**Good Character ( Moral )**

 

**13:11**. (Every person advances through varying states, before and after, and) by God's command attendant angels succeeding one another accompany him, before and after him, to guard him (and record his deeds). God does not change the condition of a people unless they change what is in themselves.5 When God wills evil for a people (in consequence of their own evil deeds), it cannot be averted, and apart from Him, they have no protector.(1)

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**3:164**. Assuredly, God has done the believers a great kindness by raising among them a Messenger of their own, reciting to them His Revelations, and purifying them (of false beliefs and doctrines, and sins, and all kinds of uncleanness), and instructing them in the Book and the Wisdom; whereas, before that, they were lost in obvious error.(2)

 Hadith

324. Abu’d-Darda, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “There will be nothing heavier in the balance of the believer on the Day of Rising than good character. Allah dislikes foul language.” (Sunan at-Tirmidhi, Birr, 61). (3)

326. Abu Umama al-Bahili, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “I guarantee a house on the outskirts of Paradise to anyone who abstains from disputation, even if he is in the right, and a house in the middle of Paradise for anyone who abandons lying, even when he jests, and a house at the summit of Paradise for anyone who has good character.” (Sunan Abu Dawud, Adab, 7). (4)

Morality is the essence of religion and a most fundamental portion of the Divine Message. If being virtuous and having good morals are to be heroic-and they are- the greatest heroes are, first, the Prophets and, after them, those who follow them with sincerity and devotion. A true Muslim is one who practices a truly universal, therefore Muslim, morality.

One of the main aims of the Prophets is to enhance people’s good morals and to perfect their good character by being the best example. This clearly can be seen in every aspect of life of Jesus, Moses, Muhammad and other prophets (peace and blessing be upon them all)

 Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): "I was sent to perfect good character.”“The best among you are those who have the best manners and character.”“The most beloved to me amongst you is the one who has the best character and manners.”“Allah has revealed to me, that you must be humble towards one another, so that no one wrongs anyone else or boasts to anyone else.”“O Aisha, Allah is kind and he loves kindness. He confers upon kindness what he does not confer upon harshness and what he does not confer upon anything else besides (kindness).”

The merciful are shown mercy by the most merciful (Allah). Be merciful to those on earth, and you will be shown mercy by the one above the heavens.[Scenes: Someone caring for animals.]Good morals and sound conscience, and good manners and virtues, are like a currency universally acceptable and which is not affected by changes in the values of other means of exchange. Those provided with such qualities are like merchants with the highest credit who can do business wherever they want. Morality is considered to change through personal development. Good morals are planted as seeds in human nature. However, they are nurtured and manifested through education, guidance in an environment of good morality. [Background: Seed being planted in the soil.]For this reason, the role parents, teachers, educators, siblings and peers as exemplary are crucial.[Background: A parent teaching her children]There is no doubt that the media is also very influential on developing bad or good character in our modern times.

The seed of good morality is emerged in the family first. Our homes should always reflect the atmosphere of a temple and an educational unit at the same time; in this way we can satisfy our children's spirituality and morality, their hearts and souls, thus we can save them from being slaves of their material desires. Second, the educational institutions which our children attend and their peers develop their character further. Finally, a good character is based on inner purification which reflects on outer. In Islam, moral values are considered one of the important parts of education which begins at cradle and continues until death. Education without moral values is like a bird with a broken wing. [Picture of a bird with a broken wing]

 Just because you are a learned one does not mean that you are truly a human. 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. Otherwise, they are no more than people who have wasted their lives. Those with high morals and virtues, even if they lack learning and as dense as iron, may sometimes prove to be a useful and valuable, and even as good as gold.

Morals are a set of noble principles that originate in high spirituality and govern human conduct. For this reason, people who neglect spirituality, and are therefore lacking in spiritual values, cannot sustain conduct in accordance with these principles. Why a good morality is necessary for every human?[Music, 10 sec]First of all, a good morality is vital for a joyful life generally and Good morality leads good thoughts and positive thinking, and those who think good and see the good side of everything, enjoy their life. (8th word)

Morals are a set of noble principles that originate in high spirituality and govern human conduct. For this reason, people who neglect spirituality, and are therefore lacking in spiritual values, cannot sustain conduct in accordance with these principles. When communities, nations and civilizations put into practice the universal moral values, they last longer. In contrary, those who neglect will have a shorter life span. In conclusion, good moral values are a very broader in Islam. It consists, humility, kindness, mercy, sharing, caring, respect all creations, modesty, truthfulness, righteousness, love, tolerance, generosity and many other universal principles.

Let’s strive for a good character, if we wish to have happy life in this world and in Hereafter.(4)

# BUILDING GOOD CHARACTER

The topic of this book, “adab in practice,” is part  of  the larger concept of akhlaq, that is, morality. In  fact,  from one perspective, adab in practice is fundamentally practical morality and ethics. Therefore, the essence of these concepts will be explained first, beginning with a short introduction to akhlaq, and only after this will adab in practice be returned to.

