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Moral Characteristics of the Prophets: A Qur'anic Perspective

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There are a number of ways to understand the best qualities of human beings in Islam. One way is to study how God has described the Prophets in the Qur'an, since they are the people who are chosen by God as His messengers and are the best ones to be chosen by human beings as their guide and role models.

For this purpose, this paper tries to present a Qur'anic account of the characteristics of each of the Prophets mentioned in the Qur'an. This paper also shows that moral characteristics occupy a central, if not, the central, position in God's praise of their qualities and this illustrates the significance of morality in Islam.

Characteristics of Prophet Muhammad

1. Submissive to God

So if they argue with you, say, 'I have submitted my will to God, and [so has] he who follow me.' And say to those who were given the Book and the uninstructed ones, ***'Do you submit?' If they submit, they will certainly be guided, but if they turn away, then your duty is only to communicate; and God sees best the servants.*** (***3:20***)

He has no partner, and this [***creed***] ***I have been commanded*** [***to follow***]***,and I am the first of those who submit*** [***to God***]***.'*** (***6:163***)

2. Gentle to the people

It is by God's mercy that you are gentle to them; and had you been harsh and hardhearted, surely they would have scattered from around you. So excuse them, and plead for forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs, and once you are resolved, put your trust in God. Indeed God loves those who trust in Him. (*3:159*)

3. Deep concern for the people

There has certainly come to you an apostle from among yourselves. Grievous to him is your distress; he has deep concern for you, and is most kind and merciful to the faithful. (*9:128*)

4. Most kind and merciful to the faithful

There has certainly come to you an apostle from among yourselves. Grievous to him is your distress; he has deep concern for you, and is most kind and merciful to the faithful. (*9:128*)

5. Who has faith in God and His words

Say, 'O mankind! I am the Apostle of God to you all, [*of Him*] ***to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. There is no god except Him. He gives life and brings death.' So have faith in God and His Apostle, the uninstructed prophet who has faith in God and His words, and follow him so that you may be guided.*** (*7:158*)

See also 10:104 and 39:14.

6. God-fearing

When Our manifest signs are recited to them, those who do not expect to encounter Us say, 'Bring a Qur'an other than this, or alter it.' Say, 'I may not alter it of my own accord. I follow only what is revealed to me. Indeed should I disobey my Lord, I fear the punishment of a tremendous day. (*10:15*)

Say, 'Indeed, should I disobey my Lord, I fear the punishment of a tremendous day.' (*39:13*)

7. Pure in his worship

Say, 'O people! if you are in doubt about my religion, then [*know that*] ***I do not worship those whom you worship besides God. Rather I worship only God, who causes you to die, and I have been commanded to be among the faithful,*** (*10:104*)

Say, '[*Only*] ***God do I worship, putting my exclusive faith in Him.*** (*39:14*)

8. His heart is strengthened by God

Whatever We relate to you of the accounts of the apostles are those by which We strengthen your heart, and there has come to you in this [surah] the truth and an advice and admonition for the faithful. (*11:120*)

The faithless say, 'Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once?' So it is, that We may strengthen your heart with it, and We have recited it [to you] in a measured tone. (*25:32*)

9. He puts his trust in God

Thus have We sent you to a nation before which many nations have passed away, that you may recite to them what We have revealed to you. Yet they defy the All-beneficent. Say, 'He is my Lord; there is no god except Him; in Him I have put my trust, and to Him will be my return.' (*13:30*)

Whatever thing you may differ about, its judgment is with God. That is God, my Lord. In Him I have put my trust, and to Him I turn penitently. (*42:10*)

10. Mercy to all the inhabitants of the world

We did not send you but as a mercy to all the nations. (*21:107*)

11. Trustworthy

[*saying,*] ***'Give over the servants of God to me; indeed I am a trusted apostle [sent] to you.*** (*44:18*)

12. Hard against the faithless

Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and those who are with him are hard against the faithless and merciful amongst themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in worship], seeking God's grace and [His] pleasure. Their mark is [visible] on their faces, from the effect of prostration. Such is their description in the Torah and their description in the Evangel. Like a tillage that sends out its shoots and builds them up, and they grow stout and settle on their stalks, impressing the sowers, so that He may enrage the faithless by them. God has promised those of them who have faith and do righteous deeds forgiveness and a great reward. (*48:29*)

