**HILM (GENTLENESS)**



3.159. It was by a mercy from God that (at the time of the setback), you (O Messenger) were lenient with them (your Companions). Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would surely have scattered away from about you. Then pardon them, pray for their forgiveness, and take counsel with them in the affairs (of public concern); and when you are resolved (on a course of action), put your trust in God. Surely God loves those who put their trust (in Him).(1)



41.34. Goodness and evil can never be equal. Repel evil with what is better (or best). Then see: the one between whom and you there was enmity has become a bosom friend.(2)



22.59. He will most certainly admit them into a place with which they will be pleased. Surely God is All-Knowing, All-Clement.(3)

**HADITH**

Aisha reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “**O Aisha,** **Allah is gentle and He loves gentleness. He rewards for gentleness what is not granted for harshness and He does not reward anything else like it**.”(4)

Jarir bin `Abdullah (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: Messenger of Allah (sallallaahu ’alayhi wa sallam) said, **"He who is deprived of forbearance and gentleness is, in fact, deprived of all good.''(5)**

**HILM (GENTLENESS)**

*Hilm* means being inclined to gentleness or  mildness; this adjective describes a person who is quiet and peaceful, slow to anger, quick to forgive, and who is in control of their lower nature. It also encompasses good *akhlaq* because it embodies behavior like patience and tolerance in the face of unpleasant situations, keeping one’s cool when provoked, and remaining dignified, serious and calm in response to distressing or unkind treatment. *Hilm,* along with humility, is one of the charac- teristics that most pleases God. In fact, these two dispositions are the source and origin of all other good character traits.

In addition to dignity and calm, *hilm* also means to act with consciousness and without haste. The result is a good and moral manner which pleases God. *Hilm* is one of the basic elements of good morality. With *hilm* it is also possible to perfect the mind and to improve other aspects of one’s temperament. Just as knowledge can be gained through learning, so *hilm* can be attained by making an effort. In other words, it is possible to reach *hilm* by working.

*Hilm* is also closely related to controlling one’s negative re- sponses and reactions. It is much more difficult for those who can- not control or reign their temper to attain a state of *hilm*. Scholars consider the ability to act with *hilm* to be among the most virtu- ous practices.

Humans are distinguished and privileged among all creatures. God Almighty blessed people with lofty attributes that He en- dowed on no other creature, like intelligence, conscience, mercy, compassion, empathy, and the desire to help, respect, and honor. For this reason, the human being is the most valuable being in all creation.

As we can see, *hilm* indicates total gentleness, as well as behav- ior such as overlooking faults, forgiving others, and being open to everyone for the sake of dialogue.

 **THE HILM (GENTLENESS) OF THE PROPHET**

Our Prophet, both before and after his prophethood, was the gen- tlest of people. This is a quality that he carried throughout his life. God Himself protected the Prophet from ever losing his *hilm*, and was pleased with the Prophet because of it. God spoke of this in the Qur’an: “*It was by a mercy from God that (at the time of the set- back), you (O Messenger) were lenient with your followers. Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would surely  have  scattered  away from about you*” (Al Imran 3:159).

The Prophet never thought to avenge himself for wrongs done to his person. In addition, he was the hardest to anger, the easiest to please, and the most forgiving of all. When Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, began his prophetic mission to teach people about God’s commands, the disbelievers in the Quraysh tribe leveled every kind of insult and indignity at him. They ridi- culed the Prophet, threatened to kill him, spread thorns on his path, threw excrement at him, and even threw a noose around his neck and tried to drag him by it. Not stopping at this, they called him a conjurer and sorcerer, and said he was possessed; they tried every- thing they could think of to anger him. But the Prophet endured everything they did to him without reacting.

No one, whoever they may be, would be able to refrain from becoming angry, and thus react and try to respond in kind when insulted or attacked in such a way by others. Yet the Prophet did none of these things. He was extremely calm, patient, and toler- ant. He strove to carry out the responsibility given to him by God. Perhaps this is why he did not respond to the torments he was subjected to.

