

LOFTY ETHICS OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S MISSION

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Sermon Plan

1. Islam is a faith of lofty ethics
2. Fall of ethics signifies the fall of nations
3. Ethics is the fruit of right worship
4. The way to improve your ethics

Sermon Text

Undoubtedly, the Islamic greatness has several sides; Islam is a law and ethics, lofty human values and ideal life patterns, inclusive of all virtues and merits and exclusive of all vices and evils. Islam highly encourages the high morals of patience, forbearing, lenience, truthfulness, honesty, mercy, fulfillment of one's promises, generosity, shyness, modesty, courage, justice, benevolence and relieving people's needs. It also calls for lowering one's eyes, harm prevention, cheerful face, nice talks, good thoughts of others, respect of the elder, making peace between people, altruism and good consideration of others' feelings as well as other ethical values.

Evidently, the texts of the Quran and Sunnah are very rich with indications to these ethical values. ALLAH (may He be Exalted) says, "Surely, this Quran guides to that which is most upright and gives the believers who do good deeds the glad tiding that theirs will be a great reward" (the Quran, 17: 9).

ALLAH also commands His Prophet to "Take to pardoning, and order what is good, and turn away from the ignorant ones" (the Quran, 7: 199). He also recommends all to "say kind things to the people" (the Quran, 2: 83).

ALLAH also says, "There is no good in most of what they privately confer, except whoever orders a charity or kindness or making-peace between people. Yet, whoever does this seeking the grace of ALLAH, We will give him a great recompense" (the Quran, 4: 114).

Careful contemplation of the Quranic verses reveals that many verses call for lofty ethics as a social duty. Actually, ethics is the legal mechanism for human refined morality and the way to human perfections.

Texts of the Prophet's Tradition also stress the paramount significance of ethics in human life and promise great rewards for those endowed with high morals. Declaring the essence of *virtue*, the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Virtue is the nobility of behavior" (Muslim in his Hadith Authentic Collection). The Prophet also said, "The heaviest thing in the believer's scale will be good morals." According to another narration, "Nothing is heavier on the believer's Scale, on the Day of

Judgment, than the noble character; indeed ALLAH dislikes the shameless obscene person” (At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunan* from Abu al-Darda).

The Prophet frequently invited people to adhere to high morals as in his statement: “The most perfect of the believers in faith is the one whose behavior is most excellent; and the best of you are those who are the best to their wives” (Ahmad in his *Musnad*).

When the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) was asked about the best of believers, he said: “the best in conduct” (Ibn Majah in his *Sunan*). When the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) was asked about the deed which will be foremost to lead people to Paradise. He said, "God-fearing and good conduct", (Al-Tirmidhi in his Hadith Collection). Furthermore, the lofty ethics is the way to earn the Prophet's love: “The dearest and the closest of you to me on the Day of Resurrection will be those who have the noblest morals” (At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunan*).

For Islam, ethics holds a lofty rank and special position; it is the essence of and kernel of faith. When the Prophet was asked about the essence of faith, he said: “the nobility of conduct.”

He even epitomized the ultimate end of Islamic Message, the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, “I have been sent to perfect the noblest of morals” (al-Bukhari in al-Adab al-Mufrad).

Even before his mission, the Prophet had the epithet: the Truthful and the Honest. Ethics and faith are inseparably associated; He (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) was the best model for noble character, so His Lord described him saying, “And indeed, you are of a great moral character” (the Quran, 68: 4). It is a great testimony from the Sublime Majestic Lord to His prophet's ethics and noble conduct.

The Prophet was the best of creation in his personification of the Quranic morals, obedience of Quranic commands and abandonment of Quranic proscriptions. Thus, he was the living Quranic ethics as stressed by ‘Aishah—the Mother of the Believer— when she was asked about the Prophet's morality, she answered, “His morality was that of the Quran.”

