

Al-Risala

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Character

“Man of character” means being predictably good, honest and dependable, and consequently inspiring in others a healthy respect for these very qualities.

We often hear the opinion expressed of some worthy individual that he is a “man of character.” What exactly do we mean here by “character?” It is a word, which applies to the personality and behavior of anyone who has a strong set of principles and who believes in adhering to them, no matter what the consequences. Being a “man of character” means being predictably good, honest and dependable, and consequently inspiring in others a healthy respect for these very qualities. The term is most often used of someone in adverse circumstances who might imaginably compromise with his conscience, because of the pressures brought to bear on him, but who courageously refuses to flinch from his original position. A man of character then is one who listens to and obeys his conscience, even if it means becoming unpopular with those whose friendship he values. Character, indeed, is the moral facet of human nature which both provides us with a yardstick for, and acts as a monitor of our own social behavior.

A characterless individual, on the other hand, will say what he pleases, and act as the mood takes him, without any reference to the effect of his words and actions on others. But a man of character thinks of others first, puts them before himself and sedulously refrains from conduct which could cause them grief or distress.

Ethics, the branch of philosophy, which deals with human morals, is an extremely wide and ramified subject, which is split up into several schools of thought. We do not wish at this point to enter into a debate on its more arcane aspects: it is our aim rather to present a survey of certain simple principles, which, if faithfully adhered to, would improve individual human behavior and, in consequence, produce a better society.

The principles we have in mind are those laid down by the Prophet Muhammad to enable members of society to regulate the entire range of human activities on a superior moral basis. Adherence to them means a better and more fruitful

interaction between the individuals making up society, hence a friction-free atmosphere in which genuine social progress can be fostered. The best thing about these principles is their simplicity. They are so easy to understand that even the most unlettered of individuals can follow them – provided they have the will to do so.

THREE HADITH

1. DO AS YOU WOULD BE DONE BY

This is a straightforward but all-embracing precept, there being no situation in which it does not hold good. It means quite simply, treating others, as we would like them to treat us, no matter what the circumstances. It means setting the same standards for ourselves as we set for others. And if it is not immediately clear to us how our behavior should be patterned, it is only a question of our putting ourselves in the place of the other man, and doing our best to imagine his feelings as if they were our very own. If we expect to have the respect of other. We must ourselves give respect where it is due. In this way justice becomes both reciprocal and universal.

2. DO GOOD TO OTHERS, OR AT LEAST LET NO HARM BEFALL THEM.

By this, the Prophet means that we must always accept the role of the giver. Our first thought should be for the good of others, never of our own. Even if it is not possible for us to feel genuinely well intentioned towards others, we should at least refrain from abusing them or doing them any other disservice. To be successful in this, we must exercise a strict control over our thoughts, words and deeds.

3. NEVER STOOP TO SAYING THAT YOU WILL REQUIRE GOOD WITH GOOD AND EVIL WITH A WORSE EVIL.

Join hands with those who sever their ties with you, be forgiving and good to your transgressors.

The above precepts may seem difficult to the point of being impossible to follow, but they were the very bedrock upon which the Prophet built his own life. A man of genuine character, he went out of his way to deal with friend and foe alike, was quick to be conciliatory, did his best to mend broken relationships, was compassionate towards those who sought to harm him and showed forbearance even to those who actually wronged him. These were

moral triumphs, and it should be the goal of every Muslim, no matter from what walk in life, to strive towards that supreme sublimity of character which made such feats a reality. It should be appreciated that following the "principle" of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is what modern psychologists would call a "knee-jerk" response and has little to do with principled behavior. Those who act out of vengemfulness, or who even nurse such feelings, are simply debasing their own characters. No one of a superior character ever degrades himself in this way, being quick to see that revenge does as much psychological harm to himself as It does material harm to his enemies. He also sees It for the divisive force which it is in society.

A society can only be as good as the individuals of which it is composed. It is, therefore, of overriding importance that individuals who wish to live within the fold of society should grasp the significance of the principles outlined above, and begin unhesitatingly to put them into practice. It is only by making one's motto, 'Do as you would be done by' that truly cohesive forces, as a matter of individual and concerted effort, can bring society to the peak of harmonious moral perfection.

5 April-May 1994

INDIAN MUSLIMS

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Man must run the gauntlet of adversity in this life, for that is in the very nature of things. But repeated emphasis on the darker side of life, with no mention of brighter prospects ahead can lead only to discouragement, depression and inertia. The better way to find solutions to the problems besetting us would be to seek out and lay stress on whatever opportunities present themselves, so that those upon whom fortune has not smiled may feel encouraged to take the initiative in improving themselves and their lot in life.

In the light of concrete realities, this book focuses, therefore, on how, in entering upon the more positive avenues open to them, Muslims may avail themselves of the same kind of opportunities right here in India as they would find at any other point on the globe. For them treading this path is treading the path of wisdom.

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Creative adaptability

Emile Chartier, the French philosopher, once remarked that "nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it is the only one we have."

