

Man and Society

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Introduction

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ وَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ يَا وَلِيَّ الْعَصْرِ (عج) أَذْرِكُنَا

Among all the creatures in this world, man has been created in such a way that he cannot fulfill all his needs without the cooperation from others. Man is dependent upon others in his daily life. Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) says:

إِنَّ أَحَدًا لَا يَسْتَعِينِي عَنِ النَّاسِ حَيَاتَهُ وَ النَّاسُ لَا بُدَّ لِيَعْضِهِمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ

“Surely no one is needless of other people in his life and people are dependent on each other.”¹

A person was praying, “O Lord! Do not make me dependent upon Your creation.”

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) said:

“Allah has not ordained in this manner. Allah has ordained one person's sustenance through another. Pray to Allah in this manner: O Allah! Bestow me my sustenance through those who are fortunate and pious. Do not bestow me my sustenance through ill-mannered people.”²

Notes

1. Wasaael al-Shiah, v. 8, p. 399
2. Tuhaf al-Uqool, p. 379

Two Thought Processes

Man can live in the society in two ways – i) Positive & Dignified and ii) Negative & Degraded. If man lives with a feeling that he will spread justice, equity, peace, security, spirituality, religiousness, humanity and nobility, then the aim of his life is positive and beneficial. But if his aim is kingdom and wealth, then this is its negative aspect. This is the proof of man's degradation because in this aspect, man's entire focus will be on his personal gains. He will be prepared to do anything for the sake of personal benefit and this will result in the destruction of the self as well as the society.

The religion of Islam has lent extreme importance to and honoured those relations where the aim is Allah and His satisfaction, spirituality and religiousness. If the aim of human relations is only material benefits, then it does not hold any value in the eyes of Islam.

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَى.

“Cooperate with each other in goodness and piety.”¹

Hence, it is important that we pay special attention in our social relations towards the fact that all our efforts should be for Allah's satisfaction and His proximity.

Notes

1. Surah Maaedah (5): Verse 2

Excellent Relationship

Man should maintain an excellent relationship with the society and his aim should not be material; rather it should be spiritual and religious. Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) says:

One of the aspects of Allah's Grace and Nobility upon man is that man, in his life, establishes excellent relations with the people and this life should be sinless. The one who presents his heart in front of Allah in utmost humility and piety, apparently he will behave with the people in a loving and harmonious manner. Hence, establish relationship with the people for the sake of Allah and not for material benefits, position, power, self-conceit, egotism and fame. Those, who are elder to you in the society, respect them like your father and honour them. Those who are younger to you, treat them like your sons and those who are of your age, be like brothers for them.¹

One who believes in Allah and the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) will not invalidate his hard work and efforts of building a relationship and bond with the society by aiming only at worldly benefits and materialism.

Notes

1. Behaar al-Anwaar, v. 71, p. 187-188

Different Types of People

Various types of people live in the society viz. scholar, ignorant, religious, irreligious, cultured, illiterate, well mannered, ill-mannered, teacher, student, ruler, ruled, businessmen, farmers, labourers, relatives, friends, dear ones, etc. One does not behave in a similar manner with each of them. The way of treating everyone is different. A person who is beneficial for the society for e.g. a teacher, trainer, cultured and religious person, the behaviour with them cannot be similar to that with an ill-mannered, ignorant and illiterate person. The behavior with a scholar and an ignorant person, a religious and an irreligious person should not be the same. Rather, it should be as per his religious, societal and moral status. The infallible Imams (a.s.) have categorized people in the following ways:

1. One who knows and knows that he knows.

فَدَاكَ مُرْشِدٌ عَالِمٌ فَاتَّبِعُوهُ

“He is a guide, a scholar. Then follow him.”

2. One who knows but is not attentive towards his knowledge.

فَدَاكَ غَافِلٌ فَاتَّقِظُوهُ

“He is ignorant. Then awaken him.”

3. One who does not know but he knows that he does not know.

فَدَاكَ جَاهِلٌ فَعَلِّمُوهُ

“He is illiterate. Then teach him.”

