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What Islam Teaches About Sin

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Islam teaches that God (Allah) has sent guidance to human beings, through His prophets and books of revelation. Believers are expected to follow that guidance to the best of their ability.

Islam defines sin as an act which goes against the teachings of Allah. All human beings sin, as none of us is perfect. Islam teaches that Allah, Who created us and all of our imperfections, knows this about us and is All-Forgiving, Merciful, and Compassionate.

What is the definition of a "sin"? The Prophet Muhammad once said, "Righteousness is good character, and sin is that which wavers in your heart and which you do not want people to know about."

Followers each try their best but fall short and seek Allah's forgiveness for their shortcomings. Allah is prepared to forgive, as the Quran describes: "... God will love you and forgive you your sins; for God is Much-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Grace" (Quran 3:31).

Of course, sin is something to be avoided. From an Islamic perspective, however, there are some sins which are extremely serious and are thus known as Major Sins. These are mentioned in the Quran as being worthy of punishment both in this world and the hereafter. (See below for a list.)

Other missteps are known as Minor Sins; not because they are insignificant, but rather because they are not mentioned in the Quran as having a legal punishment. These so-called "minor sins" are sometimes overlooked by a believer, who then engages in them to the extent that they become part of their lifestyle.

Making a habit of sinning brings a person further away from Allah, and causes them to lose faith. The Quran describes such people: "...their hearts have been sealed by the sins they have accumulated" (Quran 83:14). Additionally, Allah says that "you counted it a little thing, while with Allah it was very great" (Quran 24:15).

One who recognizes that he or she is engaging in minor sins must vow to make lifestyle changes. They must recognize the problem, feel remorse, vow not to repeat the mistakes, and seek forgiveness from Allah. Believers who sincerely care about Allah and the hereafter must do their best to avoid both Major and Minor sins.

Major Sins in Islam

The major sins in Islam include the following behaviors:

Associating others with God (*shirk* or polytheism) – This is the only sin which Allah considers unforgivable, as it violates the primary tenet of Islam which is the Unity of God.

Murder

Consuming usury (interest)
Stealing from an orphan's estate
Bearing false witness
Engaging in magic or fortune-telling
Abandoning the battlefield during a time of war
Drinking alcohol
Slandering chaste women
Disrespecting one's parents

Minor Sins in Islam

It is difficult to list all of the minor sins in Islam. The list should include anything which violates Allah's guidance, which is not itself a Major sin. A minor sin is something you are ashamed of, which you would not want people to find out about. Some of the most common behaviors include:

Breaking a promise
Being immodest (flirting, watching obscene movies/TV, etc.)
Being suspicious or spying on others
Name-calling or bullying another person
Talking excessively about things which are not our business
Swearing
and so on.

Repentance and Forgiveness

In Islam, committing a sin doesn't eternally separate a person from the Almighty. The Quran reassures us that Allah is prepared to forgive us. "Say: Oh, my servants who have transgressed against their own souls! Do not

practice good deeds such as giving to the needy in charity. Above all, we should never doubt Allah's Mercy: "If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden to do, We shall remit from your (small) sins, and admit you to a Noble Entrance (i.e. Paradise)" (Quran 4:31).

