

Role of Qur'an and Hadith in Character Building towards Re-evolving Prototypical Muslim Society

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Abstract

Man is the highest creation of Almighty Allah. He is equipped with the highest of potentialities and is left relatively free in his will, action and choice. He has shown man the right path, and the life of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) provides a perfect example for him. Islam, being a comprehensive way of life, encompasses a complete character system and Glorious Qur'an, as a compendium Book, contains multifarious excellent characters that teach the believers how to conduct their life accordingly. The importance of these excellent characters in Islam is so high so much that every Muslim is exhorted to possess excellent moral quality. It is on this basis that Islam brought down a plethora of universal and fundamental principles for guidance of humanity in almost every circumstance. To achieve these fundamental rights, it presents an effectual moral system that will make it easy for its adherents to achieve the desired goal. Almighty Allah however, through the Qur'an encourages Muslims to develop heart capable of discovering His pathway that governs and sustains the functional system in human generations. Every person is therefore responsible for his own actions, considering the fact that human nature is enslaved and enticed to committing sin, oppression, and polytheism. It is generally believed that Muslims without discipline and moral values are ineffective and valueless in their dealings. It is in line with this backdrop that this paper intends to explore the role of Qur'an and Hadith in character building stressing the Islamic moral values associated with them. To achieve the objectives of this research, this paper attempts to answer some basic questions with a view to unraveling the role of Qur'an and Hadith in character building towards evolving prototypical Muslim society. What are the excellent moral qualities? How do the Qur'an and Hadith advocate moral virtues such as patience, truthfulness, justice, thinking good about others, responding to the evil with good among others? How does the moral standard ensure prosperity of a Muslim individual or society? What are the factors that help grow the moral faculty of Muslim society in making them religiously inclined to good moral qualities? These and similar questions form the objectives of the study. The study also adopts analytical phenomenological methodology.

Keywords: Qur'an, Hadith, Character, Muslims.

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INTRODUCTION

Islam teaches the sanctity of human personality and confers equal rights upon all without any distinction of race, sex or color (Ali, 1430 AH). Man is considered in Islam as the supreme creation of Allah who acts on earth as His vicegerent and is responsible for implementing the laws of Allah on earth. It is on the basis of this that man is never born sinful. He, according to Islam, is born innocent and is bestowed by Allah with a free will to embrace Allah's guidance or live a rebellious life (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH). And he would be adjudged by Allah in the Afterlife on the basis of his faith and deeds (Qur'an

76:3). If his records are gauged with true faith and good deeds, the heaven will be his permanent abode. In case of his rejection of the true faith and adoption of vices, he will be condemned to hellfire. The law of God, enunciated in the Qur'an and exemplified by the best implementer of its teachings, Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), is supreme in all cases. It applies equally to the highest and the lowest, the prince and the peasant, the ruler and the ruled. No man has superiority over others on the basis of caste, color, nationality, material advantage, or gender. He is not superior to woman in Islam: the two have different responsibilities to run the family life. Both man as well as woman can develop a

very close relationship with Allah. Excellent character is formed in relation to convictions (strong beliefs) and the capacity to stand by those convictions when they are challenged. Islam provides clear guidelines with a view to reforming individual character by constraining, limiting, binding, obligating and compelling the believer. It provides moral values that reform character of an individual and, the society. Islam views excellent character as a trait of the Prophets of Allah that any Muslim would want to emulate in his/her earthly life. Allah did not praise Prophet Muhammad for anything in a manner that He praised him for his moral character. Allah, the exalted praised Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) in the following Qur'anic words:
And indeed you are in an exalted standard of character (Qur'an 68:4).

On this regard, the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) enunciated:

Verily, the most complete of believers in faith are those with the best character and who are most kind to their families (Al-Sababity, 2003).

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 their final destination; Hell or Paradise. One way they will be judged is by weighing their deeds, including their moral character or actions they performed while on earth. The Apostle of Allah has equally emphasized the position of excellent character in the following Ahadith:

The heaviest thing to be placed in the balance of the believer on the Day of Judgment will be good character, and Allah hates the (person who uses) abusive and obscene (language) (Al-Sababity, Al-Jami' Al-Tirmidhi, 2003)

In another Hadith he says:

Nothing is placed on the Scale that is heavier than good character. Indeed the person with good character will have attained the rank of the person of fasting and prayer (Al-Sababity, Al-Jami' Al-Tirmidhi, 2003).