4. One who is a victim of absolute ignorance i.e. he does not know but thinks that he knows.

فَدَاكَ ضَالٌّ فَأَرْشِدُوهُ

“He is deviated. Then guide him.”¹

When people are different, then the behavior with each of them will also be different. One who is able to understand this will be able to successfully live a social and public life.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that the laws of jurisprudence and morality are different for everyone e.g. father and son, husband and wife, mahram and non-mahram, friends and dear ones, ruler and subjects, teacher and student, leader and people, people and leader, scholar and ignorant, ignorant and scholar, disbeliever and a Muslim, believer and hypocrite, weak and healthy, insane and sane, etc. There is a different behaviour with each of them. The human instinct of justice demands that each of them be treated accordingly.

Notes

1. Behaar al-Anwaar, vol. 1, p. 195, H. 15 narrating from Ghawaali al-La'ali of Ibn Abi Jam'hoor al-Ahsa'ee (r.a.)

Today's Busy Life

The new age has introduced man to many innovations and eased many difficulties. It has found cure for incurable diseases, shortened distances and stepped on to planets other than the earth. Along with it, the latest social and economic system has made most of the intellectual efforts of man, if not all, dependent upon employment and economy. In today's world, the aim of knowledge is not for the adornment of an illiterate, becoming cultured, well-mannered and embellishment through human values and morals.

Rather, all educational institutions, right from play-school till higher education, have their eyes fixed only on those courses that provide for excellent employment opportunities in the future. This education system has transformed man into a money-making machine. Internet and Information Technology has universally given rise to competition among all educational and economic institutions. Establishing a place for oneself in this competition and maintaining it is very difficult.

Based on this, those who work in these institutions have become so engrossed in maintaining their materialistic life that there is no time for spirituality and religiousness. Man is so preoccupied with his own problems that even neighbours are not mindful of each other. Brothers are not aware of each other's condition. The education imparted by schools is far away from humanity, spirituality and morality. Nuclear families are restricting themselves to their smaller homes. Simply put, the life of the modern day man resembles the characteristics of animals more than to human beings.

Looking at the present state, it can be easily concluded that currently the solutions to human anguish and sorrow are concealed in the excellent Islamic morals i.e. if there is anything that can actually make man more humane, it is only the Islamic system. The system that transformed the elders of the past into humans has the ability to transform the modern materialist man into a better human being. It is extremely important for the new generation to be aware of these teachings.

Always Be the Best

The sign of Islam is كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ هِيَ الْعُلْيَا “Allah’s word is the best” and
الإِسْلَامُ يَعْلُو وَلَا يُعْلَى عَلَيْهِ¹ “Islam is the best. Nothing is better than it.”¹

Islam wishes to instill this spirit into its proponents that Muslims are the best in every field. They should always try to compete with each other in every good deed. Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) said to his close companion, Muhammad bin Muslim:

مَنْ خَالَطَ فَإِنْ اسْتَطَعْتَ أَنْ تَكُونَ يَدُكَ الْعُلْيَا عَلَيْهِمْ فَافْعَلْ

“If you socialize (with people) and have the capacity to be superior to them, then do so.”²

Similarly, Imam Moosa Kazim (a.s.) willed to Hishaam bin Hakam

وَإِنْ خَالَطْتَ النَّاسَ فَإِنْ اسْتَطَعْتَ أَنْ لَا تُخَالَطَ أَحَدًا مِنْهُمْ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَتْ يَدُكَ عَلَيْهِ

الْعُلْيَا فَافْعَلْ

“If you socialize with people and you can be superior to those whom you are living with, then do so.”³

It means that Islam wants Muslims to be the best in performing all good deeds. We are blessed to present a few examples here.

