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Benefaction in Islam

وَأَحْسِنُوا ۛ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

...And do good. Lo! Allah loveth the beneficient. (***Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:195***)

مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا

Whoso bringeth a good deed will receive tenfold the like thereof ... (***Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-An'aam, 6:160***)

إِنْ أَحْسَنتُمْ أَحْسَنتُمْ لِأَنفُسِكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا

If ye do good for your own souls, and if ye do evil, it is for them (***in like manner***). (***Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Isra', 17:7***)

The best among men are those who do good to people, without considering whether they are good or bad. (Messenger of Islam – S)

Mankind is a servant of benefaction and virtue. (Imam Ali (a.s.))

The consequence of charitable acts and goodness is prettier than their beginning. (Imam Mujtaba (a.s.))

The good deed that is closest to heavenly reward than any other act is righteousness and Justice. (Imam Musa-Ibn-Jafar (a.s.))

God hath servants who try to meet other people's needs; These are to be lodged in a secure place on the Day of Resurrection. (Imam Ridha' (a.s.))

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The life of man is enjoyable only when it has the colour of humanity to it, and his ties with society are founded on the basis of righteousness and benefaction.

Only those people whose foremost goal in life is to perform good deeds towards people and whose enjoyment lies in being charitable towards the subjects of Allah, have the right to call themselves "Human beings".

Particular consideration has been given to the issue of "benefaction" in Islam, and through emphatic statements, Muslims have been invited to engage in charity and good deeds.

The Holy Qur'an says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ ۚ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

Lo! Allah enjoineth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness - He exhorteth you in order that ye may take heed. (***Surah Al-Nahl, 16:90***)

The point that is observed in this verse is that the God Almighty has recommended the execution of Justice and Kindness side by side and in one single sentence, for, society is both in need of justice and kindness. If a society lacks justice, its foundation will be shaky and unstable. And if it lacks kindness, a dull and life-less society will develop.

Kindness and benefaction which stem from emotions are vital to society and establish warmth and friendliness in relations among people. Friendliness and companionship, love and fellowship, loyalty and benevolence, visiting the sick, sympathy and appeasement of the depressed, kindness towards orphans and other humane qualities give brightness to life and relieve it of dullness and depression.

Man is not a machine, and the people of a society are not its lifeless wheels so as to be able to rotate and 'live' without any concern for each other.

Man is endowed with emotions which, like other natural resources, are considered a great and valuable asset. If nurtured in a suitable and favourable condition, they help him greatly in attaining welfare and felicity.

In the sublime teachings of Islam, certain instructions have been given whose execution has a sentimental aspect and provides man- kind with useful results. All those instructions may be summarized in one word: "benefaction".

In order to encourage and persuade people to the principle of "benefaction", there are verses in the Holy Qur'an and also quotations from the "traditions" of the Prophet's progeny (peace be upon them) some of which we shall observe as follows:

In the Holy Qur'an we read:

مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا ۖ وَمَنْ جَاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَىٰ إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

Whoso bringeth a good deed will receive tenfold the like thereof, while whoso bringeth ill-deed will be rewarded but the like thereof... and they will not be wronged. (***Surah Al-An'aam, 6:160***)

In another verse we read:

إِنْ أَحْسَنتُمْ أَحْسَنتُمْ لِأَنفُسِكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا

If ye do good for your own souls, and if ye do evil, it is for them (***in like manner***). (***Surah Al-Isra', 17:7***)

Imam Ali (a.s.) says:

Perform good deed and do not consider any good deed as small for, however small, it is great and however little, it is much.

The Messenger of Islam (S) says:

Do not extend your hand except for performing good deeds and do not utter except good words.

Imam Ali (a.s.) says:

To whomsoever Allah has bestowed fortune and financial ability, it is his duty to give his relatives from that wealth and strengthen the ties of kinship, and to feed the hungry by inviting them to his dining table, to free the captives and slaves from imprisonment, to give financial support to the poor and the needy, to give donations to the indebted, to commit himself to carry out his duties and perform good deeds in order to receive divine gifts and rewards, because if a person possesses such qualities and donates of his wealth for such deeds, he will gain worldly honor and dignity and attain felicity and happiness in the Hereafter. 1

The Fifth Imam, Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir (a.s.) says:

Execution of good deeds, keeps the benefactors away from entanglement in misfortunes, and those who do good in this world, will be felicitous in the Hereafter. 2

The Eight Imam, Hadhrat Ridha' (a.s.) says:

Do good to all men, whether they are worthy of it or not, If they are not worthy of it, you possess the worthiness to do good deeds. 3

The Messenger of Islam (S) says:

The greatest of wise acts after sub-mission to Islam is friendship with people and doing good to everyone.[4]

In another tradition quoted from the Hadhrat Muhammad (S) it has been said:

The most laudable quality in this world and the Hereafter is: to forgive whosoever has ill-treated you, to set up ties with whosoever has severed his links with you, to treat well whosoever has wronged you, and to offer gifts to the person who has kept you deprived.[5]

Whatever we have observed from the verses of the Holy Qur'an and traditions of the prophet's progeny so far have been about the principle of "benefaction", and encouragement and guidance of people to perform good deeds.