Ours is a world of cause and effect and yet, with the best will in the world, we cannot always 'cause' the desired 'effects' to be produced. If we are to feel at all certain about attaining our objectives, we should forget about past successes and give our attention to past failures. We can all think of instances of well thought-out plans going wrong, apparently because of human or mechanical errors, or because of other circumstances beyond our control. Sometimes we have had to stand by helplessly, unable to influence the sequence of events or their outcome, and we have not been able to say exactly why. Sometimes we have overestimated the extent to which it is humanly possible to be instrumental in any given set of circumstances, but more often we have been baulked of the fruits of success because of a damaging inability to change or discard a brilliantly conceived plan. No matter how well facts are marshalled, or how intelligently reasoned a plan, these virtues exist only at the time of conception, and frequently lose in value as the situation develops. Unforeseen factors are constantly cropping up, and human unpredictability can reduce the best of planning to chaos. Once this has been understood, we have to make prompt modifications – major as well as minor – and sometimes we simply have to start all over again. We have to check for errors of judgement, see if alternative interpretations of facts are not possible, and take into account every new and changed element in the situation in order to chalk out a fresh course of action. However, many of us choose to ignore new sets of circumstances and deliberately avoid adapting to them, because we feel it smacks of weakness and indecision. But such action should never be so labelled. It should be seen rather as a superior kind of creative adaptability. Emile Chartier, the French philosopher, once remarked that "nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it is the only one we have."

The Prophet Muhammad's life is a splendid example of such adaptability, especially in his battle strategy. At the time of the Badr campaign he did do battle with the enemy, but at Ahzaab he thwarted the enemy by having a

trench dug which they were unable to cross. During the campaign of Uhud, he actually fought with his opponents, but at Hudaibi 'ya, he returned from the battle ground without actually having fought a battle. At Hamra Al-As ad, he marched openly and publicly, whereas, when he went to conquer Mecca, the journey was made in absolute silence.

Adapting oneself to circumstances should never be thought of as weak-mindedness or a lack of resolution, but should be seen rather as the intelligent tactician's formula for keeping success within his grasp.

7 April-May 1994

GOD-ORIENTED LIFE

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

The traditions–Sunnah–of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, and the lives of his companions and those closely associated with them, serve as a major source of religious enlightenment in theory and in practice. This book endeavours to present these ideas in the simplest and most direct way. In that it culls from authentic sources the sayings and deeds of the Prophet and those inspired by him, it brings to us a complete and, above all, human picture of true Islamic behaviour.

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Drinking and progress do not go hand in hand

While western civilization has taken so long to appreciate the enormity of the morass into which society can be led by alcohol, Islam has all along taught us its evils, and all intoxicants, even in small quantities, are strictly prohibited by it.

On the 3rd of May, 1980, a thirteen-year old girl called Cari was walking along the side-walk of a street in California when a car came hurtling down the road and hit her with such force that she was thrown upwards for a distance of 35 metres. Within one hour, she was dead! When the driver was arrested, it was found that he had been driving under the influence of alcohol.

Accidents of this nature are an everyday occurrence in the United States, latest statistics showing an annual toll of almost 50,000. Of this figure, no less than half of the accidents are due to drunken driving – the prime cause of death today in America.

In recent years, people have been awakened to the dangers of drunken driving, the principal champion of the cause being Cari's mother, Candy Lightner, who could not bear her daughter's death to remain an incident devoid of all meaning. Throwing herself wholeheartedly into working for this cause, she left her job, sold her property, gathered together some like-minded mothers and in 1980, formed the M.A.D.D. organisation – Mothers Against Drunken Driving. She set about gathering all possible information on this issue, making a special study of the rules and regulations against drunken driving. With the help of the media, in particular, newspapers, television and radio, she brought to the notice of the American public the yearly death toll – 25,000 – due to drunken driving. She also made the point that even those few who escape death are generally left permanently incapacitated.

Every day, seventy people die in road accidents, which means an average of one death every twenty minutes. Candy was so successful in shaking up the American public with figures of this kind that even the government had to take notice, and on the 17th July, 1984, President Reagan passed a law against drunken driving.

The American magazine, *Span* (September, 1986) makes an apt comment on

drunkenness plus mobility: Until the 20th century drunkenness was a relatively minor social problem in the United States, because drunkards were rarely in any position to cause serious damage to anyone but themselves. Drinkers might brawl in the bars and public houses, or cause family strife, or upset an applecart on a wild horseback ride through town, but for the most part a chronic drinker was more to be pitied than scorned, and certainly was not cause for government concern. With the introduction of the automobile, however, the drunkard became a menace to everyone within reach of his desire to travel.

On the 30th of March, 1981, an attempt was made on the life of President Reagan. He survived, although seriously injured. Investigations at the time showed that the would-be assassin was under the influence of alcohol. Subsequent investigations have brought to light the very close link that exists in general between crime and alcoholism.

