Ethical Values in Islam

O People, verily we created you of a male and a female; and We made you in clans and tribes“ so that you may recognize Each other: but the most honored of you with God is the one Who is the most pious of you”, (Qur’an, Chapter 49, Verse 13).

Go deep into the history of last 1400 years and you will find the imprint of Islam on every right chapter. Take, for example, the idea of human brotherhood and equality of man with man. This wide-spread belief of today is the gift of Islam.

Before Islam, people generally believed in tribal gods. In some quarters there was an idea of a supreme being; but that supreme being was almost always the god of one’s own tribe; the gods of other tribes were inferior ones. One was bound to despise those other gods, but the interesting point is that, anyhow, the other gods were recognized to exist!

That multitude of gods and semi-gods, was bound to cause conflicts and disharmonies amongst mankind, and it did cause divisions to an unbelievable extent. Theories were advanced to legalize the division of mankind into separate classes – some privileged, other persecuted and oppressed. Beliefs were fostered condemning certain branches of humanity, not because they were of bad character but just because they happened to belong to a certain tribe or clan. Different legal and social codes were invented for different classes. As there was no feeling of a Universal God, man did not have a feeling of kinship with other human beings.

The advent of Islam was the beginning of the end of such tendencies. Islam, with its emphasis on the Oneness of God, created a belief in the oneness of His creatures. Gradually the belief influenced the thought of mankind. Now the principle of equality and human brotherhood is recognized in the whole world – with certain sad exceptions. When I hear the leaders of world opinion proclaiming that racial or tribal discrimination is a sin against God, I feel proud to being to Islam which proclaimed that principle for the first time in the history of mankind. Not only proclaimed it, but made it an integral part of the Muslims’ daily life.

It was Islam which explained in most realistic terms the cause of the existence of different .tribes and clans and asked man to look into the qualities of soul, not on the color skin

On Akhlaq

Once A man asked the Holy Prophet: “What is the best of all actions”? The Holy Prophet replied: “Akhlaq”.

Akhlaq is an Arabic word meaning behavior or character or, more accurately, “moral character’. The Holy Prophet himself was praised by Allah because he possessed all the virtues and qualities of highest moral character. God said: “Indeed thou art at the highest peak of good manners”.

The Holy Prophet has also said; “You should create within yourselves the Akhlaq (behavior) of Allah”. For example, Allah is merciful: we should be merciful to others. Allah is forgiving; we also should forgive others when they are at fault. Allah treats even his enemies with love and magnanimity, we also should do likewise.

And herein lies the basic difference between an “Akhlaq” based on love of God and the modern “Akhlaq”, based on self-interest. Today nations have progressed materially to level which was undreamed of even 50 years ago. Contacts between man and man, and nation and nation, have increased due to trade, industry and commerce. There is exchange of students, scholars and technicians. The size of the earth has been reduced by modern aircrafts.

Now, motivated by the instinct of self-preservation, nations are trying to evolve international moral codes. But these codes are observed more by violation than by adherence. Why?

The answer in simple words is one and only one. We have built these codes on a wrong foundation. We have tried to build our moral behavior (which requires some “sacrifices”) on self-interest (which allows for no sacrifice). The only way to emancipate mankind from moral bankruptcy is to restore our faith in Allah, and believe in the life hereafter.

Code of Conduct

“Verily, the religion before God is Islam” (Qur’an, 3 : 19).

Islam has given mankind a perfect code of conduct. Man from every walk of life have been clearly instructed how to perform their duties, how to behave. Islamic law is based on Justice; Islamic ethics, on love and grace.

The most strict rules have been laid down for those who enter the public life, like judges, governors etc. The Holy Prophet once sent a man as a Qadhi to Southern Arabia. When he came back, he brought many gifts given to him during his stay there. When our Holy Prophet came to know about it, he demanded that all the gifts be brought to him to be distributed among poor. The ex-judge protested that it was his personal Property, as it was given as gifts. The Prophet said: “Had you gone there in your private capacity without any official credential, these gifts would have been your private property. But as long as you were my Qadhi, the things presented to you were not ‘gift’: it was ‘bribe’ to please you so that they might benefit from you.” The man had to return all his “gift”.

This clear cut rule is worth following by all public leaders. Then they would not have to worry how much a Member of Parliament may accept from his “clients”; or how much “expenses” can be spent on pleasure trips.

Hazrat Ali (A.S.) was informed of a dinner attended by the Governor of Basra. He at once wrote him a long letter, some sentences of which are sufficient to show how Islam expects its officers to behave.

