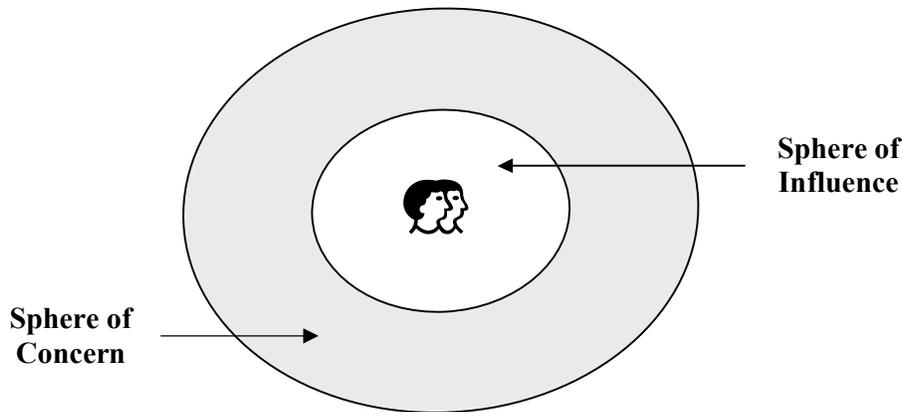
hope, excitement, anticipation and vulnerability. Breaking a promise shatters all of the above, and is an immense withdrawal. Therefore, be sparing with promises you are unsure of keeping. And if promises have been broken in the past, trust needs to be rebuilt first.

👉 Don't defend yourself when making apologies as this depreciates the deposit it could otherwise make. Make them sincere apologies, as there is nothing wrong with admitting to a mistake. After all, all Children of Adam make mistakes.

## Priceless Words!

The 6 most priceless words	“I appreciate you and your efforts”
The 5 most priceless words	“I am proud of you”
The 4 most priceless words	“What is your opinion?”
The 3 most priceless words	“Would you please?”
The 2 most priceless words	“Thank you”
The 1 most priceless word	“We”
The most costly word	“Me”

## 6. Sphere of Concern and Sphere of Influence



- ✎ Events and circumstances are divided into those that are within our Sphere of Concern, and those that are within our Sphere of Influence.
- ✎ Sphere of Influence – areas that can be acted upon (in enjoining right and repelling wrong)
- ✎ Spheres of Concern - areas you feel you have no control over, but are nonetheless concerned about.
- ✎ We have a wide range of concerns - our health, problems at work, national crises, weather, international events, etc. The fact is, we have no real control over some things that happen to us (Sphere of Concern), but there are some we can do something about (Sphere of Influence). By determining which of these we focus most of our time and energy, we can discover much about the range we can be ‘activists’ in.
- ✎ Allah does not hold you responsible for anything other than your Sphere of Influence. “...*And whatever any soul does reaps its own consequences unto itself, and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another*” (Surah Al-An’aam, 6:164)
- ✎ The Sphere of Influence is what the Muslim is considered directly responsible for, whether as an individual or collective responsibility. The best expression of faith is to one’s utmost in the enjoining of right and repelling of wrong within that sphere. However, to refuse to use one’s powers to change a wrong or to exercise some influence upon others to make the necessary change is considered a manifestation of weak faith. “*Whoever sees something wrong, let him correct it by his hand (with the power vested in him), and if he can’t (do that), let him correct it by his tongue, and if he can’t (do that), let him hate it with his heart, and this is the weakest of faith (if one can do more).*” (Sahih Muslim).
- ✎ Correcting ‘by one’s hand’ must be done with wisdom, calmness, and justice. “*Do not let hatred of a thing make you swerve from doing justice.*” “*The religion of Islam is a lenient one – so go into it with ease and patience. No one who attempts to storm his way into it will come out victorious*” (Sahih Al-Bukhari). “*Invite all to the way of your Lord (the Right Path) with wisdom and beautiful preaching.*” Both Ends and Means must be in line with Islamic

### Exercise:

If a Muslim community is enduring hardship or inequity compared to other communities in a society, what is the Sphere of Influence that such Muslims can make a difference within?  
What actions would constitute the realm of the weakest of faith?  
What actions would constitute the realm of influence?  
What actions would constitute the realm of “the hand”?

requirements.



## Law of Control

- ✎ The degree of self-control is proportional to the degree of mental health and comfort. In other words, as a law in nature, your control over your self determines how good you feel about your self; and the more self-control you have, the more peace of mind you have. If your sense of control is focused on the external (controlling what happens to you or what others do), peace of mind is also very difficult to achieve as this type of control is very difficult to achieve.
- ✎ Control starts from what we think, then our actions, so we should first take control of our thoughts (and intentions or decisions).
- ✎ *“The intelligent is one who calls his own Self to account and works for the Hereafter; and the incapable is one who follows his Self desires (without any control over it) and then depends on Allah”* (Sunan At-Tirmidhi)..

## Law of Accident

- ✎ This Law is the opposite of the Law of Control. It is also the default Law that operates if one fails to utilise the Law of Control. The majority of people believe that because they do not know what eventually will happen, and they feel that there is no control over any aspect of their life. Hence, they *think* that there is no reason to plan, and so they (in terms of action) fail to plan. This is a wrong belief and is fatalistic, as failing to plan is in effect planning to fail.
- ✎ Failing to take control over your own life is in fact giving license to letting others control you.

## Law of Cause & Effect

- ✎ For every effect in our lives, there is a specific cause(s). To change the effect, we need to change the cause.
- ✎ Everything happens by law and not by accident. These are the Sunan (ways) of Allah – *“Such are laws of Allah which have been in the past, and never will you find any change in God’s laws!”* (Surah Al-Fat-h, 48:23) Therefore, it is important for us to identify causes and influences.
- ✎ We don’t know the future but we do know that it’s a product of the past and present causes, by Allah’s permission. The present is the last chance we have to change the effects of the past.
- ✎ The Law of Control and the Law of Accident go together and they emphasise the need for us to control causes.
- ✎ Thoughts are causes; Conditions are effects. Thoughts are the primary causes of conditions, and everything we are is a product of all our thoughts. If we can change our thinking, we can change our conditions.

- ✎ Every thing that has become reality has two components: the internal or mental conception and the external or physical implementation of that conception. This may be termed a process of “double creation” – the first in one’s mind, the second in the material world.
- ✎ Hasan Al-Banna said: “O mankind, do not build your life on hope in the unknown, as it would not do you any good... Happiness, which everyone is longing for streams to them from their own minds and hearts, and likewise, the hardship surrounding them, and from which they try to escape, befalls them from their hearts as well.” (Cited in Sheikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali, 2002, *Stop Worrying, Relax and Be Happy*. London: Al-Firdous Ltd., p.6)

## II.

### Self Development

(Jihad bin-Nafs and achieving the Private Victory over Self)

“So lose not heart, nor fall into despair: For you must gain mastery if you are true in faith.” (Surah Ali-‘Imran, 3:139)

#### Habit 1: Be Proactive

Take responsibility for your life.

“Nothing shall be accounted unto a person except what he strives for, and in time he shall see the results of his striving” (Surah Al-Najm, 53:39-40).

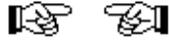
“Any action is a cause set in motion; its effects build on past effects to move us in definitive direction (destiny). To change our destiny, we must change our consistent actions. (i.e. Habits)” – Anthony Robbins

You are an arm of the Ummah.  
The Ummah moves forward if you do.

- ✎ Your life should be a product of your values and decisions, not of your feelings or conditions.
- ✎ Proactivity means living by our Shahadah: “*La ilaha illal’Lah wa Muhammadu Rasulul’Lah*” – We are ruled by the values determined by Allah and the example of the Prophet (saw), not by our circumstances or others in our environment. Living the Shahadah means being a witness in every aspect of our lives to the Truth and wisdom of Allah’s contract with mankind. “*And thus have We made you to be a community of the Middle Way, so that you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind.*” (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:143)

“Truly did We offer Al-Amanah (the trust/responsibility) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it, but man bore it” (Surah Al-Ahzab, 33:72).

- ✎ Witnessing before mankind necessitates putting our God-given responsibility as a *khalifatul-‘Ard* (trustee upon the Earth) at the forefront of all our decisions, actions and responses to others and events that we encounter.
- ✎ “Every one of you is a shepherd and every one is responsible for what he is a shepherd of” (Sunan Tirmidhi, Sunan Abu Dawud, Sahih Al-Bukhari, and Sahih Muslim).



## Whose responsibility is it?

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody.

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was asked to do it.

Everybody was sure Somebody would do it.

Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did.

Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job.

Everybody thought Anybody could do it but Nobody realised that Everybody would not do it.

It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done!

(Taken from Hisham Al-Talib, 1999, *Training Guide for Islamic Workers*. IIIT)

✎ The initiative of Prophet Yusuf (A.S) is an example of proactivity. When looming disaster was upon the kingdom, the Prophet Yusuf (A.S.) made a proactive suggestion to the King that he would take responsibility for the sufficient build-up of grain reserves over the years before the famine: *“Place me in charge over the storehouses of the land; I will indeed guard them as one that knows (their importance)”* (Surah Yusuf, 12:55). This proactivity was praiseworthy to Allah: *“Thus did We give established power to Yusuf in the land to have full mastery therein as when or where he pleased. We bestow of Our mercy on whom We please and We suffer not to be lost the reward of those who do good”* (Surah Yusuf, 12:56).

## Free-will and Responsibility

✎ Between what happens to you (stimulus) and your response to it, is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response (**response-ability**). And in that choice lies the ability to shape our growth and happiness, despite all conditions that we can do nothing about.

✎ In spite of our genetics, and the experiences we had while we were growing up, and our past relationship failures with others, and the difficulties we experience in our present environment, we have the power to influence the way it all affects us.

✎ Proactivity is about being a complete Muslim/submitter; that no situation decides or chooses for you whether or not you continue to submit to Allah's will. You should decide to submit under all circumstances or conditions – *“Do people think they will be left alone because they say ‘We believe’ and that their faith will not be tested?”* (Surah Al-Ankabut, 29:2). *“And most certainly shall We try you by means of danger and hunger and loss of worldly goods, of lives and of the fruits (of your labor). But give glad tidings to those who are patient in adversity, who, when calamity befalls them say, ‘Verily, to Allah we belong and verily, to Him is our return’. It is they upon whom descend the rahmah (blessings and mercy) from their Sustainer, and it is they who are on the right path”* (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:155-157).

## “The Last of Human Freedoms”

- ✎ We are the final determinants of how anything affects our lives. The environment could influence us but we determine *how* it influences us.
- ✎ Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor from World War II and author of *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959. Boston: Beacon Press), realized that while he was physically imprisoned in the worst of conditions and horrifying events were happening all around him, he still possessed “the last of the human freedoms” – the ability to choose one’s response to one’s condition. Frankl searched for meaning in his tribulations and was able to mentally project himself into different circumstances. Every day, while others had decided that life had nothing more for them and took to smoking and other illness-developing habits, he would visualize himself lecturing to students upon his release, writing books, and teaching others the lessons he learned from his stay at the Concentration Camps to ensure such injustice never happens again. This gave him the will to survive when many others had become ever more vulnerable to their environment. Frankl’s proactive response helped him to retain his physical strength and mental endurance throughout years of torture and beyond.
- ✎ The fact that our conditions cannot remove all of our freedoms explains why Allah continues to test us and hold us accountable in spite of all our weaknesses.
- ✎ “*We test all of you by passing you through bad and good conditions, and finally unto Us shall you return*” (Surah Al-Anbiya', 21:35).

## Stepping Forward after Suffering

- ✎ “*Allah doesn't place a burden upon anyone greater than (Allah knows) he can bear*” (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:286). Therefore, if Allah has given you a burden, it is because He knows you have the ability to handle it and earn great merit for it. It is you who sometimes *choose* not to bear it.
- ✎ Islam’s history is replete with examples of the Prophets and famous scholars who suffered much (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:215) and yet achieved great feats.
- ✎ The Prophet Yusuf (A.S.) did not let the many years of injustice he faced prevent him from focusing on what he could do. The Prophet Muhammad (saw) was an orphan from a young age, and endured the loss of most of his beloved family members, yet he never assumed an attitude that life had not favoured him and that therefore he couldn’t let proactivity overcome his condition.
- ✎ The Prophet (saw) became a refugee and was forced to leave his home for Madinah, but it was in Madinah that his efforts were of maximum advantage to Islam, and with lightning speed, Madinah became the central city of Islam; a place of peace and radiance for all Muslims to this day.
- ✎ Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal was imprisoned and tortured in his lifetime, but emerged victorious and later known as the Imam of the Sunnah. Sheikh Ibn Taymiyyah also was imprisoned but became an even more accomplished scholar upon release. Ibn Atheer wrote one of the most famous books on the science of Hadith after he became crippled. When Imam Ibn al-Jawzi was exiled from Baghdad, he was able to travel and eventually master seven different ways of reciting the Qur’an. (‘Aaidh ibn Abdullah al-Qarnee, 2002, *Don't Be Sad*. Translated by Faisal ibn Muhammad. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, p.43-44).

## Proactivity is the opposite of being reactionary

- ✎ Proactivity is exercising one's conscious control over one's impulses and living according to one's values and principles, and not just emotions.
- ✎ The opposite of proactivity is being reactive - when your life is a product of your conditions and feelings, being a victim of circumstance, product of the environment alone, of not taking responsibility
- ✎ Reactive behaviours include emotional defensiveness, telling lies, aggression, fighting, panic, greed, indifference, blaming others, etc. Indeed, most vices are reactive and involve little thought or contemplation or purification of intentions.

### Listen to Yourself

Which list reminds you more of how you tend to speak?