A Muslim professes to believe in Allah and the Last Day, the Day on which the balance is set to weigh deeds that the Prophet spoke of in the Hadith mentioned earlier. 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 (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH).

It is in view of the foregoing that Islam provides man with the sublime and most balanced concept of life. It grants him a position as Allah's

vicegerent, responsible for administering things on earth as His representative and functioning as a caretaker of this great trust, which brings upon mankind an unprecedented honor.

Man as Vicegerent of Allah on Earth

Man, according to the teachings of Islam, is the vicegerent of Allah on this perishable earth (Qur'an 2:30). This world is a trust and man is its trustee. It is not a personal property of an individual or people which could be used or misused to satisfy individual desires. It is rather man's responsibility to manage the world according to Allah's instructions and promote divine guidance. This great world- - including animals, birds, trees, rivers, mountains, gold, silver, and all it contains - has been given to the care of man because he is more familiar with it than anyone else (as he is himself made of dust) and has also a genuine interest in it. Thus, because he has knowledge of the world and interest in it - -two essential conditions for a successful trustee -he can be a good caretaker of the world. When Allah created Prophet Adam (A.S.) and made him His vicegerent on earth, the angels who are innocent and do not commit sins, submitted to Allah that as man was inclined to quarrel and shedding of blood on earth, the vicegerency might be granted to them as they glorified Him and remained engaged in worshipping Him all the time. Allah replied the angels that they did not know the matters of the world. He then tested the first man on this earth, Prophet Adam (A.S.) and the angels by asking them certain questions relating to the world.

As Prophet Adam (A.S.) was made of dust and had a natural interest in the world, he answered Allah's questions correctly whereas the angels lacking this natural interest in the things of the world failed. Almighty Allah then established that, in spite of all weaknesses man alone was most suitable for managing the world. In fact, his natural weaknesses qualified him for this position. If the world were run by angels, most gifts of God put into it, which were discovered and developed by man due to his interest and need, would have remained unknown and unused. But we have to remind ourselves that a vicegerent has a duty to fully follow the instructions of his master. His personality and precept should reflect the values of his master. To act as a vicegerent of Allah on earth requires that man must inculcate in himself His qualities which should mould his manners. We have been taught that the qualities and attributes of Allah include knowledge, mercy, appreciativeness, forgiveness, benevolence, justice, love, beauty, and power to protect- and punish. In spite of inherent limitations, man can, on the limited human scale, develop in himself attributes of Allah. He can never be God, but he can exhibit Allah's great attributes in his character as Allah's vicegerent. One can imagine if man becomes mindful of his responsibility as Allah's vicegerent on earth and thus strives to inculcate in himself divine moral attributes, how high he can rise

as a human being and how pleasant and prosperous the world can become under his vicegerency.

An Overview of the Concept of excellent Character

Excellent character refers to a set of attitudes, behaviors, motivations, and skills. The term "character" actually comes from the Greek word denoting "to mark" or identify and focus on how to apply the value of kindness in form of action or behavior, on people who are dishonest, cruel and greedy (Halim, 2004). In another clime, it is usually defined as the realization of one's positive development intellectually, socially, emotionally, culturally, and ethically. In Arabic language, character is commonly recognized as "akhlaq" with a meaning of internal states, traits, qualities or abilities that individuals possess (Kartanegara, 2015). The Arabic term "khuluq" generally describes a person's character or his inner and natural disposition. However, the Islamic moral system stems from its primary creed of belief in One Allah as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. Islam considers human race as part of Allah's creation, and as His subjects. The purpose of human life is therefore to worship Allah. Muslims look to the Glorious Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet as their excellent character guides. In the Glorious Qur'an, Almighty Allah explained that:

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces Towards east or West; but it is righteousness- to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the Allah-fearing (Qur'an 2:177).

This verse underscores the Islamic belief that righteousness and piety is based on a true and sincere faith. The key to virtue and excellent conduct is a strong relation with Allah, who sees all, at all times and everywhere. He knows the secrets of the hearts and the intentions behind all actions (Qur'an 40:19). Islam therefore enjoins moral behavior in all circumstances; Allah is aware of each one when no one else is. It may be possible to deceive the world, but it's not possible to deceive the Creator. The love and continuous awareness of Allah and the Day of Judgment enable man to be moral in conduct and sincere in intentions, with devotion and dedication (Isma'il, 2016).