Someone who heard the Prophet explaining Islam to people in the market place in Mecca related, “Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, was declaring the Oneness of God, and that those who believe in the One God would be saved. Abu Jahl started throwing rocks at him, and shouting, ‘People, do not listen to this man! He is trying to get you to abandon your religion. He wants to separate you from our idols Lat and Uzza!’ The Prophet refused to acknowledge the instigation; he did not once turn to look at Abu Jahl. He simply continued his duty.”1

Another day, the Prophet was going to visit Sa’d ibn Ubada, one of the Companions who had fallen ill. On the way, he en- countered a gathering assembled by the ringleader of the unbeliev- ers, ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy. The Prophet stopped for a while. Ibn Ubayy began to taunt the Prophet, saying  arrogantly,  “Careful you, your animal is making dust. Get out of here, your animal is bothering us!” The Prophet greeted the group and then began to speak of Islam. Ibn Ubayy, seeing that the people were listening to him, was beside himself. Saying, “If anyone wants to hear some- thing from you he will come to you! Do not talk to us of Islam!”,

he hurled curses at the Prophet. But the Prophet’s *adab* would not let him respond in kind; he simply continued his address. On see- ing this, the great poet ‘Abdullah ibn Rawaha was  moved;  he stood up and said, “O Messenger of God, come here more often, and speak to us; we love you greatly!” Then a disagreement began between the Muslims and the disbelievers. They started to argue. The Prophet, calm and gentle as always, calmed them down and then departed, continuing on his way.2

The Jewish tribes living in the Arabian Peninsula at that time were among the Prophet’s most relentless enemies. Some of them had a rancorous, jealous, greedy character. It should also be noted that these Jews took great pains to separate their own education, scholarship and literature from the Arabs, whom they believed to be inferior in these areas. As a result, they knew about the prophe- cies concerning the advent of a new Messenger, and were waiting for the coming of God’s Messenger. When Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, first declared his prophetic mis- sion from God, many Jews who had thought that the Prophet would be from the Children of Israel did not believe him. These enemies created the most evil strategies against him and tried des- perately to get rid of him.

One of them cast a spell on the Prophet, who became ill and was confined to bed for several days. Finally Archangel Gabriel came and told him, “O Muhammad, one from among the Jewish people cast a spell on you by throwing a knotted string into (such and such a well). Send someone there and have him remove the string.” The Prophet sent Ali, who took out the knotted string and brought it to him. As soon as they untied the knot he was released from the illness and got well. Although he knew who had done this, the Prophet never confronted the perpetrator about it.3

However, there were, of course, good and righteous people among the People of the Book (those who had been blessed with previous Revelations; that is, the Jews and Christians); there were those who sought the truth. There were many signs and much knowledge in the earlier Scriptures regarding the unique characteris- tics and virtues of the coming Prophet, that is, Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him.

One of the most easily recognizable of the signs related in the Torah about the coming Prophet was his *hilm.* The Torah pro- claimed that the Prophet would be of gentle spirit and show great patience and tolerance in inviting the people to God’s way. The Jewish scholars saw with their own eyes that the Prophet  had many qualities which the Torah had predicted. Some of them con- tinued to search and question, and when they saw all of the signs fulfilled in the Prophet they believed him.

One of these Jewish scholars, thinking, “I have seen in him ev- ery single sign and characteristic foretold in the Torah except *hilm,*” decided to test this last trait. “I went and lent the Prophet thirty *di- nar* for a specified time. Then I went to him one day before the payment date and said, ‘O Muhammad, pay me back. You  sons  of Abdul Muttalib never pay your debts on time.’” Hearing this, Umar retorted, “O foul Jew, by God, if we were not in the Messenger’s house, I would slap your face.” But the Messenger said to Umar, “O Umar, God forgive you. I expected better from you. You should have said that I would gladly pay what I owe him, and you should have said that you would assist him to collect it and acted courte- ously toward him.”

