

Chapter 12

Analyses of Hadiths regarding Morality (Akhlāq)

Introduction

Akhlāq, plural of *khuluq*, literally means temperament, disposition, and character. Human beings have outer and inner dimensions of existence. The Arabic words *khalq* (creation) and *khuluq* (nature) are derived from the same root word but each refers a different aspect of human beings. *Khalq* (creation) relates to the external form or appearance, the visible, material, and experienced dimension of existence while *khuluq* is concerned with the spiritual dimension, meaning, or content.⁴⁶² One's real identity is related to his/her morality that is *khuluq*. It is hard to define a person by his/her physical appearance. In order to know people's real identity and morality their character, temperament, and natural dispositions must be known.

One may try to hide his/her real character by pretending but true human nature will eventually reveal itself. The outer appearance is deceiving, for one's natural disposition removes or corrects all deceptions and thereby reveals one's true nature.⁴⁶³ The great Arab poet Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulmā states;

“If a man has a bad character, sooner or later it will reveal itself; Let him continue to think that it can remain hidden.”⁴⁶⁴

Morality or good characteristics is a goal which Muslims must desire to have it. It can be achieved by being equipped with good nature which is described in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Understanding God's way of acting will help people to understand good and bad. If God is merciful, generous, forgiving, just etc. people can be equipped with the same characteristics in their human nature. God introduces Himself in the Qur'an with His names and attributes so people can know the foundations of morality. If one is aware of this higher objective, he/she should try to actualize it.

Morality and good characteristics is the most accurate standard of piety and it can be achieved with good education. The better in morality the better in religious life. When asked which believer was better on account of his or her belief, the Prophet (pbuh) answered as the one who is better in morality.⁴⁶⁵ Prophet Muhammad had the best morality and the most outstanding virtues. God praises his praiseworthy qualities; “You are surely of a sublime character and do act by a sublime pattern of conduct.”⁴⁶⁶

The Prophet embodied the Qur'an in his conducts. Once A'isha was asked about the morality of the Prophet she answered, “Do you not read the Qur'an? His conduct is (the embodiment of) the Qur'an.”⁴⁶⁷ In addition to his outer and inner faculties and senses, and the material and immaterial aspects of his creation and character, the Prophet (pbuh) was endowed with all the characteristics needed to be the most advanced and greatest representative of human virtue.⁴⁶⁸ He achieved the highest status of morality by using his will power and developing human

⁴⁶² Fethullah Gülen, *Sufism*, vol.1, p. 72.

⁴⁶³ Gülen, *ibid*.

⁴⁶⁴ al-Hamawi, *Hizanah al-Adab*, vol.2, p. 492.

⁴⁶⁵ Ahmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad*, vol.2, 250.

⁴⁶⁶ Qur'an 68: 4.

⁴⁶⁷ Muslim, *Sahīh*, Musafirin, 139.

⁴⁶⁸ Gülen, *Sufism*, vol.1, p. 73.

potentials to furthest level possible. He established the most excellent example for his followers as stated in the Qur'an;

“Surely, in the Messenger of God you have a good example for him who hopes for God and the Last Day, and remembers God much.”⁴⁶⁹

He emphasized on morality and good characteristics in many occasions and educated his followers with the best examples in virtue. He stated; “a man can attain with morality the status which he cannot with acts of worship and adoration.”⁴⁷⁰ He informed Believers that the first virtue to be weighed in the divine Balance (in Judgment Day) is one's morality.⁴⁷¹

Some people pretend to be good-natured but when they experience harsh treatment, they reveal their true nature. One who has a good nature does not change his or her manners even when in a hellish state, but remains mild and shows no harshness.⁴⁷² While people who have good nature can control their anger and rage those intolerant ones cannot for they are like Cain who killed his brother out of jealousy.