Leaving aside this general topic of discussion, we observe that Islam has ordered the execution of all the minor and major deeds which fall under the category of "benefaction" and has promised worldly and heavenly rewards for those performing such deeds.

The point that must not be ignored is that with little attention to the Islamic instructions, it can be understood that performance of good deeds recommended in Islam is not only for gaining the heavenly reward but in addition to that, it has inevitable implications in the happy and felicitous life of the benefactors. To clarify this point, we refer to a few examples.

Kindness to Orphans

There are many recommendations in Islam about orphans, and much emphasis has been laid upon safeguarding their possession, acting as guardians, and offering them love and kindness.

The Holy Qur'an says:

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا مَالَ الْيَتِيمِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ وَالْمِيزَانَ بِالْقِسْطِ

And approach not the wealth of the orphans save with that which is better, till he reaches maturity. Give full measure and full weight, in Justice. (***Surah Al-Anam, 6: 152***)

In another verse it says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَ الْيَتَامَىٰ ظُلْمًا إِنَّمَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ نَارًا ۖ وَسَيَصْلَوْنَ سَعِيرًا

Lo! Those who devour the wealth of orphans wrongfully, they do but swallow fire in their bellies,

and they will be exposed to burning flame. (***Surah Al-Nisa 4:10***)

Other verses in the suras: Al-Baqara (2), Al-Nisa (4), Al-Isra' (17), Al-Fajr (89) and Al-Ma'un (107), sent down on the subject of orphans, clearly prove the impor-tance given to this matter from the Islamic view point.

The Sixth Imam, Hadhrat Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) says:

He who wishes to be extended the favours of Allah and lodged secure in heavens, must embellish himself with good character and treat the creatures of God justly and have mercy on orphans, hasten to help the weak and the disabled, and be humble and meek towards the One who has created him.[6]

The Prophet of Islam (S) says:

He who undertakes to supervise an orphan and support him, will be my associate and companion in Heaven.[7]

Imam Ali (a.s.), while bringing to the notice of his children and followers the issues of great importance in his last will, said:

Remember Allah when dealing with the orphans, lest they remain hungry at times, and be careful of them so that they do not grow up to turn into useless and spoilt persons.[8]

Now that we have become familiar with some of the recommendations of Islam on the subject of orphans, we will examine the issue from psychological point of view in order to throw light, to some extent, on the philosophy behind all this emphasis and counsel.

Orphanhood – whether it is due to the death of father or mother – embodies grave consequences both for the individual, and the society alike.

Psychologists and educationists examining this matter have observed that one of the most important reasons for vagrancy, backwardness in society and school, and acts of misdemeanor, crime, and corruption invariably lies in orphanhood.

One of the German psychologists who studied the implications of orphanhood on the performance of school children notes as a result of his studies, that 44 percent of kids who failed had lost their fathers, and 33 percent of them had lost their mothers. In other words, 77 percent of kids who failed have generally been orphans.

Also, another research conducted in the United States about the reasons behind defective training in one of the schools in New York shows 25 percent of the children found hard to train, are orphans.

A third research conducted in Germany on the criminal children and youths has shown that out of 2704 young offenders, 1171 of them, that 43 percent are orphans.

Another similar research conducted in the United States on prisoners has shown that on an average, 60 percent of the prisoners surveyed have been from families who lost their fathers or mothers during childhood.

Another German scientist conducted a research on the causes of vagrancy and criminal behaviour of children and young adults who are not yet of age, and concluded that 38 percent of the girls who commit theft, and 40 percent of those who engage in unlawful sexual relations, or are raped, have been orphans. And finally, in an American–sponsored psychological and social research it is observed that 70 percent of the girls who are lodged in reformatories have either lost one or both of their parents.

Orphanhood, prior to being an individual suffering, is a major social problem which is the root of many disorders, wanderings, disappointments, failures, murders, suicides, prostitution and mental diseases.