Normally a man's conscience coupled with his fear of the law restrains him from criminal acts, but after a bout of drinking, his finer sensibilities are suppressed, and he feels free to turn to crime. Even premeditated crime is closely associated with the consumption of alcohol. In America, a large number of prominent citizens, one of them being America's First Lady, Mrs. Nancy Reagan, have, therefore, taken it upon themselves to launch a crusade against alcohol.

While western civilization has taken so long to appreciate the enormity of the morass into which society can be led by alcohol, Islam has all along taught us its evils, and all intoxicants, even in small quantities, are strictly prohibited by it. Nearing the culminating point in its progress, modern civilization is beginning, quite surprisingly, to understand the value of a religious tenet which has held true, although intermittently flouted, for so many centuries. Its negligence of this truth, in the face of life's sordid realities, had taken a heavy toll in human life, broken homes and, reduced productivity. It is, indeed, tragic that it has come to acknowledge this vital truth with such extreme and costly tardiness.

10 April-May 1994

RELIGION AND SCIENCE

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

There are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of things and knowledge of truth. So far as "things" are concerned, they display no attribute which cannot be elucidated by direct argument. But where truths are concerned, it is only indirect argument which can throw any light upon them. Indeed, in the case of scientific truths, the validity of indirect, or inferential argument is a matter of general acceptance. Since religious truths are proved by the logic of similar inferential argument, it may legitimately be argued that they fall into the same intellectual bracket as scientific truths.

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Glorifying the Lord

Glorification of God is the explosion of God realization taking place in the mind of a believing soul. This is a rich and amazing experience.

After mentioning cattle and the sacrificial animals, the Qur'an says that God made these animals subservient to man so that you may glorify God for having given you guidance' (22:37).

Why is that man is well served by camels and oxen, but he has been unable to press bears and wolves into service? It is because God has chosen to make the former instinctively subservient to man and not the latter. If this had not been so, cattle would have proved as intractable as bears and wolves.

The fact that certain animals are easily tamed and domesticated is one of the great blessings that God has bestowed on mankind. A part of man's faith is to recognize and feel thankful for such blessings – some of the wonders of God's creation. When a servant of God sacrifices an animal in the name of God, this act is an outward manifestation of his inward state. He is saying, by his act, 'Lord, if you had not created those beasts as they are, we should not have had them to serve us.'

This applies not only to animals, but to many other natural resources of the world. Everything bestowed upon man is a gift from God, but, if man is able to make use of them, it is only because God has made them the willing tools of man. Whenever man's eye lights upon anything which is of great service to him, it should cause him to remember God's munificence; being in this way, he glorifies God within his own mind. This is what the Qur'an exhorts us to do when it says: 'Glorify your Lord, (74:3) and: 'Proclaim His greatness' (17:11).

Glorification of God is the explosion of God-realization taking place in the mind of a believing soul. This is a rich and amazing experience, but it can be expressed in the simplest of words: 'God is great!'

Islam versus opportunism

Any apprehensions should be set aside as having been inspired by some falsehood or by some distortion of the truth arising from the superficial quality of human vision.

There is a saying of 'Ali to which we should all give serious consideration: "Whenever people abandon some aspect of their Faith in order to improve their worldly position, they will find themselves exposed by God to even greater adversity."

This applies to nations as to individuals, it holds in all walks of life, and it covers all matters, great and small. Such guidelines, to be found in both the book of God and in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet should be religiously adhered to by Muslims as a matter of personal duty. Any apprehensions they may have about them should be set aside as having been inspired by some falsehood or by some distortion of the truth arising from the superficial quality of human vision.

There is one very important example which bears out the truth of 'Ali's saying, i.e. the communal riots which take place all too frequently in India, one of the rival communities being Muslims. Now, clear guidance on such issues is readily available to Muslims in the Qur'an and Sunnah, namely, that one should turn away from involvement in rioting; one should not allow oneself to be provoked, no matter what the provocation. Yet when such obviously practical guidelines are laid down before Muslims, they find themselves unable to put them into practice, because they are so preoccupied by self-contrived considerations. Their main obsession is that if they do not retaliate, the other community will take courage from their inaction, and feel free to make even more mischief than before.

For the last fifty years Indian Muslims have been following this path, which is of their own making, and the outcome has repeatedly underscored the truth of 'Ali's words. Having abandoned the teachings of their religion in favour of sectarian considerations, they are forced, time and time again, to endure riots, which are becoming increasingly savage and more and more destructive of the community interests which they seek to preserve.

God has always known which is the best course for us to adopt – one which will certainly bring us no harm – and He has revealed this course to mankind

through His Prophet. If we place our trust in God and His Prophet, we shall certainly achieve the greatest moral triumphs. Following any other course, no matter how seemingly advantageous, is a breach of this trust and can only lead us to ultimate ruin.

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Faith one attaches to God

Bara'ibn Azib reported the Prophet as saying:

"The strongest knot of faith is loving for the sake of God and animosity for the sake of God."

