

Akhlaaq; Improving our moral character.

Introduction.

Akhlaaq is an Islamic term that refers to our conduct to fellow humans and our moral characteristics. The singular is خُلُق and *Akhlaaq* is the plural.

It is related to the word *Khalq* (physical creation). So Allah wants us to perfect our moral creation (*Khulq*) in the same manner He has perfected our physical creation.

The purpose of the paper is to highlight its worth and value in Islam. In short, its importance cannot be underestimated. In fact, it is the essence of our faith. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

أَكْمَلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِيمَانًا أَحْسَنُهُمْ خُلُقًا

‘The most perfect believer in faith is the one best in conduct.’ (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*)

This itself should be sufficient. Once the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has described it as the essence of faith, we should acknowledge and grasp its importance.

Showing the importance of Akhlaaq in Islam.

In order to show its significance in Islam, we will introduce two terms. We are accustomed to the two terms *Huquq Allah* (the rights of Allah, or our responsibilities towards Him) and *Huquq al-Ibaad* (the rights of servants, or our responsibilities towards them).

● *Huquq al-Ibaad* includes:

- good conduct to parents and neighbours.
- protecting the tongue from harm to others.
- good dealings with people, Muslims and non-Muslims, in the religious field and secular.

● *Huquq Allah* includes:

- Salah.
- Sawm.
- Zakah.
- Hajj.
- Imaan.

But importantly...

The key elements that make up the rights of Allah are there to also serve humanity. No worship exists except it works towards human betterment, or, in other words, to improve our *Akhlaaq*.

Taking Hajj, Sawm, Salah and Zakah – which are commonly regarded as the responsibilities to Allah – as examples, we will show that these acts are undoubtedly done for the sake of Allah, but as we do so, we are automatically serving the needs of fellow humans. We fulfil the responsibilities to Allah, and sometimes even without knowing out, we care for your fellow brothers and sisters at the same time.

The dual function of the Islamic worships.

1. Hajj.

This is done purely for the sake of Allah. It consists of Tawaf, Sa'y, stoning, stay at Arafah and so on. But the Qur'an also reminds us to show utmost care to fellow Muslims during this ritual:

فمن فرض فيهن الحج فلا رفث و لا فسوق و لا جدال في الحج

‘So whoever intends to perform Hajj, then there is no vulgar, no sin or no dispute in the pilgrimage.’ (2: 197).

In fact, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) added these same conditions for the acceptance of a Hajj, in order to return home free from sins ‘like the day his mother gave birth to him.’

من حج لله فلم يرفث و لم يفسق رجع كيوم ولدته أمه

In addition to this, we already know that Hajj also teaches the importance of equality and unity. For example, all are required to wear the same clothing, the Ihraam. So Hajj is done purely for the sake of Allah. But when we perform this ritual, we are automatically caring for our fellow Muslims and ensuring we are not harming them in anyway.

2. Sawm.

This is described as the purest form of worship because there is no showing off in it. It is done purely to please Allah. In a Hadith Qudsi, we are informed by Allah, that because we perform it for His sake alone, He will reward us for it personally.

الصوم لي و انا أجزئ به

‘Fasting is for Me and I will reward it.’

But the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that a fast which also consists of a loose tongue is useless and futile. So the message is worship Allah and fast for His sake; but be kind to His servants as you do it.

3. Salah.

This is the identifying hallmark of a believer and the divider between Muslims and non-Muslims. In a Hadith, we are reminded that the Sajda is the closest position a person can get to Allah.

أقرب ما يكون العبد من ربه عز و جل و هو ساجد فأكثروا الدعاء

‘The closest a servant is to His Lord is when he is in prostration; so perform supplications excessively [in this position].’

But even this worship is there to ensure Muslims do not harm others;

- For example, in congregational prayer, we are prohibited from extending our elbows in prostration. When performing it alone, we are free to extend them.
- The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that when a person reads Salah alone, he is free to read it as short or long as he wishes. However, in congregation, the Imam is reminded that there are the young and the feeble in his congregation.

إذا أم أحدكم الناس فليخفف فإن فيهم الصغير والكبير والضعيف والمريض فإذا صلي وحده فليصل كيف شاء (مسلم)

‘When one of you performs the Imam of the people, then he should be moderate. For indeed amongst the people are the young and old, the weak and the ill.’

Imam al-Bukhari reports in his *Sahih* that once Mu’az ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him) read Surah Baqara in first Rak’at of a congregational prayer. One person left the congregation and read alone. Mu’az learnt of this and called him a Munafiq (hypocrite). The case brought to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He said to Mu’az:

يا معاذ! أفتان أنت (ثلاثا) اقرأ و الشمس و ضحاها و سبح اسم ربك الاعلي
‘Are you causing Fitna (discord) O Mu’az? Read Wa al-Shams and Sabbisma Rabbika.’

- The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to quicken his Salah when he heard a baby crying.

انس: كان رسول الله صلي الله عليه و سلم يسمع بكاء الصبي مع أمه و هو في الصلاة فيقرأ بالسورة الخفيفة أو بالسورة القصيرة (مسلم)

- In addition to this, we know that the purpose of straightening the rows is equality, unity and social discipline. It is humans that benefit from this teaching, not Allah.

4. Zakah.

Again, there can be no doubt that this is done for the sake of Allah. But when giving Zakah to the worthy recipients, we are warned not to destroy the reward by belittling the recipients.

ياايها الذين امنوا لاتبطلوا صدقاتكم بالمن و الاذي

‘O believers! Do not destroy your donations by reminders of your generosity and by injury (2: 264).

Hence, all these ‘rights of Allah’ are simultaneously fulfilling the ‘rights of the servants’

- In fact, no worship exists that leads to the harm of fellow humans.

-This notion means that suicide bombing is automatically excluded as a form of worship. If we cannot extend our elbows in congregational prayer in Sajda, in case it hurts the Muslim next to us, then how can it be possible to killing our Muslim brothers?

-The *Hudud* punishments seemingly harm individuals, but it safeguards the wider community. Someone has to pay for the crime; it is better that the criminal alone pays for it rather than everyone in the community.

Conclusion

Worship to Allah whilst harming individuals is totally futile. The proof for this in this Hadith:

Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him) reports that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

‘Do you know who a bankrupt person is?’ The Companions replied: ‘A bankrupt amongst us is one who neither has Dirhams nor property.’ The Prophet replied: ‘The bankrupt of my Ummah is the one who appears on the Day of Judgement with prayers, fasts and Zakah. But he would also have sworn at someone, wrongly accused someone, devoured someone’s property, killed someone and had injured someone. So his good actions will be credited into the account of the sufferers. And if his good actions fall short in clearing their accounts, then the sufferers’ sins will be transferred to the oppressor’s account. Then he will be thrown into Hell.’ (*Sahih Muslim*)

In short, Salah without *Akhlaaq* is of little value.

This duality in practice.

- The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the perfect servant (*Abd*) and the perfect citizen.
- The *Awliya Kiraam* (saints of Allah) were only successful in their mass preaching because they coupled piety with good conduct.