13. Devotion to God

Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and those who are with him are hard against the faithless and merciful amongst themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in worship], seeking God's grace and [His] pleasure. Their mark is [visible] on their faces, from the effect of prostration. (*48:29*)

Indeed your Lord knows that you stand vigil nearly two thirds of the night –or [at times] a half or a third of it– along with a group of those who are with you. (*73:20*)

14. Great character

Nun. By the Pen and what they write: you are not, by your Lord's blessing, crazy, and yours indeed will be an everlasting reward, and indeed you possess a great character. You will see and they will see, which one of you is crazy. Indeed your Lord knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best those who are guided. (*68:1–4*)

15. Good example

In the Apostle of God there is certainly for you a good exemplar, for those who look forward to God and the Last Day, and remember God greatly. (*33:21*)

Characteristics of the Prophet Abraham

1. Righteous

And who will [ever] renounce Abraham's creed except one who fools himself? We certainly chose him in the [present] world, and in the Hereafter he will indeed be among the Righteous. (*2:130*)

We gave him good in this world, and in the Hereafter he will indeed be among the Righteous. (*16:122*)

And We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and We ordained among his descendants prophethood and the Book, and We gave him his reward in the world, and in the Hereafter he will indeed be among the Righteous. (*29:27*)

2. Submissive to God

When his Lord said to him, 'Submit,' he said, 'I submit to the Lord of all the worlds.' (*2:131*)

See also 3:67 and 37:103.

3. Upright (hanif)

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. Rather he was a hanif, a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists. (*3:67*)

Say, 'God has spoken the truth; so follow the creed of Abraham, a hanif, and he was not one of the polytheists. (*3:95*)

And who has a better religion than him who submits his will to God, being virtuous, and follows the creed of Abraham, a hanif? And God took Abraham for a dedicated friend. (*4:125*)

Indeed I have turned my face toward Him who originated the heavens and the earth, as a hanif, and I am not one of the polytheists.' (*6:79*)

Say, 'Indeed my Lord has guided meto a straight path, the upright religion, the creed of Abraham, a hanif, and he was not one of the polytheists.' (*6:161*)

Indeed Abraham was a nation obedient to God, a hanif, and he was not one of the polytheists. (*16:120*)

Then We revealed to you [*saying*], *'Follow the creed of Abraham, a hanif, and he was not one of the polytheists.'* (*16:123*)

4. Benefactor (muhsin)

And We gave him Isaac and Jacob and guided each of them. And Noah We had guided before, and from his offspring, David and Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses and Aaron –thus do We reward the benefactor– (*6:84*)

You have indeed fulfilled the vision! Surely thus do we reward the benefactor. (*37:105*)

Thus do We reward the benefactor. (*37:110*)

5. Tender-hearted (awwah)

Abraham's pleading forgiveness for his father was only to fulfill a promise he had made him. So when it became manifest to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. Indeed Abraham was most tender-hearted and forbearing. (*9:114*)

Abraham was indeed forbearing, most tender- hearted, [*and*] *penitent.* (*11:75*)

6. Forbearing (halim)

Abraham's pleading forgiveness for his father was only to fulfill a promise he had made him. So when it became manifest to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. Indeed Abraham was most tender-hearted and forbearing. (*9:114*)

Abraham was indeed forbearing, most tender- hearted, [*and*] *penitent.* (*11:75*)

7. Penitent

Abraham was indeed forbearing, most tender- hearted, [*and*] *penitent.* (*11:75*)

.Our Lord! In You do we put our trust, and to You do we turn penitently, and toward You is the destination. (*60:4*)

8. Obedient

Indeed Abraham was a nation (*or leader or model*) *obedient to God, a hanif, and he was not one of the polytheists.* (*16:120*)

9. Grateful

Grateful [*as he was*] *for His blessings, He chose him and guided him to a straight path.* (*16:121*)

10. Most truthful

And mention in the Book Abraham. Indeed he was a most truthful one, a prophet. (*19:41*)

11. Meets his Lord with pure heart

when he came to his Lord with a pure heart, (*37:84*)

12. Faithful

He is indeed one of Our faithful servants. (*37:111*)

13. Puts his trust in God

...Our Lord! In You do we put our trust, and to You do we turn penitently, and toward You is the destination. (*60:4*)

