Real Religiousness and Having a Sound Character

**Question:** What should a believer consider so that he doesn’t crack or break in the face of bad words or treatment?
**Answer:** In terms of the Islamic world of thought and terminology, character is the deeds and acts of worship commanded by Islam. These must be developed through constant practice and with a full consciousness of God’s omnipresence; it is also possible to call this “Islamic character.” Accordingly, what we understand when a believer has sound character is that such a person maintains sound relations with God and is respectful of the Pride of Humanity as becomes his position—meaning that he or she fulfills their individual, familial, and social responsibilities thoroughly, and that they endeavor to lead an upright life in this direction.

**Exercising with Supererogatory Worships**
This kind of high character depends on a serious struggle; it’s very difficult to maintain over a lifetime. However, a believer must seek to realize this difficult task. The Perfect Guide states that the chapter Hud made him older;1 it also contained the command, “*Pursue, then, what is exactly right (in every matter of the Religion) as you are commanded (by God)*” (Hud 11:112). Then a real believer’s ideal should be walking such a path. So if this issue of paramount difficulty can be made into an ingrained trait by exercising through worship and deeds, then the burden on the believer’s willpower will be partially lightened, and the individual will carry out the responsibilities more comfortably.
Actually, it is possible to say that supererogatory acts of worship have such a function. For example, it can feel burdensome for a person to observe the Ramadan fast through an entire month during long and sweltering summer days. However, as it is known, the noble Prophet counseled believers to observe the fast as a supererogatory act of worship on the 13th, 14th, and 15th days of every month, along with every Monday and Thursday.2 As a person who becomes accustomed to fasting by observing fasts on shorter and cool days, with God’s permission, it will be easier to observe this obligation by resisting hunger and thirst on long and hot summer days.
The same goes for giving the *zakah*. It is an obligatory command to give from one’s wealth in proportions as one fortieth, twentieth, tenth, or fifth depending on the circumstances. If a person does not get accustomed to giving for the sake of God through little amounts of alms, then it might feel difficult to pay the *zakah*, which is an obligation in Islam. However, if a man’s carnal soul grows accustomed to giving for the sake of God by practicing and makes it into an ingrained trait of his nature, then his will power will not have much difficulty at paying the *zakah*.
In the same way, if a person makes it a habit to observe Prayers at times of ease, it will be easier to overcome the barriers brought by the carnal soul and fancies when it is time to rise for Prayers under more difficult circumstances, like those in the middle of the night and before the dawn. Note that the blessed Prophet stated, “God gave every Prophet a certain desire; my desire is for standing at Prayer in the night.”3 He in a way meant to say, “I take delight in worshipping my Lord as you take delight in physical pleasures” and brought to attention the idea of devotions becoming an ingrained trait in a person. So each individual Muslim’s target should be seeking to attain such horizons. Everybody may not attain such a peak, but it is also a very great virtue to be on this road. God Almighty will regard endeavors made in this respect as worship and exalt that person’s level with their work.
You can adopt the above-mentioned perspective concerning negative deeds to be avoided. For example, a person can have difficulty giving his willpower its due when faced with dizzying sins, which can tempt the carnal soul. However, if that person tries to lead their life by taking a stance against every kind of sinful act without separating between little or great, and makes this into an ingrained depth of his character, then by God’s grace, even when faced with the temptation of dizzying sins, he can overcome that trial without being polluted by any sins.