In order to prevent fatherless children from becoming ruined and corrupt members of society, and to make, these very orphan children into respectful and worthwhile members, and to prevent them from falling into the trap of waywardness, crime and corruption, and not to put society into jeopardy, Islam has issued strict instructions and useful tools whose implementation removes all the danger, and prevents the orphans from developing psychological complexes.

There may be taken measures to improve the situation of orphans in civilized countries and developed societies but these measures only meet the physical needs of orphans and cannot realize their mental and emotional needs.

They may offer modern facilities of life, trained nurses, neat and clean clothing, adequate and proper food, sport and educational facilities and so on in well–equipped orphanages, but these facilities cannot provide an answer to the feelings of the child who finds himself orphaned and fatherless, and feels inferior and humiliated in the face of other children.

The great agony is that the source of danger stems from such a situation, and it is important that we find a definite cure for this ailment.

The legislator of Islam, that is, the Creator of mankind and the Knower of all the physical and mental needs of man, in addition to meeting the physical requirements of orphans, has also taken into consideration their psychological and mental emotions, and has formulated His conclusive instructions.

In Islamic teachings, in addition to recommending the Muslims on supervising and sup–porting the orphans, great stress has been put on being kind and affectionate towards them.

The dignified leaders of Islam say, “Anyone who caresses an orphan on the head, will be rewarded by God, equivalent to the number of hair touched· by his hand. And whosoever invites an orphan to his dining table and feeds him, will get rid of cruelty, and be endowed with a kind heart.”

The conduct of the Imams in Islam towards orphans, is the best lesson that ought to be emulated by all

Muslims.

Hadhrat Ali (a.s.) in his life time, always treated the orphans kindly, took them to his house and left them free to play around like his own children and eat of the food which existed in the house. People would call him "the father of the orphans".

These good deeds (kindness to orphans and bringing up guardianless children) which are among the amazing programs of Islam are extremely beneficial and bring about happiness and welfare to society. Such deeds also prevent the ill-effects of orphanhood from which non-Islamic societies are suffering.

The point to be mentioned at the end of this discussion is that the issues discussed must not dishearten or depress the orphans for the painful effects of orphanhood befall the orphans only when the society does not treat them according to Islamic injunctions. If orphans are brought up according to Islamic injunctions, they may become one of the most competent people of their time. Orphanhood, from the Islamic point of view, is not a deficiency since the Holy Qur'an makes it explicit that the Prophet of Islam was an orphan, and apart from him, many other Islamic personalities have been orphans too.

Trying to meet the needs of others

Attempting to meet the needs of God's servants is one of the good deeds that have been thoroughly recommended and emphasized in Islam.

It has been quoted from the sixth Imam, Imam Sadiq (a.s.) that Allah sent a revelation to Hadhrat Dawood: *"Occasionaly one of My servants performs a good deed and I will grant heaven to him a reward."*

Hadhrat Dawood asked: *"My Lord! What is that good deed?"*

It was then revealed: *"To make glad and happy one of my faithful worshippers, even if it may involve giving a single date."*

Hadhrat Dawood said, *"My Lord! Whosoever has recognized you (has realized your grace and magnanimity) is worthy of not being disappointed of your blessings."*[9]

Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) has said:

"The best of deeds before Allah is to make happy His servant by feeding him or, to settle his debts if he is indebted."[10]

The seventh Imam Musa Ibn Jafar (a.s.) said:

"Allah has servants who strive to meet the needs of people. Such servants are to be granted protection from all discomforts on the Day of Judgement. And whosoever makes happy a divine servant, Allah will

make his heart replete with Joy on the Day of Resurrection."[11]

It has been quoted from Hadhrat Imam Sadiq (a.s.) that Allah says:

"*All human beings are recipients of my blessings, and the most beloved of them to me is the one who is kinder towards My subjects and most diligent towards meeting their needs."*[12]

A man named Sadaqeh Halvani narrates:

"In- side Masjid-al-Haram [The Sacred Mosque], one of my friends asked me to lend him 2 dinars. I promised to pay him that money after circumbulating the Holy Ka'ba. I had not yet finished the ritual when Imam Sadiq (a.s.) entered the circumbulation and put his hand on my shoulder, and both of us continued with the ritual. I had finished the ritual but to stay with the Imam, I continued the circumbulation.

