

THE HOLY QURAN: A GUIDING SOURCE OF MORALITY AND ETHICS

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ABSTRACT: *Morality and moral values are phenomena that are universally applicable to all humans. Basic moral values are accepted by all humans universally, regardless of their religion, race, or the region that they live in. It is morality which makes human beings distinct from other living beings. Morality guarantees harmony in society and the absence of morality brings society to the verge of chaos and disharmony. Immoral societies are the most vulnerable ones to disintegration and division. This is the very reason why all religions have stressed the importance of morality and there have been many religious leaders and great philosophers who have urged on adopting moral values. One would believe that the Quran, being the holy book of Muslims, is supposed to contain teachings about Islamic rituals or jurisprudential problems, but that is not the case. The Quran is a book that addresses human beings in general, and not just Muslims. The abundance of moral teachings mentioned in it are proof that it addresses all of mankind and is a universal book, rather than a book solely for Muslims. The moral values mentioned in the Quran are pertaining to almost all aspects of life, ranging from modesty in walking to honesty in business, from being kind & dutiful to parents to taking care of animals and plants, and from being good to neighbors to treating wives well. This brief paper focuses on moral values of the Quran which are guidelines for the whole of humanity irrespective of religion or ethnicity.*

KEYWORDS: *Moral Values, Ethics, Goodness, Quranic teachings, Morality.*

WHAT IS MORALITY? The Oxford dictionary defines morality as: “Principles concerning right & wrong or good & bad behavior.” (Hornby 2004, 826)

From an Islamic perspective, morality is one’s good habits and attributes by which he spreads peace and harmony in society and helps to protect society from social evils like hatred, jealousy etc. Prophet S.A.W had adopted these good attributes to such an extent that his conduct was declared as the highest by the Quran¹ and he was presented before human beings as a role model of a good personality².

Moral values are the basis for the establishment and stability of a harmonious society and they are so important that the Prophet once said: “I have been sent to bring the moral values to perfection” (al-Beyhaki 1994, 10:191)

MORAL VALUES OF QURAN: The holy Quran is the only divine book that presents the complete code of conduct and a plane to lead a life in this world for the betterment of the society. How to behave with one’s parents, relatives, orphans, poor and neighbors? And then, how to act and to be good with other members of the society? Below are only some of the moral values mentioned and urged upon in the Quran. Not all of the moral values mentioned in the Quran can be outlined in this paper due to the sheer number of examples available.

Kindness to Parents: The importance of treating and caring for parents was placed right after worshiping God, because parents are the only relatives who love with their children most as compared to other siblings and relatives. Parents are progenitors of their children and are

¹ Al-Quran 68:4

² Al-Quran 32:21

matchless in protecting and caring their progenies. They raise a child with love, devotion and dedication continued to grow the human race. They both suffer a lot during the nourishment of their children. That is why the Holy Quran instructs people to respect and honor them till last.

Here is how the Quran illustrates the importance of parents: “Do good to parents, if one of them or both of them reach old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honor, and lower unto them the wing of submission and humility through mercy”³ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 508)

Prophet Luqman’s admonishment to his son about good behavior towards parents is mentioned as follows: “And we have enjoined on man (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness and hardship, and his weaning is in two years, give thanks to Me and to your parents, unto Me is the final destination.”⁴ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 736) Believers have been commanded to behave their parents well even if they differ in faith. Quran says: “But if they (both) strive with you to make you join in worship with Me others that of which you have no knowledge, then obey them not, but behave with them in the world kindly”⁵ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 736)

Kindness to Relatives, Orphans, the Poor & the Neighbors: After parents, relatives (close and distant) are those with whom we interact frequently, and maintaining good relationships with them is the most desired action mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadith. It is also among the main focus of Islam. To be good with relatives is very positive signs in Islam. In our society, relatives are very close to each one. They help among selves in every stage of distress and grieves. Holy prophet always would give importance and also stress Muslims to behave good with relatives.

The Quran Says: “This is what Allah announces to true believers who do good works, say: For this I demand of you no recompense except love of relatives”.⁶ (N. J 1980, 358) In addition, the Quran says: “...and be careful (of your duty) to Allah by whom you demand one of another (your rights) and (to) the ties of relationship”.⁷ (Shakir, n.d., 48) In another part, the Quran states “Do good as well to kinsfolk, orphans, poor, the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet)”.⁸ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 162)

Similarly, orphans and poor people are perceived as the helpless and vulnerable to oppression by members of society. Those children whose fathers die are becoming helpless. In early societies, there were no rights of orphans. They lived in a very difficult time until Islam brought with their rights and strictly instruct to secure their property. In the same way, there are many poor who are marginalized. Today, people in millions are suffering from poverty and starvation due to inflation and unemployment. With this, Islam has not forgotten them and has issued special instructions for their protection and welfare.