The Jewish man recounts, “The Messenger responded to my ignorant, harsh, rude manner only by increasing his own gentleness. He said to me, ‘O Jewish man, I will surely pay you back tomorrow morning.’ Then he told Umar, ‘O Umar, tomorrow morning take him to whichever date grove he wishes, and give him as much as he wishes. Then give him more than he asks for. If he is not pleased with the dates in that grove, take him to another one.’

“The following day Umar brought  me  to  the  date  grove  of my choice. He gave me as much as the Messenger had told him to, and added even more.” The Jewish man, after being repaid in this manner by the Prophet, declared the *shahada*, or testimony of faith, and became a Muslim. He explained his conversion to Umar as follows: “O Umar, do you know why I acted that way to the Messenger of God? I acted thus because I saw in him all of the characteristics and morals foretold in the writings of the Torah. The only ones I had not observed were *hilm* and kindness. Today I tried his patience, and he responded just as the Torah said he would. With you as my witness, I hereby donate these dates and half of all my possessions to the poor among the Muslims.” This one simple demonstration of the Prophet’s patience and gentleness brought many other people to belief.4

The Prophet responded to words and actions that were turned against him with maturity, compassion, and kindness. He exhibit- ed *akhlaq* to a level that others could never possibly reach. Abu Said al-Khudri narrates, “The Prophet was distributing the spoils from the Battle of Hunayn to the Companions who had fought.

He gave a bit more from the captured property to some of the Companions. Among them were Aqra ibn Habis and Uyayna ibn Hisn, who each received a hundred camels. When this happened Dhu al-Khuwaysira of the house of Tamim came to him and ob- jected, saying, ‘O Messenger of God! Do not swerve from equality and justice. By God, this distribution cannot be pleasing to God!’ The Prophet was saddened and answered, ‘Shame on you, if I do not act justly, who will? For if I do not carry out justice, I will earn a terrible punishment. May God’s mercy be on Moses, he was patient in the face of worse insults than this.’”5

Another time the Prophet was in the mosque with the Companions, sitting and talking with them.  A  Bedouin  entered and prayed two *rakat*s of *salat*, then opened his hands and prayed, “O God, have mercy on me and on Muhammad. Do not  have mercy on anyone else.” When the Prophet heard him praying thus, he said, “You are limiting God’s great and wide mercy,” thus cor- recting the Bedouin’s mistake.

A little later, the Bedouin got up, went to a corner of the mosque, and urinated there. When the Companions saw what he was doing they jumped up to stop him. The Prophet, however, in- tervened and told them, “Leave him alone. Let him see what he has done. Later, go and wash it with a bucket of water, for you have been sent to make the way easier, not to complicate.” Then he called the Bedouin to his side and told him, “Mosques are not for reliev- ing ourselves or for any other kind of uncleanness. They are made for the remembrance of God, praying, and reading the Qur’an.”6

This incident happened in the mosque that our Prophet had helped build with his own hands for the purpose of worship; the man had made a very great error. But the Prophet knew that the Bedouin had not done so intentionally, but rather out of ignorance.

It is only when one is confronted with repulsive behavior that a display of understanding, tolerance and gentleness can be truly meaningful; it is at such times that being forgiving and forbearing are most difficult. Indeed, anyone can be patient and calm during normal situations. Just as he was in every other way, the Prophet was extraordinary in his *hilm* and gentleness. In fact he was utterly unique; it would be impossible to find his equal.

Anas ibn Malik tells of another example of the *hilm* and gen- tleness of the Prophet: “I was walking with the Prophet. He was wearing a garment made of rough Najran fabric. A Bedouin came running up behind the Prophet, grabbed his robe and yanked it back. His garment was torn and his neck rubbed raw by this roughness.” The man had yanked it so hard and the fabric was so rough that it left an angry welt on the Prophet’s neck. Then the man said, “O Muhammad! Load my camels with grain. For the possessions you hold do not belong to you nor to your father.”