#### Reactive

I can't do anything about it  
It's just my nature  
He infuriates me  
They'll never let you do that  
I must...  
If only someone could...  
The Jews control everything  
  
It was destiny (qadrul'Lah)  
Shaytan has ruined it again for us  
We saw our forefathers doing it  
before I decide

#### Proactive

What are our options?  
I'll use a new approach  
I control my own feelings  
I can convince them  
I prefer...  
I will do my best  
We will use initiative, wisdom and  
strategy  
to improve our condition  
It's my fault. I was lazy  
We take responsibility  
I will think deeply over it

The words "have" and "be" are telling indicators as to whether a person lives in the realm of their influence or their concern. The Sphere of Concern is full of "have"s: "I'll be happy when I have a new car", "If only I had a better boss", "If I had a degree..." "When I have time..." etc.

The Sphere of Influence is focussed on character, so it is full of "be"s: "I can be more patient", "I will be more efficient with my time", "I can be more resourceful... inventive... industrious...", etc.

Whenever someone thinks a problem is 'out there', that thought is the problem.

If you want to *have* a happy marriage, then *be* a person that generates positive energy and does not empower negative energy. If you want to *have* a pleasant, cooperative child, then *be* a more understanding, empathic, consistent, and self-disciplined parent. If you want to *have* greater flexibility and autonomy in your job, then *be* a more responsible more helpful more contributing employee

- ✎ Making excuses is a symptom of weak will in our Nafs.
- ✎ We usually find it easier to say “I am not responsible” than to say “I am irresponsible”. Selective use of words can sometimes be a subtle way of making excuses.
- ✎ Even Shaytan will stand up on the Day of Judgement, saying: “*I invited you and you responded to me, so don't blame me, blame yourselves*” (Surah Ibrahim, 14:22).
- ✎ Instead of asking, “What is this situation doing to me?” ask “What do I do to the situation?” or “What is this situation asking of me?”

## True Repentance means taking Moral Responsibility

One of the most beautiful supplications taught by the Prophet (saw) is the Du'a Istighfar. It exemplifies proactive speech that should be the characteristic of every Muslim: “O Allah, You are my Lord (and Sustainer). There is none worthy of worship but You. You created me and I am Your servant. I keep in mind Your promise as well as Your warning to the best of my ability. I seek refuge in You from the evil (consequences) of the wrong I have done. I acknowledge Your grace on me. I also confess my sin. And so, I pray for You to forgive me. For indeed there is no one to forgive sins except you ”

### Expanding our Sphere of Influence

- ✎ We should not let things we can do nothing about interfere with what we have great control over.
- ✎ It is important to be able to distinguish your Sphere of Influence from your Sphere of Concern under various circumstances. If you are unsure of which area a particular thing falls under, “*leave what you are in doubt of for that which you are sure of.*” (Hadith)
- ✎ Dedicated individuals who are committed to change do not let fear of failure or the experience of past failure prevent them from persistence. A common saying goes, “If for fear of failure, you fail to try, you have automatically failed.”
- ✎ Your response to stimuli eventually affects the stimuli. Your response to your Sphere of Influence gradually affects how large your Spheres of Concern and Influence respectively become.
- ✎ Proactive people focus their effort on expanding their Sphere of Influence. They work on things they can do something about. The product of their enlarging and magnifying their efforts in this area causes their Sphere of Influence to increase.
- ✎ Reactive people, on the other hand, focus their effort on their Sphere of Concern, causing their Sphere of Influence to shrink.

“I am not discouraged because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward”  
– Thomas Edison

- ✎ Focusing on one's Sphere of Influence helps to expand it into one's Sphere of Concern. e.g. Various communities who have achieved a lot because they acted on their Sphere of Influence, unlike many who still complain of their concerns.
- ✎ Concentrating on the Sphere of Influence helps us to 'walk one's talk'. Increasing your Sphere of Influence gives you a sense of responsibility and courage to take the initiative and to act. Concentrating on the development of this Sphere helps to motivate one and the belief of one's freedom to eventually change our conditions, with Allah's blessings.
- ✎ Envy is usually directed at people whose achievements or blessings from Allah stem from their having concentrated their efforts on their Sphere of Influence as opposed to their Sphere of mere Concern. Therefore, let your own envy of others help to redirect you towards also concentrating on your own Sphere of Influence in a positive way.



### Exercise

Select a problem from your work or personal life that is frustrating to you, or identify an experience you might encounter in the near future where, based on past experience, you would probably behave reactively. Clearly write out the problem, and review the situation in the context of your Sphere of Influence. How could you respond proactively? Take several moments and create the experience vividly in your mind, picturing yourself responding in a proactive manner. Remind yourself of the gap between stimulus and response, and write down your revised proactive response. Make a commitment to yourself to exercise your freedom to choose and not just react.

## Decision Making / “Niyah”

- ✎ “Actions all have their intentions, and every man shall have (the reward of) what he intended” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim). Decisions are not what you wish or prefer or are interested in or “would like” to do, but what you have committed to put into action (i.e. an intention or strong resolve). *“And whoever resolves on the Life to Come, and strive for it as it ought to be striven for, and have true faith, they are the ones whose striving finds favour”* (Surah Al-‘Isra’, 17:19).
- ✎ Decision making is cutting oneself off from all other possibilities, and abandoning doubt about its consequences. Decision-making is about living and not continuously ‘preparing to live’. *“When you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah, for Allah loves those who put their trust in Him”* (Surah Ali-‘Imran, 3:159).
- ✎ Making decisions means setting standards for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for yourself irrespective of the environment. Beware of excuses!
- ✎ Not deciding how you are going to live your life is a decision to allow others and the environment to shape your destiny for you.
- ✎ Every action is a cause set in motion that leads in a particular direction, and every direction leads to a particular destination (“destiny”). What precede our actions are decisions. If we can take control of our consistent actions, we can change our habits, and that will change our direction and thus change our destiny. *“Man has nothing but what he strives for...”* (Surah Al-Najm, 53:39).

- ✎ Many people jump into the river of life without having any idea of the direction they want to go on, and so they get caught up in the current. But by the time they decide to go on a particular course, it may be too late and they go over the fall. If they had made wiser decisions upstream these could have been avoided.

## Purify your Proactivity!

Any proactive decision to perform an action must be made within the parameters of Islam:

Acceptance of righteous deeds (by Allah) depends on the fulfilment of the following two basic conditions:



- The intentions, while doing such deeds, must be in Allah's Cause only – without any showing off or desire to gain praise or fame, etc. “(saying) *‘We feed you for the sake of Allah alone; we seek from you neither reward nor thanks’*” (Surah Al-Dahr or Al-Insan, 76:9).
- Such a deed must be performed in accordance with the Sunnah (legal ways, instructions, acts of worship, statements, approval, etc.) of Allah's Messenger, Muhammad (saw).

- adapted from *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vol.1, p.154 as cited in *The Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an*, 1989. Translation by Muhammad Taqi-ud Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan. Lahore, Pakistan: Kazi Publications, part 3, p.234.

- ✎ Allah rewards every true decision to do good (i.e. *niyyah*)
- ✎ If you make mistaken decisions, learn from them and the obstacles met, stay flexible in your approach but stay committed to making decisions again.
- ✎ Get better at putting decisions to action by making decisions more often (especially since sincere intentions are always rewarded). The more decisions you make and the more mistakes you learn from, the more you learn to stay better committed to your decisions. Each time, we honour a commitment, we build the inner strength to accept more.

### 3 Decisions for Every Moment

- \* what to focus on (priorities)
- \* what things mean to you (values, goals)
- \* what to do now (action to be taken)

### 6 Steps for Making the Most of your Decisions:

1. Take new action immediately – New action is a proof of a decision.

2. Make a true commitment (by associating it with your duties and values as a Muslim).
3. Make decisions often (you have a reward for every good intention).
4. Learn from your decisions (you will inevitably make mistakes and encounter obstacles).
5. Stay flexible in your approach though committed to your decision.
6. Enjoy making decisions, and remember that a truly committed decision is the force that may change your life.

## Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind

Define your mission and goals in life.

- 👉 “Say, ‘Verily, my prayer, my worship, my life and my sacrifice are for Allah... and verily, I shall be the foremost of those who surrender themselves unto Him’” (Surah Al-An’aam, 6:162-163).
- 👉 *Whosoever follows My Guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve (Qur’an 2:38)*
- 👉 *Ye have indeed in the Apostle of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day and who engages much in the praise of Allah. (Qur’an 33:21)*
- 👉 “To Allah we belong and to Him is our return” (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:156).
- 👉 “Because where you’re heading is more important than how fast you’re moving” (A wise man)
- 👉 Habit 2 is about Personal Leadership, Visioning and Direction in Life. It is about discovering what matters to you most, and ensuring your life is aimed at fulfilling the things you really value.
- 👉 As Habit 1 is about you being the programmer (you being responsible for your life), Habit 2 is about you writing the program.
- 👉 Beginning with the End in Mind is about “*Leading*” your life and not just “*Managing*” its efficiency.
- 👉 Having a clear direction in life helps you avoid the traps of being too ‘busy’ but getting no closer to your preferred destination. Being busy – or even efficient – is not the same as being effective.
- 👉 Articulating a purpose and meaning to your life, and having a vision of what you want to accomplish and who you want to be in your future is very important in guiding your choice of response to stimuli, and ensuring that it is in line with your submission to Allah.
- 👉 No clear direction and purpose implies difficulty in knowing if you belong where you are, who you should be around, what you should be doing, and where you’ve reached. The opposite of Habit 2 is just “going with the flow” or having “no future ambition”.

## Visualisation Exercise

Imagine a graveyard, with many people around a grave. A body is being lowered into the ground. You see that the faces are marked by deep expressions – some of mourning, some of reflection, some of peace and hope. As you come forward and look more closely at the body, you realise it's yours. You realise that your life has come to an end. It is too late now to achieve any more.

The burial ends and as the group slowly disperses from the grave, you can hear the conversations arising among the various people who have known you – your spouse, your children, your parents, relatives, colleagues from work, those who you went to school with, your friends, your neighbours, fellow Muslims from your local mosque, members of the communities you touched, and non-Muslims acquaintances that have had discussions with you. They talk about what they remember of you, about how your life had been and the legacy you had left behind.

What would you want them to say about you? What contributions and achievements would you want them to remember? *“O mankind! Verily, you are returning in toil towards your Lord – you will surely meet Him”* (Surah Al-Inshiqaq, 84:6).

If you woke up on the Day of Judgement before Allah and saw your life flashing before you, what would you want to see? How different would you be from now on if you were to really prepare to meet Allah anytime from today?

***The Prophet (s) was asked, “Who is the cleverest of all believers?” He replied, “The one who remembers death and is better prepared for life after it” (At-Tabarani).***

- ✎ The Visualisation Exercise enables you to have a clearer idea of your tendencies towards a general direction and the values you hold in high esteem. It also helps one to know whether what you are doing now with your life is in line with this direction or whether it contradicts it.
- ✎ Is the direction you wish to head towards compatible with your purpose in life as a Muslim and the direction the Qur'an and Sunnah endorse?
- ✎ Remember, *“the mutual rivalry for accumulating the things of this world distracts you (from the most important things) until you visit your graves”* (Surah At-Takathur, 102:1-2).



“The basis of Shari’ah is wisdom and welfare of the people in this world as well as the Hereafter. This welfare lies in complete justice, mercy, well-being and wisdom. Anything that departs from justice to oppression, from mercy to harshness, from welfare to misery, and from wisdom to folly, has nothing to do with the Shari’ah” (Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *I’lam al-Muwaqqi’in*, vol.3, 691-750CE, p.14).

## Islam's Broad Vision for You

- ✎ *“We have not created jinn and men for any other purpose than for them to serve Us” (Surah Al-Dhariyat, 51:56).*
- ✎ *“And it is He who has made you khalifahs (generation after generation of stewards/trustees) on the Earth, and He has raised you in ranks, some above others so that He may try you in the gifts that He has bestowed upon you” (Surah Al-An‘am)*
- ✎ *“The most honoured among you is the one who is most God-conscious” (Surah Al-Hujurat, 49:13).*
- ✎ *“Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. Such are the ones to attain felicity” (Surah Ali-‘Imran, 3:104).*
- ✎ *“We have not sent you other than as a mercy to all creatures” (Surah Al-Anbiya, 21:107).*
- ✎ *“Thus have We made of you an Ummah justly balanced that you might be witnesses over the nations” (Surat Al-Baqarah, 2:143).*
- ✎ *“And bind yourself firmly with those who call upon their Lord morning and evening seeking only His attention, and let not your eyes pass beyond them seeking the pomp and glitter of this life” (Surah Al-Kahf, 18:28).*
- ✎ *“The best of mankind are those who are most useful to others” (At-Tabarani)*
- ✎ *“The believers are only those who have attained to faith in Allah and His Messenger, and have left all doubt behind, and who strive hard in Allah’s Cause with their possessions and their lives; it is they, they who are true to their word” (Surah Al-Hujurat, 49:15).*
- ✎ *“Fair in the eyes of people is the love of things they desire: women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver, branded horses, cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world’s life, but with Allah is the best of goals” (Surah Ali-‘Imran, 3:14).*



Hasan al-Basri was asked about the key to his disregard for the entertainments of this world. He replied, “I knew that no one other than myself shall have my sustenance (rizq from Allah), so my mind was at rest; that no one else would discharge my responsibilities, so I busy myself with them; that Allah is constantly watching me, so I got ashamed that He would see me being disobedient to Him; and that death is lying in wait for me, so I prepared myself for meeting Allah.” (Sheikh Abdurrahman Kishk, *Qissatu Hayaatee*, p.228, cited in Aboo Maimoonah Ahmad Bin Muhammad Bello, 2002, *Time Utilisation: An Islamic Perspective*, Lagos, p.71)

“We all know that someday we will all die. We all know that there is no escaping death. We all know that our life in this world is only a few seconds compared to the life in the grave and in the Hereafter. Yet, we do not take the time to plan for that journey. We live day in and day out, getting into a rut or a routine, where one day is no different from the next. Our journeys in this world are full of detailed planning and answers, yet our main journey, the most important journey of our life, is left to chance.” (Ahmed Adam, *Goal Setting for Muslims*, www.islamfortoday.com, visited August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003).