God has given many bounties to human beings and assigned them as the vicegerent of God on earth for they are the best mirrors which the Divine Names can be reflected best. God has created everything in the earth for human beings and their happiness. The systems, which are established without aiming human happiness, have no value. Morality, which gets its basis from divine religion, aims to perfect human beings and actualizes their potential to its highest degree. In this respect, the Prophet once said; “I was sent to complete and perfect high morals.”⁴⁷³ Divine books are the voices of this message and Prophets are the most steadfast agents of this truth while the final ring of this golden chain is the most lustrous proof of this truth and the most exceptional sultan of the sublime morality.⁴⁷⁴

The Qur'an provides the principles of morality and foundations of good characteristics so Believers can establish their moral system accordingly. Immorality has caused many civilizations to collapse for it undermined the values of their society. Ignoring moral values and indulging in carnal pleasures have caused people to be materialistic and live only for this world. They have forgotten God and distanced themselves from the essentials of religion. However, as the material world composes one side of human reality, spirituality composes the other side and they can only be happy when both sides are satisfied together. If the balance between this world and the next were regulated according to this principle, Muslims would not be in such a wretched condition today.⁴⁷⁵

God created nature dependent on the rules of causality and operates the universe accordingly. A nation can rise or fall according to these rules. Human beings are supposed to comply with these laws for they do not have exemption otherwise; they will be eliminated. If they follow the principles of morality in conformity with the laws of nature, they will be elevated to highest level of humanity.

⁴⁶⁹ Qur'an 33:21

⁴⁷⁰ Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawā'id*, vol.8, 24.

⁴⁷¹ Hindi, *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, hadith no: 5160.

⁴⁷² Gülen, *ibid*, p. 75.

⁴⁷³ Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-Kubra*, vol.10, 191.

⁴⁷⁴ Fethullah Gülen, *From Seed to Cedar*, introduction.

⁴⁷⁵ Gülen, *ibid*.

Commentary on Unforgettable Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad

Morality is a set of praiseworthy principles that lead human beings to do good deeds. It originates in high spirituality and without spiritual values, one cannot be moral. Those who always do good without expecting any return will one day bow before God in wonder and admiration when, unexpectedly, they meet the accumulated results of their considerate nature and all the good they have done.⁴⁷⁶ Education and knowledge have pivotal role to obtain good characteristics. Learned people are freed from carrying the burden of superfluous information and attain greatness to the extent that they serve humanity and set a good example for others through their high morals and virtues.⁴⁷⁷

Morality and good characteristics is like a currency which has universal acceptance. Being equipped with the principles of morality people possess the highest credit. Those with strong willpower and good, sound character will not lose anything of their virtuous essence, even if they are made to suffer thousands of kinds of pains and sorrows and forced to change their views and ways.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶ Fethullah Gülen, *Pearls of Wisdom*, p. 24.

⁴⁷⁷ Gülen *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸ Gülen, *ibid.*

Analyses of Hadiths regarding Morality

First hadith

وعن أنس رضي الله عنه قال: كان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أحسن الناس خلقاً

Anas (May Allah be pleased with him) reports; “the Messenger of God (pbuh) was the best of all the people in morality (good characteristics).”⁴⁷⁹

Analysis of the hadith

Bukhari and Muslim agreed on the authenticity of the hadith and recorded it in their *sahīh* collections. The hadith explains that the Prophet is the best person in morality and good characteristics. His life is the embodiment of the Qur’an and Islamic principles. Before teaching the rules of religion to others, he always practiced them in his individual and family life. Anas bin Malik served the Prophet for ten years and observed his conducts during that time. He says;

“I never felt any piece of velvet or silk softer than the palm of the Messenger of God (pbuh), nor did I smell any fragrance more pleasant than the smell of Messenger of God (pbuh). I served him for ten years, and he never said ‘ugh’ (an expression of dislike) to me. He never said ‘why did you do that?’ for something I had done, nor did he ever say ‘why did you not do such and such’ for something I had not done.”⁴⁸⁰