The Significance of Excellent Character in Islam

Islam gives very much emphasis on the importance of excellent character and its significance for the development of an individual and society. An individual with high moral qualities produces an excellent society at large. There are a plethora of Qur'anic verses and Ahadith which indicate the position

of excellent character. In the Qur'an, Almighty Allah emphasizes that:

Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones who attain success (Qur'an 5:44).

Deduced from the above verse are two important points. The first point is calling others to all that is good, while the second is enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Excellence implies the whole Islamic value system, its beliefs, ideas, ethical principles, and all aspects of life. It can be inferred from here that successful Muslims are those who struggle and exert considerable effort to practice everything which is good and to refrain from everything which is unlawful according to Shari'ah. Relatively, Almighty Allah extols the Muslim community in the following verse: You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind. You enjoin right conduct and forbid wrong (Qur'an 3:10).

Understood from this sense is how Almighty Allah labeled Muslims as the best Ummah which enjoins what is good and forbids what is wrong. In fact, the personality of the best Ummah is not only having personal virtues but also calling and directing others to the right path of virtue. This has been, over the time, the practice of the Prophets and their successors. After achieving their own perfection, they helped others to achieve same. The Prophet (S.A.W.) was reported to have elucidated:

Nothing is heavier on the scale than having an excellent character (Al-Sababity, Al- Jami' al-Tirmidhi).

There is no gain saying the fact that Islam stresses much on aspects of having sublime manners. Moreover, ethics can be considered as the basic pillar for a healthy and firm nation. A society or nation, which is devoid of ethical values always invite problems that will hinder its progress. A considerable number of scholars as well as philosophers have come to term on the importance of ethics and sublime manners in every individual and society, and considered both as the foundation of every society. Most of the scholars maintained that the first step in promoting an ideal human society is to advocate refined morality. Indeed, each Prophet brought the same message to urge his people to uphold good morality. To be more precise, the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) tells us that:

I was sent to accomplish the exalted characters (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH)

While in the Qur'an, Almighty Allah praises him of having excellent standard of characters (Qur'an 68:4). In theological terms, excellent character is central to the Islamic understanding of salvation in the Hereafter. All Muslims, indeed all human beings, will be evaluated on the Day of Judgment by placing their good and bad deeds on the scale. The character of the

faithful is among the heaviest deeds on that Day. The Prophet (S.A.W.) has in one of his traditions said: Nothing is heavier on the Scale of a believer on the Day of Resurrection than good character. (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH)

Indeed, good character is one of the primary reasons that people are admitted into Paradise. A man once asked the Prophet (S.A.W.): What admits most people into Paradise? The Prophet (S.A.W) replied Mindfulness of Allah (al-taqwa) and good character. (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH)

Showing the superiority of good character and positive relationships that are even more important than voluntary acts of worship, such as extra prayers and fasting, the Prophet (S.A.W) once said to his companions:

Shall I not tell you what is better in degree than voluntary fasting, prayer, and charity? They said, of course! He said, Reconciliation between people. Verily, a corrupted relation between people is the razor. (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH)

In another narration, the Prophet (S.A.W) adds,

Hatred is the razor. I do not say it shaves hair, but rather it shaves the religion. By the one in whose hand is my soul, you will not enter Paradise until you have faith and you will not have faith until you love each other (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH).

It is on the basis of excellent character that the believers raise to the ranks in Paradise as high as those who regularly performed voluntary acts of worship. The Prophet (S.A.W) further elaborates on this matter when he says:

Verily, the believer may reach, by his good character the rank of one who regularly fasts and stands for prayer at night (Dawud, 1980).