14. Good example in his and his followers' treatment of idol worshippers

There is certainly a good exemplar for you in Abraham and those who were with him, when they said to their own people, 'Indeed we repudiate you and whatever you worship besides God. We disavow you, and between you and us there has appeared enmity and hate for ever, unless you come to have faith in God alone,' except for Abraham's saying to his father, 'I will surely plead forgiveness for you, though I cannot avail you anything against God'. (*60:4*)

There is certainly a good exemplar for you in them –for those who look forward to God and the Last Day– and anyone who refuses to comply [*should know that*] *indeed God is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable.* (*60:6*)

Characteristics of the Prophet Jesus

1. Righteous

He will speak to people in the cradle and in adulthood, and will be one of the righteous. (*3:46*)

and Zechariah, John, Jesus and Ilyas, –each of them among the righteous– (*6:85*)

2. Held in honour in the world and the Hereafter

When the angels said, 'O Mary, God gives you the good news of a Word from Him whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, held in honour in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near [*to God*]. (*3:45*)

3. Taught the Book and wisdom by God

And He will teach him the Book and wisdom, the Torah and the Evangel, (*3:48*)

When God will say, O Jesus son of Mary, remember My blessing upon you and upon your mother, when I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so you would speak to the people in the cradle and in adulthood, and when I taught you the Book and wisdom, the Torah and the Evangel, and when you would create from clay the form of a bird, with My leave, and you would breathe into it and it would become a bird, with My leave; and you would heal the blind and the leper, with My leave, and you would raise the dead, with My leave; and when I held off [*the evil of*] ***the Children of Israel from you when you brought them manifest proofs, whereat the faithless among them said, 'This is nothing but plain magic.'*** (*5:110*)

4. Near to God

When the angels said, 'O Mary, God gives you the good news of a Word from Him whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, held in honour in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near [*to God*]. (*3:45*)

When God said, 'O Jesus, I shall take you[*r soul*]***, and I shall raise you up toward Myself, and I shall clear you of*** [*the calumnies of*] ***the faithless, and I shall set those who follow you above the faithless until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me will be your return, whereat I will judge between you concerning that about which you used to differ.*** (*3:55*)

5. Pure

He said, 'I am only a messenger of your Lord that I may give you a pure son.' (*19:19*)

6. Kind and considerate

and to be good to my mother, and He has not made me self-willed and wretched. (*19:32*)

Characteristics of the Prophet Moses

1. Penitent

When Moses arrived at Our tryst and his Lord spoke to him, he said, 'My Lord, show [*Yourself*] *to me, that I may look at You!' He said, 'You shall not see Me. But look at the mountain: if it abides in its place, then you will see Me.' So when his Lord disclosed Himself to the mountain, He leveled it, and Moses fell down swooning. And when he recovered, he said, 'Immaculate are You! I turn to You in penitence, and I am the first of the faithful.'* (*7:143*)

2. Faithful

. And when he recovered, he said, 'Immaculate are You! I turn to You in penitence, and I am the first of the faithful.' (*7:143*)

They are indeed among Our faithful servants. (*37:122*)

3. Purified

And mention in the Book Moses. Indeed he was purified [*by God*]*, and an apostle and a prophet.* (*19:51*)

4. Given wisdom (and judgement)

So I fled from you, as I was afraid of you. Then my Lord gave me wisdom (*judgment*) *and made me one of the apostles.* (*26:21*)

5. Benefactor (muhsin)

Thus indeed do We reward the benefactor. (*37:121*)

6. Noble

Certainly We tried the people of Pharaoh before them, when a noble apostle came to them, (*44:17*)

7. Trustworthy

[*saying,*] *'Give over the servants of God to me; indeed I am a trusted apostle* [*sent*] *to you.* (*44:18*)

Characteristics of the Prophet Joseph

1. Most truthful

'Joseph,' [*he said*], *'O truthful one, give us your opinion concerning seven fat cows who are eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears and* [*seven*] *others dry, that I may return to the people so that they may know* [*the truth of the matter*].*'* (*12:46*)

2. Trustworthy

The king said, 'Bring him to me, I will make him my favourite.' Then, when he had spoken with him, he said, 'Indeed today [*onwards*] *you are honoured and trustworthy with us.'* (*12:54*)

3. Good keeper

He said, 'Put me in charge of the country's granaries. I am indeed a good keeper [*and*] *well-informed.'* (*12:55*)