**Moderation in Attitude and Behaviors**
All of these points mentioned also hold true for a believer’s relations with others. A believer must make it into their character to act in accordance with religious teachings—and not only in his relations with God, but also with people. To elucidate this a bit further, if one has not acquired the virtues of embracing everybody with love, meeting everybody with smiles, helping the needy, and showing kindness to those around them, then such a person might unexpectedly show an aggressive and harsh reaction when being met with ugly words or behaviors.
Such a person will have serious difficulty, for it will be a task left to the willpower to respond in a way appropriate for a believer against every bad treatment; they will not be saved from experiencing the occasional failures. These variations in his attitude and behavior will harm his credibility and trustworthiness. As believers, if we also wish to become credible people who inspire genuine trust in those around us, we must worship, avoid sins, and show kindness to those around us—and we must make these into ingrained character traits.
In spite of everything, sometimes there can be cracks and breaks in a person’s character, especially depending on the severity of the situation. Some breaks might stem from a person’s high regard for religion; they might respond to slanders and insults. In such a situation, a person might suddenly assume a negative air. There can be an exchange of negative remarks and arguments. Hearts might be broken. But it should not be forgotten that no matter what happens, when you respond in a way that does not become your character, you harm your credibility. It is in this respect that a real believer must not make concessions from his character even in the face of the most wicked attacks and transgressions. Even if they are to respond, this should be in a way that suits a believer, who is supposed to be a monument of good manners and virtue.

**Heroes of Patience with a Lofty Character**
Actually, the Qur’an allows Muslims to respond to attacks in the same way with the verse: “*If you have to respond to any wrong, respond (only) to the measure of the wrong done to you*” (an-Nahl 16:126). However, God Almighty addresses those with a lofty character in the rest of the same verse: “…*but if you endure patiently, it is indeed better for the patient*.” This is important, because if a person experiences a break in character—even just once—he shakes the trust of those around him, paving the way for future mistakes.
A person with such cracks of character can experience failure at unpredictable times. For this reason, no matter what the conditions are, one must maintain their high character. Those devoted souls who attached their hearts to the path of serving faith and the Qur’an must retain their horizons of love and tolerance everywhere. Even in the face of most contemptible attacks, they should not change their path or course. As Yunus Emre said, a dervish should have such a heart that he would not have a hand to respond to those who beat, and he would not have a tongue to respond to those who curse.
It is possible to replace the phrase dervish with “student of the Qur’an.” These students should not break hearts, even if they are heartbroken; they should not hurt others, even if they have been hurt. It is still a matter of hurting a heart. And a heart is—even if it has not become so in reality yet—potentially the Throne of God.4 In other words, a heart is comparable to a seed with the potential to form an entire tree. This seed may not have flourished due to poor ground, the wrong atmosphere, or insufficient water or sun—but it might flourish in the future. We cannot be disrespectful to an exalted creature God created as a counterpart of the Divine Throne.
About this point, such a question may come to mind: “Is a believer supposed to remain silent before evils then?”
It first needs to be known that a believer must take a stance not against people but against bad attributes. He must use the stance he takes against attributes like ignorance, corruption, hypocrisy, and obdurateness for the sake of eliminating these attributes, which kill and destroy a person’s spiritual value. In other words, just as one strives to rescue his child from a fire or cliff’s edge, believers should feel the same suffering when seeing people with negative attributes; they must try to guide them by means of advice and warnings. The noble Prophet describes this situation with the following statement: “My parable and that of yours is like a man who kindled a fire. When it has illuminated all around him, the moths and grasshoppers began to fall therein. He tried to push them away, but they overcame him and jumped into it. I am catching hold of your waists (to save you) from fire, but you slip away from my hands.”5
A real believer is a monument of mercy and compassion. As a representative of compassion and mercy on earth, what would you say to a person who was drifting towards Hell before your eyes? Would you just say, “Go to Hell if you wish; just go ahead!” Or would you try to divert that person from the wrong way like the Messenger of God did?
The first will be the response of someone with a darkened conscience; the latter reflects the character of a real believer. In this respect, taking a stance against bad traits is a great means of serving humanity. May God make all of us genuinely religious people who have internalized Islam, and who present a lofty character even in the face of the most negative happenings!

1. *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, Tafsir, (56) 6.
2.*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Sawm, 56, Ahadith al-Anbiya, 37; *Sahih Muslim*, Siyam, 181.
3. Tabarani, *Mu’jamu’l-Kabir*, 12/84.
4. Ibn Qayyim, *Al-Fawaid*, p. 27.
5.*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Anbiya, 40; *Sahih Muslim*, Fadail, 17–19.

*This text is the translation of “[Gerçek Dindarlık ve Karakter Sahibi Olma](http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/kirik-testi-gercek-dindarlik-ve-karakter-sahibi-olma/).”*