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# **Ethics And Manners (Akhlaq)**

The word 'akhlaq' is derived from the root 'khulq' meaning disposition. Disposition is nurtured by the regularity of an action or practice such that it becomes ingrained in the mind and heart of a person resulting in the innate tendency to revert to that action; the action becomes 'second nature' to him. It is the variety of these dispositions that ultimately compose the entirety our character.

It is this character, forming the true image of a person – and not his or her physical qualities – that interacts with the world. Whether one's character is aggressive, ill–tempered, foul mouthed, untrustworthy and mischievous, or God–centric, pleasant, courteous, humble and concerned with the well–being of others, indeed the nature of this character is the culmination of years of development of either negative or positive traits. For this reason, Imam Ali (A) stated, 'The distinguishing feature of a believer is his good character.'1

Mankind's interactions are divided into three groups: his *akhlaq* with Allah, *akhlaq* with the world and *akhlaq* with his self. So if a person finds any flaw in his interaction or manners in any of these three areas, he must identify the reasons for its presence, how it became that way and what steps must be taken to rectify his disposition from a negative one to a positive and beautiful one. Allah promises His assistance to those who take on this endeavour, saying,

#### 'And as for those who strive hard in Our cause, surely We guide them in Our ways. (Qur'an, 29:69)

The greatest and noblest character was that of Prophet Muhammad (S) about whom Allah confirms, 'And certainly, you have attained an exalted standard of character.' (Qur'an, 68:4). His moral perfection should be studied and encompassed into our lives so that we live up to his lofty values.

The Holy Prophet's character is also exemplified in Imam Zayn al– Abidin's (A) Supplication for the Highest Moral Character, wherein he prays, 'Make me worship You but do not let my worship be corrupted by conceit. Let good flow out from my hands for people but do not let me erase it by making them feel obliged. Grant me the highest moral traits but protect me from vanity. O Allah, bless Muhammad and his family. Raise me not a single degree with people unless You have lowered me an

equal amount, within myself. Let there not occur any outward honour for me unless there has occurred an inner degradation of an equal amount within myself.'2

## Story 1

Shaykh al-Nu'mani narrates that on a particular day during his house arrest, Shahid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr was looking through a hole in the wall at the guards surrounding the house. When he saw one of them finding the heat difficult to bear and wiping his forehead in a state of distress, he recited the *Kalimat Istirja'ah.* 3

He addressed Shahid al-Sadr, asking, 'Why do you have sympathy for these people? These people prevent you from leaving and stop those who love you from meeting you. Because of them, your children are scared and are prevented from having even the simplest of things.'

Shahid al–Sadr replied, 'This is not the right view to have. We must have sympathy for them. Know that when we wear this turban, we must change the way we look at people. We do not know whether they have deviated because of not having a good Islamic environment or not receiving the correct education that nurtures sound belief. How many examples do we have of misguided people who have been guided and reformed! Maybe one day, they too will become guided. Please go and give them some water. '5

Shaykh al-Nu'mani went out and gave the guards water. He spoke with the captain of the guards, who sent a message back to Shahid al-Sadr, saying, 'Don't surrender to these cowardly people. They are shaking in fear of you.'6

### Story 2

Al-Haj Ibrahim Lari recounts that one of his friends hired a group of Egyptian workers to carry out a certain project in his house and whilst praying, he saw that they prayed in the manner that the Shi'a pray.

Having assumed that the workers were Sunni, al–Haj Ibrahim asked them why they were praying in the Shi'a way. The workers replied, 'Yes we are Shi'a and the reason for us converting and becoming Shi'a is that once we were working in Kuwait and there was a scholar in the mosque, close to where we were working. He used to live in a flat close to the mosque and he would regularly come holding a tray with food and drink on it. He used to give us the water with his own hands. We became enamoured by his great character and we loved him and we loved his school of thought; we became Shi'a Muslims because of him. This person was Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Ridha Shirazi.'8

### Story 3

Once, after the hajj season, Ayatullah Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim held a large conference and invited

Ayatullah Shahid Muhammad Baqir al– Sadr to attend a lunch with many scholars and dignitaries from different sects in attendance. When Shahid al–Sadr came, he found a large meal with many varieties of food to cater to the varying palates of guests attending from many places around the world.