- ✎ A vision is usually detected and discovered from self-examination and not just hypothetically made up. It requires you to look into what are those gifts from Allah; one’s talents and special qualities. It requires you to ask “What do you admire in others?” “What does growth and development mean to you?” “What contributions really matter to you?” “What inspires you?” “What are other people’s acknowledgements of you?” “What are your areas of unique ability and interest?”
- ✎ Once you have a Vision or mental picture of your ideal self, which is in line with the tenets of Islam, it forms a poignant self-compass that provides the wisdom to make better choices for your life. This process of visualisation can continually motivate you towards your chosen direction.

## The Power of Visioning for the Ummah

During one of the darkest times faced by the Muslims, preparing for the Battle of the Trench, the Prophet (saw) was blessed by Allah with a vision of the Ummah’s future:

After many vain attempts to split or dislodge a rock he struck, ‘Umar went to the Prophet (saw) who took the pickaxe from him, and gave the rock a blow from which a spark as of lightning flashed back over the city and toward the South. He gave it another blow and again there was a flash but this time in the direction of Uhud and beyond it toward the North. A third blow split the rock into fragments, and this time the light flashed Eastward. Salman saw the three flashes and knew they must have some significance, so he asked for an interpretation from the Prophet (s) who said, “Did you see them, Salman? By the light of the first, I saw the castles of Yemen; by the light of the second, I saw the castles of Syria; by the light of the third, I saw the white palace of Kisra at Mada’in. Through the first has Allah opened up to me Yemen; through the second has He opened up to me Syria and the West, and through the third, the East. (Sunan Al-Baihaqi, cited in Martin Lings, 1983, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, p.218).

The Prophet’s vision has motivated Muslims for more than a millennium. It foretold the conquering of Constantinople, for which the Muslims waited seven hundred years. Mentioning the vision still energises Muslims to this day.

- Extract from Rafik Beekun and Jamal Badawi, 1999, *Leadership: An Islamic Perspective*. Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, p.6).

## Goal-Setting



To each is a goal to which Allah turns him. Then, strive together (as one) towards all that is good” (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:148).

- ✎ Goal-setting is the most important habit for maximum performance. The best leaders are habitual goal-setters. Goal achievers are continually motivated by compelling burning internal goals.
- ✎ We achieve more in a short time *with* goals than we achieve in years *without* them. Unless we have goals we drift and go round in circles. Goal-setting gives direction and focus. Goals are dreams with a deadline.
- ✎ Once goals are set, the subconscious goes to work to add ideas and motivation for goal-attainment.

### Goal-Setting Requirements:

1. Goals should not contradict each other (e.g. “I want to be a politician but I don’t want to be in the public eye”)
  2. Goals should be congruent with our basic values as Muslims. (e.g. “I want to get rich through halal means in order to be of financial benefit to my community”)
- ✎ Once these are met, the only challenges are: How badly do you want them? Are you willing to pay the price?

## Exercise:

1. In 30 seconds, write down the three most important goals in your life.
2. What are the five things that you value most in life? What would you pay most for? What would you be ready to fight for? These are your present foundation goals.
3. What would you do if you won a billion dollars tomorrow? If you had all the time and money you ever needed, what would be the first thing you do? What would you buy? What would you change if you had no financial limitations?
4. How would you spend your time if you knew you would live in good health for just 6 months (exactly 180 days), and then immediately die? What changes would you want to see in your life? The answer to this helps you with what you value most.

If your answers to 1-3 contradict that of 4, then you need to seriously sort out your priorities, direction and focus in life.

What is the purpose of your life? *“Do you think we have created you in jest – for no purpose?”* (23:115-116) *“We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in vain”* (44:38).

5. What have you always wanted to do but have been afraid to attempt or try? The answer to this is usually a bad habit you’ve developed. E.g. “I’ve always wanted to pursue a PhD but I thought I wouldn’t have enough time or money”. “I’ve always wanted to do da’wah in public but I always anticipate everyone will either condemn or laugh at me”.
6. What sort of activities, under what sort of circumstances, gives you the greatest feeling of importance, self-worth, mental well-being, personal pleasure and satisfaction? The answer to this is a key indicator of your niche – where your area of excellence is.
7. If you had *one* wish to realise any *one* goal, what would it be?

These questions help us in identifying our foundation/major goals, what we value most, what our priorities are, bad habits we’ve developed, our areas of excellence, direction and possible niche.

Take one goal at a time and work at it. The success of one goal will help to motivate you for the next.

## Steps in Goal Setting:

1. **DESIRE** – This is the greatest motivator, as it gives a good reason or a “why”
2. **BELIEF** – That you have no doubt in your ability. It should be **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, Time-bound), and **believable** to YOU. A 50% increment in financial status within 12 months is more believable than a 50% increment in 12 days.
  - Goals should cause you to stretch and should be challenging enough to move you out of your “comfort zone”<sup>1</sup>.
3. **WRITE** it down in every detail. (This is the most important step and programs the goal into the subconscious.) Not writing it down makes a goal merely a wish.
4. **LIST** all the advantages and differences this goal will make when accomplished. The more the reasons, the more the motivation and desire and belief in it. (See Neuro-Associative Conditioning under Self-Motivation Techniques in this material).
5. **ANALYSE** your position now – what is your present situation? “Presently, I weigh x kilos, my grade in class is y, the number of Qur’anic verses I have memorised is z...”

<sup>1</sup> Comfort Zone – what you are used to.

6. SET A DEADLINE – Goals should be measurable and SMART.
7. IDENTIFY any obstacles to overcome. Most of these obstacles are small when put down in writing. In fact, when isolated they can be carefully scrutinised and identified as whispers from Shaytan. This is a form of therapy in itself. (No obstacles means it is an activity, not a goal).
8. IDENTIFY the knowledge required to achieve the goal. What would you have to learn, research or analyse, etc?
9. IDENTIFY the people, groups and organisations whose co-operation and assistance would be needed to achieve your goal, and bear in mind 2 Laws:

### **Law of Return**

Whatever you sow you shall reap, and you only reap as a result of what you sow. The more you sow the more you reap.

### **Law of Service**

True happiness requires service, especially service to fellow men. Happiness is a by-product of service (*ibadah*). There is more longer-lasting joy from service than from being served. Service requires going the extra-mile.

When setting any service goals, remember the things that make life fulfilling:

- i. Having a loving relationship. Love for yourself only grows through showing it to others.
  - ii. Accepting full responsibility (using proactivity).
  - iii. The happiest people have always been givers, not takers. *“It is permissible for you to disclose your charity, but if you conceal it, and give it to the poor, that is better for you...”* (2:271).
10. MAKE A PLAN FOR STEPS 7, 8, & 9 and prioritise according to time and importance. Re-write plans to improve them, be flexible, and use feedback. As a rule, always plan and think on paper.
  11. GET a clear mental visualization of your goals at its completion as if it was already in realization.
  12. BACK your plan with determined and resolved action. Remember that the best plan will not work until you do. Trust in Allah and resolve never to give up. Ie. Exercise Sabr (patient persistence).

### **Patient Perseverance (Sabr):**

- i. Every achievement outside the ordinary has failed to be achieved on many attempts. It requires an attitude of no retreat and no surrendering.
- ii. Self-discipline is persistence in action. Your persistence is your measure of your belief in yourself.
- iii. Obstacles are what you see when you take your mind off your goals.
- iv. Encourage others with goal-setting both individually and collectively, and try to become a

*“Nobody can be given a blessing better and greater than patience”* (Sahih Al-Bukhari).

*“Self discipline is persistence in action; your persistence is a measure of your belief in yourself.”* (A wise person)

goal-setting machine – a compulsive goal-setter.

- ✎ We all have goals – even if it’s just “making a living” instead of designing a life. If you don’t plant good seeds in the fertile soil of your mind, you will have weeds growing. It is necessary, therefore, that goal-setting must be immediately followed by a plan, then massive action.
- ✎ The unconscious fear of self-disappointment and no encouragement is one of the potential hindrances to achieving our goals which we need to shun and be more proactive about. Hence, it is important to develop one’s sabr, dhikr and a positive enabling environment of peers to help encourage and support one along the way.
- ✎ At least twice a day, put your major goals and purpose in life at the forefront of your mind.

## **Your Mission Statement**

- ✎ Habit 2 entails creating a Mission Statement for your self, family or organisation.
- ✎ Having a mission statement gives you a sense of identity and compass towards your direction. “If you don’t know where you are going, then any road will take you there” (Zahid Parvez, *Building a New Society: An Islamic Approach to Social Change*. p.234). And if you have no plans or goals, any road is as good as any other.
- ✎ A Mission Statement is the essence of true leadership, and is important for individuals, marriages, families and organisations, etc. It is a statement that summarises who you are, and what contributions you will be making to the world.
- ✎ A mission statement becomes a summary of your basic life-policy; a standard; an internal sense of what you are about, and helps identify weaknesses and hypocrisy.
- ✎ The process of introspection, learning, and developing a mission statement for a group – through *shura* (participatory means and consultation) – is as important as its contents
- ✎ This takes time and effort to develop.
- ✎ Writing it down and placing it at a place you may constantly refer to it serves to cement its aims in your mind and redirect your actions through regular reminder.
- ✎ A mission statement has 2 basic parts –
  - 1) a vision (the mental picture of who you should be), and
  - 2) principles (which is how you should go about being your ideal), and your values that represent your essential identity.

### **Important Qualities for a Mission Statement to have:**

- 1) It should deal with “timeless” goals – the methods of attaining the goals are flexible.
- 2) It should deal with ends and means. Ends alone become simply wishes or preferences.
- 3) It should deal with all 4 basic needs: to live, learn, love and leave a legacy.
- 4) It should implicitly and explicitly deal with all your roles in a balanced life.

### **Example of a family mission statement:**

“To create a nurturing place of faith, order, truth, love, tranquillity, happiness, relaxation, and to provide the opportunity for every member to become responsibly independent and effectively interdependent in order to serve worthy purposes in society.”

## **Organisational Mission Statement of the Muslim Students' Association of the USA and Canada:**

“To be the medium through which Islam will be the active and progressive force on University and College campuses throughout North America” (Rafik Beekun and Jamal Badawi, 1999, *Leadership: An Islamic Perspective*. Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, p.41)

### **Some DON'Ts regarding a Mission Statement:**

- 2) Don't rush it
- 3) Don't impose it (on a group). A collective Mission Statement should be reached at by mutual participation and involvement of all stakeholders
- 4) Don't ignore it, but add to it over time

## **3 Mental Laws:**

Since thoughts, intentions and changes in ourselves can instigate causes towards better conditions for ourselves, there are 3 mental laws worth considering which propel us towards continually Visualising our Ends in our Minds.

### **Law of Belief**

- 👉 **Whatever you believe, with feeling, becomes your reality.** People with multiple personality are a prime example of this. **Placebo effects** are also another example. For over 70% of illnesses known to mankind, the placebo effect works in curing cases where it has been administered (Dr. Stephen Juan, 2000, *The Odd Body and Brain*. Sydney: Harper Collins, p.215-218).
- 👉 You are the sum total of your beliefs, both positive and negative. **Self-limiting beliefs**, therefore, whether real or not, become true to us. Self-limiting beliefs include statements such as: “Because people look down upon me, I can't do...” “Because of my health, I can't accomplish...” “Because of my limited education, I won't be able to handle that job.” “Because of my disability, I will never be able to...” These statements may not be true in reality, but if you believe them, you will limit yourself from that reality to, in effect, create another reality.
- 👉 Our beliefs are true (for us) to the extent to which we believe them. This also applies to what we think are our gifts or “rizq” from Allah. The moment you believe Arabic is too hard to learn, it will be too hard for you to learn. The moment you believe you are easily distracted, you will be easily distracted. This may be termed “**Self-Sabotage**” by self-limiting beliefs. Likewise, believing you can become something beyond your natural abilities will enable you to achieve that by Allah's grace.

### **Law of Expectation**

- 👉 Whatever we expect, with confidence, becomes our own self-fulfilling prophecy. **Our outlooks affect our results.** If you say to yourself, “I will fail this exam,” you will probably end up failing.
- 👉 **Even in du'a, our expectations play a strong role in our eventual reality.** The Prophet (s) advised that, “*Whatever you pray for, be certain that it will be responded to*” (Sunan At-Tirmidhi, Al-Haakim). “*When you doubt whether the prayer has been*

*accepted, then it is not accepted, so take it that it has been accepted...” (Riyadh us-Saliheen).*

- ✎ Don't impose limits on Allah such as saying: “If you can Allah, or if you wish, please do such and such a thing for me...” Expect that it will be answered positively. It is never too much for Allah.
- ✎ “*Don't despair of Allah's mercy...*” (Surah Az-Zumar, 39:53) Hence don't say: “*I shouldn't pray for this since I have sinned so much.*” “*I treat My servants as he expects Me to treat him...*” (Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim). Imam Ash-Shawkani commented on this hadith, saying that, “Allah encourages His servants to expect the best from Him, since He will treat them according to their expectations. So whoever expects good from Him will be showered with His Good, and will be shown His Beautiful Generosity... But he who is not like that will not be treated in this manner. And this is the meaning of the fact that He is with him when he remembers Him. So it is obligatory on the slave to always assume the best of Allah” (Imam Ash-Shawkani, cited in Abu Ammaar Yasir Qadhi, 2001, *Du'a: The Weapon of the Believer*. Birmingham: Al-Hidaayah Publishers). “*Ask Allah for some of His bounty, for Allah likes to be asked, and the most excellent worship is the expectation of relief*” (At-Tirmidhi).
- ✎ People usually like to meet expectations, whether these are from parents, bosses, colleagues, peers, spouses, etc. We usually move to meet expectations, even our own. So it is important to always expect the best. When a friend or spouse behaves irrationally, instead of thinking and behaving as if the person is irrational, think and respond “You must be having a bad day”. Studies on the role of expectation in education also show that children who are given high expectations by their teachers usually perform significantly well, even if their actual assessed intelligence is far below average.