The Bedouin’s behavior was rude and uncouth, and the Prophet was troubled. He turned to the man and said, “First apologize, for you have injured me.” The Bedouin retorted, “No, I will not apolo- gize.” The Prophet was trying to guide him in the way of courtesy, but the other man was unconcerned. The Prophet then turned to the Companions and, ignoring the man’s incivility, instructed them, “Load one of this man’s camels with barley, and the other  with dates.” The man, satisfied, went away. The Companions were sur- prised by the Prophet’s kind treatment of this rude Bedouin.7

Likewise, our Prophet treated all those  under  his  authority and in his service with the utmost gentleness; he did not get angry with them or hurt their feelings. Even if they were negligent in their duties or did not do what they said they would, he would only inquire with kindness and polite consideration.

Anas ibn Malik, who was in his service for many years, spoke of the *akhlaq* of the Prophet: “I served the Messenger for ten years. He never once showed impatience with me, never reproved me for neglecting to do something, nor ever asked me why I had done something I was not supposed to do.”8

Anas recalled one time when the Prophet had to admonish him for neglecting his duty, “The Messenger of God sent me out one day with a task. At first I said, ‘By God, I cannot go.’ But in wardly I felt compelled to go wherever he sent me. I went out, and then I came across some children playing on the street. I for- got myself and started playing with them. Then the Prophet came up behind me, and put his hand on my head. I looked at his face, and he was smiling. ‘Dear Anas, did you go where I sent you?’ he asked. ‘Yes, I am going, O Messenger of God,’ I said.”9

The Prophet’s wife Aisha said that the Prophet once advised her, “O Aisha, be gentle. For wherever gentleness is found, its pres- ence beautifies, but wherever gentleness is absent, its absence is ugly.”10

Our Prophet’s true courage and heroism was not in the physi- cal strength to overpower, but in the knowledge and ability to stay calm when something upset him and to act gently even when he was offended.

‘Abdullah ibn Mas’ud relates, “The Messenger of God said, ‘Who among you do you call a hero?’ We answered, ‘One whom the wrestlers cannot defeat; one who cannot be overcome.’ He re- plied, ‘No, that is not a hero. The hero is one who can control himself when offended, the one who always practices self-mastery and temperance.’”11

From this perspective, Prophet Muhammad, peace and bless- ings be upon him, was a hero in the true sense of the word. He could not be defeated by his enemies in this aspect as well; those who sought to defeat his self-control, to overwhelm his restraint, could not do so. Instead, God’s Messenger responded to wrongs done against his person with forbearance.

According to a narration of Jarir ibn ‘Abdullah, the Prophet said, “Without a doubt, God rewards gentleness and kindness, not harshness and roughness. And when God loves one of His ser- vants, He grants them the blessing of gentleness. A person or household bereft of this blessing is bereft of everything.”12

The “gentleness and kindness” referred to here means a mature morality which requires, on principle, that one never loses one’s temper. To get irritated and fly into a rage at any time is totally contrary to the nature of *hilm,* which entails a gentle and morally up- right character. Thus, disciplining oneself in this one area—by cool- ing a quick temper and avoiding irritability—can bring a great num- ber of positive effects and make great changes in one’s morality.

Abdur Rahman ibn Awf relates, “Once someone came to our Prophet and asked, ‘O Messenger of God! Teach me words with which I can attain comfort and peace. But let them be brief, so I won’t forget.’ The Prophet replied, ‘Don’t lose your temper!’”13

Our Beloved Prophet taught us that there is also a satanic side to anger, and gave a practical solution: “Anger is from Satan, and Satan is created from fire. Fire can only be put out with water. For this reason, when you become angry, make ablutions.”14 Another helpful solution from the Prophet is, “When one of you becomes angry, if he is standing, let him immediately sit down. If his anger passes, good; if it does not, let him lie down.”15.(6)

**References**

**(1)3:159.The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(2)41:34.The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(3)22:59.The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(4)Sahih Muslim 2593**

**(5)[Muslim].**

**(6)Gulcu, Dr. Musa Kazim. “Good Character” Tughra Books Press. February 2009.**