In a similar vein, excellent character must be counterpart of other sciences, such as, law, politics, science, economics, etc for such sciences become soulless or insignificant if detached from sound character. As such, basic ethical principles like justice, freedom, equality, and rights should exist and be applied in all disciplines. Otherwise, so many problems would likely occur. Thus, excellent character must exist in each and every field of discipline. For example, there must be certain ethical manners that need to be observed in economics or business in order to ensure that there will be no practices of corruption, exploitation, and any other unethical acts. The relationship between ethics and economics has been expounded clearly by Muslim jurists like Qadi Abu Yusuf (d. 799), and Abu Ubayd (d. 834) in their discussion about the concept of justice in economics (Fakhry, 1991). There is an Islamic code of conduct which is meant to be a reference for financial matters, such as production, trading, distribution, and

consumption. There are values that must be as well observed and respected. That is why Islam forbids us from exploiting other people or using unjust method in acquiring wealth. It also has regulated the way of spending which is not too niggardly and not too extravagantly but to be a middle course between these two extremes. In terms of income distribution, Islam suggests it should be done on the basis of justice. Justice in distribution is to make sure that the wealth should not be monopolized by the rich only (Qur'an 59:7) but should be circulated fairly among the members of the society.

Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) as a Role Model in Excellent Standard Character

In Islam, the standard of excellent character which becomes the main reference is none other than that of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). He is known as sublime person with sublime character even before he was appointed as a Prophet and Messenger. In the Qur'an, Allah himself praised the noble character of the Prophet (S.A.W) in the following verse:

And verily thou (Muhammad) have great character (Qur'an 68:4).

This is a remarkable statement from the All-Knowing on the personality of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). In Islamic history, the sublime character of the Prophet is captured perfectly. He is known as an honest, trustworthy, thoughtful, polite, love of neighbor, generous, tolerant, and so on. Greatness of his character is not only felt by his associates/friends and followers, but even by the enemies and the followers of other religions such as Judaism and Christianity. Quite a lot of events are recorded manifesting his compassion to Jews, Christians, and Quraish infidels. This is so amazing to such an extent that some of these groups voluntarily embraced Islam at their will. Being the Prophet Muhammad as a role model in building a high standard of excellent characters, the expression of his beloved wife, A'ishah (R.A.) suffices us.

The character of the prophet is the Quran (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH).

So the Prophet was actually a walking Qur'an and his overall character is the real embodiment of the concept of moral values scattered on almost every page of the Qur'an.

It is important to note that the Sunnah of the Prophet (S.A.W.) comprises various terms of excellent character in Islam such as behavior, morality and attitudes, among others. Abu Huraira (R.A.) reported that the Messenger of Allah, (S.A.W.) encouraged Muslims in these words:

Be devout and you will be the most pious of people. Be content and you will be the most grateful of people. Love for people what you love for yourself and you will be a believer. Behave well with your neighbors and you

will be a Muslim. Laugh less, for too much laughter will deaden the heart (Sunan Ibn Majah, ND).

Ammar Ibn Yasir, (R.A.) further explained: Whoever has three qualities will have completed the faith: being fair to others, offering peace to the world, and spending in charity even while poor (Al-Bukhari M. , 2003).

Al-Zubayr Ibn al-‘Awwam (R.A.) also reported that the Messenger of Allah, (S.A.W.) said: Lurking towards you are the diseases of the nations before you. Envy and hatred is the razor. I do not say it shaves hair, but rather it shaves the religion. By the one in whose hand is my soul, you will not enter Paradise until you have faith and you will not have faith until you love each other. Shall I tell you what can affirm that for you? Spread peace between yourselves (Ahmad Hanbal, 1995).

‘Iyad Ibn Himar (R.A.) reported that the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.) explained: Verily, Allah has revealed to me that you must be humble towards one another, so that no one oppresses another or boasts to another (Muslim, 2003).

Abu Burda (R.A.) reported that the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W) said: Make things easy and do not make things difficult. Give glad tidings and do not repel people. Cooperate with each other and do not become divided (Al-Bukhari M. , 2003).

In a nutshell, no matter whichever walk of life it is, whatever situation of life it is, a Muslim is to turn towards the mirror of the personality of Muhammad (S.A.W.) and find that particular piece of guidance from it. Muslims must adopt, preach and spread the teachings of life of Prophet (S.A.W.) because it is not only good for Muslims; rather the goodwill that comes from it has a universal appeal and will help make the world a befitting abode.

Qur’an as a Catalyst for Promoting Moral Excellence among Muslim Society

In religious texts, the principles, fundamentals and etiquettes of moral excellence are based on submission and adherence to the teachings of Islam. The Glorious Qur’an revealed by Allah for the guidance of mankind, contains a plethora of instructions scattered in almost all pages of the Qur’an that directly or otherwise command Muslims to embrace moral excellence in all spheres of life. The implementation of these high standard morals is largely defended on an individual Muslim and by extension the Muslim Ummah who are saddled with the responsibility of guiding the Muslims to the right path.

