I Have Only Been Sent to Perfect Good Manners

The topic of good akhlaaq is a very important topic. Consider that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:   
  
"The only reason I have been sent is to perfect good manners."   
  
Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala starts off Surah Al-Qalam, an early Makkan surah revealed to defend the status and honor of Prophet Muhammad sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam by saying:   
  
And indeed, you are upon a noble conduct, an exemplary manner (Al-Qalam 68/4).   
  
This exemplary manner is high akhlaaq. Of the things that Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala praised the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam for was that he had good akhlaaq, or good manners. This shows us the importance of good akhlaaq; in defending the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, one of the first things that Allah mentions is his good akhlaaq.   
  
There are numerous Quranic aayaat referring to having good manners. Allah says:   
  
Worship Allah, and do not associate partners with him. And be good to your parents, and the relatives, and to the orphans, and to the poor people, and the neighbor that is close to you and the neighbor that is not close to you, and your companion on the journey.   
  
So good akhlaaq is for everyone including your parents, your relatives, the poor, the orphans, all of mankind.   
  
Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala says in another aayah:   
  
Command my servants to say that which is best.   
  
Say good statements. Allah describes the Ibaad-ar-Rahman, the servants of Allah, as those who walk with humility and humbleness on the face of this earth. They are not arrogant. This is from the characteristics of the believers. Allah hates arrogance in all of its forms. Allah hates kibr and pride in all of its forms.   
  
There are many blessings and benefits of having good akhlaaq. I will summarize some of the blessings of having good akhlaaq and its benefits according to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and the Qur’an. I will mention eight of these blessings, though of course there are more.   
  
Blessing #1:   
  
Having good akhlaaq is one of the themes found continually throughout the Qur’an and Sunnah and this is the first aspect that proves the importance of good akhlaaq. Good akhlaaq is part of the comprehensive advice that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would give. In one hadith he said to Muadh:   
  
"Fear Allah wherever you are, follow up an evil deed with a good deed, and meet with the people, interact with the people, with good akhlaaq."   
  
Three phrases, but so beautiful and comprehensive.   
  
In another hadith a person came to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and asked him for some advice. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam responded:   
  
"Be firm, be perseverant, be straight in your following of Siraat al Mustaqeem. Let your akhlaaq be good to the people."   
  
The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam also said:   
  
"Have fear of Allah, and do not trivialize anything of goodness, even if it is that you take from your bucket of water and pour it into your brother's bucket."   
  
In those days they would have to lift water out of the well, and this was a very trivial thing. Everybody from every household would go maybe even more than once a day to pull some water out of the bucket. It was a very minor thing; everybody did it. So the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said not to trivialize any good that you do, even if it is taking your bucket of water and pouring it into your brother’s bucket when you find that he too is coming to get water.   
  
And he said:   
  
"Even if you were to meet your brother with a smiling face, do not trivialize it."   
  
The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam also said,   
  
"If someone curses you or tries to find fault with you, in a matter that does not exist in you," or in other words he accuses you in a fault that you do not have, then, "do not find fault with him in a matter that he does have."   
  
So even if he lies about you and slanders you, do not point out the mistakes he himself has. He, sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, went on and said:   
  
"Leave him, because the evil of that deed will be against him, and the good will be for you."   
  
In another place he said:   
  
"Do not ever curse any person."   
  
Blessing #2:   
  
Nothing is a greater blessing, after of course having eman. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:   
  
"The best blessing that a person can be given in this life is akhlaaq."   
  
The best blessing that a person can be given, far greater than any money, wealth, status, family and children, or anything of this world, is that of good akhlaaq.   
  
In another hadith he said:   
  
"Mankind has not been given anything better than good akhlaaq."   
  
In yet another hadith he said:   
  
"I command you to be of good akhlaaq,"   
  
Meaning good manners and characteristics.   
  
"And also, remain silent for long periods of time, because by Him whose hand is in my soul, the creation cannot beautify themselves with anything better than these."   
  
You cannot beautify yourself with anything better than good akhlaaq.   
  
Blessing #3:   
  
The rewards of having good akhlaaq are greater than, or at least equivalent to, the rewards of extra and continual worship. The rewards that a person brings through good akhlaaq cannot be brought through worship of Allah. Or even if they are to be brought about through the worship of Allah, they will be brought at a very heavy price. Through akhlaaq, a person can obtain a lot of blessings he would not otherwise be able to obtain. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:   
  
"A person can reach the level of a person who prays all night and fasts all day just because of his good akhlaaq."   
  