“I have been told that a young man of Basra invited you to a dinner and you hurried to it. Fine dishes were brought out for you; luxurious plates were served. I never thought that you would accept a dinner to which only rich were invited, and from which poor were excluded……..See that I, your Imam, am satisfied from his world with two old clothes and two daily bread. I know that you cannot do as I am doing, but at least you should try to help me with your efforts, your fear of God and your behavior; because, by God, I did not collect from this world of yours any gold, nor did I amass any riches……

“Should I remain content that people call me ‘Amir-ul -Mumeneen’ (leader of the faithful) without sharing with them their hardships, without setting for them a model to be followed……..”

Many of his letters to governors and officers show this trend when he exhorts them to live as ordinary men, without erecting barriers between them and the people; to behave in such a way “that big people cannot use you to oppress poor ones, and poor are not discouraged from obtaining justice even against the richest and biggest man.”

Self - Criticism

In Islamic terminology, one aspect of human soul is called “Lawwamah’ (self-reproaching spirit). It is one of the surest means of perfecting one’s character and behavior. As Hadhrat Ali (A.S.) said: “Check your account (of deeds) before you are called to render it (after death, in presence of God)”. We must check our account and make up the shortcoming before it is too late.

Realistic self-evaluation and self-criticism are essential for the development of the soul. Only in this way can we save our self from being a prey of conceit and pride. Before we go to sleep we must relive the whole day, seeing whether our behavior was up to the required standard of spiritual perfection. If we detect any slip, any wrong or any impurity, we must firmly resolve to amend it at once and repent sincerely.

If we cultivate this habit of continuous self-criticism, we will progress, in no time at all, towards that stage of spiritual perfection which is called in Islam ‘Mutma’innah’ when a soul rest and

satisfaction by grace of Allah. But this self-criticism must begin before our vision has blurred, before evil makes a slave of our soul. Otherwise, we will fail to recognize the evil when we see it.

When a murderer justifies (nay, really feels justified in) his crime; when a robber thinks that, by his action, he is rectifying the imbalanced of the society, then only a special grace of God can save him from plunging into the lowest Hell of disgrace.

Unfortunately, modern society is heading blindly towards that same degradation. Social thinkers spend their whole energy in inventing new excuses for law-breakers. Stealing is white-washed by the impressive name of 'kleptomania'; sex-perversion and dirty habits are explained away as "just a protest against society". Criminals are afforded more protection in law than their helpless victims, under the disguise of 'liberty of the individual'. And the real tragedy is that all of it is done in the name of 'progress'.

Is the 'conscience' of modern nations merely stunned?

?Or, really dead

On Righteousness

"Righteousness is not just to turn your faces towards the East or the West (in prayers). But the true righteous is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Book (Qur'an) and the prophets; and gives his wealth, for love of Allah, to the kindred and the orphan and the poor and the traveler and to those who ask (for help), and for ransoming the captives;" (Qur'an 2: 178).

Just to observe some external rites is not Islam. True faith and good actions are the primary requisite of a Muslim. Faith is the seed which gives birth to good deeds; and if the faith does not create an urge in us to perform noble deeds, our faith is dormant, and we must try to awaken it by conscious efforts.

If a Muslim does not help needy persons, if he does not bestow love and kindness upon the orphans, if he turns out the people who are in need of assistance, then his claim of righteousness is just a claim and nothing more.

Often we have seen our kith and kin in distress; several times we have been approached by stranded travelers seeking shelter and food; daily we hear the cries of starving persons in famine-stricken areas; so many times we have looked upon a child whose very countenance was a monument of affliction and hardship. What has been our usual reaction in these circumstances? Have we parted with some of the wealth to help the poor fellows. And have we done it with kindness and a sense of gratitude? And above all, have we done it "For love of

Allah”? Let us search our soul!

The above-mentioned Ayat of Qur’an exhorts us to have faith, and to support that faith by charity and good deeds, based upon ‘Love of Allah’: We should realize that the fellow human-beings are in the eyes of Islam, dependents of Allah’, and that our wealth is, in fact, a property of Allah, given to us in trust. When we help our fellow brethren, we should remember that we are giving the property of God to the dependents of God. It should be based upon love of Allah, without any shade of worldly motives. A secret desire to enhance our social prestige by a charity destroys the fiber of that charity. A help given with a motive to gain political advantage is a body without soul.

Alas, how many good actions are ruined by unworthy motives!

Have faith, bestow charity; and bestow it ‘For Love of Allah’, That is the basic teaching of .Islam

Justice and Generosity

“Verily, God commands (you) to do justice and be generous……” (Qur’an Chapter 16, Verse 90). Islamic code of conduct is based on justice and love in every sphere of life. For example, it commands the trade to “give full measure and weight”. It is justice. Then it exhorts him to give more than the agreed quantity while, side by side, the buyer is encouraged to try to take less than that. It is love. In this atmosphere, friction and litigation are things unimaginable.