(Ahmad, *Musnad*)

A major difference

And where are the people nowadays, like the people of Mecca in the old days, who will be satisfied with nothing but the truth.

In the early days of the Muslims in Mecca, the chieftains of the Quraysh (who had still not converted to Islam) once gathered at the house of Walid ibn Mughirah to consult with each other as to what they should tell the people about Muhammad. One of their members suggested they should say he was a soothsayer. To this Walid ibn Mughirah replied "By God, he is no soothsayer. We have seen soothsayers, and there is none of the humming and hawing of the soothsayer about Muhammad." Another suggested they label him a madman, at which Walid ibn Mughirah swore an oath that he was no madman, for they had seen madmen, and there was no mistaking what madmen were like. Someone else proposed that they call him a poet. To this Walid ibn Mughirah replied: "He is not a poet either. We are familiar with all the various forms of verse and his words do not sound like verse to us." Another suggestion was that they should say he was a magician, but Walid ibn Mughirah rejected this idea also, saying that he had seen magicians and their magic. He does not cast spells as magicians do, nor does he tie knots, as is their wont."

The people then asked Walid ibn Mughirah to tell them what he thought they should say. His answer was that Muhammad was certainly none of these things and, no matter what they called him, the untruthfulness of their accusation would be exposed.

The chieftains of the Quraysh, although idolaters, realized that people would accept the accusations they levelled against Muhammad only if they were supported by the facts. Even although the people were hostile towards Muhammad, they would see through derogatory labels for what they were—misnomers. What the people wanted was the truth.

In those days, such was the conduct of even the idolaters of Mecca. But what of 'Muslims' conduct nowadays? We see all around us that it is governed by an entirely different type of mentality. A Muslim leader has only to level an accusation against someone and his followers take it up and spread it around

without pausing for even a second to consider whether it contains a single grain of truth, or whether the accuser can back up his allegations with substantial proof. In this way many a good name is unfairly besmirched and many a good reputation completely ruined. And where are the people nowadays, like the people of Mecca in the old days, who will be satisfied with nothing but the truth?

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The preacher of God's word wishes people well, no matter how they treat him

The Prophet beseiged Taif for more than twenty days. When it became difficult for the Muslims to continue with the siege, he ordered them to withdraw. It was then suggested that the Prophet bring down a curse upon the heads of the Thaqeef tribe, but the Prophet merely raised both hands and prayed: "Lord, guide the Thaqeef, and bring them into the fold of Islam." The Prophet was likewise told of the contumacy and disbelief of the Daus tribe, and again it was suggested that he should invoke a curse upon them, but the Prophet's response was again to pray. "Lord, guide the Daus," he begged, "and bring them into the fold of the faithful."

Our actions and their outcome

When Nadir Shah, the King of Iran, attacked and captured Delhi in 1739 AD, he gave orders for his troops to kill whomsoever they came across and to loot as they pleased. The slaughter lasted from eight in the morning till three in the afternoon, and resulted in the death of 30,000 people. The scenes of arson and carnage were terrible to witness. On May! 26, 1739, when Nadir Shah departed from Delhi, the spoils he took with him amounted to thirty crore rupees worth of gold, silver and diamonds. The Peacock Throne constructed by Shah Jahan was also transported to Iran on this occasion.

It is said that when the people of Delhi suffered this terrible affliction, some of them went to see the famous scholar, Mirza Mazhar Jan Janan and asked him to offer a prayer that they should be released from persecution to which Nadir Shah was subjecting them. But all Mirza Jan Janan had to say to them was that the outcome of their own actions had taken on the form of Nadir.

The Mughal state had grown corrupt and inefficient and as a result had become defenceless. Ghulam Husain, one of the most important Indian writers of the mid-eighteenth century described its condition thus: "The roads and passes being neglected, everyone passed and repassed, unobserved; no intelligence was forwarded to court of what was happening; and neither Emperor nor Minister ever asked why no intelligence of that kind ever reached their ears." In fact, the Emperor and his courtiers conducted themselves so inefficiently in the face of an imminent invasion as to seem almost imbecilic. The Persian army had reached a point just a few miles out of Delhi before they managed to shake off their lethargy. When Nadir found no concerted attempt to oppose him, it is little wonder that he acted as he did.

When any nation suffers such moral degradation, it ceases to be effective as an active force. With continual dissension in the ranks, no army can act with the strength of unity. Once the rot has set in, there is an increasing tendency for the common good to be sacrificed for personal interests. The members of such a society are without principle and it is strength, not truth to which they bow. Such a nation is like rotten wood, eaten away by decay and destined to disappear from the face of the earth.

A page from history

Two of the most powerful Muslim rulers of the fourteenth century were Taimur Lang (1336-1405), born in Samarkand and belonging to the family of Chengiz Khan, and Bayezid I (1389-1402), born in Anatolia and ruling over Adrinopal. Taimur, envious of Bayezid's Asian territory, wished to conquer it, and this led to conspiracies and counter-conspiracies, each associating with other's enemies. The culmination was a fierce and prolonged battle at Ankara which ended on the 20th of July, 1402, when Bayezid was taken prisoner. Taimur added zest to his victory by incarcerating his vanquished foe in an iron cage and displaying him in it on all his journeys. Crushed by such humiliating treatment, Bayezid died eight months later. Taimur himself lived only another two and a half years after his victory. His ultimate destination was no different from that to which he had despatched the vanquished Sultan.