³ Al-Quran 17:23-24

⁴ Al-Quran 31:14

⁵ Al-Quran 31:15

⁶ Al-Quran 42:23

⁷ Al-Quran 3:01

⁸ Al-Quran 4:36

For orphans, The holy Quran says about the protection of property that, “Come not near to the orphan's property, except to improve it, until he (or she) attains the age of full strength”⁹ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 275) and “Verily, those who unjustly eat up the property of orphans, they eat up only a fire into their bellies, and they will be burnt in the blazing Fire!”¹⁰ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 153).

For poor, there are many verses in the Quran, such as, “Give to the near of kin his due, and also to the needy and the wayfarers” (17:26).

Truthfulness: The Holy Quran indicates much of the social good ethics in our society and wants believers to observe such good habits. Speaking truth is considered one of the most important elements in our society. It reflects the sincere personality of a person. Only few people observed such good practice. The Quran has focused a lot on truthfulness. Believers have been commanded to speak the truth in all circumstances, whether it is favorable or unfavorable. The following verses are examples of verses regarding truthfulness: “whenever you give your word (i.e. judge between men or give evidence, etc.), say the truth even if a near relative is concerned”¹¹ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 275)

Believers have been asked to speak the truth¹² and be among the true ones¹³. In many places in the Quran, truthfulness has been mentioned as the attribute of Allah¹⁴. Prophet Ibrahim’s attribute of being the truest person has specially been mentioned¹⁵.

This is guaranteed that the truthful will benefit from the truth on the Day of Judgment¹⁶.

Truthfulness has been admired on one hand, while on the other hand liars have been cursed in the Quran¹⁷.

Fulfilling a Promise: A man could be judged if he fulfils his promise. It is a big scale. This is very hard to keep one’s words shielded. Many people who always ensures others by giving them false promises. This is very common in our society and in the end, if he does not keep his words, the relations got deteriorated.

Fulfilling a promise is as important as truthfulness because it is essential for maintaining a state of cooperation and trust among people; two compulsory components for the integrity of society. The Quran has not ignored this important quality and has given it a leading place among the good habits of human beings. The Quran Says: “Fulfill (every) promise, verily! the promise will be questioned about”¹⁸ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 510)

One of the qualities of believers mentioned is that they are faithful to their covenants¹⁹. The significance of fulfilling a promise is evident from the fact that it has been counted admiringly as one of the good qualities of Allah’s great prophet Hazrat Ismail²⁰.

⁹ Al-Quran 6:152-153

¹⁰ Al-Quran 4:10

¹¹ Al-Quran 6:152

¹² Al-Quran 33:70

¹³ Al-Quran 9:119

¹⁴ For example see 3:95, 33:22, 48:27.

¹⁵ Al-Quran 19: 41

¹⁶ Al-Quran 5:119

¹⁷ Al-Quran 3: 61

¹⁸ Al-Quran 17:34

¹⁹ Al-Quran 23:8

²⁰ Al-Quran 19:54

Avoiding Extravagance and Misery in spending wealth: Man has been gifted many bounties from God, the Almighty. Among them, wealth is considered much grace. A man who has much property goes astray sometimes and became extravagant because of the excess of wealth. Extravagance is to waste one's wealth in very irresponsibly on the occasions of exultations. The Quran has forbidden from such act.

Being moderate and having self-control are key for successful financially stable life. Spending extravagantly in poor financial conditions has been declared as a Satanic act and being stingy while having enough money to spend has been condemned in the Quran because both conditions reflect extremism. Islam advises a balanced approach in every aspect of life. The Quran says: "Eat and drink but waste not by extravagance, certainly Allah does not like those who waste by extravagance"²¹ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 286)

"Spend not wastefully (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift, let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach (like a spendthrift), so that you become blameworthy and in severe poverty"²² (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 508,509) Spendthrifts have been termed as the brothers of *Shaytan* (the devil)²³

Another quality of the believers that has been mentioned is that when they spend, they are neither extravagant nor Spendthrifts, but are in the middle of these two extremes²⁴.

Honesty: Islam wants its followers to be trustworthy and straightforward. It always insists to observe the full honesty and justice. Honesty is the backbone of a successful and prosperous society. Earning from legal resources has been made the primary obligation of a believer. "O you who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves unjustly except it be a trade amongst you, by mutual consent"²⁵ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 159) "Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight"²⁶ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 510)

"Give full measure and full weight with justice"²⁷ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 275)

Modesty in Walking: Man's character makes him better person and role model in the society. His posture shows that how he acts with other members of the society. Islam guides people to be modest not only in life style but also in walking. How a person walks is a reflection of their personality. Modesty in walking has been encouraged by Islam in order to leave a polite and friendly impression. "Walk not on the earth with conceit and arrogance. Verily, you can neither rend nor penetrate the earth, nor can you attain a stature like the mountains in height"²⁸ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 511)