This may not be unconnected with the fact that changing our erroneous and atrocious attitude to the

profitable and unquestionable behaviours becomes prime priority of every meaningful Muslim. These instructions include but not limited to the following:

Do not be rude in speech

Almighty Allah has strongly warned us not to engage in rude speech and harsh in heart but instead encouraged us to be lenient. The exalted enunciates So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him] (Qur’an 3:159).

Be good to parents and others

After obedience to Allah and His Messenger, it is most important to be obedient to one's parents. Being polite and helpful to one's parents is the duty of every Muslim. Children sometimes do not realize how much their parents have done for them. Every mother bears the pains of pregnancy and childbirth. As their child grows, they try to provide him a good education and a loving home. Most of all, they pray that their child will grow up to be successful and happy in this life and in the Hereafter. Parents feel very happy if their son or daughter is kind, polite, helpful and obedient. If their child is rude, disobedient or lazy, they feel disappointed and even embarrassed. After all, the way a child behaves reflects on his parents. We truly owe our lives to our parents, so taking care of them in their old age should be our pleasure. The Qur'an commands us to show kindness and obedience to our Muslim parents. If the parents are not Muslims, the Prophet (S.A.W.) taught us to be kind and respectful to them. The Apostle of Allah (S.A.W.) did explain the rights of parents and duties of children, in the same way as he has explained the rights of children and the duties of parents. To obey parents and treat them with respect and kindness is next only to Divine worship. In one of his traditions, the Prophet (S.A.W.) has said that the parents of a person are his Heaven or Hell. This shows that anyone who seeks to please Allah should earn the good pleasure of his parents. To keep the parents well pleased is essential since their anger and displeasure will lead to Allah's anger and displeasure. Abu Hurairah (R.A.) relates that the Prophet (S.A.W.) once said: May he be disgraced, may, he be disgraced, may he be disgraced. Who? The Sahaba (R.A.) enquired. The person whose parents, or any one of them, attain old-age during his life-time and he does not earn Paradise (by being kind-hearted and dutiful to them)!

This Hadith suggests that anyone who gets an opportunity to serve his parents in their old-age and does not avail himself to it (to attain Paradise), undoubtedly, he is a most wretched person. Thus showing signs of disobedience or harming them, is seen as a most serious and detestable sin. We can imagine,

from this submission, what an important place respect for parents occupies in the moral and social teachings of Islam. Almighty Allah explains: Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful (Qur'an 4:36).

Do not be arrogant

Descend from Paradise, for it is not for you to be arrogant therein. So get out; indeed, you are of the debased (Qur'an 7:13).

Speak to people mildly

And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allah] (Qur'an 20:44).

Do not ridicule one another

O you, who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent – then it is those who are the wrongdoers (Qur'an 49:11).

Do not engage in bribery

And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or send it [in bribery] to the rulers in order that [they might aid] you [to] consume a portion of the wealth of the people in sin, while you know [it is unlawful] (Qur'an 2:188).

Do not spy and backbite

And do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You would detest it. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Accepting of repentance and Merciful (Qur'an 49:12)-

Return a greeting in a better manner

And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet (in return) with one better than it or (at least) return it (in a like manner). Indeed, Allah is ever, a careful Account taker of all things (Qur'an 4:86)

Respond to evil with good

And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel (evil) by that (deed) which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity (will become) as though he was a devoted friend (Qur'an 41:34).

Stay away from corruption

Eat and drink from the provision of Allah, and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption (Qur'an 2:60).

Choose rulers by their merit

And their prophet said to them, "Indeed, Allah has sent to you Saul as a king." They said, "How can he have kingship over us while we are more worthy of kingship than him and he has not been given any measure of wealth?" He said, "Indeed, Allah has chosen him over you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature. And Allah gives His sovereignty to whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing [in favor] and Knowing (Qur'an 2:247).

Do not be envious

Or do they envy people for what Allah has given them of His bounty? But we had already given the family of Abraham the Scripture and wisdom and conferred upon them a great kingdom (Qur'an 4:54).

Act justly to people of all faiths

Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes – from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly (Qur'an 60:8).

