

Major Sins in Islam (part 1 of 2): What is a Major Sin?

Description: A short introduction to the concept of sin and the differences between major and minor sins. The emphasis is on major sins, what they are, and what are their consequences to both an individual and the society as a whole?

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Objectives:

- To clearly define a major sin.
- To explain the difference between major and minor sins.
- To list major sins.

Arabic Terms:

- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.
- *Hadith* - (plural "*ahadith*") is a piece of information or a story. In Islam it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.
- *Riba* - interest.
- *Du'a* - supplication, prayer, asking Allah for something.
- *Shirk* " a word that implies ascribing partners to Allah, or ascribing divine attributes to other than Allah, or believing that the source of power, harm and blessings comes from another besides Allah.

What is a sin?

In Islam a sin is any act a person chooses to take that is in defiance of Allah's law. They are acts which have been forbidden by Allah in the Quran or by Prophet Muhammad in the *Sunnah*. The Quran teaches us about people whose hearts have been covered by the sins they accumulate. **(Quran 83:14)**. The Prophet Muhammad explained this verse by saying that when a person sins even once, it is like a black dot is placed on his heart.



Eventually if a person accumulates enough black dots his heart is completely covered and hardened. The road back to Allah then becomes more difficult, but never hopeless because Allah is the most Forgiving and wants nothing more than to forgive those who turn to Him in repentance.

oeAs for those who avoid great sins and immoralities, though they may commit small sins, verily, your Lord is vast in forgiveness. He knows you well when He created you from the earth and when you were fetuses in your mothers' wombs. So do not claim yourselves to be pure; He is most knowing of who fears Him.” (Quran 53: 32)

What is the difference between a major and a minor sin?

Islam classifies sins according to the severity of their consequences on individuals and society. A major sin in Islam is one that is directly warned against in the Quran, with reference to a specific punishment either in this life or in the Hereafter. This includes violations against Allah such as worshipping idols or something other than Allah alone. Other major sins include murder, theft, perjury, bribery, slander, adultery, and drinking alcohol. These actions are considered severe because of the disastrous consequences they have on individuals and societies. Other acts that are usually more personal in nature are considered to be minor. They are acts about which Allah has not stated extreme anger, punishments, or warnings.

Why avoid sin, especially major sin?

Major sins might be one of the reasons Allah does not accept your *du'a*. Ask yourself how and why would Allah respond favourably to one who remains in a state of sin and does not give it up or repent from it. It is very important for a believer to avoid major sins because they can carry many severe punishments and Allah has guaranteed Paradise to those who avoid them.

oelf you avoid the major sins which you have been forbidden, We will cancel out for you your (other) evil deeds and admit you (to Paradise) with a noble entry.”(Quran 4:31)

What are the major sins?

Over hundreds of years of Islamic scholarship many lists have been compiled of the major sins in Islam. Today we will begin our lesson by using a *hadith* narrated by Abu Hurairah. The Prophet said, "Avoid the seven great destructive sins." They (the people) asked, "What are they?" He answered as follows:

- 1) To join partners in worship with Allah.
- 2) To practice sorcery.
- 3) To use *riba* (usury).
- 4) To take a life unjustly.
- 5) To deal unjustly with the property of an orphan.
- 6) To turn one's back and flee from a battle.
- 7) To accuse chaste women of immorality.

Let us examine these sins more closely.

- 1) *Shirk*, or associating partners with Allah is the most serious prohibition of all. Prophet Muhammad said, **"Shall I not tell you of the most serious of the major sins?" We said, "Of course, O Messenger of Allah!" He said, "Associating anything in worship with Allah . . ."**[\[1\]](#)

Verily, Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with him in worship, but He forgives except that (anything else) to whom He pleases, and whoever sets up partners with Allah in worship, he has indeed invented a tremendous sin." (Quran 4:48)

- 2) Sorcery, witchcraft, divination, astrology and fortune telling are all included under the heading of sorcery which is one of the seven sins that can condemn a person to Hell. Sorcery causes harm and contains no benefit whatsoever. Allah says of the one who learns or practices it, **"And they learn that which harms them and profits them not . . ."** (Quran 2:102)
- 3) In the Quran, Allah does not declare war on anyone except the people who deal in *riba*.

O you who believe! Be afraid of Allah and give up what remains (due to you) of *riba* (from now onward), if you are (really) believers. And if you do not do it, then take a message of war from Allah and His Messenger." (Quran 2:278-279)

Riba conflicts with the spirit of brotherhood and sympathy, and is based on greed, selfishness and hard heartedness. It is one of the major contributors towards inflation and causes trauma and depression due to mounting debts. *Riba* guarantees gain without any

possibility of loss, hence all the risk is taken by the borrower, rather than sharing the risk and the profits with both parties. *Riba* also creates a monopoly in society, where the rich are rewarded for being wealthy, while those who are not are forced to pay extra.

- 4) One of the gravest sins in Islam is the intentional taking of a life. This is due to the fact that Islam embodies a code of ethics, designed to protect the rights of an individual including his or her right to live in a secure community. Prophet Muhammad said, "A man will continue to be sound in his religion so long as he does not shed blood which it is forbidden to shed."^[2]
- 5) The guardians and caretakers of orphans should use the property in their trust in a correct manner and only for the benefit of the orphan. A caretaker should be very careful not to spend any of the orphan's money on himself because this is a very serious offence. Islam is concerned with fairness and justice and being responsible for the welfare of an orphan is a great responsibility not to be taken lightly.

Indeed, those who devour the property of orphans unjustly are only consuming into their bellies fire. And they will be burned in a Blaze." (Quran 4:10)

Endnotes:

^[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

^[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

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