## Law of Attraction

- ✎ “*We appoint to him that unto which he has turned...*” (Surah al-Nisa', 4:115). We are all like magnets that draw people and ideas towards us that are in line with our dominant thoughts and beliefs. What we keep thinking about is what we keep attracting to ourselves. To attract different circumstances, resources, etc., we need to change our dominant thoughts and what we dwell upon.

*“If someone wants to know what position he enjoys in the eyes of Allah, he has only to look at what place he gives to Allah (in his heart and life)” (Al-Hakim).*

## Habit 3: Put First Things First

Prioritize, and do the most important things first.

*“Two favours in respect of which many people are duped are: Good-health and Time” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Sunan At-Tirmidhi, Sunan Ibn Majah)*

**“Time is money!” This is true from a materialistic point of view, for those who do not evaluate existence except in materialistic terms. However, Time is Life for those whose vision transcends matter. What is your life in this existence, O man, other than the time that passes between your birth and your death? Money, no doubt, dwindles away and gets depleted. However, you could replenish it later on. You could even have more of it than you originally had and lost. Life, however, once lost can neither be renewed nor restituted! It follows, therefore, that Time is more valuable than money, more expensive than gold and**

**diamonds, more precious than any jewellery or merchandise – for Time is Life.”** (Hasan al-Banna, *Ahadith al-Jumu'ah*, cited in *Time Utilisation: An Islamic Perspective*, by Abou Maimoonah Ahmad Bin Muhammad Bello, 2001, Lagos)



We don't manage time, we manage ourselves!

- ✎ This Habit is about Personal Management. Habit 2 decides what Priorities and Objectives one has in life. Habit 3 is a test of integrity – about ‘walking the talk’, and ‘running the program’; about discipline. Since we can't really change Time, “Time Management” is really more about Personal Management through time.
- ✎ The opposite of Habit 3 is to put First Things Second or Last, where you get weighed down by the things that matter least, at the expense of the things that matter most.
- ✎ Imam Al-Ghazali in his *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din* says, “You should structure your time, arrange your regular devotions and assign to each function a set period of time during which it is given first priority but which it does not overstep. For if you abandon yourself to neglect and purposelessness, as cattle do, and just do anything that may occur to you at any time it happens to occur to you, most of your time will be wasted. Your time is your life and your life is your capital; it is the basis of your transactions (with God); and the means to attain everlasting felicity, in the proximity of God the Exalted. Each of your breaths is a priceless jewel, and when it passes away it never returns.” (Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, cited in Khurram Murad, 2000, *In the Early Hours: Reflections on Spiritual and Self Development*. Markfield: Revival Publications, p.14).



### Exercise:

- 1) What are the most important First Things in your life? List the first 5.
- 2) By elimination, find the most important of them, i.e. the one without which others are futile or even impossible.
- 3) Think of one activity which you are not doing now but if done very well and consistently in your work, personal and family life, would make a tremendous positive difference in your life. (i.e. Which one activity for each aspect of your life would secure the (most important) First Things?)
- 4) Write down your key life roles:
  - E.g. 1. Muslim – submitting devotee of Allah
  - 2. Spouse
  - 3. Parent
  - 4. Son
  - 5. Brother
  - 6. Manager Staff Development
  - 7. Community member
  - 8. Da'wah Grassroots Volunteer
  - 9. Chairman New Horizons Alumni Board
- 5) Set at least one goal for yourself each week with respect to each of these roles
  - E.g. 1. Read Surah Yusuf and reflect on its application
  - 2. Accompany wife on her visit to the hospital for check-up
  - 3. Make fishing rods with children over the weekend
  - 4. Visit Mum...
- 6) Schedule these goals FIRST in your weekly timetable. This ensures that our priorities are never neglected and that there still is time available for accomplishment of activities in other Quadrants.

👉 Note: Relationships come before things. So when dealing with a relationship, make sure it gets its fair share of time, especially your relationship with Allah and primary responsibilities.

👉 *“Of the dinar you spend on your family, and the dinar you spend on the poor..., the one spent on the family is the most valuable.”* (Riyadh us-Saliheen). *“Most deserving of your honour is your mother.”* *“The best among you are those who are best to their wives.”*

👉 But Relationships come first even in business, not just in family life.

## **Getting your Priorities Right!**

👉 “There’s not enough time to do everything in life, but there is enough time to do the most important things.” – A wise saying

👉 Muslim jurists generally classify activities into the following 5 categories: 1) obligatory (*fard* or *wajib*) 2) encouraged (*mustahab*) 3) merely permissible (*mubah*) 4) discouraged (*makruh*) and 5) prohibited (*haram*). For a Muslim, among the most important priorities are the fulfilment of obligations – both personal and social (*fardu ‘ayn* and *fardu kifayah*), and the moving away from prohibitions. One is then ready to fulfil whatever one can of those things that are encouraged, and move away from the things that are discouraged in one’s personal or social life.

👉 Life may be busy for most people. There is always something yet to be done, and technology has made activities move at super-fast pace. Yet for all the speed and things done, one may have been steadily killing one’s investments and relationships for years through neglect or maltreatment due to one’s lack of priorities and poor methods of dealing with others.

👉 It’s not about just doing more things faster; it’s about focussing on relationships before schedules. Schedules should be made around what is most important to one’s life, and the most important roles we play.

👉 If we are spouses or parents, these are among the most important roles we play, which we will have to answer for on the Day of Judgement. Allah stresses, *“O you who believe, save yourselves and your families from the Fire”* (Surah At-Tahreem, 66:6).

👉 The Prophet (saw) clearly outlined that we ourselves and our families as first priority for care, when he said, *“The best sadaqah is that which subsequently leaves the giver sufficiently wealthy; start with those you are responsible for”* (Sahih Al-Bukhari). He also said, *“Begin*

*by taking care of and being charitable to yourself; if there is surplus, then your wife; if there is surplus, then your near and dear ones; and if there is surplus, then you may give out to others left, right, and centre” (Al-Nasa’i).*

☞ We cannot turn people into things. You cannot be efficient with a loved one. They are priorities and need more time. With people, going fast is slow (and going slow is fast) in achieving effectiveness.

## Classifying your Time

☞ The things you do can generally be divided into their importance and urgency.. A paradigm of the way we use time in our lives may be displayed in the Time Management Matrix below, where 2 major things are considered:

- 1) importance (your values and principles)
- 2) urgency (what is demanded of you from the environment)

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<b>I</b> Important, Urgent	<b>II</b> Important, Not Urgent
Not Important	<b>III</b> Not Important, Urgent	<b>IV</b> Not Important, Not Urgent

**Quadrant I** has to do with crises, deadlines, pressing problems

**Quadrant II** has to do with prevention, preparation, relationship-building, exercise, reading meaningful literature, planning, and missions. This is the Leadership Quadrant

**Quadrant III** has to do with interruptions, some meetings, popular activities, some phone calls

**Quadrant IV** has to do with watching TV, spending hours chatting on the net with strangers, spending hours looking at vanity magazines and/or reading cheap romance novels, spending hours just driving around with no particular destination, spending hours just listening to pop-music, gossiping and other idle-talk, drinking alcohol with friends, playing some types of card and video games, and other time-wasting activities

☞ Popular culture has equated urgency with importance. Most executive meeting agendas are Quadrant I and III. If it has to be done “now, now” it takes precedence over what is a priority.

☞ The results of prioritising the various Quadrants may be displayed as follows:

---

<b>Urgent</b>	<b>Not Urgent</b>
---------------	-------------------

<b>Important</b>	<b>I</b> Stress, Burnout (feeling drained), Constant Crises management	<b>II</b> Contentment, Fulfilment, a sense of Balance, Healthy mind, body and relationships
	<b>III</b> Short-term focus, Crisis management, Goals and plans become worthless, a sense of Victimisation and being out of Control, Shallow or broken relationships	<b>IV</b> Total irresponsibility, Being fired from jobs, Constantly dependent on others, Poor health and personal growth
<b>Not Important</b>		

- ✎ Prioritising Quadrant II was the practise of the Prophet (s) and his righteous Companions. Wahb, for instance, reported that, “It is recorded in the wisdom of Dawood that: It is incumbent on all rational men to set aside four hours: one hour in which he communes with his Lord; one hour in which he criticises and appraises himself; one hour that he devotes to his fellow human beings; one hour that he enjoys and refreshes himself in any lawful and decent way. This fourth hour of refreshments relieves his mind and is a great boon to the other hours” (Ahmad, cited in *Time Utilisation: An Islamic Perspective*, by Abou Maimoonah Ahmad Bin Muhammad Bello, 2001, Lagos).
- ✎ It is important to say “No” to Quadrant III and IV (what is Not Important), whether Urgent or Not. You may simply tell the person concerned who is requesting something Un-Important of you: “I’m very sorry, I’ve got a prior commitment.” This is being honest without hurting anyone, and demonstrates integrity. Quadrant III should involve delegation – handing over the doing of the task to others. A priority is something that cannot be delegated.
- ✎ To discover what these are, ask yourself “Is this something anyone else can do?” “What am I doing that can only be done by me?” and “What am I *not* doing that can only be done by me?”
- ✎ Remember, things that matter most should never be at the mercy of things that matter least.

*“Hurry up with good deeds ahead of some seven calamities! Are you waiting for anything except 1) a poverty that makes one forget, or 2) a prosperity that makes one transgress, or 3) a sickness that incapacitates, or 4) an old-age that confuses, or 5) a sudden death, or 6) the Dajjal: Verily, he is a hidden evil that is being awaited for, or 7) the Hour: Behold, the Hour is most grievous, most bitter!” (At-Tirmidhi, Al-Haakim)*

*“Take advantage of some five (things) before some five (others): your Life before your Death; your Good Health before your Ill-Health; your Free Time before your Pre-occupation; your Youth before your Old-Age; your Wealth before your Poverty” (Al-Haakim, Al-Baihaqi).*

- ✎ The fact that you choose to do something at a period of time means that that same period of time is not available for some other activity. This can be an “opportunity cost” (and an “opportunity lost”) if one’s choice is unwise.



## Exercise

If you are married, have children, or are still living with your parents, ask yourself the following questions to test how much you’ve been placing your family in Quadrant II:

- 1) The time I spend at work or in studying does not prevent me from having good communication with my family.
- 2) My family is aware of what I want to achieve in my job, my studies and my life.
- 3) Most of my time at home is not spent in working or studying at the expense of interacting with my family.
- 4) My morality and consideration is the same at home as it is at school, work, the mosque, and in front of Non-Muslims.
- 5) My family means more to me than worldly possessions and accomplishments.
- 6) I keep an open mind when I consider how my decisions will affect my family.
- 7) I am involved with all my family members and I try to share in their areas of interest.
- 8) It is easy for me to relax when I leave my work or my studies. I appreciate the beauty and joy Allah has placed around me.

- ✎ Quadrant II requires the highest discipline. The word “discipline” implies being a *disciple* to a set of principles or values from the Qur’an and Sunnah.

- ✎ To develop Quadrant II requires proactivity because Quadrants III and IV *act on you*. You must say a proactive “Yes” to activities in Quadrant II and a proactive “No” to those in Quadrants III and IV.

Six-Step Process for Meeting Priorities:

- 1) Connect to your Mission (See Habit 2)
- 2) Study and identify your key roles in your life, and review those roles
- 3) Select goals around each role identified
- 4) Organise weekly for each goal
- 5) Exercise integrity in the moments of choice
- 6) Evaluate for adaptation and adjustment

Because you know when you have schedules your “First Things”, it is easier for you to have peace of mind and a sense of control and balance in your life because you know you have remembered and included all your Important Commitments.

## III.

# Self-Motivation

# and Habit-Formation Techniques

## Law of Concentration

*Whatever you dwell upon grows in your experience.* It is therefore important to keep your focus on your accomplishments. There is a need for you to focus on positive expectations than on what you fear; on solutions than on problems; on positive than on the negative. This does not imply disregard for genuine concerns/fears and negative feedback.

## Law of Substitution

Things are usually negative or positive; good or bad, to us. There is a need to substitute bad for good; negative for positive. This may be associated with the Pleasure-Pain principle. If something is fully bad, it should be emphasised, as in alcohol. And if something is really good and wholesome, we should really focus on it.

The application of the Law of Concentration and the Law of Substitution is evident in Affirmations. There should not be any negatives in the affirmation, nor should affirmations be negative in focus. Otherwise, the Law of Substitution may affect something we do not intend.

Making a positive expectation gives enthusiasm. To make positive Affirmation, we need to understand that expectations come from our beliefs. Beliefs are the sources of our expectations. Our beliefs about ourselves are a product of our self-concept.

### **The Process of Change – how do you change your thoughts and self-concept?**

We are all in the process of becoming, no-one stays the same, i.e. we all change. “The self is not a concrete entity that one can actually know completely after having withdrawn from activity. I am not the same person today that I was yesterday, so there is no question of sorting myself out once and for all. We seize our moments of soul searching at all times and we remain on the path of self-discovery (and reform) until we leave this world.” (Farid Esack, 1999, *On Being a Muslim*. London: Oneworld Publications). We keep on changing in the direction of our dominant thoughts.

### **The 2 most important habits to avoid in this process are:**

- 1) homeostasis – clinging to the way things are and how they have been; being stagnant; unwilling to change; inhibiting any positive growth. This is a sort of weakness in will-power, that even though you know that improving yourself is wise and you are shown how to do it, you decide it's too difficult or that you don't have time or some other excuse / procrastination. This may be termed homeostasis. The Qur'an repeatedly warns us about blindly following our old ways or the old ways of others.
- 2) Psycho sclerosis – a hardening of attitudes; dogmatic and rigid attitudes

Psycho sclerosis is an attitude – a conscious refusal to accept any new ideas or another person's wisdom. It is a somewhat arrogant stance that you are always right and everybody else is wrong, and that your way of doing things is the best way, and that your type of thinking is always superior.

