

Perfecting Our Character

Description: An introductory lesson on the importance of developing good moral character.

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Objectives

- Appreciate that character building is related to belief and is not based on slogans.
- Understand the relationship between the prophets of Allah and good character.
- Learn the meaning of a few hadiths of Prophet Muhammad on good character.
- Identify the three basics of good character.

New Terms

- *Khuluq* - character or inner natural disposition

We live in an age where character is dead, where morality exists without good or evil. Modern society has mostly reduced morality to empty maxims: “Be cool, follow the rules,” “Just say no,” “Just do it,” “Do the right thing.”



Character is formed in relation to convictions (strong beliefs) and the capacity to stand by those convictions when they are challenged. That is what Islam provides: clear guidelines to reform individual character by constraining, limiting, binding, obligating, and compelling the believer. It provides abiding values that reform character of the individual and, thus, the society. Even the Arabic term “*khuluq*” describes a person’s character or his inner, natural disposition. Islam, if observed with proper guidance, reforms one’s very core, the “*khuluq*.”

Islam views good character to be a trait of the prophets of Allah that any Muslim would want to emulate in their daily lives. Allah praised Prophet Muhammad for his beautiful moral character. Allah, the Exalted says,

“And indeed you are in an exalted standard of character.” (Quran 68:4)

Prophet Muhammad said, **“The most excellent believers in faith are those who have good moral character.”** (*Tabarani*)

One of the fundamental teachings of Islam is that this life will end and it will be followed by another life that will be eternal. People will be judged and sent to either Hell or Paradise. One way they will be judged is by the weighing of their deeds, or the actions they performed in this life. Speaking of that reality, Prophet Muhammad, said **“The heftiest thing to be placed in the scale of the believer on the Day of Judgement will be good character, and Allah hates the (person who uses) abusive and obscene (language).”** (*Tirmidhi*)

What motivates a Muslim who has submitted to Allah? What moves a believer who has accepted “faith”? Naturally, it is what the person claims to believe. A Muslim professes to believe in Allah and the Last Day, the Day on which the scale which will be set to weigh the deeds of people. Using the most powerful motivation to encourage Muslims to pay attention to their morals and character, Prophet Muhammad said, “Let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day either speak good or keep silent, and let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day be generous to his neighbor, and let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day be generous to his guest.” (*Muslim*)

Love of Prophet Muhammad is a fundamental requirement of faith. A person cannot be a Muslim without loving Prophet Muhammad. Learning more about him makes one love and appreciate the man who sacrificed so much for our sake. A natural result of that love is the desire of a Muslim to meet and see the Prophet in the life to come, on the Last Day. A person who spends more time getting to know the Prophet and reading about his life will actually want to be with him on that Day! Addressing the deep seated desire of a true believer to meet him and to be with him, Prophet Muhammad said, **“The dearest to me and the nearest among you to me on the Day of Judgement will be those who have good moral character.”** (*Tirmidhi*)

There is more to character than respect, responsibility, compassion, honesty, and civic participation. So, what exactly is good character? Many scholars consider good character has three aspects:

1. To have a cheerful face

Naturally, its effect is quite the opposite of meeting people with a frown. Greeting people with a cheerful, smiling face makes them happy, brings about mutual love, and makes the other person feel comfortable.

2. To be generous

There is more to it than being generous in spending money. It includes taking your time out, using your position or skills, or even your knowledge and expertise in a specific area to help others.

3. To harm no one

It is easy to say not to harm others with your words or actions, yet in practice we end up doing just that – hurting others with our words and actions, and quite often without even thinking much of it. Just remember that a hurtful person has bad character, remember, “before I look at others, I need to look at myself!” Think about how common it is for people to gossip about co-workers in the office, for relatives to backbite other relatives whom they don’t like, and even parents and siblings to talk bad behind each other’s backs. All gossip is not the same in terms of sin. Hurting parents is the worst, followed by other close relatives and the neighbors.

Perfecting our character, however, requires effort, determination, and self-discipline. Remember that our character is moulded and motivated by: love of the Prophet, belief in Allah and the Last Day, desire to increase the “weight” of our good deeds on that Day, and simply to be an excellent believer.

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