Notes

1. Mun Laa Yahzohorohu al-Faqeeh, vol. 4, p. 334, H. 5719
2. Jame'o Ahaadith al-Shiah, v. 2, p. 35; Al Kaafi, v. 2, p. 637
3. Jame'o Ahaadith al-Shiah, v. 2, p. 35; Mustadrak al-Wasaael, v. 8, p. 317

Loving for others what you love for yourself

The religion of Islam views man as an individual and a part of the society. Hence, Islam does not look at only personal and individual success; rather, it wishes for the collective success of the entire society. Islam teaches to love for others what we love for our own selves. Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) says in a tradition:

أَحِبِّ لِعَيْرِكَ مَا تُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِكَ وَ اَكْرَهْ لَهُ مَا تَكْرَهُ لِنَفْسِكَ

“Love for others whatever you love for yourself and dislike for others what you dislike for yourself.”¹

Hence, a society which only thinks about its own well-being and not of others, the center and focus of all its actions revolves around itself. It is not an Islamic society. Islam looks at the entire society as a part of a single body. Just as all parts of the body cooperate with each other to ensure the smooth functioning of the body, keep working for each other, are a part of each other's joy and sorrow, if one part is injured, all other parts are discomforted due to it, only then the sorrow and pain is relieved and the body remains healthy.

Otherwise, if all other parts of the body are inattentive to the pain caused to any other part, then the entire body will be gradually affected and all the parts will be the cause of each other's destruction. This is the nature of Islam. Islam is not an advocate of only apparent camaraderie. It wants to see love and the spirit of sacrifice in everyone's heart for the others. Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) once sent a person for some work. He returned late. He (s.a.w.a.) inquired about the delay in returning. He replied: I did not have proper clothes. The Prophet (s.a.w.a.) said:

“Did your neighbour not have two pairs of clothes so that he could have given you one?”

“Yes, he did have”, replied the man. On hearing this, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) was extremely upset and he (s.a.w.a.) said:

مَا هَذَا لَكَ يَا خ

“He is not your brother.”²

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) says,

“Muslims are brothers of each other. They are the eyes on one another. They are mirrors, guides and proofs (for each other). They do not cheat each other, do not oppress each other, do not betray, lie or backbite about each other.”³

Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) says,

“Believers are brothers of each other. They do not abuse each other, do not hurt each other and do not think negatively about each other.”⁴

Islam wants to see its followers in a state that the highest levels of moral teachings become common.

Notes

1. Amaali of Shaikh Saduq (a.r.), p. 401
2. Wasaael al-Shiah, v. 12, p. 27
3. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 166
4. Behaar al-Anwaar, v. 75, p. 176

Love and Friendship

Islam invites towards love and friendship with one another. Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) says:

اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا إِخْوَةً بَرَّةً مُتَحَابِّينَ فِي اللَّهِ مُتَوَاصِلِينَ مُتَرَاحِمِينَ تَزَاوَرُوا وَتَلَاقُوا وَتَذَاكَرُوا
وَ أَحْيُوا أَمْرَنَا

“Fear Allah, be good brothers (of each other), love each other for the sake of Allah, maintain family relations, have mercy on each other, visit and meet each other, discuss our affairs (traditions) and enliven them.”¹

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) also said:

“The right of Muslims upon each other is that they maintain (good) relations with each other and strive excessively for cooperation, love, equity and brotherhood. They fulfill the needs of the needy, treat each other with love and affection the way Allah has ordered, they are compassionate among themselves, take care in each other's absence and behave with each other in a manner which the companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) used to behave.”²

Notes

1. Behaar al-Anwaar, v. 74, 351 taken from Amaali of Shaikh Tusi (r.a.)
2. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 175

Meeting Each Other

Islam has emphasized that people go to visit each other. Ameerul Momineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) says:

لِقَاءُ الْإِخْوَانِ مَعْنَمٌ جَسِيمٌ وَإِنْ قَلُّوا

“Meeting of brothers (with each other) is immensely beneficial, even if these (meetings) are few.”¹

Imam Ja’far Sadiq (a.s.) ordered his companion Khaisamah to convey the following message to his Shias and friends:

“Tell them to acquire piety of Allah, convey to them that the rich should help the poor, the powerful should take care of the weak ones, the living ones should participate in the funeral of the dead ones and visit their houses, for surely the meeting of some of them with others enlivens our affairs, may Allah have mercy on the one who enlivens our affairs...”²

Imam Ja’far Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“Visit each other because your meeting each other will enliven your hearts and is a cause of the remembrance of our traditions. They are compassionate with one another through our traditions. If you act as per these (traditions), you will be guided and receive salvation but if you forsake them, then you will be deviated and destroyed. Then hold fast unto them, I shall be the guarantor for your salvation.”³