According to a noted historian, the battle at Ankara had been a clash between giants, both sides fighting with equal courage and ferocity and the death toll finally mounting to almost one and a half lakhs. Death and destruction were everywhere and the carnage was terrible to behold. Some blamed Taimur, while others blamed Bayezid for these enormous losses, but, no matter where the responsibility lies, it was the entire Islamic world which had had to suffer the setback.

Europe had been on the verge of being turned into an Islamic continent by the Ottoman Turks, and, with Taimur ruling over the entire eastern region and Bayezid holding sway over the west, (having extended the boundaries of his Islamic domain as far as the Danube in Hungary), it only needed these two brave and powerful kings to extend their empires to the east and west respectively for the whole world to be brought under Islamic domination. As it was, the conflict between them obviated any such possibility, and Europe instead became a Christian stronghold.

This is one of the great lessons of history, but as far as Muslims are concerned, it has fallen on deaf ears. In-fighting continues to be the principal factor in their downfall and they are all too ready to complain of the conduct of others. They do not wish to accept the fact – which is staring them in the face – that any

harm which befalls Muslims is due to Muslims. Things are no different now from what they were in the past. They would do well to give some consideration to the thought that the seemingly tremendous advantages of the victor over the vanquished will be set entirely at naught in the Hereafter, for both victor and vanquished will be compelled to appear in the court of their Lord as equals – as two humble servants of the Almighty. And, as in the case of Taimur and Bayezid, it may be sooner than they imagine. (126:14)

Accepting disappointment

Although from the very beginning, Muslims were required to offer prayers, the stipulation of five times a day was made for the first time during *Mi'raj* (the Night Journey of the Holy Prophet,) and it was only after the Muslims' Emigration to Medina that they started saying their prayers regularly, five times a day. At the outset, the practice had been for Muslims to make their own way to the mosque when the time for prayers drew near. But, eventually, there had to be some means of announcing the prayer so that the act of worship might assume a regular, established form. The Prophet consulted with the people on this matter. Some suggested that a horn should be blown, while others said that a fire should be lit on high ground. Several other suggestions of this nature were made, none of which met with the Prophet's approval.

Shortly after this, the words of the Adhan, or call to prayer, were inspired in one Abdullah ibn Zayd, one of the Prophet's companions. In a dream, he saw a man clad in green with whom he was discussing the Call to Prayer. The man told him that the best method would be for them to recite the invocations of the Call to Prayer, beginning with "Allahu Akbar" and ending with "There is no God save Allah," and he thereupon recited them all for the benefit of the Prophet's companion. This is the same Call to Prayer that is still issued in a loud voice at the time of prayer.

Abdullah came to the Prophet and related what he had seen. The Prophet assured him that what he had seen in his dream was true, and immediately gave his approval to the Call to Prayer taking this form. Naturally, Abdullah ibn Zayd would have liked to have been appointed himself to issue the Call to Prayer. But the Prophet appointed Bilal as the Muazzin, or "Crier," explaining to 'Abdullah that the reason for this was that, of the two, Bilal had the louder voice. Abdullah was quite entitled to think that since he had received the good news of the Call to Prayer, it was, therefore, his right to be the one to deliver the Call. But the purpose of the Call to Prayer was not to reward anyone but announce the time for prayer, hence the appointment of someone with a loud voice. This decision was a disappointment to 'Abdullah ibn Zayd, but he accepted it. Indeed, the key to success in life is just such acceptance. A

community whose members are willing to relinquish their own claims in favour of one who is more deserving, is sure to go far on the road to progress.

20 April-May 1994

GOD ARISES

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

This book, the result of 30 years spent by the author in exhaustive research, attempts to present the basic teachings of religion in the light of modern knowledge and in a manner consistent with modern scientific method. After a thorough investigation of the subject, the writer has reached the conclusion that religious teachings are, academically, valid and as understandable and intellectually acceptable as any of the theories propounded by men of science.

"... in the fourteen hundred years of Islamic history, innumerable books on Islam have appeared. There are just a few books calling mankind to God which are clearly distinguishable from the rest because of the clarity and force with which they make their appeal. Without doubt, this book is one of that kind."