Who amongst us fasts every single day and prays every single night? Nobody. Yet, if we have good akhlaaq we can reach the level of the person who does this.   
  
In another hadith the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam mentions the reward for one who is a musaddat, the one who is always trying to fill in the gaps between other Muslims by being social, friendly, and having good akhlaaq. He says:   
  
"The Muslim who is musaddat reaches the darajat as-sawwam al-qawwam."   
  
Sawwam is the one who continually fasts and the qawwam is the one who continually stands in prayer. So the Muslim who is very social, has good akhlaaq, and is fulfilling the rights of his brothers reaches the level of the one who continually fasts and prays just because of his good akhlaaq. This is the way that we can earn extra thawwab.   
  
How few of us pray tahajjud and fast the voluntary fasts? Yet, if we want to be amongst those who obtain good deeds, all we have to do is be amongst those of good akhlaaq.   
  
Blessing #4:   
  
Having good akhlaaq is a sign of one's strong eman. Akhlaaq is that it is a sign of the perfection of one's eman. This is a very important point that should not be trivialized. A person who does not have good akhlaaq does not have strong eman. It is that simple. It does not matter what label or what status he assigns himself. It does not matter what he says or what he boasts about himself; if a person is coarse, arrogant, and vain, then this person is not a good Muslim. Even if he fasts and prays, he has not perfected his eman nor is his eman strong. Whereas the person who performs the minimum wajibaat, or what is obligatory upon him, and he is of good akhlaaq, then he is far better than a person who might pray more and fast more than him but his akhlaaq is bad. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:   
  
"The people (or the Mu'mins) who have perfected their eman most perfectly, are those who are best in akhlaaq."   
  
And in another narration:   
  
"The best of the Mu'mineen are the ones who are best in their akhlaaq."   
  
And he also said in the same hadith:   
  
"The best of you are those of you who are best to their wives."   
  
This is an important point to ponder over, why is it that the best of you are those who are best to their wives? It is because it is very easy to show good akhlaaq to your neighbor that you meet once a day or to your coworker that you are with for a few hours every day, or to your relative that you meet once a year, or to any other person that you occasionally meet. It is very easy to show good akhlaaq to such people. But when you show good akhlaaq to your wife, the one you eat with, drink with, sleep with, and wake up with then you have really reached the height of perfection of good akhlaaq.   
  
Your wife is your life partner; she shares everything with you. The man is the one who is in charge of the woman as Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala said. So when the man can show good akhlaaq to the one who is under him, his family and children, his wife and children, then this shows that he has reached the height of akhlaaq.   
  
In another hadith, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:   
  
"The best Mu'mins are those who are best in their akhlaaq, those whose shoulders' are trodden over."   
  
What does this mean? It is an expression in Arabic meaning that they are humble. Anyone can come and trample over them but they will remain quiet and humgble. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said they are those who are friendly and respond to friendliness. They are those who achieve ulfa, meaning a sense of brotherhood and friendship. Those who give that sense and who achieve it too. And then he said there is no good in one who does not show this concept of ulfa, nor does he receive it from others. So the mu'min is one who is friendly to the other people. And when other people show friendliness to him, he responds in friendliness as well. He does not respond in arrogance, sarcasm, or in looking down on them or in testing them. This is not the way of the mu'min. The mu'min is one who is genuinely friendly from his heart, genuinely wanting good, and desiring the best for himself and his Muslim brothers.   
  
Blessing #5:   
  
Akhlaaq is very beloved to Allah; he loves good characteristics and hates evil characteristics. In one hadith, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:   
  
"Allah is beautiful and loves beauty, and He loves noble akhlaaq (ma'ali akhlaaq) and He hates, he despises lowly characteristics."   
  
He, sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam also said:   
  
"Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala has containers on the face of this earth, and the containers of your Lord are the hearts of His servants." The hearts of His servants act like containers of Allah meaning that they fill up with the mercy, love, and knowledge of Allah. These servants of Allah act like containers to the mercy of Allah."The most beloved of these containers are the ones that are the most soft, and the ones that are most gentle." These people with soft hearts and gentle natures are the ones whom Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala loves the most.   
  
That is why the opposite is also true. When a person becomes of a coarse heart, of a vulgar nature, always criticizing, always arrogant, always being sarcastic, always looking down at people, a person does not wish to be around him. These are the people whom Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala hates, no matter what they call themselves, no matter how much they fast and pray.   
  