The convert to Islam is often open to new ideas. Many raised Muslims, on the other hand, are inflexible, and not open to learning where they may have been wrong or misinformed before. Early scholars shunned this characteristic and were ever-ready to accept new ideas and learn

from others (e.g. Imam Malik and Imam Shafi'i, etc.) as well as their own students, who disagreed with their teachers and were respected and appreciated for making the school richer with a diversity of opinions which could be applied in a variety of situations. Psycho sclerosis can inhibit this sort of intellectual, spiritual or moral hijrah (migration). This can result in (as well as from) a blind, deaf and dumb heart.

The process of changing thoughts, if done seriously, could take 10-21 days of deep mental programming:

## **Mental Programming**

(Through Affirmations, Visualisations, and Acting the Part)

Personal development is not a singular experience. It is the ongoing process of keeping your values before aligning your life to be congruent with those most important things. And in that effort your powerful brain capacity can be great help on a daily basis to integrate your personal statement into your life. It's another application of "begin with the end in mind". It requires you to develop a clear mental picture of yourself with new positive attitudes such as caring, leading with wisdom, etc. i.e. thinking of yourself with new noble qualities and not old self-limiting ones.

### **1. Affirmations**

These are assertive statements that say "yes" to our potentials, that you repeat with belief and enthusiasm to programme your subconscious mind.

Affirmations, in order to be effective, must be positive, personal, in present tense. E.g. "I like myself" not "Some people find me likeable." "I am a non-smoker" not "I will not smoke." "I am intelligent" not "I can be intelligent if I study more" "I submit to Allah with all my heart" not "I will gradually become a better submitter" Affirmations operate on the Law of Subconscious Activity:

### **Law of Subconscious Activity**

Whatever our conscious mind believes and accepts, our subconscious mind goes to work in making it possibility and a reality. The Subconscious mind is like the car and the Conscious mind is the steering. Here, thoughts are viewed as things that affect us and other people.

### **2. Visualisation**

"Your imagination is your preview of life's coming attractions" – Albert Einstein

Whatever your mind can hold, you can achieve if Allah wills. The key is to visualize before the up-coming situation. Performing your best in your mind's eye and visualize the results. E.g. Before a public speech or a difficult situation, visualise the setting, the flow of your points, the confidence you emanate, the positive and enthusiastic reaction of the crowd, the people that come to commend you afterwards, etc. This mental picture must be clear and give you a sense of deep contentment. This preview should make you more prepared and geared towards achieving that result. It also subconsciously initiates the Law of Expectation. It also builds the emotional satisfaction of such an achievement to an extent that it highly motivates.

### **3. Acting the Part**

If you feel a certain way, you will normally behave accordingly. It takes only 5-10 minutes for our acting to change our feelings and vice versa. If you pretend a thing is interesting, it will become so. Start the morning with pretence that you feel terrific and let it be your last thoughts before you go to bed. If you continue with this for 10-21 days, amazing results may be seen.

In *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali says that the Muslim who wants to adhere to good behaviour has to first change his ideas about himself and imagine himself in the desired condition. Then, he must gradually assume those good manners until they become part of him. He asserts that the interaction between the psycho-cognitive aspect and practical behaviour is inevitable. As a result, once the individual behaves in a certain manner, even if he is pretending, the effect of that behaviour will reflect his thinking and emotions, and when his thinking and feelings change, his observable behaviour and countenance will also change.

“Good manners can be acquired by practice: by feigning or assuming the actions issuing from those manners at first until they eventually become part of one’s nature. This is one of the wonders of the relation between the heart and the organs – I mean the soul and the body. Every quality that appears in the heart will have its influence flowing to the organs so they act only in accordance with that quality. Similarly, the effect of every action that issues from the organs may reach the heart. And this continues in a circular system.” (Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*. Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, n.d., vol.3, pp.56-59).

Imam al-Ghazali also elucidates the psychological treatment that combines opposing stimulation and gradual internal cognition. “Since the malady that changes the health of the body and causes illness can only be treated with its opposite, like treating heat with cold, and cold with heat, so vice, which is a malady of the heart, is treated with its opposite. The malady of ignorance is treated with learning, that of avarice with generosity, pride with humility, greed with abstinence, and all by assuming the contrary... A curious aspect of this exercise is noticeable when the disciple is not willing to give up a serious offence or reprehensible wrongdoing by directly assuming its opposite, then his sheikh should lead him from that greatly undesirable habit to another one, less undesirable. This is like someone who washes the bloodstain off his shirt with urine, then washes the urine off with water, when water cannot wash off blood.” (Ihya', pp56-59).

The Prophet (saw) said: “*Truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise. And a man keeps on telling the truth until he becomes a truthful person. Falsehood leads to wickedness/evil-doing, and evil-doing leads to the Fire, and a man may keep on telling lies till he is written before Allah, a liar*” (Sahih Al-Bukhari). Changing a bad habit of lying may thus be done through assuming the attribute of truthfulness gradually until it becomes an ingrained habit and one may be written before Allah as a truthful person

Pretend something is fascinating and it becomes so. Therefore, make the habit of starting the morning with good pretence and also making it the last thing before going to bed.

## **Sustaining Mental Programming**

Spend the first 20-30 minutes, even up to 60 minutes, on programming with dhikr, meditation, planning and reading for the day.

Try to always listen to tapes in your car or read particularly education and inspirational material. This will keep your batteries going in the period that you are trying to program yourself to commence changing and getting out of homeostasis.

A word of caution: The Prophet (saw) said, “*It is better to be in good company than to be alone, but it is better to be alone than to be in bad company.*” With all one’s personal efforts, one should not underestimate the influence of one’s environment to de-motivate you and reprogram

you out of your improvement paradigm. Our friends, family members, TV, sport groups, certain magazines, etc. can all have a negative effect on our willpower to change for the better. We should all be conscious of this fact and take preventative measures to protect ourselves.

Beware of people who are going nowhere... people with no ambition and people who are cynical and negative in their attitudes.

**The clearer your ideal self is to you, the easier it is for you to affirm, visualise and act with discipline, and the faster you move to your ideal self.**

## **The importance of repetition**

You keep the idea alive. This is emphasised in dhikr of reminding yourself and keeping the belief alive and really internalised in your conscious and subconscious.

### **Daily Mental Programming Schedule:**

#### **In the Morning:**

Begin your day with “Bismillah” and whatever acts of devotion to Allah that you can. This helps in putting you in the necessary psychological and spiritual gear to prepare and plan for an effective day insha Allah. Write your affirmations down again and again, first thing in the morning everyday for just 2-3 minutes, and visualize them. Resolve to submit to the will of Allah whatever your past and imagine that you are declaring your intentions before Allah (or at least know that He is watching you declare them). This is the essence of Ihsan

#### **Whenever an event or important situation is about to occur:**

Just before the event, purify your intentions, take a deep breathe, exhale, close your eyes and affirm your expectations in the present tense. E.g. “this is an excellent presentation” and visualize the result. i.e. perform mental rehearsal of the situation as it would go perfectly. This is important prior to meetings, negotiation, gatherings etc.

#### **In the Evening:**

Write goals in the personal, positive and present tense. Repeat it 3-5 times and renew your niyyah. Create a mental picture or visualisation, and add emotions of accomplishment to it.

**All changes in oneself are mental. All we need to do is control our minds, and the purity of our intentions.**



### **Exercise**

What one great thing would you dare to dream if you knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that you absolutely could not fail?  
How badly do you want it?  
Are you willing to pay the price?

## **Neuro-Associative Conditioning**

Neuro-Associative Conditioning is about associating massive pain and pleasure with doing what you want to do so that the unconscious mind will insha Allah help us do what has to be done so that it doesn't feel like an effort. i.e., making the jihad (striving) easier by ‘enjoying it’.

## Pain and Pleasure as Tools

Being intellectually convinced of a decision is often not enough to follow it through. To develop stronger willpower, motivation and drive for a decision, there must also be an emotional commitment attached to it. It is important to appreciate the role that the need to seek pleasure and avoid pain, in this world and the Hereafter, plays in governing most or even all of our decisions. Our association of pain/pleasure with a thing can dramatically influence our actions. Procrastination, therefore, is simply putting off pain. When, however, pain is linked to the past, present and future, it can also create massive energy for change. Our fear for pain is usually a fear not of actual pain but of our perception of it.

With Neuro-Associative Conditioning, we can link pain and pleasure to almost anything we want to change.

We can become more proactive, and therefore improve our capabilities and character as vicegerents of Allah, by changing what we link pain and pleasure to.

Allah usually associates what is harmful (*haram*) to us with pain in this life or the Hereafter, and He associates true and beneficial beliefs and actions with contentment (pleasure) in this life and the Hereafter. This helps the Believer to be more motivated and committed to follow His commands.

This association with pain and pleasure is important for a da'iya to remember when endeavouring to help others appreciate the significance of various Islamic injunctions, ranging from what is compulsory to what is prohibited. To be very convincing in da'wah, one may have to take one's audience through a total and cumulative impact assessment of the belief or action in question. Explaining how certain prohibitions are also towards protecting certain long-term benefits, such as the preservation of one's mental faculties, the protection of life, and protection against what is harmful to oneself and society. For example, an axiom of *usul al fiqh* is that "harm should be removed." This necessitates laws that ban harmful drugs and pornography which lead to destruction of self and exploitation. Explaining to one's audience that such laws are interested in protecting individuals from pain may help one's audience in appreciating the wisdom of the Shari'ah.

Most of us naturally make decisions based on short term pain/pleasure. We may choose to marry a person because, unconsciously, we associate pleasure with them. On the other hand, we could also avoid marrying that same person if we train ("condition") ourselves to think more about the long-term pleasure/pain of the marriage. We may choose to not prioritise reading broadly because we associate inconvenience (pain) with it, and moreover because we do not link sufficient pleasure to the benefits of reading. On the other hand, we could prioritise reading if we train ("condition") ourselves to link pleasure with its short and long-term benefits to our knowledge and intellectual exposure, as well as link pain to short and long-term ignorance. We may decide to accept a bribe because we associate short-term benefit (pleasure) with it. On the other hand, we could avoid any form of bribery, even at our own expense, if we train ("condition") ourselves to think more about the long-term consequences of the action (pain in this life and especially the Hereafter). The greater the degree of pain we associate with a thing, the more we avoid it. The greater the degree of pleasure we associate with a thing, the more we are unconsciously driven towards it.

Neuro-Associative Conditioning, therefore, attempts to utilise the association of such "massive pain" or "massive pleasure" to a thing in order to steer us towards or away from decisions and actions that may or may not be in line with our Personal Development as Muslims.

Pleasure and pain that is linked to our Spirituality has the effect of further entrenching and intensifying the commitment to change. Malik Badri notes that spirituality “differs from secular in-depth thinking in that its visions and concepts go beyond this world of the here and now to encounter the infinite dimensions of the hereafter; its object goes from the creation to the Creator. While everyday thinking may be limited to the solving of worldly problems, and may be free from (sufficient) sentiments, passions and emotions, contemplation, by virtue of crossing the worldly barriers and the limitations of matter into the everlasting freedom of the spirit, is capable of motivating all the internal and external psycho spiritual reservoirs of the believers. Those believers who are absorbed in deep Islamic contemplation perceive the things they are contemplating in terms of their previous experiences, as well as through the symbols and expressions they acquired from their use of language, and their imagination of what they used to be and what they could become in the future. They then vitalise the whole combination of different thoughts and visions with a fearful love of the Almighty... (This mixture of cognitions, emotions and spiritual imagination) metamorphoses the internal cognitive processes into a new exalted state.” (Malik Badri, 2000, *Contemplation: An Islamic Psycho spiritual Study*. Kuala Lumpur: Medeena Books, p.28-29).

### **Steps to Personal Change:**

It is a myth that “Change” takes a long time and is difficult; rather change with the right strategy is instant. It is decision and readiness to change that takes time. Instant change can be achieved through the following steps:

- 1) Realise our Neuro-Associations from our habits, words, images, sounds, etc. Be aware of non-beneficial and inappropriate connections and linkages, especially in our wrong beliefs. Linking pleasure to learning is a powerful cause of good linkages and good actions. Learning is important to know the basis of good beliefs, and the knowledge to establish certainty in a belief.

### **Belief Systems:**

Beliefs are what make one person different from another. Beliefs are a feeling of certainty with references or evidence from one’s experiences. The more references one has, the greater emotions one has and stronger the belief becomes. This is demonstrated vividly in cases of multiple personality disorders, where a change in the patient’s belief about their personality can actually cause changes even in their eye-colour and voice, diseases they have such as diabetes, etc. The Placebo Effect in Medicine also illustrates the power of belief as a factor in human health. The classic Placebo, which is just a sugar pill in disguise, is arguably the most effective pill in science, and has been considered successful in curing 70% of cases where they are administered (Dr. Stephen Juan, 2000, *The Odd Body and Brain*. Sydney: Harper Collins, p.215-218). Beliefs without references are just ideas. Because of the importance of beliefs to oneself and to society, it is important to associate pain with wrong beliefs and pleasure with positive or right beliefs.

- 2) Question your false associations and change disempowering and self-limiting beliefs.

### **Changing Disempowering and Self-limiting Beliefs:**

- i. Doubt can destroy limiting beliefs, or nearly any beliefs for that matter! Asking appropriate questions can create useful doubt, thus creating conviction that the belief is false and unhelpful. These questions may be, for example, “Does this belief come from a correct interpretation of the Qur’an and Sunnah?” “If not, why am I holding so

firmly to it as if it was an aqidah matter?” “Am I really sure it is true?” “How did I arrive at this belief?” “Is this always the case?” “How has this belief limited my life so far?” “How much has this belief cost me in terms of lost opportunities and experiences to grow and be happy?” “Is my conscience comfortable with using this belief as my excuse for inaction when standing before Allah?”