One of the grievances against the modern era is that people do not love each other like in the past. But what is its cure? If we look for the right remedy, then any disease can be cured. In the past and even today, wherever people go to meet each other in their houses, love, attachment and affection exists between them. If people do not meet and are not aware of each other, distances are bound to increase. When people frequent each other, incidents from the lives of the infallible Imams (a.s.) are also discussed among many other things and blessings descend due to them. As the distance between people increases, love between them decreases. When such things are discussed today, then one thing which is commonly expressed is that there is no time to meet each other. The truth is that if we wish to remove time then we surely can. Certainly, time is not an issue but laziness, lethargy and malice in the hearts.

Notes

1. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 179
2. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 175
3. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 186

Fulfilling the Needs

One of the best ways of strengthening social relations is by fulfilling the needs of people. Islam has laid special emphasis on this. Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.) have stressed on this topic. The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) said,

“One who goes to fulfill the needs of his believing brother and spends an hour in it, whether it is during the day or night, (whether that need is fulfilled or no) but based on this effort and attempt, his reward is more than staying for a month in e'tekaaf in the Masjid al-Haraam.”¹

Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) says:

“Compete with each other in doing goodness to the believing brothers so that you are included among the good-doers. There is a door in Paradise called ‘Ma’roof’. Only the one who has done good deeds in this world will be able to enter through it. Certainly, when a servant goes to fulfill the need of his believing brother, Allah, Mighty and Majestic be He, appoints two angels for him, one on his right and the other on his left. Both these angels continue to seek forgiveness for this servant from Allah and pray for the fulfillment of his needs.”²

Safwaan-e-Jammaal was a trusted companion of the infallible Imams (a.s.). He says, “I was in the presence of Imam Ja’far Sadiq (a.s.) when a person named Maimoon from Mecca entered. He started complaining about his grievances and not having enough money to pay his rent. Imam Ja’far Sadiq (a.s.) told me: “Go and help your brother.” I stood up and arranged for his rent. Then I returned to the holy presence of Imam (a.s.). Imam (a.s.) asked me: “What did you do for your brother?” I replied: May my parents be held your ransom! Allah has fulfilled his need. Imam (a.s.) replied: “Helping a Muslim brother is dearer to me than circumambulating (the Holy Ka’bah).”³

Resolving the difficulties of people and fulfilling their needs carry excessive rewards near Allah the Almighty and the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.). This fulfillment is not restricted only to monetary help. If one does not have enough money to help, he can help by requesting someone else, directing towards a generous person and even through prayers. These needs could either be material and worldly or religious and spiritual. Informing an ignorant person of a religious act is also considered as fulfilling his religious need. Equipping someone with education and good morals is also regarded as fulfilling the spiritual need. The more a person fulfills or tries and strives to fulfill the needs of others, the more his needs will be fulfilled by Allah.

Notes

1. Al-Kaafi, vol. 2, p. 196, H. 1 {The Entire Chapter is dedicated to this subject}
2. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 195
3. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 198

Redressing Grievances

Islam has emphasized on believing brothers resolving each other's pains and sorrows. Sometimes just a thought engrosses one to such an extent that all roads in front of him seem to be shut. There is darkness all around. A great sorrow has engulfed his heart. His smile has vanished and his face has turned pale. It is a disturbing and problematic situation. At this moment, if someone talks in a loving manner, eases the burden, reduces the pain, spreads calm over worried faces then this carries a great reward near Allah. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) says:

“One who relieves a Muslim of one of the difficulties of this world, Allah will relieve him from the difficulties of the hereafter. When a servant is busy helping his brother, Allah becomes his Helper and Aide.”

