

Tazkiyah Halaqa
Self Honesty – Session 4
Sheikh Adnan Rajeh
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Wellness Centre, London, Ontario

Overview

This session marks the continuation of the series' focus on self-honesty (*ṣidq ma'a al-nafs*), one of the foundational pillars of tazkiyah. Sheikh Adnan emphasizes that this is not a quick or straightforward process. Self-honesty is an enduring spiritual discipline that may take months to cultivate and must be approached with patience, repetition, and structured introspection. The session centers on how to uncover the essence of one's identity beneath the surface of societal and personal roles.

Removing Roles to Uncover True Identity

Sheikh Adnan explores the concept of personal identity by discussing the multiplicity of roles people carry—parent, spouse, sibling, employee, etc.—and how these roles often define one's self-perception. He warns that while these roles are important and must be fulfilled with excellence, they can also obscure a person's foundational self.

To truly practice self-honesty, one must temporarily “remove the hats” of these roles to examine the consciousness that remains. That remaining essence, according to the Qur'anic framework, is rooted in two coordinates:

- *Khilāfah* (Stewardship): Being responsible for others and the world.
- *Ubūdiyyah* (Servitude): Serving Allah in all states.

Without awareness of this core identity, a person risks defining themselves exclusively through external assignments, which can be lost through life's trials. Sheikh Adnan illustrates this by referencing the story of Prophet Ayyūb (‘alayhi as-salām), who was stripped of all worldly roles but retained his dignity and identity through unwavering servitude.

The Danger of Self-Definition through Roles

When roles become the foundation of identity, their loss can result in an existential crisis. The Shaykh references contemporary examples such as retirees, celebrities, or professionals who lose status or function and subsequently spiral into depression or self-harm. The root issue is often that they had no clear concept of self beyond their public roles.

True self-definition, he argues, is based on recognizing oneself as a conscious servant and steward. Roles are expressions of that essence—not the source of it.

Honest Self-Appraisal through Ethics and Values

Beyond roles, self-honesty must also examine a person's alignment with core values like compassion, patience, trustworthiness, and honesty. These values should be tested through real-life circumstances where they are challenged. For example, being patient or compassionate when one is tired or upset reveals the true strength of that virtue.

Shaykh Adnan emphasizes that values are not what one claims to believe but what one demonstrates under pressure. Self-honesty, therefore, is the act of confronting the gap between claimed values and lived behaviour.

Excuses vs. Reasons

A major theme in this session is distinguishing between excuses and reasons:

- Excuses are rationalizations to avoid accountability and change.
- Reasons reveal underlying causes and create pathways to correction and growth.

The Shaykh cautions that the *nafs* is highly skilled in producing excuses and will resist reasoned introspection. To grow, one must reject excuses and probe deeper into the real “why” behind behaviour. This distinction is essential for meaningful spiritual development.

Real-Life Examples and Prophetic Guidance

Shaykh Adnan uses several examples to ground his discussion:

- Ka‘b ibn Mālik, whose honest admission to the Prophet ﷺ during the Battle of Tabūk earned him divine forgiveness.
- Abū al-Muṭṭalib, who understood his limited responsibility and entrusted the greater affair (the Ka‘bah) to Allah.
- The abused child, who lies to survive trauma, demonstrating how early deception can warp identity and self-perception.
- Salman al-Farisi, whose relentless quest for truth exemplifies the power of uncompromising honesty with oneself.

These narratives underscore the importance of being truthful with oneself even when it is painful, and of seeking clarity on core beliefs—what one truly values and lives by.

The Need for a Standard and Mentorship

To perform self-honesty effectively, one must have a standard for comparison. Sheikh Adnan explains that without righteous role models, one’s evaluation becomes either exaggerated or underwhelming. He recommends studying the lives of the prophets and the righteous (*al-sāliḥīn*) as a reference point for personal assessment.

He also insists that mentorship is critical for tazkiyah. Without a teacher or spiritual guide, the individual risks delusion or distortion in self-evaluation. Self-honesty, while personal, is not entirely private—it requires guidance and calibration.

Practical Exercise and Final Reflections

Participants are asked to return to the roles-based exercise but add two layers:

1. Define the consciousness beneath all roles, in terms of *khilāfah* and *‘ubūdiyyah*.
2. Assess personal behaviour against claimed values using real-life situations as evidence.

Shaykh Adnan closes by reaffirming that self-honesty is the gateway to self-value, humility, confidence, and ultimately to the purification of the soul. It is the only means to unlock sincere growth and meaningful servitude.

Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHv1_9WFTLw