- ii. Observe, learn and study more about a thing to get an intellectual and emotionally-intense conviction for or against a thing.
- iii. Associate pain with negative/limiting beliefs and pleasure with good and positive/empowering beliefs.
- iv. Build up an empowering belief with sufficient evidence/references to develop it into a conviction.
- v. Take action upon empowering beliefs and focus on the pleasurable consequences.



### Exercise:

- 1) **Take 5mins** to write down 5 disempowering beliefs and another 5 empowering beliefs.
- 2) Then, question in detail the disempowering beliefs, with respect to their physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual consequences.
- 3) Write down alternative beliefs to the disempowering beliefs.

- 3) Assume the power to change our associations by Neuro-Associative Conditioning. Focus on the pain of inaction and the pleasure of action. Realise that change happens in an instant, the moment we take the decision.

### Essential beliefs for effective change:

- 1) The belief that we can change instantly
- 2) We are the agents of change and are responsible for our changing or not changing

***Remember change occurs in “an instant”. We are responsible for our change, i.e. we are the agent of change, no-one else should be blamed.***

### 6 Master Steps to Change:

1. Decide what you really want and what is preventing you from getting it. (Not focus what you don't want).
2. Get leverage. Associate massive pain to not changing now. Create an intense sense of urgency. What has, does, or could it cost me, in my past, present, and future? Use pleasure-associated questions (What could I accomplish?) Get many good reasons.
3. Interrupt the limiting patterns. Disrupt your patterns and state of mind by doing something one doesn't expect e.g. silly laugh, jump etc to break the power of disempowering emotions.
4. Create a new empowering alternative pattern. (e.g. Model people who are successful)
5. Condition the new pattern until it is consistent as this makes sure a change is long term e.g. give yourself a reward- something that feels good (your own personal emotional investment). This emphasises the emotional connection of pleasure to new change. Rehearse and repeat it until it feels good. Schedule rewarding yourself at every milestone.
6. Test the new pattern for ecology (holistic impact assessment) and belief relationships. New behaviour must preserve the good beliefs in an empowering way. Do the new patterns fit into your core beliefs and values?

### Neuro-Associative Conditioning Checklist:

- Is pain fully associated with old patterns?

- 🗑️ Is pleasure fully associated with new patterns?
- 🗑️ Are the new patterns consistent with my values and principles?
- 🗑️ Have the benefits of the old pattern been maintained?
- 🗑️ Is the change in long-term conditioning effective? Are you sure you can sustain your new patterns?

The human mind is always pursuing goals but we are often unconscious of these goals. We must hence find a goal grand enough to push us beyond our mental limits so that we are not just making a living but directing our lives in accordance with Allah’s guidance.

## IV.

# Interpersonal Development

(Achieving the Public Victory over Self)

### Habit 4: Think Win-Win

Have an "everyone can win attitude".

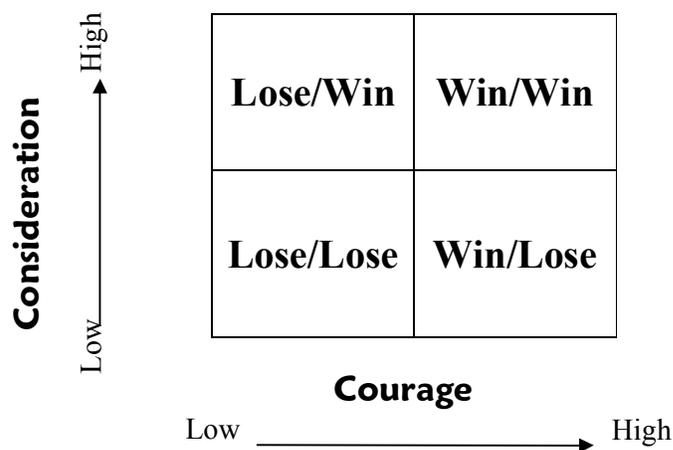
- 👉 *“None of you has attained to faith until you love for your brother what you love for yourself”* (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim).
- 👉 *“Help one another in promoting virtue and God-consciousness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity”* (Surah Al-Ma'idah, 5:2).
- 👉 This is the Habit that concerns itself with mutual benefit and respect.
- 👉 It’s the habit of a paradigm of abundance (there’s plenty for everyone), sharing of *rizq* from Al Razzaq (The Provider), and sadaqah fee sabeel il’Lah, of recognition, and development, and of accepting Allah as Al-Ghaniyy (The Rich).
- 👉 The opposite of this habit is a concern with a hierarchy, and a paradigm of scarcity – where one perceives that there is not enough “barakah” (blessings from Allah) for everyone and therefore is threatened by others’ success or strengths, and the anxiety of competition. The understanding is that sharing equates to having less, and “If I let you have your way, I’m not getting mine.” It’s a paradigm also of ‘either-or’, it can never be both. This paradigm applies in marriage, other relationships, work, and cooperation between Islamic organisations. It is Shaytan’s mentality “I’m not going down alone, I will take man with me”, and the mentality of “*the envier who envies*” (Surah Al-Falaq, 113:5).



#### Exercise:

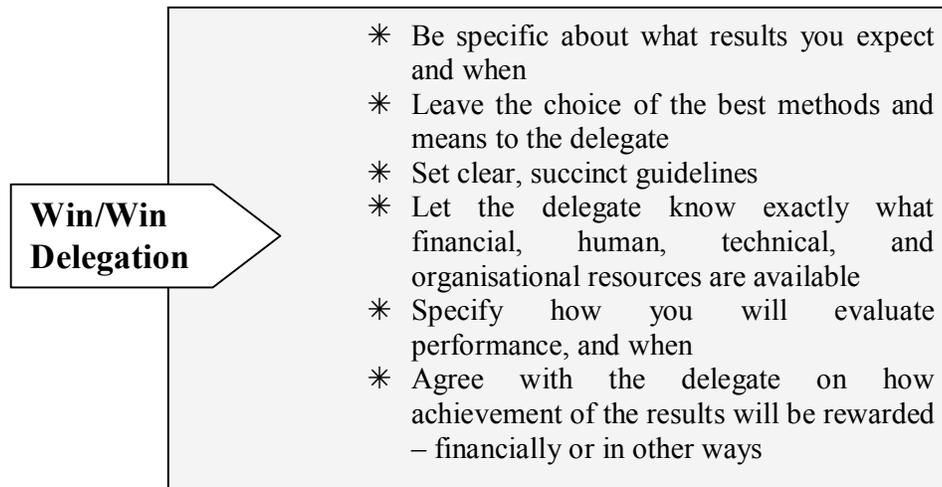
The Thumb-Game: Every time you press the other person’s thumb down with your own thumb, you get one point. Instructions of the game: to get the highest number of thumbs down as possible in one minute, counting your success-rate.

- ✎ There is a knee-jerk reaction upon hearing the instructions in the Game above that a competition (not cooperative effort) is now on. In our society, this Competition is the dominant paradigm. Thinking Win/Win means understanding that one person's success does not need to be achieved at the expense or exclusion of others. This Habit concerns itself with Interdependence and Teamwork.
- ✎ A major challenge to Win/Win thinking is egotism and self-centredness.
- ✎ Competing against oneself and one's performance is good. But to outdo your previous performance, there needs to be some cooperation.
- ✎ Comparing oneself against others assumes that all parties have similar standards. It is important to aim for your own higher standards rather than someone else's norms.
- ✎ Two qualities need to be developed to engage in this habit: trust, cooperation, consideration and courage.



- ✎ The element of inequity and injustice usually inherent in Win/Lose and Lose/Win situations can in the long-term lead to a Lose/Lose situation, where one or both parties may bear resentments such as “You got me this time, I’ll get you next time.”
- ✎ Jealousy and envy also reinforce the scarcity paradigm. “If you have a car I don’t have, or a watch or dress that I also have, it cannot be allowed to continue. You either have to lose yours or I’ll get something you don’t have.”
- ✎ The Muslim should always remember that other people’s blessings are from Allah’s wisdom, and hence, we should never have a problem with. “*And We have not sent you other than as a mercy to all creatures.*” (Surah Al-Anbiyaa’, 21:107)
- ✎ The Prophet (saw) said: “*Do not be people without minds of your own, saying that if others treat you well, you will treat them well, and that if they do wrong, you will do wrong; but accustom yourselves to do good, if people do good, and not to do wrong, if they do evil.*” (At-Tirmidhi)
- ✎ Win/Win thus involves self-discipline and a sincere heart that trusts in Allah.
- ✎ Hence, thinking Win/Win involves using Consultation. Allah classes successful believers as “*those who conduct their affairs through mutual consultation...*” (Surah Al-Shura, 42:38). The Prophet, except in matters where he received wahy (revelation), would often seek and follow the advice of his companions. “This enabled all his men to take part in discussion and

offer suggestions, and in this way the best solution was found through mutual consultation.” (Afzalur Rahman, 1990, *Muhammad as a Military Leader*. Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, p.170).



- 👉 There are, of course, some interdependent Win/Win relationships that already exist and which we often take for granted. We also forget to nourish or emotionally invest in them. These Win/Win relationships often involve people very close to us – our spouses, families and friends.
- 👉 True commitment to thinking Win/Win means that one will either accept Win/Win or No Deal. This avoids hypocrisy but necessitates sincerity and openness, as well as the attitude which Allah enjoins of cooperation. “*Cooperate in the doing of good and piety, and do not cooperate in the doing of wrong*” (Surah Al-Ma’idah, 5:2).
- 👉 The pursuit of Win/Win and mutual respect turns an ordinary business transaction into a transformational relationship with empathy, trust, goodwill and understanding, which thus increases the brotherhood and quality of the relationship and encourages there to be further positive exchanges, of benefit to all.
- 👉 The more Win/Win relationships you are able to have, the greater the Win/Win’s – which leads to Synergy, where the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts.
- 👉 Though there are exceptions to Win/Win, such as in sports competitions and war, in our relationship with individuals Win/Win should be the rule.
- 👉 In the real world, Win/Win is the most lasting, most rewarding and Islamic way of building up an Ummah (community) and society. It is stronger because it demands greater internal strength of iman, taqwa and sabr.

## **Habit 5: Seek First to Understand... Then to be Understood**

Listen to people sincerely for true mutual understanding.

“Give glad tidings to those who listen to what is said and follow the best meaning in it” (Qur’an..

“I enjoin on you five things: a collective life, listening, obeying, migrating in Allah’s Cause, and striving hard in Allah’s Cause” (Ahmad, Sunan At-Tirmidhi)

“If only we had listened and understood” (Surah Al-Mulk, 67:10).

- 👉 Empathic and effective communication skills are the key to Win/Win relationships. The sequence of this habit is important.
- 👉 Seeking to understand the other BEFORE you seek to be understood means really paying attention to what the person is trying to convey, not how you feel about how they have said it or whether they are right or wrong.
- 👉 One of the deepest needs of the human heart is to be understood, to be respected and valued as an individual.
- 👉 The most common preference in communication, however, is to be understood before you understand others, and to listen with your mind on your reply. This, however, is not helpful to developing a relationship, whether personal or professional.
- 👉 All real professionals practise seeking first to understand. It is obviously critical for doctors to diagnose and understand the patient’s concerns before issuing a prescription, just as it is for lawyers to obtain all the facts first before they can formulate a case. Engineers need as much data as possible on the materials from which they are constructing a block. And product design without engaging in a market survey to understand the nature of the market and consumer desires would be futile. Da’wah also achieves little results if one does not actively listen to and understand the causes and feelings evoked by another’s misunderstandings or confusion about Islam. Hence, “seek first to understand” is an almost universal principle at work everywhere in the world
- 👉 Yet nowhere is it more important than in the area of interpersonal relationships. Practising this Habit is at the centre of your Circle of Influence and dramatically builds trust and insight.
- 👉 Unless you seek to understand, you don’t know a person’s frame of reference to be able to make meaningful emotional deposits, and thereby build trust and positive relationships.
- 👉 We are the sum of our experiences and all of us have a context, pretext, perception and biases. Communication and interaction occur when subjective worlds and paradigms collide. The more attentively you listen to others, the more aware you will become of the enormous differences in various people’s perceptions. People’s dominant paradigms filter their understandings of the world. Thus, everyone lives in their own subjective worlds. Some people are centred on money, others are centred on their families, etc. Common sense is not so common, and very few people think in exactly the same way. When we enter someone’s subjective world, we can have greater influence over them.
- 👉 If someone doesn’t feel understood, he would usually not try to understand himself. A satisfied need no longer drives one to seek it. Once a person feels understood, he has no need to argue with or interrupt you when *you* wish to be understood. This is of tremendous importance in effective conflict-resolution and in the ethics of disagreement in Islam.

“Before I can walk in another person’s shoes, I must first remove my own”  
(A wise man)

- ✎ It is common for someone to launch straight into reason and argument when trying to communicate with another person. However, this approach usually backfires. To be effective, put forward your character first (by prioritising relationship-building, building trust, and thinking Win/Win), then your relationship (by seeking first to understand), then your arguments.
- ✎ Understanding others implies giving them worth and value. It doesn't mean agreement with them but it makes them feel that they matter. It makes them feel respected and willing to reciprocate in kind.
- ✎ A problem is when we try to be efficient in listening (putting a time-restraint on it, pretending to listen, thinking about other Urgent things to do, looking at our watches). This pretence is easily detected and is an emotional withdrawal. Not listening is a disease, which seems not to have been prevented by our having two ears and only one mouth!
- ✎ Empathic listening involves demonstrating one is eager to understand (through asking questions and repeating what the other person has said), and giving feedback that one is listening (through nodding head and encouraging them to continue). This takes skill, sincerity, patience, and much practice.
- ✎ The comforting news is that if you intend to and are geared up to finding interest in what another person is saying, you most likely *will* find it interesting. And remember that some individuals, especially those who may be tagged as “weird” or “crooked” in some way, have scarcely had the pleasure of being really listened to respectfully – it would be a great sadaqah on your part at the very least, and you may even learn something!
- ✎ Habit 5 therefore requires a strong sense of psychological security and confidence if you are to enter another person's subjective world without prejudice. Some are unwilling to be empathic listeners due to the vulnerability of their life and beliefs, and the fear of the consequences of understanding the truth about others.
- ✎ Every Muslim needs to be committed to the sincere search for truth and an intellectual immunity to falsehood. One should not be distracted or provoked by explosive, exaggerated or emotive comments, nor should one fear a person's upset moods.
- ✎ Even when a person doesn't want to open up about their problems, showing empathy by saying “You seem down today” may be appreciated. It demonstrates to the other a sense of understanding and respect for their feelings, no matter what the cause.
- ✎ In emotional outbursts or in tense conversations, noting what interruptions are made and where they are made in the conversation would signal one to what the other person is feeling strongly.
- ✎ Try to catch yourself saying “Listen to me!”
- ✎ There is need to beware of being defensive, and to avoid suspicions and assumptions. Selective listening also needs to be averted, and the art of actively listening to others as you would want them to listen to you needs to be practiced.
- ✎ Allah says, “*Show forgiveness, enjoin what is good, and turn away from (joining) the foolish*” (Surah Al-A'raaf, 7:199) and “*Repel (wrong-doing) with that which is better, then verily, he between whom and you there was animosity (will become) as though a close friend*” (Surah Fussilat, 41:34).