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“One who dispels a (worldly) difficulty of a believer, then Allah will save him from the difficulties of the hereafter and he will rise from his grave in a state that he will have tranquility in the heart. And the one who feeds anyone who is hungry, Allah will feed him with the fruits of Paradise. And the one who quenches the thirst of someone, Allah will make him drink from the exquisite drink (of Paradise).”¹

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) has also narrated the following tradition:

“If a believer dispels the calamity of another believer while he himself is in difficulty, Allah shall make his desires of this world and the hereafter easy for him and the one who covers a fault of a believer which he fears, Allah shall cover 70 of his faults of the world and hereafter and till the time a believer remains a helper for his believing brother Allah will remain his helper. Then take advantage of the admonishment and long for goodness.”²

The following is indeed a great tradition from Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.):

“If anyone of you brings joy to a believer and dispels his pains and sorrows, then he has not just driven away his pains and sorrows, rather he has pleased us. No, by Allah, he has pleased the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.).”³

It is clear from the above two traditions that relieving a person from his sorrows, dispelling the troubles of a troubled person, comforting a disturbed person and cheering up gloomy faces are so important to Allah the High. These acts carry extensive rewards near Allah the Almighty and the Prophet (s.a.w.a.).

Notes

1. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 199
2. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 200
3. Musadaqat al-Ikhwaan, p. 60

Some Rights of Muslims

It has already been discussed that Islam does not mean severing relationships, solitude, living an individual life and simply glorifying Allah the High in seclusion. Rather, it means living by establishing mutual cooperation with each other. Hence, Islam spreads the message of worshipping Allah the Glorious by using the plural terms **إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَ إِيَّاكَ**

نَسْتَعِينُ. Both **نَعْبُدُ** and **نَسْتَعِينُ** are plural. We worship only You and to You do we beseech for help and not “I” worship only You and to You do “I” beseech for help. There is no individualism in Islam. If it has ordered to live with each other then it must definitely contain rights of each other as well. In the traditions of Ahle Bait (a.s.), these rights have been discussed on many occasions. Ameerul Momineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) has explained these rights thus:

“A Muslim has 30 rights upon his Muslim brother. The way to be relieved of these rights is either by fulfilling them or seeking forgiveness from our brothers regarding non-fulfillment of these rights. These rights are as follows:

1. Forgive his faults
2. Have mercy on his tears
3. Cover his sins
4. Accept his excuses
5. Defend him when others backbite him
6. Ignore his mistakes
7. Admonish him
8. Safeguard his friendship
9. Keep his promise and covenant
10. Attend to him while he is sick
11. Participate in his funeral
12. Answer him when he calls
13. Accept his gifts
14. Repay his good behavior with goodness
15. Thank him for his bounties
16. Help and assist him in the best possible way
17. Protect his family
18. Fulfill his needs
19. Solve his problems
20. Pray for him when he sneezes
21. Guide him if he forgets his way
22. Reply to his salutation (salaam)
23. Talk to him politely
24. Repay his gifts with goodness
25. Testify for his promises. Befriend his friends and don't befriend his enemies.
26. Help him whether he is an oppressor or oppressed. If he is an oppressor then help him by preventing him from oppressing. If he is oppressed then help him get his rights.

27. Don't leave him alone

28. Don't try to disgrace him

29. Whatever good one desires for oneself, the same should be desired for him

30. Dislike for him what you dislike for yourself

After this Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) said:

“I have heard the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) say: If anyone of you forsakes (any of) the rights of his believing brother and if he is asked about that right on the Day of Judgment, then it will be decided against him.”¹

It means that non-fulfillment of that right will result into a big loss for that person on the Day of Judgment.

Mo'alla ibn Khonays was a reliable companion of Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.). He asked Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.): What is the right of a Muslim upon another Muslim? He (a.s.) said:

“There are seven obligatory rights and fulfilling each of them is obligatory.”

May I be sacrificed for you, what are those rights?

“Surely I am compassionate towards you. I fear (for you) that you might not be able to fulfill those rights and might neglect them.”

Mo'alla persisted: I will protect and fulfill them. Imam (a.s.) said:

“The easiest right is that you like for him whatever you like for yourself and dislike for him what you dislike for yourself.

The second right is that you guard against his displeasure, obey his satisfaction and happiness and comply with his orders.

The third right is that you help him with your body, wealth, tongue, hands and feet.

The fourth right is that you become his eyes, his guide and his mirror.

The fifth right is that it shouldn't happen that you are satiated while he is hungry, you are quenched while he is thirsty and you are clothed while he is without clothes.

The sixth right is that you have a slave for yourself while he does not. Then it is obligatory that you send your slave to him who will wash his clothes, prepare food for him and make his bed.