Al-Ahram, (Cairo)

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Position of Woman in Shari'ah – I

QUR'ANIC VERSES

The Qur'an and Hadith give detailed commandments regarding women, and also lay down clear guidelines for the relationship between men and women. The following quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith highlight the most important aspects of feminine virtue and the standing which a woman should have vis-a-vis her husband and father:

Treat them with kindness; for even if you dislike them; it may be that you dislike a thing which Allah has meant for your own abundant good.¹

Women shall with justice have rights similar to those exercised against them, although men have a degree (of advantage) above women. Allah is mighty and wise.²

Men shall have a share in what their parents and kinsmen leave; and women shall have a share in what their parents and kinsmen leave; whether it be little or much, it is legally theirs.³

And among His signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts).⁴

Those that do evil shall be rewarded with like evil; but those that have faith and do good works, both men and women, shall enter the Gardens of Paradise and receive blessings without measure.⁵

1. Qur'an, 4:19.
2. Qur'an, 2:228.
3. Qur'an, 4:7.
4. Qur'an, 30:21
5. Qur'an, 40:40

But the believers who do good works, whether men or women, shall enter the gardens of Paradise. They shall not suffer the least injustice.¹

We shall reward the steadfast according to their noblest deeds. Be they men or women, those that embrace the faith and do what is right.

We will surely grant a happy life; We shall reward them according to their noblest actions.²

The true believers, both men and women, are friends to each other. They enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil; they attend to their prayers and pay the alms-tax and obey Allah and His apostle. On these Allah will have mercy. He is mighty and wise.³

I will deny no man or woman among you the reward of their labour. You are the offspring of one another. Those that fled their homes or were expelled from them, and those that suffered persecution and fought and died for My cause, shall be forgiven their sins and admitted to gardens watered by running streams, as a reward from Allah; it is He who holds the richest recompense.⁴

WORDS OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

The first four of the following sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, stress the high standard of conduct which a man is meant to maintain in his relations with women:

Only a man of noble character will honour women, and only a man of base intentions will dishonour them. ⁵

The best among you is he who is best for his family. For my family, I am the best of all of you.⁶

1. Qur'an, 4:124.
2. Qur'an, 16:97.
3. Qur'an, 9:71.
4. Qur'an, 3:195.
5. *Thn Majah, Sunan, Kitab an-Nikah, 1/636.*
6. *Kanz al-'Ummal, 16/371.*

No believing man should hate a believing woman, for if there is any habit of hers that displeases him, there will be some other habit of hers which pleases him. ¹

The most perfect man of religion is one who excels in character. The best among you is he who gives the best treatment to his womenfolk.²

According to Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet considered a woman good if

she was a delight to her husband's gaze, obeyed his wishes when something had to be done for him, and placed her person and her wealth entirely at his disposal. ³

The following traditions give a clear indication of the position that a woman occupies in Islam.

Everything in this world is a piece of property, or a possession. The best possession in the world is a pious woman.⁴

Shall I not tell you what the best form of wealth is? It is a pious woman who is a delight to her husband's eyes, who obeys when asked to do anything, and who looks after his interests when he is away.⁵

When it was revealed in the Qur'an that punishment awaited those who heaped up gold and silver, certain of the Companions said that if they could find out which form of wealth was better, they would accumulate that instead. At this the Prophet said, 'The best thing one could have is a tongue which expresses remembrance, a heart which gives thanks and a believing woman who helps one to be more steadfast in one's faith.'⁶

1. Muslim, *Sahih, Kitab ar-Rada'*, 2/1091.
2. At-Tirmidhi, *Sahih, Abwab ar-Rada'*, 2/1091.
3. An-Nasa'i, *Sunan, Kitab an-Nikah*, 6/68.
4. Ibid., p. 69.
5. Ibn Majah, *Sunan, Kitab an-Nikah*, 1/596.
6. At-Tirmidhi, *Sahih, Abwab at-Tafsir*, 11/238.

Next to piety itself, the best thing that a believer can find is a pious wife. She should be such that if he asks her to do anything, she obeys, and when he looks at her she should make him happy. When she swears upon him, she should fulfill her pledge and, in the absence of her husband, she should devote herself earnestly to keeping his wealth and preserving her chastity. ¹

They have found all the good of this world and the hereafter who are in possession of these four things: a heart that gives thanks, a tongue that remembers God, a body which is patient when persecuted, and a wife who can be trusted to remain chaste and refrain from misusing her

husband's wealth.²

Treat women well, for they have been created from a rib. The rib is most curved in its upper part, so that if you try to straighten it out, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain intact.

Therefore, follow my advice on giving women fair treatment.³

Women are the other half of men.⁴

Fear God in respect of women.⁵

Heaven lies beneath the feet of mothers.⁶ (i.e. those who serve their mothers well are deserving of Paradise)

One who brings up three daughters, teaches them good manners and morals, arranges their marriages and treats them with fairness, deserves to be ushered into Paradise.⁷

If a man to whom a girl is born neither buries her alive, humiliates her, nor gives his sons preference over her, he will be allowed to enter heaven by God, as a reward.⁸

1. Ibn Majah, *Sunan, Kitab an-Nikah*, 1/596.
2. Al-Haythami, *Majma' ai-Zawa'id wa Manba' ai-Fawa'id, Kitab an-Nikah*, 4/273.
3. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih, Kitab an-Nikah*.
4. Abu Dawud, *Sunan, Kitab at-Taharah*, 1/61.
5. Ibn Majah, *Sunan, Kitab ai-Manasik*, 2/1025.
6. Ialaluddin al-Suyuti, *Ai-Jami' as-Saghir fi Ahadith ai-Bashir an-Nadhir*, 1/536.
7. Abu Dawud, *Sunan, Kitab ai-Adab*, 4/338.
8. Ibid., p. 337.