Re-evolving Prototypical Muslim Society:

Muslims are of diverse nationalities, cultures and races, but their religion teaches that all humanity is essentially equal. Islam essentially portrays the same message contained in previous divine scriptures and taught by all Prophets of Allah. The Divine revelation and the Prophetic Sunnah constitute the foundation of social order in Islamic society. That is the reason why racism and sectarianism have no basis in Islam so much that there could be no hindrance in the attainment of universal characteristic and transformation of humankind to a single brotherhood. It is in view of the aforesaid that Laluddin emphasizes that:

The conception of society in Islam is much more comprehensive, for it synthesizes material and spiritual aspects of human life and views society as an organic whole... (Laluddin, 2014)

It is in view of this submission, that Islam, being the last revealed religion provides the best and most comprehensive moral teachings that are capable of eradicating all forms of social vices in human society thereby making it a better one. Thus; there is no an aspect of human actions, psychological conditions, circumstances, rights, excellence and etiquette which has been left out of the Qur'anic moral as well as Hadith teachings. For every Muslim society to prosper it must be inclined towards the practical training for which the Noble Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) was sent to train the Ummah as was clearly elaborated in the Qur'an.

And indeed you are on a great moral character (Qur'an 68:4)

Aishah, (RA) the beloved wife of the Prophet (S.A.W.) was reported to have posited that the character of the Prophet (S.A.W.) was the Qur'an. This interestingly, reveals that the Prophet has exemplified all the teachings of the Qur'an in his life and taught his Companions to take lead a decent life. That perhaps could be the reason why Almighty Allah directed all mankind to emulate the Prophet (S.A.W.) when He says:

There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern (Qur'an 33:21)

On the other hand, the Prophet (S.A.W.) always invokes Allah to better his character, advising his Companions to practice good morality. He taught the believers that morality attracts huge rewards than ritual devotions such as Salat, Zakat, Sawm e.t.c. To further buttress the point, the Prophet (S.A.W.) was always merciful and charitable, humble yet just, giving to each his/her due yet full of compassion and sympathy for the weak, for the orphan, the deprived and the oppressed. Morality is therefore seen as an integral part of Islam. In fact, if an individual Muslim is said to be morally upright and religious sound his immediate family and people around him would as well be impacted by his moral virtues and excellent characters. The same way other communities and nation at large would follow suit. However, the wish of every individual Muslim is to guide at least one person to the right path who would in turn become a useful member of his society. This wish cannot come to pass easily; it requires a lot of dedication, commitment and determination from the Muslim society. By extension, being a true Muslim entails doing good to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) summarizes this in a tradition:

A Muslim is someone who does not hurt fellow Muslims (and non-Muslims alike) with his tongue and hands. (Al-Bukhari, 1406 AH)

As part of the covenant a Muslim signed with Allah, he also must ensure that he behaves well to fellow Muslims, neighbors and mankind in general. The Apostle of Allah was reported to have said in one of his traditions:

Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should honour his neighbor, and whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should honour his guest. (Al-Humaidiy, 1423 AH)

If anyone calls himself a Muslim and is found wanting in his dealings with others, he should check his faith and adjust according to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Building a sound character and moral values among Muslim society is a herculean task that awaits Muslim and Da'awah scholars. They should exert more efforts in ensuring that well brought up Muslim individuals are produced. Having exemplary personalities with extra ordinary qualities that are capable of influencing those around them as a role

model should be their priority. More so, Allah (S.W.T.) described the wives of the Prophet (S.A.W.) as ideal and extra ordinary women not comparable to any other women, when He mentions in the following Qur'anic verse:

O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other women. If you keep your duty (to Allah), then be not soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease (of hypocrisy, or evil desire for adultery, etc.) should be moved with desire, but speak in an honorable manner (Qur'an 33:32)

Ideal Muslim society must set a good example. Every action should portray Islamic principles in everyday life, in eating, drinking, dressing, speaking, in peace, during a journey, at home, in action, and in silence. The fact is that every individual Muslim should realize the rights of other Muslim brethren in Islam. Particularly, one should have great regard for the honour of a Muslim. The Prophet (S.A.W.) says in some of his traditions:

He is not one of us, who does not respect our elders and does not show mercy to our youngsters and is not respectful to our scholars (Musnad Imam Ahmad Bn Hanbal, ND)