The seventh right is that you accept his promise, accept his invitation, visit him when he is sick, participate in his funeral, if you come to know of his requirement then strive to fulfill it immediately, do not allow him to ask for his needs from you rather you fulfill it proactively, for, if you do this, then you have established your friendship (vilaayat) with his friendship and his friendship with your friendship.”²

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) said in his reply to Abu al-Ma'moon al-Haarithi concerning the rights of believing brothers:

“A believer has the following rights upon another believer: to possess his love in his heart, make him a partner in his wealth, be his substitute (in his absence) for his family, help him when someone oppresses him, if anything is being distributed among the Muslims and he is not present there then take his share for him, visit his grave when he dies, he should not oppress him, he should not deceive him, he should not betray him and he should not belie him. Do not utter even an 'uff' to him.”³

A group of Shias came to Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.). Imam (a.s.) asked them about the believing brothers. The people praised and appreciated each other a lot. Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) asked them:

“Do the rich help the poor?”

Very rarely

“Do the rich meet the poor?”

Very rarely

“How is the behavior of the rich towards those poor people who work for them?”

You are asking us about those things which are found very rarely in our people.

“Then how can you even think that they are Shias?”⁴

If the human society and that too Muslims, especially those who are lovers of Ahle Bait (a.s.), start following these basic rules, the world would be a different place. It is possible for someone to think that in this world and age it is very difficult and challenging to follow these rules and uphold these moral principles. The reply to this is that if man wishes to act upon these rules independently then it is indeed very difficult, but if he prays to Allah sincerely with a pure tongue and heart, then all these stages would become easy by the grace (taufeeq) of Allah.

Notes

1. Behaar al-Anwaar, v. 74, p. 236
2. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 169
3. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 171
4. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 173

Best Values

The Islamic moral values have been divided into two broad categories viz. 'good characteristics' and 'noble characteristics'. Those relationships and behaviours which are related to the social and public life are called as 'good characteristics' and those things which are a cause of a person's spiritual, religious and humanitarian perfection are called 'noble characteristics'. Ameerul Momineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) says:

ذَلِّلُوا أَحْلَاقَكُمْ بِالْمَحَاسِنِ وَ قُوذُوهَا إِلَى الْمَكَارِمِ

“Master your manners by high traits and drive them towards the nobilities (of character).”¹

The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) said:

بُعِثْتُ لِأَتَمِّمَ مَكَارِمَ الْأَخْلَاقِ

“I have been raised for the perfection of morals.”²

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) was asked about good morals. He (a.s.) replied:

مَا حَدُّ حُسْنِ الْخُلُقِ؟ قَالَ ثَلَاثٌ جَانِبَيْكَ وَ تُطِيبُ كَلَامَكَ وَ تَلْقَى أَخَاكَ بِبِشْرٍ حَسَنِ

What is the boundary of good morals? He (a.s.) said: “Be polite with the people, talk respectfully and meet your brother in a cheerful manner.”³

These are morals which are necessary and essential for everyone. The human society cannot exist without these. If we cannot be polite, are unable to talk courteously and respectfully and cannot meet people in a cheerful way then how can our society be called a human society?!

Noble characteristics are even higher than this. A person said to Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.), “O the son of the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.)! Tell me about noble characteristics.” Imam (a.s.) replied:

الْعَفْوُ عَمَّنْ ظَلَمَكَ وَ صِلَةُ مَنْ قَطَعَكَ وَ إِعْطَاءُ مَنْ حَرَمَكَ وَ قَوْلُ الْحَقِّ وَ لَوْ عَلَى

نَفْسِكَ

“Forgiveness to the one who has oppressed you, maintaining relations with the one who breaks relations with you, bestowing the one who has prevented for you and speaking the truth even if it is against you.”⁴

Good morals are not only related to the spiritual life of a human being but being patient in times of increase or decrease in sustenance and a disturbed and troublesome life are also impacted by good morals. Ameerul Momineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) says:

فِي سَعَةِ الْأَخْلَاقِ كُنُوزُ الْأَرْزَاقِ

“The treasures of sustenance lie in the increase of (good) morals.”⁵

Imam Moosa Kazim (a.s.) said:

لَا عَيْشَ أَغْنَى مِنْ حُسْنِ الْخُلُقِ

“There is no life better than (one with) good morals.”⁶

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) says:

الْبِرُّ وَ حُسْنُ الْخُلُقِ يَعْزِمَانِ الدِّيَارَ وَ يَزِيدَانِ فِي الْأَعْمَارِ

“Goodness and good morals prosper the towns and (cause) increase in lifespan.”⁷

The following incident highlights how good morals affect our worldly life, deliver us from hardships and free us from prison.