Shall I not tell you what the best object of your charity is? It is your own daughter who has returned to you as a widow, or a divorcee, and who has no one to earn for her except you.¹ (That is, to spend on a daughter in need is the best form of charity).

When a man is tested through his daughters by God, and he treats them well, his actions will guard him from hellfire.²

1. Ibn Majah, *Sunan, Kitab ai-Adab*, 2/1209-10.

2. At-Tirmidhi, *Sahih, Abwab ai-Birr wa as-Silah*, 8/105.

THE QUALITIES OF A BELIEVING WOMAN

Umm Salmah, the Prophet Muhammad's wife, once remarked to the Prophet, 'I hear of God mentioning men but not women.' It was in this context that the following verse was revealed to the Prophet:

I will deny no man or woman among you the reward of their labours.
You are members, one of another.³

3. Qur'an, 3:195.

This makes it clear that, although males and females differ from one another biologically, they are equal in terms of human status, they have a definite partnership with one another, and there is no distinction made between them as regards their respective rights. They are, in fact, each other's lifetime companions.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE DIVISION OF LABOUR

Within the social framework, however, Islam – to the extent that it is both natural and practical – has adopted the division of labour in respect of the sexes, the man's field of activity being basically external to the home, while the woman's is domestic. This division, however, has never been intended as a form of discriminatory treatment. Its main purpose has always been to preserve the distinctive characteristics of both the sexes, while deploying their respective talents and skills in the most socially useful manner.

This enables both sexes to make the best use of their innate capabilities without causing any undue disruption in the family or in society. In modern parlance, this is a form of managerial optimization rather than of sexual discrimination. For this principle to be effective, the spheres of activity of men and women have had to be quite different and, of course, separate from each other. That is to say that the man's field of activity is in the outside world, while the woman's is in the home. This traditional distinction has been so often cited by feminist as an inhibiting factor in women's lives that the true meaning of equality has been lost sight of. After all, it will be the very same virtues in thought, word and deed which will be prerequisites for both sexes to enter Paradise. If the qualities of piety, humility, honesty, patience and compassion are demanded of men, they will in like measure be demanded of women. The fact that men and women

function in different spheres has no bearing whatsoever on the ultimate equality – equality in the eyes of God.

BASIC ATTRIBUTES OF MEN AND WOMEN

The characteristics of true believers, both men and women are depicted in the Qur'an in the following words:

Men and women who have surrendered,
believing men and believing women,
obedient men and obedient women,
truthful men and truthful women,
enduring men and enduring women,
humble men and humble women,
men and women who give in charity,
men who fast and women who fast,
men and women who guard their chastity,
men and women who remember God in abundance -
for them God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward. ¹

1. Qur'an, 33:35.

These then are the basic attributes which both men and women must cultivate if they are to endear themselves to God and become His favoured servants:

Islam The initial step to be taken is to embrace Islam, which means that one should willingly obey God, leading one's life within the bounds of God's commandments.

Iman (faith) Islam begins really to take root with the conscious discovery of God, which is known as *iman* (faith). When *iman* is genuine, the men or women concerned cannot but surrender themselves to God. Discovering God as their Creator causes them to treat Him as an object of worship and to mould their thinking upon the truth. They control their desires and dedicate their wealth to the cause of God. They even stop eating and drinking the whole day throughout the month of Ramazan in obedience to God's will. Their consciousness of their servitude to God makes them remember God constantly, on all occasions and at all times.

Qunut (*sincere* obedience to God) This entails the adoption of the path of piety as shown by God and His prophet. It means the fullest concentration of the heart and mind on the will of the Almighty.

Sidq (truthfulness) means living an honest, straightforward life in the sense of saying plainly what one is going to do, and then actually doing as one has said. In other words, it means leading a life of principle.

Sabr (patience) is a quality which enables one never to deviate from religious teachings, even if one is faced with difficulties and persecution. It is the quality one needs if one is to follow the path of Truth, surmounting all obstacles which have been placed there either by the self or by Satan. It is the virtue which will keep one from abandoning the divine path and succumbing to worldly temptations.

Khushu' (apprehension, fear) is a powerful emotion which engenders an attitude of humility and submission. One comes to this state through a realization of God's greatness and His absolute power, which is in stark contrast to man's total powerlessness. The fear of God completely engulfs the believer, making him bow before his Maker. In consequence, he becomes kind to and humble towards other human beings.

Sadaqah (alms-giving, charity) is the duty of acceding to others the right to a share in one's wealth. It makes one aware that if one's own needs require the expenditure of money for their satisfaction, so also do the needs of others. One is never then oblivious to the needs of others.

