

The Status of Human Beings in the Glorious Qur'an

We can look at human beings from two different angles. The first view would be to explore human beings as a whole in general terms; or else we can deal with the matter by looking at them as individuals. The Glorious Qur'an presents both aspects. Sometimes the Glorious Qur'an speaks of human beings in general terms. At times, it treats the matter on an individual basis, for example with the presentation of the Pharaoh as a bad person. It also sometimes speaks of good people like the wife of Pharaoh, the prophets and so on. So, both aspects are thoroughly dealt with in the Glorious Qur'an.

Now we want to speak about humans generally, not some individuals, but as a whole. Can we understand from the Glorious Qur'an that humans as a whole are good or bad? What is the answer? As a whole can we say something?

According to the Glorious Qur'an a human being can be the best and the most perfect creature. As far as our knowledge permits, we recognise, comprehend and identify these beings according to given norms. If we compare man to any form of matter or living things such as plants and animals and so on, we will immediately draw an important conclusion that human beings are better, more intelligent and perfect. If man can cultivate a field and make use of the produce for his own and others' benefit, capture animals, make use of them and extract natural resources for upgrading his life and that of the society, naturally, we definitely come to this result that man is a higher being. For instance, an elephant is much bigger than a human, but man trains it and controls it to do some work for him.

Thanks to his talents, physical abilities, mental powers, and the indomitable spirit that Almighty Allah has bestowed upon man, his life has adjusted according to the needs of his time and place. For example, the way of life today is completely different from that of the ancient ages. Again, when we compare the ancient way of life with that of life in the stone age, you will see that man has always been after improvement. The change of the mode of life can be studied in context with that particular age of man. However, this is not the case with the animals. All the animals have followed the same pattern of survival for centuries. The environment may have modelled their pattern of survival but they have never been the

masters of the environment. Many animal species have become extinct due to environmental changes. Human beings have shown their capability to survive by modifying their environment to fit their needs. Consequently, we can say that man is more perfect than animals. Would it be wrong to conclude that man is the best creature?

We can say yes, and we can argue for it in some ways, but we should be careful! When we give an affirmation of our status, it does not mean that every human being is better than every other creature!

Are human beings better than the angels? We do not want to speak about one person. Yes, the Prophet of Islam (S) and Imam 'Ali (a.s.) are better than any angels. That is clear. But can we make a generalisation that a new-born child is better than an angel? It is difficult to say because the actual perfection that a child has is not sufficient to answer this question, but we can argue for the idea in other ways.

According to a verse from the Glorious Qur'an we can deduce that man is very important and precious.

“Then we made the life-germ a clot, then we made the clot a lump of flesh, then we made (in) the lump of flesh bones, then we clothed the bones with flesh, then we caused it to grow into another creation, so blessed be Allah, the best of the creators.” (23: 14)

This verse explains different stages of creation that a human being goes through. After the body achieves its perfection, Allah, the Most Glorious, gives him another creation. What it means here is that Allah, the Creator, bestows souls into the body. This is the final phase of creation. On the first day the embryo has no spirit, then after some months, Allah the Glorious breathes life into the foetus. So we can realise why Allah the Almighty has emphasised the stage of creation of the spirit by saying 'another creation' which means that the spirit is not an ordinary thing of the material world. The spirit belongs to another heavenly universe.

When people were asking the Prophet (S) about the spirit and its nature, the following verse was revealed. The answer was that the spirit is from the command of Allah(1) or that it belongs to the abstract world (according to different interpretation, but the result does not change).

“And they ask you about the spirit. Say: The spirit is from the command of my Lord, and you are not given ought of knowledge but a little.” (17:85)

Notice that in the last part of the verse (23: 14) Allah, the Almighty, says: “Blessed be Allah who is the best of the creators”. According to this verse of Scripture, we can now conclude that man is the best creature. Because it is the best Creator who can create the best creature. To understand this point more perfectly, we should take note of the following verse:

“And surely we have honoured the children of Adam, and carried them on the land and at the sea, and provided them with good things, and we have made them to excel by an appropriate

excellence over many of those we created.” (17:70)

Since Almighty Allah has honoured man with the highest position on the earth and has bestowed upon him the highest respect, the Creator provided man with the means to excel many but not all of His other creatures. What this sentence really implies is that there may be some creatures superior to man, otherwise Allah would have pronounced thus: We have made them to excel over all of our creatures. Now the question arises whether man can be considered the best creature.

Man can rise to the rank of supremacy if he makes use of his God-given possibilities. Man progresses on the ladders to supremacy according to his possibilities. These God-given possibilities are the natural or Divine gifts (talents) innate in every being. These talents are of two kinds: actualities and capacities (potentialities) for further perfection. Our corporeal body, being the first dimension, is, to some extent actualised at the time of our birth. But it is not the case with our soul which is the other dimension.

Every individual is capable of reaching the highest level of perfection; they can be vicegerents of Allah; they can be the real servants of Allah. These capacities or potentialities, (although dormant at the time of birth) excel in quality compared to every other creature. Natural gifts do not make us better than other creatures at birth.

However, when we opt for the right path to develop our God-given talents and begin to fully make use of the potentialities bestowed upon us, we start climbing the ladders to supremacy. The more constructively we make use of those potentialities, the better we become compared to other creatures. We can ascend to the ranks that no angel has reached. And if man takes a wrong path and begins making use of the God-given talents in a wrong direction, man can descend to the murkiest level where no animal has fallen!

We can conclude that at the time of birth, because of our innocence and purity we may excel many creatures, but there are some creatures like angels who are better than us at that particular stage. Yes, human beings are equipped with the best talents and are made in a manner that can reach the highest levels possible for a creature. So Allah's power and wisdom is best manifested in human beings. That is the reason that Allah says:

“Blessed be Allah, the best of the creators.”

Now let's return to the Glorious Qur'an to see the values of human beings. We will give a list of attributes beginning with the good attributes of humans and then the bad attributes. There are many verses and it is not possible to mention them all.

The Vices Attributed to Human Beings

We can describe man in two different ways. We can view man in general terms as masses or speak about some individuals. When we say an individual is good or bad, it does not imply that all are bad or

good. It does not mean that the same qualities can be attributed to all human beings. If an individual happens to possess an undesirable quality, that stain can be cleansed through strengthening his faith. Here we want to mention some undesirable attributes of human beings mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an

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