He was a practical example of the Quranic ethics. Occupying the peak of ethics as being the kindest, most beloved and merciful of humankind—he was deeply forbearing and inclined to forgive others. His speech ranked most truthful; he frequently kept his promises and honored his friends. He was the master of humankind, yet proved most modest.

Anyone who knew him closely would love him. Khadijah, the Mother of the Believer, (may ALLAH be pleased with her) described him saying, “By ALLAH, ALLAH will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your Kith and kin, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously and assist the deserving calamity-afflicted ones.”

Describing Prophet Muhammad (may ALLAH's Peace and Blessings be upon him), He (may He be Exalted) says, "And it was by God's grace that you [O Prophet] dealt gently with your followers: for if you had been harsh and hard of heart, they would indeed have broken away from you. Pardon them, then, and pray that they be forgiven. And take counsel with them in all matters of public concern; then, when thou hast decided upon a course of action, place thy trust in God: for, verily, God loves those who place their trust in Him" (the Quran, 3:159).

He (may ALLAH's Peace and Blessings be upon him) educated his companions to follow the best of morals in his advice to Abu Dharr (may ALLAH be pleased with him): "Fear ALLAH wherever you may be, after each sin do a good deed to efface it and deal with people gently."

All the companions kept to kindness and benevolence and kept apart from extremism and anger; they proved most forbearing and forgiving and were the best examples in high morality, good treatment and generosity. When the Prophet migrated from Mecca to Medina, he concluded the bond of fraternity between the Muhajirun (immigrant) and the Anṣār (the Helpers) whereby they shared wealth. The human ethics shall entrench the grace of giving. The Quran stresses the lofty examples of benevolence to strengthen the merit of giving in the Muslim community.

ALLAH (may He be Exalted) says, "They [i.e., the Helpers] love those who migrated to them and find not any want in their breasts of what they [i.e., the emigrants] were given but give [them] preference over themselves, even though they are in privation" (the Quran, 59: 9).

In their adoption of these ethics, they became the leaders of nations, the focus of eyes and the optimal models to follow. People accepted Islam in multitudes for the lofty treatment and high morality they experienced when dealing with Muslims. However, when Muslims deviated from the right way, morals faded, ideals ended, values lost and concepts changed. Imam Malik proved wise when saying, "The late generations of this nation can only prosper when they follow the same approach of the early Muslim generation." Lofty morals protect communities from disintegration, chaos and loss. Actually, Muslim safety, power, prosperity and greatness are all conditional upon the adoption of noble ethics. Conversely, immorality and vices are the natural outcome of forsaking ethics and good deeds.

Setting your affairs right lies with good ethics

So, educate yourself with ethics to get it under control

For one's self when set right is in the best grace

Yet, one's self when given to evil is in the worst place

The Prophet thus warned against the fall and deterioration of morals. Sahl Ibn Sahl al-Sa'idi (may ALLAH be pleased with him) said, "I heard the Prophet (may ALLAH's Peace and Blessings be upon him) saying: "ALLAH is generous and love generosity; He likes lofty matters and dislikes low concerns" (al-Hakim in *his al-Mustadrak*). The ethics are not a luxurious part but a bulwark against the collapse of nations and communities. Ethics awards nations life and eternal achievements while the loss of ethics marks the destruction and fall of nations. Many powerful nations of mighty economy and military fell to ruin only when their ethics deteriorated.

The Emir of Arab poets Ahmad Shawqi (may ALLAH rest his soul in peace) said,

Nations are nothing but their ethics

Once their ethics lost, nations are no longer

Indeed, all acts of worship aim to guide the behavior of individual and inculcate the lofty mores in the society. Islam is not a combination of empty rites done in mosques apart from the social life. Actually, acts of worship in all religions aim to educate human beings and improve their conduct. For example, indicating the wisdom of prayers, ALLAH (may He be Exalted) says, "Recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of ALLAH is greater. And ALLAH knows that which you do" (the Quran, 29: 44).