Blessing #6:   
  
Good akhlaaq is the heaviest thing on the Day of Judgment on the scales. Good akhlaaq is the heaviest thing that will help a believer on the Day of Judgment when the scales will be weighed. Every single person's good deeds will be placed on the right side of his scale, and his evil deeds will be placed on the left hand side. And as the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam told us:   
  
"The heaviest aspect, the heaviest matter [that will help a believer] that will be in the meezaan, on the scales on the Day of Judgment, is good akhlaaq."   
  
You cannot get something better than good akhlaaq. Therefore, even if a person has not fasted the voluntary fasts, prayed a lot of nafl or Sunnah prayers, or has left a lot of good that he could have done, then there is one way to make that up on the Day of Judgment – by having good akhlaaq. This is a great blessing that should not be trivialized.   
  
Blessing #7:   
  
Good akhlaaq ensures that person is close to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam on the Day of Judgment and in Jannah. The better a person's akhlaaq is, the closer he will be to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam on the Day of Judgment and also in Jannah. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:   
  
"Those of you who will be closest to me on the Day of Judgment will be those who have the best akhlaaq."   
  
So if you wish to be close to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and enjoy his company on Yawm al Qiyaamah and in Jannah, then one of the ways of achieving that is through good akhlaaq.   
  
In another hadith the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:   
  
"Those who are most beloved to me, and the closest to me in the Hereafter, are those who have the best akhlaaq amongst you." These are the people that will have the, "closest seats to me."   
  
And the opposite is also true. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:   
  
"And the people who are the most hated by me and the ones who are the furthest from me in the Hereafter are those who have the worst akhlaaq."   
  
The people with the worst akhlaaq will be the farthest away from the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam. And he described them by saying:   
  
"Atharta'oon, al mutabayhaqun, al mutashaddaqoon."   
  
All of these three words have the same characteristics in that they are vulgar, crude, and coarse in their manner of talking. They are arrogant and look down upon people. They have bad akhlaaq and they show it to other people. These types of people will be the worst and the most hated by Allah and the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, and will be the furthest from him on the Day of Judgment.   
  
Blessing #8:   
  
Good akhlaaq is so powerful that this, along with the taqwa of Allah, is the primary factor that will cause people to enter Jannah: taqwallahi, wa husnal khuluq. Akhlaaq is one of the primary factors that will cause people to enter Jannah. Someone asked the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, "What is the one characteristic that will cause the most amounts of people to enter Jannah?" What is the one characteristic that will cause the most number of people to enter Jannah?"   
  
The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam responded, "To have the taqwa of Allah and to have good akhlaaq."   
  
These two come together – tawheed and akhlaaq; worship Allah properly and treat mankind properly. When taqwa of Allah and husnal khuluq are combined, then it becomes the one characteristic that is the primary cause for most of mankind to enter Jannah.   
  
These are eight blessings and characteristics that I have mentioned, and of course, there are far more than these.   
  
PART II   
  
Having good akhlaaq is easy and difficult at the same time. On the one hand it is easy because you do not have to spend a lot of time and money, but on the other hand, it is difficulty because you have to control yourself; keep yourself in check and guard yourself. In finding this middle path to good akhlaaq, it is very important to avoid two extremes. Some people, and alhamdulillah this is very rare amongst the Muslims, but common amongst the non-Muslims and other religious movements, emphasize akhlaaq more than their worship of Allah. You will find that the Christians say, "Oh, as long as I'm good to them, as long as I show peace and harmony to society and culture and nature, then it doesn't matter, even if I commit major sins or shirk, as long as I'm good to everyone else."   
  
So this person has taken the akhlaaq of mankind and given that in preference to the worship of Allah. If a person leaves the wajibaat, for example the five prayers, then do not think this person is going to enter Jannah just because he smiled at his brother. The fact that he left the prayer is a major sin and in fact it might be a type of kufr to leave the prayers. Yet, a person might trivialize it on the pretext of, "Oh, I'm being good to other people and that is what's most important." No, you must perform the wajibaat.   
  
All of these ahadith apply only when you have done at least the wajibaat. Say the five prayers, fast in Ramadan, give the zakah, and then show good akhlaaq. Then you might be rewarded more than the one who fasts and prays and has bad akhlaaq. But do not leave that which is obligatory based on the pretext of being good to others.   
  