Akhlaq, the plural of khuluq in Arabic, means  the  character and temperament of a person. The temperament of a person brings either good or harmful things. In the broadest aspect morality means that there is a moral character, that is, morality becomes deeply ingrained in the soul and as a consequence right actions and behavior come naturally and easily from within; then, the per- son with such a character no longer has to struggle intellectually to know what ethical choices to make.

Human characteristics can generally be divided into those that society approves of and  those  that  we  disapprove of. Decency, hu- mility, and kindness are traits that are seen in  a  positive  light, while arrogance, deceit, and miserliness are generally perceived as negative human characteristics. To recognize these  characteristics and their attendant traits is  to  understand  what  is  meant  here  by the phrase “moral character.” Nawwas ibn Saman once asked the Prophet how to recognize the  difference  between  goodness  and sin. The Prophet answered, “Goodness  is  good  moral  character. Sin is anything that pricks one’s  conscience,  and  which  one  does not want others to know about.”1 Another narration from Jabir re- ports that the Messenger said, “The  most  beloved  to  me  among you and the ones who  will  be  closest  to  me  on  the  Day  of Judgment are the best in moral character. And they who are most loathsome to me and will be farthest from me on the Day of Judgment are those who gossip, those  with  unbridled  tongues, and those who condescend.” When they asked him, “O Messenger of God! Who are those who condescend?” he replied, “They are those who are arrogant.”2

Ethics, which is the study or science of morals, can be divided into the theoretical and the practical. While theoretical morality is concerned with those concepts that constitute the principles and rules of morality, practical morality is concerned with the duties that constitute the basis of a moral life. As reported by the Prophet, “God looks not at your outward appearances, nor at your wealth or belongings. God looks only at your hearts and your deeds.”3 For this reason, here we will be mainly concerned with the practical side of morality, and as mentioned above, the pur- pose of this book is to explore adab in practice. At this point, with a view to clarifying the meaning of human responsibility, let us take a closer look at the concept of duty, which is pivotal to devel- oping a good character with adab.

#### THE NATURE AND TYPES OF DUTY

Duty is the moral responsibility of a person who has reached pu- berty when they have been asked to do something good or help- ful. Accordingly, Islamically there are two types of duty. One is the obligatory (fard) group of duties, that is, those the perfor- mance of which is binding and the abandonment of which is for- bidden. For example, performing daily prayers, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, and offering prescribed purifying alms fall into this category. The other type of duty is that which, al- though not obligatory, is encouraged or desirable; it is these du- ties that religion presents as being inherent parts of a good moral character. To observe these duties on top of the obligatory ones shows greater spiritual maturity and is worthy of Divine reward; the observation of them pleases God. To neglect such duties would be a shortcoming. An example of this type of duty would be the giving of money or goods to those in need (sadaqa),  over  and above the prescribed purifying alms (zakat), and generally being kind and polite to everyone.

Duties can further be classified as those fulfilled in the cause of God, or for the benefit of the individual, family, or even soci- ety. From this perspective, duties can be divided into different sorts—divine, familial, and social duties. Let us more closely ex- amine these categories.

#### Divinely-Ordained Duties

It is incumbent upon every person who has come of age and who is in possession of all their mental faculties that they recognize and worship God. For a human there can be no greater blessing or honor than this servitude to God. One worships God by willingly and gratefully performing acts of worship, such as daily prayers, fasting, charity, and such other commitments that require both physical and financial abilities, like the pilgrimage to Mecca. In ad- dition to these duties that pertain to the personal practice of Islam, safeguarding and defending one’s homeland is also a sacred duty.

Another very important divine duty is to struggle against one’s own evil-commanding soul. Those who cannot discipline their ego or self through moral education will not be able to help themselves, let alone society. Believers, both as individuals and members of soci- ety, need to exert themselves to strive in the way of God in all their actions at all moments of life. This is what Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, meant when he said, “We are re-

turning from the lesser jihad (struggle) to the greater,” while he was

returning to Medina from the Campaign of Tabuk.4 Emphasizing that they were returning from “the lesser struggle to the greater,” the Prophet directed his Community to this “greater struggle” that is waged against one’s carnal self at all moments of life.

Being this comprehensive in nature, jihad includes every ac- tion, from the simplest act of speaking to remaining silent or per- forming supererogatory acts of worship, such as extra prayers, worship and fasting to attain the good pleasure of God. Likewise, to enlighten our hearts we can read the Qur’an, or to increase the light of our faith we can continually remember and reflect on the Divine Attributes of our Almighty Creator that are manifest all around us.