Another example: Islam prohibits hoarding food grain when there is a shortage in the market. It is justice, and it rules out that possibility of artificial famine and black market which are the cause of our present day society. But our religious leaders have gone further, setting the example of Islamic love and sympathy.

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (A.S.) used to purchase his one year’s requirement of food grains at the beginning of the year. Once there was a danger of famine in Madina. He asked his men how much grain was left in his store. They assured him that there was enough to suffice for long time. Hearing it, he ordered them to take out all that grain and sell it at once at a much cheaper price. They protested that his family would have to suffer from the famine if the grain was sold out. Imam replied: “Let us alleviate the present calamity as much as we can. Afterwards, we will be just one of the public, sharing with them the hardships of the famine. We shall eat when they will eat; we will be hungry when they will be hungry”. This was the love. And what is our behavior these days? Famine conditions are created artificially to raise the prices. Such people literally feast on the dead-bodies of the poor. The present day economy of the world, which is based on un-Islamic principles, encourages human greed instead of suppressing it. Islamic

love and sympathy have no room in the structure of today's commerce and industry. The people are taught from the childhood the God-less theory of the struggle for self-preservation and the survival of the fittest. Everybody is made to believe that his survival depends, not on co-operation with others, but on killing the weaklings. In this background, the strives and conflicts are inevitable.

This way of life, which denies the authority of God in our daily life, offers no solution to the sufferings of our times. The only refuge is in the precincts of Islam which accepts the authority of God in every Sphere of our life, be it material of spiritual.

Essence of Ethics

"Verily, God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin; and He forbids all shameful deeds and injustice and rebellion". – (Qur'an: 16: 90).

This 'Ayat' of the Holy Qur'an has been truly acclaimed by the commentators as the 'essence of ethics". The basic requirement of human character is "justice". It is a comprehensive term which includes all virtues of philosophy. But to raise himself higher than this lowest rung of the ladder, a man needs something warmer and more humane – doing of good deeds even where they are not demanded by justice, returning good for evil, being kind to those who (in worldly language) have no claim on him.

After exhorting to be generous to all special mention has been made of those whose claims are recognized in social life: your kith and kin. This includes all moral and ethical, as well as legal and obligatory; duties of a man towards his family and relatives. It ensures a good society by ensuring a good family.

And the opposites, the evils, are to be avoided, because a cup of honey becomes poisonous if a few drops of poison are mixed with it. A man is to refrain from "shameful deeds", and injustice. In Islam, end does not justify the means. A just and good and must be reached through just and good means. Therefore, it was necessary to warm mankind of all shameful acts, unjust means.

And last, but not least, man is to guard himself against rebellion – rebellion against God, rebellion against good conscience. Some people say: "It is a very high standard; a very distant goal". And then they decide that distance is a good excuse to abandon the path.

This attitude is the result of the weakness of their spirit. Ironically, the spirit can be strengthened by pursuing the right path only. If you want to go from Dar-es-Salaam to London you have to make a start, otherwise you will never reach there. So, if you are to achieve perfection of character, you have to start the spiritual journey – in right direction. Distance of

.goals is not an excuse to sit idle on the road-side: rather, it is a challenge

On Pride

"He (Satan) refused (to obey God) and was proud……" (Qur'an, Chapter 2, verse 34): Pride, greed and envy are the three basic evils which are the foundation of all sins and crimes in this world. All three were clearly demonstrated in the very beginning of mankind when Satan refused to bow down before Adam and arrogantly declared that he was better than Adam. It was 'pride' which led to disobedience of God. Eve, owing to her greed, was persuaded by Satan that eating from the 'forbidden tree' would be in her benefit. That also led to the disobedience of God. Cain became envious of his brother Abel and killed him. Envy led to the capital sin and crime. It is for the sake of these moral lessons that this story has been repeated several times in the Qur'an.

Pride is one of the most condemned sins in Islam. Four verses of the Qur'an clearly state that Hall is the abode of proud persons. The Holy Prophet has said: "Allah says, greatness is My prerogative, and whoever tries to share it with me (becomes proud) I will put him in Hell".