Keeping away from vices, misdeeds and malpractices is the kernel of prayers. Ibn 'Abbas (may ALLAH be pleased with him and his father) narrated that the Prophet (may ALLAH's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "ALLAH (may He be Exalted and Glorified) said:

I only accept the prayers from the one who humbly does it for My Majesty without feeling the least pride therewith over my creation or persistently committing sins at night. Meanwhile, his/her day is busy with my remembrance and s/he is extending mercy to the needy, the wayfarer, the widowed and afflicted ones" (al-Bazzar).

Ibn Mas'ud said, "The one whose prayers fail to make him do good deeds and keep him from evildoing will have nothing but driven further from Allah" (al-Tabarāni with authentic chain of transmission).

When the prayers fail to keep a servant away from verbal and practical vices, then it failed to achieve its ultimate objective. The same goes true for obligatory charity, fasting, pilgrimage and all other acts of worship. They all aim to educate high morals and purify human souls. ALLAH (may He be Exalted) says, "[O Muhammad] Take from their wealth a charity by which you purify them and cause them increase, and invoke [Allah's blessings] upon them.

Indeed, your invocations are reassurance for them. And ALLAH is Hearing and Knowing,” (the Quran, 9: 103).

The Prophet intentionally broadens the sense of *sadaqa* i.e. charity, to include several areas as narrated by Abu Dharr that the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said:

- Your smiling in the face of your brother is *sadaqa*,
- Your putting some of the water from your bucket in your brother's bucket is *sadaqa*,
- Your enjoinder of right and forbidding of wrong is *sadaqa*,
- Your removing stones, thorns and bones from people's path is *sadaqa*
- Your guiding a man in a place where no guide exists is *sadaqa*” (al-Bazzar).

The duty of fasting is divinely ordained for servants to achieve the righteousness as the ultimate end and fruit of fasting. ALLAH (may He be Exalted) says, “O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous” (the Quran, 2: 183).

Fasting teaches Muslims to strengthen their will and control their ethics and desires. Abu Hurayrah (may ALLAH be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, “Fasting is a protection for you, so when you are fasting, do not behave obscenely or foolishly. Yet, if anyone argues with you or abuses you, say, 'I am fasting, I am fasting’” (al-Bukhari). Fasting thus is a protection from immoral behavior and vices; it must positively affect the Muslim behavior and ethics.

In respect of Hajj, ALLAH (may He be Exalted) says, “Hajj is [during] well-known months, so whoever has made hajj obligatory upon himself therein [by entering the state of *ihrām*], there is [to be for him] no sexual relations and no disobedience and no disputing during hajj. And whatever good you do – ALLAH knows it. And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of Allah. And fear Me, O you of understanding” (the Quran, 2: 197).

Abu Hurayrah (may ALLAH be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, “Whoever visits this House [for hajj] and neither speak indecently nor does s/he act wickedly will return free from sin as on the very first day his/her mother bore him” (Muslim).

The worship must leave a positive effect on the morals and behavior of individuals and the whole society; otherwise, it is fruitless in the Afterlife. Immoral behavior consumes the good deeds just as the fire consumes the firewood. Abu Hurayrah (may ALLAH be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said:

“Do you know who is poor? The Companions of the Prophet said: For us, a poor man is one who has neither dirham with him nor wealth.

*The Prophet said: The poor of my Ummah is the one who would come on the Day of Resurrection with **prayers, fasting and charity** but he also comes as bankrupt, **since he hurled abuses upon others, brought calumny against others and unlawfully consumed the wealth of others and shed the blood of others and beat others**. His virtues would be credited to the account of one (who suffered at his hand). If his good deeds fall short to clear the account, then his sins would be entered in (his account) and he would be thrown in the Fire.” (al-Tirmidhi)*

Once a question was raised before the Prophet, there is a woman who persistently does night prayers, fasts many days and gives much charity, but injures her neighbors with her tongue.' The Messenger of ALLAH said, “She is in the Fire.”