- ✎ Habit 5 requires patience. It requires quality and quantity of time, and there's a need to ensure that what one thinks one has understood is actually confirmed (the Felt-Found technique). Repeat what you have heard so that you give the reassurance that the other feels understood.
- ✎ Active listening to a questioner, and striving to really understand an issue is a characteristic of the greatest among the fuqaha. Indeed, it is this quality that enables merciful variations in fiqh in accordance with the unique environmental context of the issue. "Only the trustworthy fuqaha (who deeply understand a problem) can permit facilitation, but everybody knows how to pass a restraining opinion" (Imam Sufyan al Thawri, cited in Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi, *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*, p.142).
- ✎ Habit 5 is the key to conflict-resolution and saving relationships.
- ✎ Proactive use of this Habit would entail creating opportunities for prevention of communication crises. You don't have to wait for a problem before you seek to understand your children or your spouse or your colleagues at work. Let others have an opportunity to air out what their day has been like, how they are feeling, and what is on their mind. Showing you are interested and willing to sincerely listen will generate immense emotional deposits in your relationship accounts with them. It also builds trust so that when problems do occur, they can be handled without fear of relationship dissolution.
- ✎ "Every hour spent on correct understanding saves 10-100 hours in dealing with the problems that come from not understanding." (Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* Audiocassette Series).



### Exercise:

The next time you have an opportunity to watch people communicate, cover your ears for a few minutes or stay far enough so as not to hear them, and just watch. What emotions are being communicated that may not come across in words alone? Next time you are listening to a person with whom you are closely involved, can you try to be more alert to their non-verbal emotional communication?

## **Habit 6: Synergise**

Work together to achieve more (ADD MORE here)

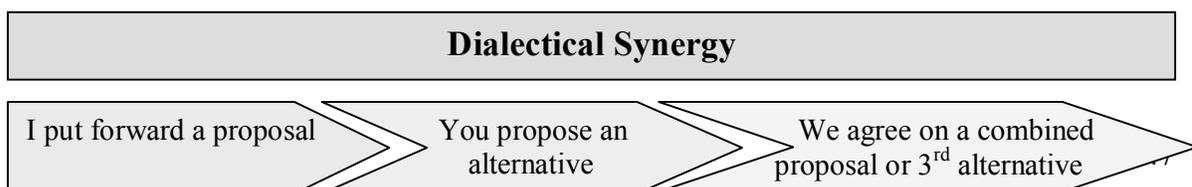
*"And among His signs are ...the differences of your tongues and colours"* (30:22)

- ✎ This Habit is about valuing diversity and the third alternative. A common saying goes "If you are forced to choose between two alternatives, choose the third."
- ✎ Synergy is found everywhere in nature and ecology (the relationships between all elements of nature). For example:
  - In the growth of bamboo, the roots of the various shoots become intertwined to strengthen each other
  - The V-formation of some flying birds increases flight distance by 75% of what a single bird can do. Ie. they can nearly double their distance of flying (with less energy required to flap their wings) by flying on the thrust of the other birds in front of them

- ✎ Cooking is also a good example of Synergy – where different flavours are combined to bring out a unique and even more delicious meal. Music is another example, whereby the individual notes put together create a beautiful melody (sometimes great masterpieces), much greater than playing all the notes separately.
- ✎ Synergy requires valuing differences. Within diversity lie creative and productive alternatives.
- ✎ Habit 6 (Synergise) is the fruit of Habit 4 (Think Win-Win) and 5 (Seek First to Understand). It is about Creative Cooperation, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts:  $1+1 = 3$  or 27 (as in communal salat) or more.
- ✎ Synergy requires Self-development (Habits 1-3: Proactivity, Goals and Prioritising), as it can be taxing on your patience and perseverance (sabr) to always seek the wisdom in alternatives and appreciate differences.
- ✎ It may be contrasted with Compromise, which is like  $1+1 = 1\frac{1}{2}$ . For example, if one person wants the window open to feel cooler, and the other doesn't want it open because it may blow his papers off the table. Opening it just a little is a compromise and doesn't really satisfy either of them.
- ✎ Synergy is like the apex of a triangle, where the middle point is at a higher path than the two other individual points. In the example above, a third alternative which could care for both needs would be for one to move to another room, to put the air conditioner on, or to move the table to a place where the draft would not affect it, etc.
- ✎ Different perspectives and paradigms are also a sign of Allah's *rahmah* (mercy).

## Being “Objective”

- ✎ Since we usually see the world according to our perceptions, and not really from wisdom or true objectivity, accepting and realising our own subjectivity is the key to wisdom and objectivity. Imam Shafi'i is quoted as having said, “My opinion is correct with the possibility of its being in error. An opinion different from mine is an error with the possibility of its being correct” (cited in Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, 1992, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, Kuwait: IIFSO, p.4).
- ✎ Synergy therefore requires significant Humility, and the assumption that you are not always right. It requires saying sincerely: “I want to understand and appreciate your perspective”. In doing so, you may even enlarge your own perspective. It is essential for synergy to occur that we be ready to sincerely assess our perspectives and enrich ourselves with those of others.
- ✎ It also requires *unlearning* prejudices and stereotypes, and shifting our paradigms from one of dichotomy to one of harmony, diversity, and complementarity.
- ✎ From a synergistic perspective, the unity of the Ummah or of individuals does not come from uniformity but from coexisting in harmony, where legitimate differences of opinions and perspectives does not automatically imply disunity.



👉 Note: When there is not enough time or opportunity to discuss developing a third alternative, each party may rank how important the desired action is to them on a scale of 1-10, and the decision may be made in favour of the party whose rank is greater. For example, each spouse wants to use the car to go to a particular destination, the wife to visit a friend in hospital and the husband to meet a business colleague who is waiting for him. A ranking may be done where the wife selects 6 because the hospital may be visited later, and the husband ranks 9 because the colleague is already waiting. Thus, the couple can mutually agree that the car may be used now for the husband and later for the wife. This compromise may be satisfactory to both if the ranking and ultimate decision is done with sincerity, and does not involve any coercion.



### Exercise:

The next time you have an opportunity to watch people communicate, cover your ears for a few minutes or stay far enough so as not to hear them, and just watch. What emotions are being communicated that may not come across in words alone? Next time you are listening to a person with whom you are closely involved, can you try to be more alert to their non-verbal emotional communication?

## V.

### **Sharpening the Saw**

(Self-Renewal according to the Qur'an and Sunnah)

#### The Story of the Tree-Cutter

A man was walking in the bush and saw a tree-cutter busily sawing down a tree. The tree-cutter spent a considerable period of time sawing yet appeared to achieve very little result.

The man asked the tree-cutter "Why aren't you making any progress?" The tree-cutter replied "The saw is blunt." The man suggested to the tree-cutter "Why don't you sharpen your saw?" He received the reply "I can't, I'm in a hurry. There's not enough time to do anything else!"

👉 Habit 7 is the habit of Renewal; of keeping and sustaining balanced personal development and improvement. This applies to the tree-cutter just as it applies to the management of

machinery, your car, your family-life, and everything that requires improvement. It applies at the personal level, interpersonal level, organizational and managerial level.

✎ Habit 7 is about the development and renewal of all the other 6 habits. It deals with your capability to engage in self and interpersonal development. It is in the realm of Quadrant II, and consequently we need to act upon it (be proactive), and not let the lack of doing it act upon us.

✎ The self has 4 major dimensions that require nurturing and consistent renewal:

- 1) the spiritual dimension – development of one’s relationship with Allah, beliefs, values, trust, direction towards the doing of all that is good and useful, confidence and meaning in life and our potentials, resilience to hardships, and God-consciousness.
- 2) the physical dimension – development of the physical body and its health.
- 3) the mental dimension – development of one’s mind and talents.
- 4) the emotional dimension – development of one’s social relationships.

✎ The dimensions are in line with the maqasid (objectives) of Shari’ah<sup>2</sup> and form a personal maintenance program to improve and sustain your biggest asset – you!

✎ The Prophet advised Muslims to: “*Take advantage of some 5 (things) before some 5 (others): your life before your death, your good health before your ill health, your free time before your preoccupation, your youth before your old age, your wealth before your poverty.*” (Al-Hakim, Baihaqi)

✎ Replenishing your 4 dimensions may involve:

\* **Spiritual renewal:** Salat at regular intervals, dhikr, reading of Qur’an with reflection, meditation, tahajjud, fasting, zakat and sadaqah (not just with money), Umrah and Hajj, seeking knowledge, interaction with nature and contemplation over the wonders of Allah and His Creation, and the frequent intention of doing anything *fee sabeel Allah* are vital to spiritual renewal. They steer you in the right direction and provide essential leadership over your important inner core (or heart) that determines your intentions, actions and habits. They sharpen your conscience and help you form a greater commitment to your *shahadah*, and an increased alertness to what is *haram* and *halal*, and greater strength of character to follow up with the right response. Working on the spiritual aspect of your personal Mission Statement helps you to always aim higher and keep a mental vision of how you would like to become. Reading inspirational biographies can also help motivate you to not give up on your spiritual aims. This spiritual dimension develops your character and values, which form the base for all human effectiveness, and is the essence of *Islam, Iman* and *Ihsan*.

\* **Physical renewal:** Attention to the quality of what you eat, eating one-third of your stomach’s fill, having sufficient rest and sleep, relaxing in a tranquil atmosphere, and regular exercise will enable you to have increased energy, stamina and health to be a more effective Muslim each day and for a longer period of your lifetime. The Prophet (s) said “your body has a right over you” and “*Allah likes the stronger Mu’min more than the weaker Mu’min, though there is good in both*” (Sahih Muslim). In addition, taking the step of exercising despite an inclination to be lazy will itself build your ‘proactivity muscles’, and can cause a paradigm shift in your self-image and confidence. You begin to “feel good” about yourself and your sense of self-control. This can be the most important benefit that is gained from renewing your physical dimension.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Maqasid of Shari’ah are: 1) the preservation/protection of deen, 2) the protection of life, 3) the protection of mind, 4) the protection of chastity, 5) the protection of provision/wealth/property

- \* **Mental renewal:** Most people exchange intellectually stimulating activities for a TV set the moment they leave work or school. TV and excessive music can make the mind dull and easily distractible (i.e. having a “TV-brain”), in addition to wasting precious time. The mind needs regular exercise to remain sharp and prevent decay. Try to get used to reading a book a week or a month, and read broadly. True visionary leaders expand their minds through frequent reading and are ever-learning. “Leaders are readers”. Cassette tapes and educational documentaries are also beneficial. Courses challenge you to read with focus and study what is learned. Writing and compiling knowledge is moreover the most effective mental exercise. Imam Shawkani once said, “Some scholars advised me that I should never give up writing, even if that meant writing only two lines every day. I acted in accordance with this advice and I reaped its fruits” (cited in ‘Aaidh ibn Abdullah al-Qarnee, 2002, *Don’t Be Sad*. Translated by Faisal ibn Muhammad. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, p.385). Any form of sharing knowledge helps with keeping and preserving it better in yourself.
- \* **Emotional renewal:** The need to reach out and heal wounded, important relationships is crucial to renewal. Rebuilding relationships is itself a self-rewarding act. Enmity and negative energy is like a cancer and affects all other dimensions of your being. Home is the best place to start doing things together emotionally and socially. Communication, empathy, creative cooperation, eating together, sharing each others thoughts and achievements, encouraging and complimenting each other, appreciating each other, understanding each other, respecting each other’s needs and thinking Win/Win are all acts that need rehearsing. Renew your commitment to your spouse(s) through a habit of making emotional investments daily. The hardest step to take in this dimension is the first. Once one starts sharpening one’s emotional/relationship dimension, the succeeding steps become much easier.
- ✎ Taking time off for Leisure and Recreation is also crucial to achieving effectiveness in other areas of one’s life. The Prophet (saw) said “*Entertain the hearts in-between hours, for if the hearts get tired they become blind.*” (Sunan Al-Daylami)
- ✎ Be a prolific reader and learner.
  - “Read! In the name of your Lord Who creates... Read! For your Lord is most Bountiful. Who taught by the pen. Who taught man what he knew not” (Surah Al-‘Alaq, Q96: 1 – 5)
  - “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave” (Hadith)
  - “Whoever take the path of seeking knowledge, Allah makes easy for him the path to Paradise” (Hadith)
  - “The search for knowledge is an obligation on every Muslim” (Hadith)
- ✎ Taking the time for regular renewal of ourselves will decrease the time wasted towards our goals.
- ✎ And don’t stop sharpening the saw for the dividends are highly rewarding, both in this life and the Hereafter. (“No pain, no gain!”)