Shahid al-Sadr partook in the meal by only eating some vegetables and drinking water. He avoided that which his eyes preferred and his soul desired in a subtle manner so that others would not notice.

When he returned home, he asked his wife, 'Do you have anything that can be eaten?' a question that took her by surprise. She asked, 'Did you not just return from a large lunch with those dignitaries?' He replied, 'Yes, but I would have not enjoyed any of the food whilst you are satisfied with just a piece of bread and cheese!'

Shahid al-Sadr and his wife had at that time already packed their luggage to travel and only had some travellers' food with them and so they ate a few pieces of bread, a bit of cheese and some cucumber and drank tea. They had their lunch and were thankful to Allah for it.9

### Story 4

Sayyid Mahdi Imam Jamarani, a representative of the Ministry of Endowment, was told by one of the Communists in the organisation, 'I love only one person from amongst you scholars – Ayatullah Dastaghayb Shirazi.' Sayyid Mahdi asked the Communist why this was the case. He replied:

'I was sleeping in a jail in the time of the Shah and it was midnight. They opened the door of the prison so I raised my head and I saw a scholarly man, old and short and very weak; they brought him into my cell. I hid my head under the covers and I didn't bother with him and slept. A few minutes before the rising of the sun, a hand touched me politely and I opened my eyes and this very old man gave me salutations and said very politely, "O my dearest brother, stand up so that the morning prayer is not missed." In anger, I said in a raised voice, "I am a Communist, I do not offer prayers." The man replied, "Then please accept my apologies as I have troubled you; I desire that you forgive me." And so I went back to sleep.

'After I woke up, the old man continued to ask me to forgive him in a very humble way until I felt ashamed of what I had done in raising my voice to him. Regretting my past actions, I said, "No problem, Sayyid. Come sit on this bed comfortably and I will sleep on the floor as you are elderly," but he refused! He said, "You are the first into the cell so it is your right and you have also had more trouble in the prison, having been here longer, whilst I am fresh. You are more entitled to it than me."

'I became attracted to his personality and ethics and my admiration continued throughout my stay with him in the prison. This is why he is the best person, in my view, amongst all your scholars.'

### Story 5

Sayyid Hadi al-Qazwini narrates:

'A few years ago I had the honour of going to Makkah to perform the *hajj*. Only a day or two after my return to the holy city of Qom, I received a phone call from the late Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Ridha al–Shirazi himself. After exchanging greetings and welcoming me back, he asked me when a good time would be for him to visit me in my home. Shocked at his proposal to come and visit me, I insisted that I would instead visit him at any time he asked me to. However, being the immensely humble scholar he was, he refused.

'Feeling extremely ashamed and embarrassed, I insisted again on being the one to come to his service. However, in the most respectful and compassionate tone, he refused, asking me, "Why would you deprive me of the reward of visiting a person who has just performed the *hajj*?" At this point, I had no choice but to accept. I was truly and greatly humbled when this honourable personality arrived at my home, taking time out of his most busy schedule to visit me, a young student of the seminary, after my return from the *hajj*.

'May Allah bless his soul and grant him the rank of being amongst the most pious, in the vicinity of the Holy Prophet and his Ahlul Bayt.'

### Story 6

Shaykh Muhammad Khalfan narrates:

'We were with al-Haj Hasanain Rajabali and his family and they had asked for an audience with His Eminence, Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli; they had some questions regarding dreams and issues pertaining to the rights of women. And so we were granted an audience and travelled to Damavand outside Northern Tehran to his house, to meet him.

'After the discussions, we prayed our Salah behind him and then he invited us to partake in lunch with him. Although we were all sitting together, Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli was constantly looking at us, vigilant that everybody should be comfortable and that they should eat properly. I remember that after each morsel of food he would eat, he would say, "Al-hamdu lillah". 10

'After we had finished our meal, he wanted to rest but due to his excellent manners, he didn't just say, "Now I'm going to rest," but rather he said, "I am going to rest; why don't you stay and take some rest as well?" However, we excused ourselves and left.