They said, 'Another woman only prays the prescribed fasting, charity and prayers but she gives bits of curd in charity and never harms anyone.' The Messenger of ALLAH said, 'She is in Paradise” (Ahmad).

ALLAH (may He be Exalted) has dignified all human beings without discrimination. Ethics are for all people, Muslims and non-Muslims, and human beings are all brothers in humanity. He (may He be Exalted) says, "We have honored the Children of Adam and carried them in the land and the sea, and We have provided for them of the good things, and We have preferred them over many of those We created" (the Quran, 17: 70). When the Prophet stood up for the funeral of a Jew that passed by him, it was said, 'It is the funeral of a Jew.' In reply, he said, “Was he not a human being!” (al-Bukhari).

ALLAH (may He be Exalted) says, “And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, “We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him” (the Quran, 29: 46).

Mujahed narrated that Abdullah Ibn ‘Amr had a sheep slaughtered for his family. When he came, he said, 'Have you given some to our neighbor, the Jew? Have you given some to our neighbor, the Jew? I heard the Messenger of ALLAH saying: 'Jibreel (Gabriel) continued to advise me about

(treating) the neighbors so (kindly and politely), that I thought he would order me (from Allah) to make them heirs” (al-Tirmidhi).

The high ethics is not only for treatment with humankind but also for animals. ALLAH forgave a man because of watering a dog. Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, “A man saw a dog eating mud from the severity of thirst. So, that man took a shoe and filled it with water and kept on pouring the water for the dog until it quenched its thirst. ALLAH then approved of his deed and made him to enter Paradise” (al-Bukhari).

Conversely, ALLAH caused a woman to enter Hell due to a cat that she persecuted. ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar narrated that the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, “A woman was tortured and was put in Hell because of a cat which she had kept locked till it died of hunger.” Allah's Messenger further said, (ALLAH knows better): “ALLAH said (to the woman), 'You neither fed it nor watered when you locked it up, nor did you set it free to eat the insects of the earth” (al-Bukhari).

If we are seriously resolute to refine and improve the ethics in our society, it is necessary to have the optimal model. The model is essential for good ethics. ALLAH (may He be Exalted) says, “The messenger of ALLAH has set up a good example for those among you who seek ALLAH and the Last Day, and remembers ALLAH unceasingly” (the Quran, 33: 21).

Parents are good examples for their children. The Prophet stressed the educational role of good examples in human life and warned against deviant examples. For instance, deviant parents can mislead their children as narrated by Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet said, “No child is born but has the pure faith (Islam); however, his/her parents turn him/her into a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian.” Abu Hurayrah added, “The nature of Allah in which He has created humankind; there is no alteration in Allah's creation; that is the right religion” (the Quran, 30: 30), (al-Bukhari).

Likewise, the teacher is a model for his students in integrity and ethics. Al-Shafi'i once entered into the court of Harūn al-Rasheed in the company of his servant Sraj. Al-Shafi'i left his servant with Abu ‘Abd al-Samad, the private tutor of al-Rasheed's children. Sraj said to al-Shafi'i, O Abu ‘Abdullah, those are the children of the Commander of the Believers. Here is the one in charge of educating them, so advise him in this regard. Al-Shafi'i addressed Abu ‘Abd al-Samad saying,

“Let your first step to educate the children of the Commander of the Believers be the reform of yourself. For their eyes actually observe yours; the good in their sight follows the good in your sight and the evil in your vision follows the evil in your vision” (Abu Nau ‘aym, Hilyat al-Awliyā.).

It is worth mentioning that ethics is not restricted to the individual; some ethics are individualistic but others are social, such as family ethics between spouses, parents and children, Kith and kin, as well as other social ethics of sales, purchases, neighborhood, friendship and work. Some are international such as the ethics of international relationships between the states and the ethics of war and peace.

Sincerity to ALLAH and supplicating Him for noble character are seriously significant for a servant to have a good character. S/he should also strive against one's desires and frequently examine his personal deeds with consideration of the ultimate evils of immoral conduct and its bad consequences on the individual and the society.