4. Benefactor (muhsin)

That is how We established Joseph in the land that he may settle in it wherever he wished. We confer Our mercy on whomever We wish, and We do not waste the reward of the benefactor. (*12:56*)

Characteristic of the Prophet Jones

He was of those who glorify God

And had he not been one of those who glorify God, (*37:143*)

Characteristics of the Prophet Lot

1. Trustworthy

Indeed I am a trusted apostle [*sent*] *to you.* (*26:162*)

2. Given wisdom (and judgement)

We gave wisdom (*judgement*) *and knowledge to Lot, and We delivered him from the town which used to commit vicious acts. Indeed they were an evil and profligate lot.* (*21:74*)

3. Given knowledge

We gave wisdom (judgement) and knowledge to Lot ... *(21:74)*

4. Righteous

God draws an example for the faithless: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of our righteous servants, yet they betrayed them. So they did not avail them in any way against God, and it was said [to them], 'Enter the Fire, along with the incomers.' *(66:10)*

Characteristic of the Prophet Saleh

Trustworthy

Indeed I am a trusted apostle [sent] to you. *(26:143)*

Characteristics of the Prophet David

1. Given wisdom and kingdom

Thus they routed them with God's will, and David killed Goliath, and God gave him the kingdom and wisdom, and taught him whatever He liked. Were it not for God's repelling the people by means of one another, the earth would surely have been corrupted; but God is gracious to the world's creatures. *(2:251)*

We made his kingdom firm and gave him wisdom and conclusive speech (or sound judgement). *(38:20)*

2. Given knowledge

. and taught him whatever He liked. . *(2:251)*

3. Strong

Be patient over what they say, and remember Our servant, David, [the man] of strength. Indeed he was a penitent [soul]. *(38:17)*

4. Penitent

Be patient over what they say, and remember Our servant, David, [the man] of strength. Indeed he was a penitent [soul]. *(38:17)*

Characteristics of the Prophet Aaron

1. Benefactor (muhsin)

Thus indeed do We reward the benefactor. (*37:121*)

2. Faithful

They are indeed among Our faithful servants. (*37:122*)

Characteristics of the Prophet Noah

1. He puts his trust in God

Relate to them the account of Noah when he said to his people, 'O my people! If my stay [*among you*] ***be hard on you and*** [*also*] ***my reminding you of God's signs,*** [*for my part*] ***I have put my trust in God. So conspire together, along with your partners, leaving nothing vague in your plan, then carry it out against me without giving me any respite.*** (*10:71*)

2. Grateful

descendants of those whom We carried [*in the ark*] ***with Noah. Indeed he was a grateful servant.*** (*17:3*)

3. Trustworthy

Indeed I am a trusted apostle [*sent*] ***to you.*** (*26:107*)

4. Benefactor (muhsin)

Thus indeed do We reward the benefactor. (*37:80*)

5. Faithful

He is indeed one of Our faithful servants. (*37:81*)

6. Righteous

God draws an example for the faithless: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of our righteous servants, yet they betrayed them. So they did not avail them in any way against God, and it was said [*to them*], ***'Enter the Fire, along with the incomers.'*** (*66:10*)

Characteristics of the Prophet Solomon

1. Given judgement and knowledge

We gave its understanding to Solomon, and to each We gave judgement and knowledge. And We disposed the mountains and the birds to glorify [Him] with David, and We have been the doer [of such things]. (21:79)

2. Given knowledge

Certainly We gave David and Solomon knowledge, and they said, 'All praise belongs to God, who granted us an advantage over many of His faithful servants.' (27:15)

3. Penitent

And to David We gave Solomon –what an excellent servant! Indeed he was a penitent [soul]. (38:30)

Characteristics of the Prophet John (Yahya)

1. Eminent

Then the angels called out to him, as he stood praying in the sanctuary: 'God gives you the good news of John, as a confirmer of a Word of God, eminent and chaste, a prophet, among the righteous.' (3:39)

2. Chaste

.'God gives you the good news of John, as a confirmer of a Word of God, eminent and chaste, a prophet, among the righteous.' (3:39)

3. Righteous

. 'God gives you the good news of John, as a confirmer of a Word of God, eminent and chaste, a prophet, among the righteous.' (3:39)

and Zechariah, John, Jesus and Ilyas, – each of them among the righteous– (6:85)

4. Compassionate

and a compassion and purity from Us. He was pious, (19:13)

and good to his parents, and was not self– willed or disobedient. (19:14)