That man who was sitting in a corner and did not know Imam Sadiq (a.s.), assumed that I was neglecting his request would signal with his hand to remind me of his request every time I passed him.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) asked me: *"Why is this man pointing at you?"*

I answered: *"He is waiting for me to lend him some money after the ritual, but since you put your hand on my shoulder, I did not wish to leave you."*

Without a moment of hesitation, the Imam let his hand go of my shoulder and said*: "Leave me to myself and hasten to meet his request."* I went and fulfilled my promise by meeting his demand.

The following day when I came to the gathering of the Imam (a.s.), he was talking to his companions. When he saw me, he discontinued his speech and said: *"If I make haste to meet the need of one of my brothers in faith, it is more pleasing to me than to set free a thousand slaves, or mobilize a thousand people to wage war in the way of God."*[13]

In another tradition, the sixth Imam (a.s.) said:

"Sometimes, when anyone asks me a favour, I hasten to meet his request lest what he has asked of me reaches him late or proves to be useless."[14]

The fifth Imam (a.s.) said:

"A person's kind smile unto his brother-in- faith (*speaking of his heart-felt love*) *is considered a good deed."*[15]

The sixth Imam (a.s.) said:

"Whosoever asked a favour by his brother in faith but he does not try to meet it, in spite of his ability, will

be tried by Allah with tied hands on the Day of Judgement."[16]

The Fourth Imam, Hadhrat Saijad (a.s.) said:

"Try to comprehend the sublime stages of heaven, and know that only those who are more beneficent to their brothers in faith and offer more services to the needy, will gain higher positions and more magnificent lodgings. Sometimes utterance of a kind word leads to man's proximity to Allah and his salvation. Never count as small your favor and good deed towards your brothers in faith. These deeds will prove beneficial on the Day when everything else fails to be useful for you."[17]

In these instructions, which have been mentioned as examples from among thousands of religious injunctions, it has been tried to promote all sorts of good deeds among Muslims, and make Islamic society a humane community in the true sense of the word.

The late scholar, professor Shaltout, the Rector of Al-Azhar University, has written a chapter on good deeds in Islam in his book entitled "Men-To-]ihat-al-Islam", an excerpt from which is brought hereunder:

"The prophet of Islam was very kind and affectionate towards the faithful. He would establish relations with his kinsmen, share other peoples' problems, helped the weak and infirm, and his endless favors were bestowed not only on the human beings, but also on the animals, whom he treated kindly, so much so that he held the dish of water in front of a cat until its thirst was quenched."

It is also quoted from him: "Allah punished a woman to the fire of hell because she had interned a cat, tortured it, and kept it there until it eventually died."

One day, the Holy Prophet (S) told the following story to his companions:

"Someone became very thirsty in a hot desert. To quench his thirst, he drank from a well of water. After coming out of the well, he saw a dog that was rubbing its muzzle to the ground out of thirst. The man thought to himself that like himself, this dog is thirsty and needs water. Therefore, he climbed down the well again and filled his shoes with water for the dog. Almighty God forgave him as a result of this good deed.

His followers asked: "Would we too be rewarded for kindness to animals?"

The Prophet (S) said, *"'Yes. You will be rewarded for any good deed performed."*

One day, a man came to the prophet and said that he was tired. Immediately, the Prophet (S) sent someone to his house to bring some food for that man. The Prophet's wife regretted that there was no food in the house. The Prophet (S), who was disappointed at this, then addressed his companions and asked if any of them could be a host to this guest. One of the Prophet's companions accepted to host the man but found out that there was no extra food in his house except the portion set aside for his

children. When the table was laid, the host turned off the light, bringing an excuse.

The guest ate in darkness and thought that the host too was also eating, whereas he would only stretch his hand to the food and take it back empty. How many people do you know to possess such unique humane quality, in the present day society?

Some people lead a comfortable life with an undisturbed heart, enjoying security, and observing abundance of divine blessing around them. The faces of their wives and children are cheerful and they enjoy welfare in life. If you, my Muslim sister, enjoy such blessings, you should be thankful for them.

But do not forget that there are also such people who are plagued by the darkness of poverty, misery and destitution, and have chosen the bare earth as their dwelling and the sky as their roof. Again, when you look at your healthy and well–fed children, do not forget that some fathers and mothers, along with their children, go to bed without food. You speak to your children out of joyfulness but remember that there are also small children who once led a merry life under the protection of their fathers. But now the dust of orphanhood has smeared their heads and faces, and they are shedding tears of grief in quest of food and clothing. There is no one to wipe the tears off their gloomy faces and cure their pain of hunger. Fear the day when the misfortunes of time may do the same to you.