#### Individual Duties

Each person has some duties toward their own self as well. Some of these pertain to the body, and some to the spirit. The following are the main duties that fall into this category:

1. Training the body: For everyone it is crucial that the body be kept strong and clean. Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “A strong and vigorous be- liever is better than a frail and weak one.”5
2. Caring for one’s health: Health is a great blessing; there- fore, it is vital to avoid things that may damage one’s health and to seek treatment when one is ill.
3. Refraining from dangerous practices of abstinence or self- denial practiced in the name of spiritual discipline.
4. Guarding against things that wear down and age the body.
5. Strengthening

willpower:   A   person   needs   to   develop

healthy self-control. This involves learning what is good for the body and partaking of it, as well as finding out what is harmful and avoiding it.

1. Duties relating to the mind and intellect, such as pursuing learning and enlightenment, awakening higher emotions and positive feelings in the heart, and honing one’s talents and skills.

####  Family Duties

The family is the very foundation of a healthy society. Each mem- ber of the family must accept some responsibility for the others in the family. Some of the primary duties of a husband, for instance, are to behave kindly toward his wife, to meet her basic needs, and to be loyal to her. A narration of the Prophet says, “The best of you is he who is the best to his wife.”6 A wife who is happy with her spouse will support her husband’s decisions, as long as they do not conflict with religious directives and contribute to protecting the family honor and property. All these are pivotal to happiness in marital relations and to a happy family.

Parents in such an atmosphere commit themselves to nurtur- ing, educating and training their children to the best of their ability, setting them on the path to success in life. Fathers and mothers should treat their children equally, holding them in equal regard and affection. They should be gentle towards their offspring, and raise them in such a way that they will not be inclined to rebel. Parents also have the duty to be models of virtue for their children.

Respect and obedience are, in turn, some of the basic duties of children towards parents who have brought them up according to the principles set out above and with love and compassion, feeding and caring for them. This is why children should not show displeasure or impatience with their parents. A son or daughter who ignores the wishes of their parents and does not heed them nor come to their assistance if they are in need is not a source of blessing for the parents. Such a person not only is not a useful member of society, but will also stand before God as one who is guilty of shirking their duty.

Likewise, siblings have duties toward one another, such as showing affection and compassion for each other, as well as help- ing and respecting each other. There is a very strong bond be- tween brothers and sisters and this should be maintained at all times. Brothers and sisters who cut their ties with one another over finances or property disagreements cannot be considered to be blessed or benevolent. Finally, if a household has hired help, this helper also must be treated as part of the family. They deserve kindness and gentle treatment and should never be  overloaded with work that is too difficult for them to carry out.

####  Social Duties

Human beings have been created as social beings, and as such they live in social groups and have formed civilizations. Socializing is one of our basic needs, and social life involves certain expectations between people. When these are disregarded, society breaks down and people can no longer coexist peacefully or work together. The main responsibilities in this category are the preservation of the following inalienable rights:

1. Protecting the life of every individual: Every person has the right to life. No one has the right to take another person’s life. According to Islam, one who wrongfully kills a per- son is as guilty as if they have murdered all of humanity; likewise, one who saves one person’s life is as blessed as if they have saved all of humanity.
2. Safeguarding the freedom of all people: God Almighty cre- ated every human being free and equal. At the same time, it is certain that this freedom has boundaries. We do not have the prerogative to do anything we want; if we had such freedom this would violate the freedoms of others.
3. The consideration of conscience: When a person has a well- functioning conscience, this allows them to differentiate between good and bad. The value of such a conscience can be better understood if one observes outward consequenc- es. A person who engages in incorrect behavior cannot be said to have a functioning conscience. Islam assigns great importance to having a conscience that helps one to be concerned for the happiness and guidance of all humanity.

To this end, it encourages pity towards those who have a faulty conscience, and tries to bring them to the right way. One can never try to control or rule another person’s con- science; this  is the  province of  God alone.  Each person will be rewarded or punished for what is in their con- science. However, this does not mean it is wrong to ad- monish or advise a person who has a bad conscience, if the idea is to help the person.

1. Protecting freedom of mind: Any thought or opinion, right or wrong, must be approached in a scholarly man- ner. This is the only way for a truth to be discovered, and it is also the only way for society to prove the harmfulness of false ideas.
2. Protecting the honor and reputation of individuals: In Islam, everyone has the right to maintain their honor and dignity. Any attack against honor or dignity, we have been taught, will be gravely punished. It is for this reason that gossip, slander, ridicule, the cursing of others and saying negative things about others are absolutely forbidden in Islam.

The preservation of other people’s property: It is also for- bidden to usurp the property or possessions of any other person. What is earned by a person belongs strictly to that person. This is essential for the development of a civilized society. It is reasonable and necessary that the individuals who make up a society will have different degrees of wealth, according to their profession and  training.  In  a fair and equitable society all should be grateful for and sat- isfied with their own portion.(5)

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