"And be moderate (or show no insolence) in your walking"²⁹ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 737)

"And the servants of (Allah) most gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility"³⁰ (Abdullah Yusuf Ali 2004, 1033)

²¹ Al-Quran 7:31

²² Al-Quran 17:26 & 29

²³ Al-Quran 17:27

²⁴ Al-Quran 25:67

²⁵ Al-Quran 4:29

²⁶ Al-Quran 17: 35

²⁷ Al-Quran 6:152

²⁸ Al-Quran 17:37

²⁹ Al-Quran 31:19

“...nor walk in insolence through the earth. Verily, Allah likes not each arrogant boaster”³¹ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 737)

Good Behavior with People: Man is social animal and cannot live alone. He has to live with his nearer and dearer and has to abide by some social values and norms. So, interaction between humans is inevitable due to their nature of living together. Islam has taught various social values to maintain peace and harmony in society and to avoid any chaos and instability. The following verses are good examples of these values: “Turn not your face away from people with pride”³² (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 737)

“(And the slaves of the Most Beneficent (Allah) are those) whom when the foolish address (with bad words) they reply back with mild words of gentleness”³³ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 655)

“And lower thy voice, for, the harshest of sounds without doubt is the braying of the ass”³⁴ (Abdullah Yusuf Ali 2004, 1175)

Don't Spread News without Verification: Spreading fake news and misinformation is customary now-a-days. This is a very ill habit that caused much loss in the society. Forwarding news, especially news that is of strategic importance, without investigating the source may cause chaos and lead to turmoil. That's why it is highly recommended to verify the authenticity of any news source. Prophet S.A.W said: “It is enough of a lie for a man to narrate everything he hears” (Ibn Abi Sheybah, n.d., 8:407)

Quran's commands in that regard are as under:

“Verify news when you receive it, lest you harm people in ignorance, and afterwards you become regretful to what you have done”³⁵ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 923)

“Do not follow what you do not know. Surely the hearing, sight and heart-about all these (you) shall be questioned”³⁶ (N. J 1980, 203)

Respecting Each Other: God, the Almighty created His creation as a big sing of His power and diversity. Among his creation, the man is addressed the most respectable. No matter he belongs which region and race. Islam maintains the importance of self-respect & esteem of an individual and hence ordains believers to avoid such deeds which may hurt someone. It also states that all human beings are equal; there is no discrimination based on color, race or region. In fact, a full chapter (Surah Al-Hujurat) has been dedicated to this matter.

“Let not a group of men or women scoff at another group, nor defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames, avoid much suspicions, and spy not, neither backbite one another”³⁷ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 924)

“O you men! Surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families, that you may know each other. Surely, the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you who is most careful (of his duty)”³⁸ (Shakir, n.d., 346, 347)

³⁰ Al-Quran 25:63

³¹ Al-Quran 31: 18

³² Al-Quran 31:18

³³ Al-Quran 25:63

³⁴ Al-Quran 31: 19

³⁵ Al-Quran 49:6

³⁶ Al-Quran 17:36

³⁷ Al-Quran 49:11,12

³⁸ Al-Quran 49:13

Cleanliness: In every society, cleanliness is much praised because of its inhabitants keep their environment tidy. The most disease spread due to lack of cleanliness. Untidiness and impurity not only affect the man's mind but put the society in distress. This is a very serious issue in our populated urban areas where such practice of cleanings is lacking.

The Prophet S.A.W said: "Purity is half of faith" (Muslim b. Hajjaj, n.d., 1:140) Cleanliness is among the most desired acts by Allah. Allah mentions one of the qualities of believers that they do the act of cleanliness³⁹ and He loves those who purify themselves by taking baths, and cleaning and washing their bodies thoroughly.⁴⁰ (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 70) Allah admires those who clean and purify themselves⁴¹ i.e. who clean their private parts with dust or using soap and water to cleanse from urine and stool after answering the call of nature" (al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan 2011, 366)

Conclusion This paper outlined some of the many moral teachings of the Quran. As mentioned earlier, not all the moral teachings within the Quran could be mentioned due to the sheer number of examples available. A notable fact of this paper is that the exact translations of Quranic words have been presented with minimum explanation. This shows how simple these teachings are and that a philosophical approach is not needed to understand the moral teachings of the Quran, just merely reading them is enough. This is also evident from the above discussions that Quranic teachings cover almost all aspects of life and apply to the whole of mankind, regardless of intellect. The Quran gives a solution to many problems concerning human beings in general and should be used by everyone as a guide for solving problems.

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³⁹ Al-Quran 23:4

⁴⁰ Al-Quran 2:222 & 9:108

⁴¹ Al-Quran 9:108