'Before we departed, he noticed that I was unwell and had a cold. He asked me if I had taken any medicine, to which I replied I had not. Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli then brought me some medicine and gave it to me.

'As he bade us farewell, he recited a supplication for us, saying, "May you be blessed wherever you may be." This is from the speech of Prophet Isa (A) when he says,

"Indeed I am the servant of Allah; He has given me the Book and made me a Prophet. And He has made me blessed wherever I may be" (Qur'an, 19:30–31)

However, Ayatullah Jawadi used this phrase for us. This moment was very refreshing – it was the climax of the whole event, for when a sincere person supplicates for you, it is something very unique.'

### Story 7

Sayyid Adil al-Alawi narrates about his teacher, Ayatullah Sayyid Shahab al-Din Mar'ashi Najafi:

'I was sitting in his room next to him [Ayatullah Mar'ashi Najafi] when a very old man from the community entered the room. After exchanging salutations and welcoming him, he said, "My master, I would like to introduce myself to you. I was responsible for opening and closing the public bath houses and I want to remind you about an incident from your life.

"When I was responsible for opening the public baths, you were in the prime of your youth and you used to come with your small children to that place. One day you entered and you saw other children and you asked me about them and I told you that they were orphans. You turned to your children and said, "Do not call me by the name, 'baba' [father]' so as to protect the feelings of those orphans who didn't have a father 11. Then you gave me some money so that I should buy for them stationary for their school needs and I bought it for them. 12"

Sayyid al-Alawi adds, 'When I heard about this story I was moved by it. I said to myself, "God is great! What sympathy and feeling Sayyid Mar'ashi has for others!"

- 1. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, p. 392, hadith no. 59.
- 2. Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyyah, supplication number 20 His Supplication on Noble Moral Traits and Acts Pleasing to God https://www.al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-a... [1]
- 3. Inna lillah wa inna ilayhi raji'un.
- 4. This action is the manifestation of the noble verses,
- 'O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? It is most hateful to Allah that should say that which you do not do.' (Qur'an, 61:2-3)
- 5. This action is the manifestation of the noble verses,
- 'Surely Allah will make those who believe and do good deeds enter gardens ... And they are guided to goodly words.' (Qur'an, 22:23-24)
- <u>6.</u> This action is the manifestation of the noble narration in which Imam Ali (A) says, 'A person who teaches his own self and disciplines his own self deserves more reverence than a man who teaches others and disciplines them.' (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p 56, hadith no. 33)
- 7. This action is the manifestation of the noble verse,
- 'Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and have disputations with them in the best of manners.' (Qur'an, 16:125)
- 8. This action is the manifestation of the noble narration in which Imam Ali (A) says, 'Rehabilitate and reform the wrongdoer

by your good deeds [toward him] and indicate towards good deeds through your good words.' (Ghurar al-Hikam, hadith no. 2304)

- 9. This action is the manifestation of the noble narration in which Prophet Muhammad (S) says, 'The heart bears wisdom when the stomach is empty and the heart throws out wis- dom when the stomach is full.' (Tanbih al-Khawatir vol. 2 p. 119)
- 10. All praise belongs to Allah ...' (Qur'an, 1:2) This phrase from the Qur'an is used as the perfect expression of thanks to Allah for any blessing.
- 11. This action is the manifestation of the noble verse,
- 'And when they are present at the division of the relatives and the orphans and the needy, give them something out of it and speak to them kind words.' (Qur'an, 4:8)
- 12. This action is the manifestation of the noble verses, And they ask you concerning the orphans. Say: "To set right for them their affairs is good." (Qur'an, 2:220) and 'O you who believe! Spend out of what We have given to you.' (Qur'an, 2:254)

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#### Links

[1]

https://www.al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-al-abidin/20-his-supplication -noble-moral-traits-and