By practicing the best example of good characteristics, he raised perfect human beings (the Companions) in a short time. While educating people the Prophet did not hurt anybody by his word or deed, nor he overlooked those who hurt him, rather he forgave them. He was not offended by the one who stood before him and told him to be just, he just told him that if he could not be just none could be.⁴⁸¹ Another time a Bedouin pulled his robe from the back and hurt him. Rudely he asked the Prophet to give something from the war booty. The Prophet smiled at him and told his Companions to fulfil his demand.⁴⁸² When some hypocrites slandered about his innocent wife he did not punish them, rather he visited them when they are sick and attended their funeral processions.⁴⁸³

Abdullah bin ‘Amr bin al-As reports; “Messenger of God (pbuh) did not indulge in loose talk nor did he like to listen to it. He used to say, ‘the best of you is the best among you in conduct.’”⁴⁸⁴ The Prophet never presented any bad in his words or conducts. There was nothing which disturb eyes or annoys the hearts in his personality. He never screamed others or spoke harshly to them. He did not retaliate evil acts, rather he forgave and closed his eyes to others’ mistakes.

⁴⁷⁹ Bukhari, *Sahīh* Adab, 112; Muslim, *Sahīh*, Adab, 30.

⁴⁸⁰ Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Sawm, 53; Muslim, *Sahīh*, Fadāil, 82.

⁴⁸¹ Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Adab, 95.

⁴⁸² Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Khumus, 19.

⁴⁸³ Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Shadah, 15; Muslim, *Sahīh*, Tawba, 56.

⁴⁸⁴ Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Manāqib, 23; Muslim, *Sahīh*, Fadāil, 68.

God praises His final Messenger in many places in the Qur'an. He is described as mercy to the worlds; "We have not sent you (O Muhammad) but as an unequalled mercy for all the worlds."⁴⁸⁵ In other verse his exemplary characteristics is mentioned; "You are surely of a sublime character and do act by a sublime pattern of conduct."⁴⁸⁶

The Prophet was the most handsome among people. He combined inner and outer beauty in his personality. The beauty in his soul was reflected on his physical structure. He never presented any immoral conducts even in his pre-Islamic time. God protected him from committing a sin. He always presented the best model in morality.

The best person among Believers is the one who is best in morality. The Prophet likes people according to their level of morality. The most beloved one by the Prophet is the one who is best in good characteristics.

Second hadith

وعن النَّوَّاسِ بْنِ سَمْعَانَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: سَأَلْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَنِ الْبِرِّ وَالْإِثْمِ فَقَالَ: الْبِرُّ حُسْنُ الْخُلُقِ، وَالْإِثْمُ: مَا حَاكَ فِي نَفْسِكَ، وَكَرِهْتَ أَنْ يَطَّلِعَ عَلَيْهِ النَّاسُ

Nawwas bin Sam'an reports; "I asked Messenger of God (pbuh) about virtue and sin, and he said, 'Virtue is good morals, and sin is that which creates doubt in you and you do not like people to know about it.'⁴⁸⁷

Analysis of the hadith

The hadith is reported by a Companion named Nawwas bin Sam'an. There is not much information about him in the sources. He is from Medina and one of the students among Aṣḥāb Suffa (people who lived in the masjid to learn from the Prophet more). He narrated 17 hadiths in total. May God be well pleased with him. The hadith is authentic according to criteria of Imam Muslim. Muslim and Tirmidhi reported it in their hadith collections.

The Prophet defined morality in a short statement very eloquently. Morality is about being a good person and doing goods to others. Any kind of goodness is included in the scope of morality. In other words, a moral person can only do good. Morality is the target which Islam wants its followers to achieve it. The commands or prohibitions are established to raise moral human beings. By following the rules of religion, Believers train themselves and control their desires. Practicing Islam creates good nature in people.

Morality is like a dress which cover people. With this garment, their beauty is increased and they become perfect human beings. They present the best values and are admired by society. No one ever expect any evil from them for they establish peace and tranquility wherever they are.

⁴⁸⁵ Qur'an 21:107.

⁴⁸⁶ Qur'an 68: 4.

⁴⁸⁷ Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, Birr, 14; Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Zuhd, 52.