Ali Askaafi says: I was the secretary of the Governor of Baghdad for a very long time. Once, my conditions deteriorated and my entire life changed. The governor was displeased with me and he removed me from my position, seized my entire movable and immovable properties and imprisoned me in a humiliating way. I was living an utterly degraded and troublesome life in prison until I was informed that the chief of Baghdad Police, Is'haaq ibn Ibrahim Tahiri, had come. I was certain about my death. Despaired of life, I went to him and followed the required code of conduct for greeting. Is'haaq looked at me and started smiling. He said, 'My brother Abdullah Tahir has written to me from Khorasaan and recommended to release you. The governor has accepted it, ordered for your release and also returned all your property to you. Now you can go home.' I thanked Allah and started crying out of joy. I came home and started to streamline my scattered life.

One day I went to meet Is'haaq ibn Ibrahim. I prayed for him and said that I had never met Abdullah Tahir. I have never helped him. Then how did he recommend for me?

Is'haaq said: "I received a letter from my brother a few days ago. He said that 'the letters which I used to receive from the Governor earlier were full of love and respect, resulted in strengthening of relations and the relationship was profound and warm. The letters from the secretary were full of dignity and respect. Since the past few days, the nature of these letters has changed. Unlike earlier, there is no love and respect now. It seems that the Governor has changed his secretary, imprisoned him and someone else has replaced him.

Since the former secretary was courteous and behaved with dignity and respect hence, it is impolite and immoral to leave him in this state. You go to the Governor, ask about the former secretary's crime and recommend for his release on my behalf. If his crime is pardonable then forgive him and if there has been any misappropriation in accounting then repay it from my account and reinstate him to his position.' I conveyed my brother's message to the Governor. He accepted his recommendation and released you from prison and also returned your entire properties to you."

Is'haaq immediately gave me ten thousand dirhams. After a few days, I got my position back and I became busy in my work. I regained my lost reputation. All problems were solved and difficulties were eased.

You must have noticed that it was the good character of the secretary which resulted in his freedom or else it was quite possible that he would remain imprisoned for the rest of his life. The secretary used to write letters with dignity and respect. He used to strengthen the relations, encouraged socializing and friendship. Ameerul Momineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) said:

رُبَّ عَزِيزٍ أَدَلَّهُ خُلْفُهُ وَ دَلِيلٍ أَعَزَّهُ خُلْفُهُ

"Often a respectful person is disgraced due to his (bad) behavior and often a disgraced person is respected due to his (good) behaviour."⁸

The reason for the adversity of today's material life is stooping character. Our ears are longing to hear honourable and respectful things. People do not treat each other with respect even under normal circumstances, forget while in anger. Respectful words are very rare in today's life. It seems as though these words are not found in the dictionaries at all. Disrespectful words are being used even to call out to people. Since words have their own effect, noble and respectful words develop a sense of dignity and honour in the heart, they increase love and affection. Now that words are devoid of honour and respect, even life is devoid of any honour and respect. Since good morals were a treasure-chest for sustenance and the cause of living an independent life, now that these causes fail to exist the blessings from sustenance have vanished and life is being surrounded by needs and requirements.

Forgiveness and pardon, forbearance and patience, tolerance and politeness, dignity and respect, gratitude and gratefulness, maintaining relations and good behavior, taking care and enquiring about each other, visiting the sick and offering condolences, greeting and saluting... are no longer found and even if they are, then only superficially. Hearts adorned with good character and etiquette, the tones embellished with respect and within the boundaries of respect, polite speech, prayers which affect the heart, special affection to the young, rightful respect to the elders, etc...are indeed uncommon.