Islam has framed its code of life in such a way that pride is crushed continuously. Take for example the rules of salutation. It has been stressed that you should be the first in saying 'Asalamu alaikum'. Do not wait for others to salute you. And it makes no difference whether the other party is older or younger than you or equal to you in age. Not only this code, but the reason given for it also is a sure remedy of pride. It has been explained in this way. If the other party is older than you, you must salute him, because owing to his longer stay in this world, he has got more chances of good deed than you have; if he is younger than you, you must salute him, because owing to his shorter stay in this world, he has got less chances of evil -deed and sins than you have; if he is your contemporary, remember that you know your own, but not his, vices and sins: therefore you must be the first to begin Salaam to everyone without any distinction of age or rank.

Prayers in the mosques are another example of crushing the pride. There are no reserved seats. Whoever comes first, sits nearer to the priest. A pauper stands in the first line, a millionaire stands behind him: and in prostration the feet of the pauper touch the head of the millionaire, reminding him that in the presence of God it is piety which counts, not the coins.

Pilgrimage to Mecca is another reminder of this lesson. Poor and rich, great and small, ruler and ruled, all are dressed alike, with shaven heads and nearly bare feet, and perform all the functions of Hajj side by side.

.Thus minds are dense constantly of 'pride', one of the fundamental evils

On Greed

"And when they are told, 'Spend ye of (the bounties) with which God has provided you, the unbelievers say to those who believe: 'Shall we then feed those whom, God would have fed Himself if He had so willed? You are in nothing but manifest Error:" (Qur'an, 36:47).

Greed is the rather fundamental evil. All these litigation, all these disputes, all these conflicts, are nothing but a manifestation of greed. Greed, basically a personal evil, has gradually been extended to national, and then international, affairs. These wars, whether hot or cold; these races of armament; these international intrigues; these power blocks, what is their real reason? An uncontrollable greed to dominate the world!

Islam trains a man to subdue his greed to the greater benefit of mankind. It has forbidden "interest" and thus abolished the system of earning money from money. Islamic society cannot tolerate an economic system based upon taking and giving interest. If you have money to spare, give it without any worldly motive, just for the sake of pleasing Allah by helping his creatures. Do not follow those unbelievers who refused to help poor on the pre text that God could have given them wealth, had He wanted so. They have been condemned in the verse quoted above. Do not take a share in that condemnation by acting like them!

Alms and Zakaat are another method of subduing the undesirable greed. Ameer-ul-Momeneen Ali bin Abi Talib has said: "O son of Adam. Whatever thou earneth above thy needs, thou art just its treasurer for others". The world will become a paradise, if mankind heeds to this ethical code and changes its attitude accordingly. Also he has said: "Whatever poverty and distress in this world, is owing to the greed of rich men who do not comply with the rules laid down by Islam about their financial obligations".

Division of inheritance is another method by which Islam compels Muslims to distribute the wealth accumulated during a lifetime. The Qur'an lays down the detailed rules of its distribution among heirs. But it does not become silent after this. It says that if any poor person is present, give something to him also.

The Holy Prophet has said: "Allah says, 'The poor are my dependants, the rich my agents; if my agents will not give to my dependents their due I shall put them in Hell and I shall not care for them".

.Let us root out the 'greed' from our hearts. Only then this would will be a place to live upon

On Envy

"Do they envy people for what God hath given them of His bounty"? (Qur'an Chapter 4: verse 54).

Envy is the third basic evil; and itself is a product of pride, greed and anger. It is the most foolish of all evils. Every evil has some attraction to catch the eyes of mankind, except envy. It has no immediate or long-term benefit, no comfort, no sweetness. On the contrary, an envious man burns his own heart, wastes his own time thinking why God has given such bounties to my neighbor, and keeps awake the whole night imagining that neighbor as ruined. But all this wishful thinking affects nobody but his own psychology and health. It is a fire which burns the fire-maker only.

The inner layers of envy are worth studying. Why a man indulges in this most futile exercise? Does he think that God should consult him before bestowing His grace upon someone else? Does he imagine that he is a partner of God, and that nothing, especially no good, should happen on the Earth without his consent? If not so, then why so much heart-burning on the decisions of God? On the other hand, does he think that God's grace is a limited quantity which must be taken away from one to give to another. If not so, then why envy your relatives or friends? Why not ask God to bestow His grace upon you also as He has done with them?

Envy ruined Satan when he began burning his heart on the status of Adam. It destroyed Cain when he became envious of his own brother Abel. Therefore, the Holy Prophet has said: "Envy eats away the good deeds as fire eats away the wood".

Islam has prescribed a medicine for this spiritual sickness: love. It shows the way towards the Love of God through the love of His creatures. The best person in the eyes of God is that who is the best for the creatures of God.