Sawm (fasting) must be practised for the sake of God. By fasting, man contrasts his own helplessness with God's omnipotence, and thanks God for the food and drink which He has bestowed upon him.

The preservation of chastity. It is important as it keeps one pure and guards one against shameful behaviour. The sense of shame which God has given man acts as a natural deterrent against permissiveness.

Remembrance of God. One of the most important virtues is the frequent remembrance of God. It is not enough to have made discovery of the Creator and Sustainer of mankind: truly virtuous men and women must remember God at all times. One who has truly found God will always have Him in his thoughts and will always have His name on his lips.

The 66th chapter of the Qur'an, entitled 'Prohibition,' mentions three more qualities of believing women: penitence, devoutness and obedience.

Tawbah means feeling penitent about having committed a sin and then turning away from sinfulness. This is a very special attribute of believing men and women. In this world of trial one does make mistakes from time to time – dominated as one is by the self – but the effect of one’s wrongdoing will not be irreversible if one at once turns to God and repents one’s misdeeds. This repentance acknowledges God’s greatness as compared to man’s insignificance. Those who are truly repentant find the greatest favour in God’s eyes.

‘Ibadah. This is the act performed to acknowledge supernatural exaltedness. It is familiarly known as worship, and its object should be none other than the Almighty. Believing men and women worship God and God alone.

Itinerancy. The virtues of undertaking journeys for God’s cause are best explained in the *hadith* recorded by Abu Dawud: ‘According to Abu Umamah, a certain individual once asked the Prophet’s permission to become a dervish. The Prophet replied that the dervishism of his ‘Ummah (community) meant struggling in the path of God.’¹

Travelling for the cause of God includes, according to Imam Raghīb Asfahani, taking such action for His sake as necessitated moving about from one place to another. Examples of such travel are: covering long distances in order to acquire a knowledge of religion; emigrating for the sake of religion; visiting scenes of natural beauty or places of historical interest which have some lesson for mankind; especially undertaking journeys in order to convey God’s message to His creatures.¹

These qualities, separately enumerated above, when taken together constitute an ideal, not just for men, but for both sexes. These are the qualities that form the basis of Islam, and are the true means of salvation in the world to come.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

1. Abu Dawud, *Sunan, Kitab at-Jihad*, 5/3.

The facade of human greatness

The 'greatness' of human beings should be viewed as a mere facade which is erected as a test of man in this world to be seen through, penetrated and cast aside as irrelevant to the truth that no one besides God is invested with true greatness. |

In the days of the Companions and the generations immediately succeeding them, there was a remarkable atmosphere of tolerance. Only God was great, and people lived in awe of His greatness alone. If people criticized one another, such criticism was acceptable, for it did nothing to diminish the greatness of God. It was therefore possible for one of Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab's congregation to stand up during a speech he was making in Medina and say, "By God, 'Umar, if we detect any crookedness in you then we will put you straight with our swords," without eliciting any reproof either from the Caliph or from other members of the congregation.

In modern times, however, this is no longer so. Anyone who attempts to criticize any leading personality nowadays will find that, no matter how well founded his critics, his action will have the same effect as disturbing a hornets' nest. He will find himself the object of innumerable attacks by the followers of whatever dignitary he has chosen to criticise, and will be hard put to it to make whatever point he had felt was worth making. The reason for this is that society mistakenly attributes greatness to human origins and people have forgotten that the words routinely uttered in prayer: "God is great" are meant to be taken quite literally and seriously. Too many individuals allow themselves, erroneously, to be dominated by the 'greatness' of other human beings, whereas their sole preoccupation should be the greatness of God. The 'greatness' of human beings should be viewed as a mere facade which is erected as a test of man in this world. It has to be seen through, penetrated and cast aside as irrelevant to the truth that no one besides God is

invested with true greatness. Only those who appreciated this fact can have any hope of success in the next world.

Bowing before the commandments of God

There was a family of the Thaqeef tribe of Taif, named Banu Amr ibn Umair, and another from the Banu Makhzoom, named Banu Mughirah who, during the Period of Ignorance, (that is, before Islam) used to conduct usurious transactions amongst themselves. After the conquest of Mecca, both families accepted Islam, But, at that time, the Banu Mughirah still owed a certain amount of money to the Banu Amr ibn Umair, who demanded repayment of the debt. The Banu Mughirah conferred amongst themselves and decided that they would pay no interest (on any loans made to them) from the earnings they made after their acceptance of Islam. This naturally caused much dissention. Attab ibn Usayd as a representative of the Prophet in the area, informed the latter of the situation. In reply, the Prophet recited this verse of the Qur'an: "Believers, have fear of God and waive what is still due to you from usury, if your faith be true; or war shall be declared against you by God and His apostle" (2:278279). The attitude of the Banu Amr ibn Umair immediately changed when they heard this verse and they said, "We turn to God and waive the interest still due".

(Ibn Kathir, *Tafsil*)