## Conclusion:

“If you teach once, you learn twice”. Share these habits with others, and remember it takes time to change a habit. Be patient and persistent, and you will succeed insha Allah.

A lack of applying these habits leads to the following:

- Lack of Habit 1 – No sense of responsibility
- Lack of Habit 2 – No sense of vision
- Lack of Habit 3 – No Integrity

Lack of Habit 4 – No mutual respect  
Lack of Habit 5 – No understanding  
Lack of Habit 6 – No cooperation  
Lack of Habit 7 – No renewal

These 7 habits are all already in the fitrah. We all, down inside, already know these must be developed if we are to be better people, and better Muslims in particular.

*“We must never cease from exploring, and the end of all our exploring is to arrive where we began and to know the place for the very first time.”* by T.S. Eliot

---

## Gung Ho!

Gung Ho is a Chinese word that means “working together”. It is now a term often expressed in Management to mean an enthusiastic, highly-driven, team-committed attitude. The Gung Go! Strategy for Motivating Teams utilises the wisdom behind the behaviours Allah has inspired in the fitrah of 3 notable animals that share our planet.



**“And on the earth there are signs to those with inner certainty, just as (there are signs) within your own selves” (Surah Al-Dhaariyaat, 51:20-21).**

### *Spirit of the Squirrel* WORTHWHILE WORK

#### 1. Knowing we make the world a better place

- \* It’s the understanding of how the work contributes to society, and how the absence of such work would leave a harmful vacuum
- \* It’s how the work helps others, not the units dealt with in a production line
- \* Result: self-esteem – an emotion whose power to mobilise is as compelling as love and hate

“The value of an individual and his status, get determined by the extent of the use, and effect of his work on the lives of others. He may, for example, lead them to guidance, or deliver them from ruin, or relieve them of a distress, or liberate them from tyranny, or repel from them an enemy, or some such transitive deeds, whose benefits are not, as it were, inherent in their subject, but are rather transferred on to others, who may be individuals, or group of individuals, or perhaps, the whole society itself” (Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Al-Waqt fi Hayaatil Muslim*, p.55ff, cited in Abou Maimoonah, 2002, *Time Utilisation: An Islamic Perspective*. Lagos, p.56-57)

*“You are the best community raised for humanity. You enjoin what is right, repel what is wrong, and you have faith in Allah”* (Surah Ali-‘Imran, 3:110)

“...If anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind” (Surah Al-Ma’idah, 5:32)

“Never will I allow to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female” (Surah Ali-‘Imran, 3:195)

“O mankind! Verily, you are working hard towards your Lord, a hard work which you will assuredly meet (in His presence).” (Surat al-Inshiqaq, 84:6)

## **2. Everyone works toward a shared goal**

- \* Goal sharing means involving others towards a mutual commitment, not merely announcing what the goal is. Trust and putting team members first lead to support for goals.
- \* The manager sets critical goals. The team can set the rest. People support best that which they help create.
- \* Goals are targets you place into the future landscape between where you are and where you want to be. They focus attention productively.

## **3. Values guide all plans, decisions and actions.**

- \* Individuals must be proud of both the goal and how they get there.
- \* Goals are achieved in the future. Values are to be enacted now. Goals are set. Values are lived. Goals change. Values are rocks you can count on. Goals get people going. Values sustain the effort.
- \* Values become real only when you demonstrate them in the way you act and the way you insist others behave.
- \* In a Gung Ho organisation, values are the real boss. The political authority of the Shari’ah rests in its values and principles determined by Allah. All subjects in an Islamic state, including the leaders, are ruled by Shari’ah values.

“O you who have attained to faith, if you are conscious of Allah, He will grant you a criterion (to judge between right and wrong), or a way out (from any difficulty), and will expiate for you your sins, and forgive you” (Surah Al-Anfal, 8:29)

“Verily, your efforts and deeds are diverse (in aims). As for he who gives (in sadaqah) and is conscious of Allah, and has testified (through his actions) to that which is best, We will make smooth for him the path of ease” (Surah Al-Layl, Q92:4-7).

### ***The Way of the Beaver*** **IN CONTROL OF ACHIEVING THE GOAL**

#### **1. A playing field with clearly marked territory**

- \* Goals and values define the playing field and rules of the game.
- \* Leaders decide what position team members play but then have to get off the field and let the players move the ball.
- \* Freedom to take charge comes from knowing exactly what territory is yours.

#### **2. Thoughts, feelings, needs, and dreams are respected, listened to, and acted upon**

- \* You can't be in control unless the rest of the organisation supports you and doesn't rip you, or your work, apart.
- \* Golden Rule of Management: Value individuals as persons.
- \* Information is the gatekeeper to power. Everybody needs full open access to information. Managers must be willing to give up the levers of control they've worked a lifetime to get hold of. It's touch to be boss without being bossy.

*"The believing men and women are supporters of one another"* (Surah Al-Tawbah, Q9:71)

### **3. Able but challenged**

- \* Production expectations should be within capacity and skills, but if you undershoot you'll insult.
- \* Nothing drains self-esteem faster than knowing you're ripping off the system, not contributing. If people can't do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, you demean them.
- \* Gung Ho requires a stretch: work that demands people's best and allows them to learn and move ahead into uncharted territory.

*"He whose two days are equal (in accomplishment) is a sure loser"* (Sunan Al-Daylami).

*"I have never grieved as much on anything as I do on a day that has ended in which my appointed lifetime has reduced, yet my deeds have not increased"* ('Abdullah bin Mas'ud, cited in Abou Maimoonah, *Time Utilisation: An Islamic Perspective*. Lagos, p.xxvii)

## ***Gift of the Goose*** **CHEERING EACH OTHER ON**

The Gift of the Goose doesn't have the impact unless the Spirit of the Squirrel and the Way of the Beaver are first attempted.

### **1. Active or passive, congratulations must be TRUE**

- \* Congratulations are affirmations that who people are and what they do matter, and that they are making a valuable contribution toward achieving the shared mission.
- \* Telling people what a great job they've done or presenting an award is an active congratulation. Passive congratulations are such things as stepping aside and letting a team member go forward with a tricky, complicated, and important project, without exercising some sort of control or even offering advice.
- \* You can't overdo TRUE congratulations: **T**imely, **R**esponsive, **U**nconditional, and **E**nthusiastic.
- \* Congratulations should not be done weeks or months after the deed is done. It must be Timely in order to be effective.

*"Men whom neither trade nor sale diverts them from the remembrance of Allah, nor from regular prayer, nor from giving zakat, their (only) fear is a Day when hearts and eyes will be overturned, that Allah may reward them according to the best of their deeds, and add even more for them out of His Grace. And Allah provides without measure to whom He wills"* (Surah An-Nur, 24:37-38).

“He who does not thank people does not thank Allah” (Sunan Abu Dawood, Sunan At-Tirmidhi).

## 2. Keep score, and cheer the progress

- \* At football games, fans don't sit mute as the ball is moved down the field, waiting for the goal before cheering. Cheer the progress, not just the results. Measurement (score) shared with everyone generates excitement.
- \* The farther congratulations are to the right on the scale below, the better (more effective) they are:

Programmed	→	Spontaneous
Blanket	→	Individual
General	→	Specific
Traditional	→	Unique
- \* Congratulating someone individually is more effective than just congratulating the team. Specifying what exactly an individual has achieved that is pleasing is more effective than just expressing a general “thank you for your work”. Rewarding in a way that is most helpful or meaningful or just unique to an individual is more effective than giving everyone the same thing.
- \* Stop focusing on problems and the guilty party (police behaviour) and start looking for those responsible for things gone right (coach behaviour). Try to “catch people” doing things as they should be, and cheer them on!
- \* If someone hasn't achieved what they were supposed to, encouragement and expressing belief in their ability is a way of cheering them on.
- \* If someone has done something the wrong way, provide supportive redirection rather than punishment, unless it involves a crime.

There is reward from Allah for even a good intention not carried out: “Allah ordered (the angels) that the good and the bad deeds be written, and He then showed how (they should write it). If someone intends to do a good deed and he does not do it, Allah writes for him a full good deed; and if he intends to do a good deed and actually does it, then Allah writes for him from ten to seven hundred times or more its equal as a reward. If someone intends to do a bad deed and he does not do it, Allah writes a full good deed (for him); and if he intends to do it (a bad deed) and actually does it, Allah writes one bad deed (in his Record)” (Sahih Al-Bukhari).

“And by the Mercy of Allah, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from you” (Surah Ali-‘Imran, 3:159).

## 3. $E = mc^2$ – Enthusiasm equals mission times cash and congratulations

- \* Worthwhile work and being in control of achieving the goal – make up a mission.
- \* Cheering each other on brings enthusiasm to work.
- \* Cash comes first – you need to feed material needs (food, clothing, etc.) before you can feed the spirit with congratulations.

“Pay your labourer his wages before his sweat dries” (Sunan Ibn Majah).

“He who is not grateful to Allah does not thank people” (Sunan Ahmad).

“Whoever comes to you with beneficence, reward him; and if you are unable to reward him, then make a supplication for him until you know that you have rewarded him; for Allah is The Thankful, and He loves the thankful” (At-Tabarani).

# Creativity

## Maximising the use of your brain

Everyone is a born genius, born with efficiency and creativity. Results today come more from creativity of the mind and not so much from labour. From studies done, 94% of 2-4 year olds are highly creative but with the effect of the environment, especially parents and to some extent schooling, only 4% of 4-7 year olds are creative.

Certain things stimulate creativity: clear, specific goals; pressing problems that need solutions; and relevant questions.

Creativity obeys the “**LAW OF USE**”: Use it or lose it.

“If necessity is the mother of invention, then creativity is the father”

The following techniques stimulate the conscious mind and hence maximise creativity. The passive methods are:

1. Solitude – going into silence for 30-60 minutes not eating, drinking or reading anything. The first 20-25 minutes is the most difficult. This is the easiest method of obtaining solutions to so many problems but it requires discipline and patience.
2. Deep relaxation and meditation. Quietly count down from 150 to 1 with eyes closed and deep breathing, for 10-20 minutes. During this time, numerous ideas may enter the mind.
3. Being with nature – taking walks along the river or seaside, hills, deserts, gardens, etc.
4. Exercise – concentrating on physical development while the mind is at rest can often stimulate circulation to the brain.

The active methods include:

- 1) Mind-storming – sitting quietly with a pen and pad of paper, writing down the specific question(s) and then write down 20 answers that come to mind. Write the problem/goal at the top of the paper in the form of a question. The last 3-7 answers are the hardest and require you to dig deeper into your creative abilities.
  - 2) Systematic problem solving method – has 8 requirements: 1) Every problem should be approached with the assumption that there is a logical solution 2) the language should change to more positive terms e.g. A problem is either a situation, an opportunity or a challenge. 3) Put the “problem” (situation/challenge) down clearly in writing and have a crystal clear definition of the problem for all to see. 4) List all the possible causes 5) Write down what are all the different things that can be done (solutions)? Write down the ideal solutions before putting down the possible solutions. Be solution-focused and do not go back into focussing on the problem 6) Make a decision on what to do. 80% of decisions can be made immediately, or have a deadline for decisions to be made. This removes a lot of stress 7) Give specific delegation of who should do what i.e. assign specific responsibilities 8) Set a deadline
  - 3) Brain storming – Ideally, 4-7 people should ideally be involved in brain storming, with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 12. It should go on for 30-45 minutes. It should concentrate only on idea-generation and not on the evaluation of ideas, which may be done later. There should be 1 leader asking everyone questions in turn or in rounds. Questions should be very specific. There should be an encouragement of cheerfulness, funny and even silly ideas. All ranks in the organisation should be involved.
-

# Bibliography

- Ali, Yusuf (n.d.) *The Holy Qur'an* (English translation). Madinah: King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex
- Asad, Muhammad (1980) *The Message of the Qur'an* (English translation). Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus Ltd.
- Badri, Malik (2000) *Contemplation: An Islamic Psycho spiritual Study*. Herndon: VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Beekun, Rafik and Badawi, Jamal (1999) *Leadership: An Islamic Perspective*. Beltsville, MA: Amana Publications.
- Bello, Abou Maimoonah Ahmad Bin Muhammad (2002) *Time Utilisation: An Islamic Perspective*. Lagos.
- Blanchard, Ken and Bowles, Sheldon (1998) *Gung Ho!* London: Harper Collins.
- Covey, Stephen R. (1990) *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York: Simon & Schuster Ltd.
- Ekram, Dr. and Beshir, Muhammad R. (2001) *Muslim Teens: Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope*. Beltsville: MA: Amana Publications.
- Esack, Farid (1999) *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today*. London: Oneworld Publications.
- Al-Ghazali, Sheikh Muhammad (2002) *Stop Worrying, Relax and Be Happy*. London: Al-Firdous Ltd.
- Mohammed, Yasien (1996) *Fitra: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature*. London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd.
- Murad, Khurram (2000) *In the Early Hours: Reflections on Spiritual and Self Development*. Markfield: Revival Publications
- Al-Najjar, Abdul Majid (2000) *The Vicegerency of Man: Between Revelation and Reason*. Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought
- Parvez, Zahid (2000) *Building a New Society: An Islamic Approach to Social Change*. Markfield: Revival Publications.
- Pickthall, Muhammad (n.d.) *The Glorious Qur'an* (English translation).
- Al-Qaradawi, Sheikh Yusuf (2000) *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*. London: Awakening Publications.
- Al-Qarnee, 'Aaidh ibn Abdullah (2002) *Don't Be Sad*. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House.
- Sahih Al-Bukhari (n.d.) Found in Alim Software Version 6.0



Sahih Muslim (n.d.) Found in Alim Software Version 6.0

Sunan At-Tirmidhi (n.d.) Found in Alim Software Version 6.0

Al-Talib, Hisham (1991) *Training Guide for Islamic Workers*. Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought.

Yakan, Fathi (1970) *Islamic Movement: Problems and Perspectives*. Translated by Maneh Al-Johani. Armed Forces Printing Press.