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ خَصَّ رُسُلَهُ بِمَكَارِمِ الْأَخْلَاقِ فَأَمْتَحِنُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ فَإِنْ كَانَتْ فِيكُمْ فَاحْمَدُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنْ خَيْرٍ وَإِنْ لَا تَكُنْ فِيكُمْ فَاسْأَلُوا اللَّهَ وَارْعَبُوا إِلَيْهِ فِيهَا

“Surely Allah, Mighty and Majestic be He, honoured His Messengers with good morals. You all should examine yourselves. If it (good morals) is present in you then thank Allah and know that surely this is from the goodness. And if you do not have it, then sincerely ask Allah for it and turn towards Him for it.”⁹

The world today believes in ‘tit-for-tat’. Why do you not go to their house? Do they come to our house? Why do you not ask for their well-being? Have they ever asked? Say ‘Salaam’ to them... Why? Who are they? They are elders. So what? Forgive them? Why?

The language used in newspapers and television these days, the way in which morals and etiquette are disappearing from schools and colleges are even worse, the people whom the next generation considers as their ideals, their public life is completely devoid of morals, let alone their personal lives. These immoralities are becoming a culture so rapidly that they are not even considered as immoral anymore.

If there's anything that can save this world from this whirlpool of destruction and change the world, save it from poverty and hunger, scarcity and inflation, wars and conflicts, destruction and devastation, it is the teachings of the Holy Quran and the Ahle Bait (a.s.).

The Holy Quran states:

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ
وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾ وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا ۖ وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا دُوحًا عَظِيمٌ ﴿٣٥﴾

And the good and the evil are not alike. Repel (evil) with what is best, then the one between whom and you there is enmity would be as if he were a warm friend. And none are made to receive it but those who are patient and none are made to receive it but those who have a mighty good fortune.”¹⁰

It means that in order to reach the peak of good morals patience is necessary and it also requires divine grace (taufeeq). It is not possible to reach that stage without Allah’s Grace. This was the teaching of the silent Quran. Now let us see what the speaking Quran has taught concerning this. Let us see how close is the relation between the Noble Quran and Ahle Bait (a.s.). Imam Zainul Aabideen (a.s.) says:

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ، وَ سَدِّدْنِي لِأَنَّ أُعَارِضَ مَنْ عَشَّيْنِي بِالنُّصْحِ، وَ أَجْزِي مَنْ
هَجَرَنِي بِالْبِرِّ، وَ أُتَيْبَ مَنْ حَرَمَنِي بِالْبَدْلِ، وَ أُكَافِي مَنْ قَطَعَنِي بِالصِّلَةِ، وَ أُخَالِفَ مَنْ اِعْتَابَنِي
إِلَى حُسْنِ الذِّكْرِ، وَ أَنْ أَشْكُرَ الْحَسَنَةَ، وَ أُغْضِي عَنِ السَّيِّئَةِ.

“O Allah! Bless Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) and his progeny (a.s.), guide me
So that I may counter whoever acts dishonestly towards me with my
good advice

So that I may make amends with whoever parts company with me
So that I may reward whoever deprives me with generosity
So that I may recompense whoever cuts himself from me with union
So that I may oppose whoever slanders me with excellent mention
So that I may give thanks for good and
So that I may shut my eyes to evil!”¹¹

May Allah bestow us with the best morals by the blessings of
Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) and the progeny of Muhammad (a.s.) and characterize
us with those esteemed attributes which are essential for the service and
servitude of our master, Hazrat Vali-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.).

Amen, O Lord of the Worlds!

Notes

1. Tuhaf al-Uqool, p. 224
2. Mishkaat al-Anwaar, p. 243
3. Ma'aani al-Akhbaar, p. 253
4. Al-Amaali of Shaikh al-Saduq (r.a.), p. 280
5. Behaar al-Anwaar, v. 77, p. 286
6. Mustadrak al-Wasaael, v. 8, p. 444
7. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 100
8. Safinatul Behaar under the root of 'kh-l-q'
9. Al-Kaafi, v. 2, p. 56
10. Surah Haa Meem Sajdah (41): 34-35
11. Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah, Dua-e-Makaarem al-Akhlaaq

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