

# Moral Degeneration

H A R U N   Y A H Y A

What we refer to as "moral values" are the concepts introduced by religion that make life beautiful and rewarding. Whenever these values are distorted, we face a really disturbing picture in society. First of all, in an environment where no rules and limits are observed, "lawlessness" prevails. In this system, everyone lays down his own rules and principles, based on highly variable criteria. In the ignorant society the basic principle that is applied is not to go to extremes in social conduct and hence not to incur any reaction from the society. It is wholly acceptable to do anything wrong, as long as it is not publicly disclosed. Ignorant people deliver speeches about virtuous conduct and morals, or severely condemn those who hold a contrary view. However, they themselves violate these values when they are convinced that nobody sees them.

This is actually the main basis upon which their philosophy rests. They never think that God surrounds them all at every moment; they never conceive that He sees every deed they commit and hears every word they utter. They perceive degeneration as a "modern" way of living.

They fear being humiliated if they do not project the image of a "modern person." This image essentially calls for the flouting of such moral values as honesty. Someone, for instance, who returns the money he found on the street to its owner is ridiculed. In such a situation, acceptable behavior according to ignorant people would be not to give the money back. This example reflects only one aspect of the ignorant society's understanding about moral values however. Concepts like honesty and chastity also lose their importance. Forgery and lying are accepted as normal. A person may commit burglary since he finds nothing wrong with it. Likewise, anyone can tell a lie whenever he wishes. In this system other people have no right to object because they also have the right to behave "freely"(!) in accordance with their own moral values.

The Qur'an makes it clear that people who adhere to the moral values of the age of the ignorant suffer for doing so:

**Indeed, God will not deal unjustly with man in any way. It is man who wrongs his own soul. (Surah Yunus: 44)**

In a society where people adhere to religious values, they conduct themselves responsibly towards each other since they go in fear of God. They never deign to be dishonest or insincere, and certainly never push things to such extremes as to make life difficult for others. Moral values become the basis of all acts and conduct.