And you Madame, the lucky and happy woman who are enjoying the protection of a kind husband, do not forget that your widowed woman sister too enjoyed such a luck and happiness as you, but suddenly her husband died and left her unhappy and distressed. And you, happy and comfortable people, pray to God for His blessings, for, these are the words of God that say:

.. لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ ...

***"If you thank your God, indeed My blessings unto you shall be multiplied."*(*Holy Qur'an, Surah Ibrahim, 14:7*)**

Appreciation and thanksgiving do not merely mean to utter some words or to sigh and pretend to show false pity and sympathy towards those who are miserable. What problems can these actions resolve? What hungry person can it feed and what prosperity can it bring to a miserable person?

Sympathy and sorrow must have a positive aspect. You must act in a way that the spirit of generosity, charity, bravery and justice are revived within you. Fathers and mothers, educate your children and all the members of your family in this manner. Will you do this?

Some sit around colourful tables and lose their wealth in gambling. Others pretend ignorance by busying themselves with games such as backgammon and hundreds of other sinful acts.

You ignorants! Who have drowned yourselves in games and lust, and you! Who are engaged in

wrongdoings and crimes. Society is threatened with poverty, disease, death, anxiety, and thousands of calamities, prosperous homes are becoming ruined, pure hearts are tending towards evil, families are losing solidarity and unity, and on the corners of streets, homeless people are dwelling ... but still you are involved in your warm and noisy parties drinking and committing debauchery thus undermining your human status.

Therefore, what is the fate of those people who do not have a home or shelter and are unable to manage a shelter for their wives and children? So hurry up, and leave these sinful gatherings.

Make haste. Mix up with people, even if it is for a short while. Gladden a heart, give joy to a needy, and caress an orphan even if it is only once. And then if you continue this regularly, you will taste its real pleasure, keeping a clear conscience and leading a sweeter and more secure life.

In this manner, you will get the consent of God and also rescue the society from destruction. And above all, you will be carrying out your duty as a human being.

Gentlemen, it is not only for religion or humanity that I invite you towards benevolence, charity, mercy and benefaction to the needy, but the general interest of the country and your personal interests too demand this.

By benefaction, attending to the helpless, and carrying out charitable acts, it is possible to organize a force out of a group of wanderers and use their potentials in the path of the progress of the country and also to repel any danger posed to the society.

By benefaction, it is possible to remove the rust of animosity from hearts and to attract other people's satisfaction, trust, and kindness, and finally to create cooperation and trust among the members of society. Whenever you help a poor, he feels himself indebted to you and demonstrates modesty and humbleness towards you.

Many times it has happened that a small amount of charity has made immune a huge amount of savings, and good deeds· have saved man from a dangerous perdition. Now, let us all become just relievers of sorrow and true benefactors.

Let us revive this motto of humanity and act as demanded by religion, country and personal interests.

Come, and have mercy on earth–dwellers so that God of the earth and the heavens may have mercy on you.[18]

Whatever has been said so far constitutes a brief· example of the Islamic teachings on benefaction.

The delicate point lies in the fact that, Islam has endeavored to create the spirit of benevolence and good deed in people from childhood. So that when they grow up, they may be tempted towards performing good deeds automatically and without any trouble, botheration, or feelings of discomfort in

performing good deeds. They may cherish those moments of life when they do a service to someone or initiate a good deed.

The life history of the great leaders of Islam and their disciples is the best witness to this claim that Muslims should read and become familiar with the life-styles of those leaders, and follow their path concerning benefaction in order to attain real salvation and felicity, God-willing.

Whosoever performs charitable deeds resembles the true king of the people, and he rules over their hearts. **George Herbert**

Whosoever wishes welfare and prosperity for others, will eventually attain self-prosperity. **Plato**

The reward for your good-deed lies in execution of righteous deeds by you. **Ciceron**

If we fail to win the hearts of free-born men through beneficence, how else are we then to secure their trust? **Bahram Goor** (An Iranian king in the olden days)

There are two kinds of pleasures which will never result in unpleasantness or regret. One is to perform righteous deeds towards people; the other is to do ones duty. **Jean Jacques Rosseau**

Good deed conquers all but is never conquered itself. **Tosltoy**

He who performs good deed towards mankind shall enjoy felicity in this world and the hereafter. **Saadi**

Where benefaction is of value, perform it and be ashamed of doing evil. **Ferdowsi**

1. Nahjul Balagha Vol. 1
2. Amali by Sheikh Sadouq, Pg. 153
3. O'yun Al-Akbar, Vol.2, Pg. 35
4. O'yun Al-Akbar – Al-Ridha', Vol.2
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18. A look at Islamic teachings

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