5. Purity

and a compassion and purity from Us. He was pious, (***19:13***)

6. Pious

and a compassion and purity from Us. He was pious, (***19:13***)

and good to his parents, and was not self-willed or disobedient. (***19:14***)

Characteristic of the Prophet Elias

Righteous

and Zechariah, John, Jesus and Elias, -each of them among the righteous- (***6:85***)

Characteristics of the Prophet Hud

1. Puts his trust in God

Indeed I have put my trust in God, my Lord and your Lord. There is no living being but He holds it by its forelock. Indeed my Lord is on a straight path. (***11:56***)

2. Trustworthy

Indeed I am a trusted apostle [***sent***] ***to you.*** (***26:125***)

Characteristics of the Prophet Shu'ayb

1. He puts his trust in God

He said, 'O my people! Have you considered, should I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord, who has provided me a good provision from Himself? I do not wish to oppose you by what I forbid you. I only desire to put things in

order, as far as I can, and my success lies only with God: in Him I have put my trust, and to Him I turn penitently. (***11:88***)

2. Penitent

. and my success lies only with God: in Him I have put my trust, and to Him I turn penitently. (***11:88***)

3. Trustworthy

Indeed I am a trusted apostle** [**sent**] **to you. (***26:178***)

Note: In the verse 11:87, those who had not believed in the Prophet Shu'ayb's mission, characterised him with forbearance and right-mindedness:

They said, 'O Shu'ayb, does your worship require that we abandon what our fathers have been worshiping, or that we should not do with our means whatever we wish? You are indeed** [**a**] **gentle and sensible** [**person**]**.' (***11:87***)

There are two views among the exegetes of the Qur'an in this regard. Some believe that they were not serious in this and were instead ridiculing him. Others believe that they had admitted that he possessed these two qualities and were asking him that why a person like him with such characteristics must ask them not to worship what their fathers used to worship.

Characteristics of the Prophet Jacob

1. Puts his trust in God

And he said, 'My sons, do not enter by one gate, but enter by separate gates, though I cannot avail you anything against God. Sovereignty belongs only to God. In Him I have put my trust; and in Him let all the trusting put their trust.' (***12:67***)

2. Righteous

And We gave him Isaac, and Jacob as well for a grandson, and each of them We made righteous. (***21:72***)

Characteristics of the Prophet Ismail

1. Submissive to God

So when they had both submitted** [**to God's will**]**, and he had laid him down on his forehead, (***37:103***)

2. Knowledgeable

They said, 'Do not be afraid. Indeed we give you the good news of a knowledgeable son.' (***15:53***)

Then he felt a fear of them. They said, 'Do not be afraid!' and they gave him the good news of a knowledgeable son. (***51:28***)

3. Truthful in his promise

And mention in the Book Ishmael. Indeed he was true to his promise, and an apostle and a prophet. (***19:54***)

4. Pleasing to his Lord

He used to bid his family to [***maintain***] ***the prayer and to*** [***pay***] ***the zakat, and was pleasing to his Lord.*** (***19:55***)

5. Patient

And Ishmael, Idris, and Dhul-Zifl -each of them was among the patient. (***21:85***)

When he was old enough to assist in his endeavour, he said, 'My son! I see in a dream that I am sacrificing you. See what you think.' He said, 'Father! Do whatever you have been commanded. If God wishes, you will find me to be patient.' (***37:102***)

So We gave him the good news of a forbearing son. (***37:101***)

Characteristics of the Prophet Isaac

Righteous

And We gave him Isaac, and Jacob as well for a grandson, and each of them We made righteous. (***21:72***)

And We gave him the good news of [***the birth of***] ***Isaac, a prophet, one of the righteous.*** (***37:112***)

Characteristics of the Prophet Zechariah

1. Righteous

and Zechariah, John, Jesus and Elias, -each of them among the righteous- (***6:85***)

2. Humble before God

So We answered his prayer, and gave him John, and remedied his wife['***s infertility***] ***for him. Indeed they were ever quick in*** [***performing***] ***good***

works, and they would supplicate Us with eagerness and awe and were humble before Us. (***21:90***)

3. Quick in performing good works

So We answered his prayer, and gave him John, and remedied his wife['s infertility] for him. Indeed they were ever quick in [performing] good works, and they would supplicate Us with eagerness and awe and were humble before Us. (***21:90***)

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