The other extreme is that some ignore akhlaaq completely. And unfortunately this is the extreme that is more common amongst the Muslims, especially those who might be calling to the correct methodology and correct creed, the creed of Ahlul Sunnah Wal Jam'a. Those of this extreme think that just because they have arrived at the correct beliefs in Allah, the correct beliefs of the Qur’an and Sunnah, and the proper methodology of worshiping Allah and calling to that worship, then they can ignore all of the aayaat and ahadith about akhlaaq. This then causes them to be arrogant, look down on, trivialize, backbite, and stab others in the back. This is not the way of the believer. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam was not of this character. So these segments of society, although they have given importance to tawheed and aqeedah, at the same time completely neglect and ignore being good and having true brotherhood. In reality, this is a sign of a weakness in eman.   
  
It does not matter what they say or what labels they put on themselves. If a person has bad akhlaaq, if he is arrogant, vulgar, and foul-mouthed, then this is not a person with strong eman. If people do not want to be around him, and he is always criticizing everybody else, then this person is not a person with strong eman. This is the other extreme. You have to avoid both of these two extremes. The middle path is that we worship Allah, the way that He deserves to be worshiped and also to have good akhlaaq with all the Muslims.   
  
That is why it is important to have akhlaaq along with knowledge, because knowledge tells you what to do and when to do it. Without knowledge, a person will not know how to act in every single situation. Accordingly, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:   
  
“The best of you in Islam, the best of you that have converted to Islam, are the best of you in akhlaaq as long as they have knowledge.”   
  
Without knowledge, akhlaaq is not that powerful. But when a person combines knowledge and akhlaaq, then this is the height of eman. And that is why, when the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam combined both of these to their perfection he was the most knowledgeable of Allah, he had the most fear of Allah, and he was also of the best of akhlaaq.   
  
Allah describes the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam in the Qur’an:   
  
Had you been coarse and vulgar, of a harsh characteristic, of a hard heart, then the Sahabah would have left you.   
  
So Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala tells the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam that even though he is the Prophet of Allah, and the Sahabah are the best of all of society, if he had bad akhlaaq, the Sahabah would have left him.   
  
Imagine if a da'ee, a caller to the way of Islam, has bad akhlaaq. No one will take from him. Not even his family and relatives will take from him, much less society, if he has bad akhlaaq. And this shows that perfection comes about when a person combines akhlaaq with knowledge. When one exists without the other, then this is a sign of imperfection, a sign of deficiency.   
  
We have to avoid the two extremes. The first one is to emphasize akhlaaq with mankind and to ignore the worship of Allah. The other extreme is to ‘supposedly’ perfect the worship of Allah yet have bad akhlaaq with mankind. This scenario cannot exist.   
  
PART III   
  
Akhlaaq is of three types. The first type is the most important type, and that is your akhlaaq with Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala, your characteristics and your manners with Allah. What do you think of Allah? What are your hopes with Allah? How much do you fear of Allah? How much do you love Allah? Love, fear, and hope are the primary components of tawheed. Your love of Allah, your fear of Allah's punishment, and your hope in Allah's mercy. How have these three been perfected in you? How much are you shy and embarrassed of Allah? How much do you desire Allah's reward? How much do you love Allah? What is your akhlaaq with Allah? This is the most important.   
  
The second type of akhlaaq is akhlaaq with the creation, akhlaaq with the Muslims, akhlaaq with the non-Muslims, and even akhlaaq with the animals. Each one has its own chapter of akhlaaq. How do you deal with them in each situation and circumstance? This second type of akhlaaq is not as important as the first. The first is the most important. After the person has done the first, with tawheed and with worshiping Allah the way He deserves to be worshiped, he then moves on to the second, which is basically akhlaaq with the creation all around him.   
  
The third type of akhlaaq is the akhlaaq with one's own self. Yes, you even have to have akhlaaq with your own self. Your body has rights over you. Your spiritual body, your soul, and your physical body all have rights over you, so you have to show your body and soul its rights as well. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam once told Salman al Farsi to tell the following to one of the companions:   
  
"Tell him that your body has a right over you, your soul has a right over you, and   
  
your family and wife have a right over you. So give everyone the right that it has over you."   
  
Give everything its right. So the third type of akhlaaq is the akhlaaq one has with one's self.   
  
When we understand these three types of akhlaaq, akhlaaq with Allah, akhlaaq with creation, and akhlaaq with one's self, then we will appreciate the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam's hadith:   
  
"I have only been sent,"   
  
Meaning the only reason Allah has sent me,   
  
"Is so that I may perfect good akhlaaq."   
  
Akhlaaq with Allah, akhlaaq with other creation, and akhlaaq with one's self.   
  
We pray that Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala grants us knowledge, grants us akhlaaq to preach to and call to act upon that knowledge, resurrects us along with the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, grants us his shifaa'a, and grants us Jannah because of our deeds and because of the forgiveness of Allah.