It also emphasizes that the real grace and bounty is not that of this world. The bounty and grace in the life-hereafter is the real one. Therefore, you should not make the comforts of this would ultimate goal of your life. Your aim must be the 'Eternal Grace of God'. That grace cannot be obtained by envy; it may be obtained by love. Love of God, love of His Prophet, love of the family of the prophet, love of your parents and your relatives, love of your neighbors, love of your brothers in religion, love of your fellow human beings – these are some aspects of love which are stressed by Islam, to make a man free from envy and spite. Let the 'love' conquer .'envy', and be a real Muslim

Most Dangerous Disease

Satisfaction with one's spiritual performance is one of the most dangerous diseases of soul. What are the symptoms of this disease? The patient has a feeling that he has got the monopoly of the spiritual perfection and no one else is worthy of the mercy of God. According to his thinking, whatever is done by him is always correct and justified; and whatever is done by

others is always based on wrong motive and, therefore, wrong.

For example: if he remains aloof from public, it is because he likes to avoid the chances of sin and mistake. If other are aloof, it is because they are proud. If he mixes with the people, it is because he loves the children of God. If others mix with the masses, it is because they want to ensure their political future. If he berates a man, it is because it is his divine duty to point out that man's mistakes to him. If others do the same, it is because they are prejudiced against that man. If he commits a mistake, it is because to err is human. If others commit the same sin, it is because they are ignorant and irreligious. If he sleeps, it is because the body needs some rest. If others sleep, it is because they are lazy.

When a soul is caught in this invisible snare of Satan, only the Mercy of Allah can save it from .eternal disgrace

On Extravagancy

"Verily, God is not pleased with the extravagants". (Qur'an 7:31).

There is a marriage in the neighborhood. The parties belong to middle class. They cannot afford a big feast; they cannot afford the pomp and show. But oh, the strange twists of "inferiority complex"! They want to appear more prosperous than they are. Their trend of thought "What will 'the people' say if we did not do this, or did not do that? The 'name of the family' should not be allowed to be tarnished by our poverty". And so, to 'save the name of the family', the poor people spend more than they can afford reasonably.

It is just one example. This evil is not limited to the special functions only. In fact, it has become the accepted norm of life in these days. Cars are purchased – on hire-purchase, of course – where a cycle would serve the same purpose. Nylon and silk is used when the cotton clothes may prove more comfortable. Watches are worn by people who have all the time in the world at their disposal. Typewriters are considered a necessity for a man who writes no more than two letters in a week. These examples are not imaginary.

And what is the result of this spending beyond limit? The first thing is that God is displeased. And his displeasure manifests itself in many ways. Usually there is no money when it is needed most: rent of the house becomes overdue, prompting the landlord o serve notice of eviction; family grocer grumbles that his bills are not paid in time, so he will not give any thing except by cash; the doctor gently reminds that his accounts must be settled without delay. And so on. But there is no money to meet these demands. It has already been over-spent on 'face-saving items'.

There is only one remedy: Think twice before spending money. There is a test to decide,

whether the thing you intend to purchase is actually a 'necessity'. Is your work suffering without it? Are you experiencing actual difficulty without it? If so, go ahead and take it. If not, forget it.

Generosity and Miserliness

"And spend in the way of Allah and put not yourselves into destruction by your own hands". (Qur'an, 2:192).

Not spending in the way of Allah, i.e., being miser is, according to the Qur'an, tantamount to self-destruction. There are four types of people so far as generosity is concerned:-

1. First come those who ignore their own needs and comforts and spend whatever they have to help others. This is the highest stage of human generosity, which reflects the divine virtue: God needs nothing and sustains every creature.
2. Then are those who spend to satisfy their own needs as well as to help others. They are 'beloved of Allah', and may be sure of His Grace in both worlds.

A Muslim is exhorted to reach at least this standard, if not the first one.

3. Now we leave the boundary of generosity and come to those whose only ambition is to satisfy their own desires without caring about the plight of others. They are 'enemies of God'; they feel no compassion for others, how can they expect any mercy on the Day of Judgment!
4. But the worst kind of niggards are those who do not spend even for their own necessities. Such people neither deserve nor get any love from anyone. As Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq explained, "such persons practice misery as a safeguard against some imagined future adversity. It is ironic to see them inflicting upon themselves by their own hands the same hardships which they are guarding against. What a fool he is? He collects the money by hook or crook, lives in a wretched condition, earns the displeasure of God, is despised by his fellows; and when he dies, the heirs spend that ill-gotten money extravagantly in pursuit of their sinful ambitions. The miser does not get any benefit from his wealth and earns the condemnation of God for his miserliness….and, as if that was not enough, gets his share in the punishment of the heirs also."