Islam and Excellent Character

Islam, being the last revealed religion provides the best and most comprehensive moral teachings that are capable of eradicating all forms of social vices and building a strong human society. Thus; there is no an aspect of human actions, psychological conditions, circumstances, rights, excellence and etiquette which has been left out of the Qur'anic moral teachings (Mainiyo, 2015). The Islamic moral values include truthfulness, honesty, chastity, modesty, excellent attitude, kindness to neighbours, hastening to do good, helping people to do what is right, refraining from harming others, and other aspects of Islamic conduct have tremendously did impact on religious and social life of Muslims. Islam discusses a great deal of excellent moral behaviors, its fundamentals and its impact on the well-being of individual Muslim or community, so that the accurate image of Islam could best be presented. Religion and morality are two sides of the same coin. One cannot be a "good Muslim" and a "bad person" at the same time. The adherents of other religions did accuse Islam and Muslim for an evil being committed by some ill-mannered among them, but this does not represent the true expression of faith. Rather, it is hypocrisy which Allah, the Almighty has condemned in the following Qur'anic verses:

Among people are those who say, 'We have faith in Allah and the Last Day,' but they are not truly believers. They try to deceive Allah and the believers but they deceive none but themselves, while they do not perceive it. In their hearts is a disease (of hypocrisy), so Allah has increased their disease and they will have a painful punishment (Qur'an 2:8-10).

In another verses, Allah says:

Among people are those whose speech impresses you in the life of this world and he calls Allah to witness what is in his heart, yet he is most fierce in argument. When he turns away, he strives in the land to corrupt it and destroy crops and cattle, but Allah does not love corruption. When it is said to him, 'Fear Allah!' pride in the sin takes hold of him, so Hell will suffice him and wretched is the destination (Qur'an 2:204-206).

Deduced from the above submissions is the fact that the primary focus of the Prophetic teachings was to instill excellent moral values in his Companions and those who follow them with righteousness towards Allah by holding sound beliefs and performing regular devotional acts as well as other people by compassion, kindness, and fair treatment for all irrespective of gender, race, location and faith. When Companion Abu Dharr (R.A.) first heard about the Prophet (S.A.W.) before he met him, he did send his brother to see to himself what the Prophet (S.A.W.) teaches. His brother returned and said:

I saw him ordering noble morals and he did not speak like one of the poets. (M.H. Muslim, ND)

The successors also took the matter very seriously, as stated by Al-Dahhak Ibn Muzahim (R.A.): The head of the matter is good character (Al-Khara'iti, 1999).

Yet, another classical scholar Ibn al-Qayyim even considered the entire religion to be a way of life revolving around moral behavior. He said:

The religion itself is good character, so whoever surpasses you in good character has surpassed you in religion (Al-Qayyim, 1996).

This could be understood on the premise that being a good Muslim means being a good person, and being a bad person means being a bad Muslim or perhaps not being a Muslim at all.

On several occasions, the Prophet (S.A.W.) defined the best Muslims as those who have the best inward and outward behavior.

The best of you are those with the best character (Al-Bukhari M. , 2003).

Good character, however, must be informed by a spirit of learning and devotion to religious instruction. In another narration, the Prophet (S.A.W.) said: The best of you in Islam are those with the best character, if they have understanding (Ahmad Hanbal I., 2003).

Impliedly, to have an excellent moral character is to have knowledge and understanding (al-fiqh) of

religion both inwardly and outwardly, theoretically and practically.

Importance of Islamic Morality:

Islamic morality is as important as the teachings of the Qur'an to a Muslim. This is because the Qur'an has laid down a solid moral foundation. It contains verses that encourage moral development and discourage moral lowliness. In fact, those who uphold the teachings of the Qur'an are referred to as prosperous because of their moral qualities. Similarly, numerous Qur'anic verses contain discourse on moral qualities of a believer such as justice, kindness, patience, fairness, firmness, thankfulness to Allah among others. The Qur'an discourages immorality in its entirety. These include, but not limited to injustice, corruption, envy, malice, pride and excessive love of worldly materials to mention a few. Prophet (S.A.W.) had clearly demonstrated the importance of morality in his various traditions. He always invokes Allah to better his character and advises his Companions to practice good morality. He taught believers that morality attracts higher rewards than ritual devotions such as Salat, Zakat, Siyam. It is the heaviest deed on the scale (Mizan) on the Day of Judgment as it also brings a believer closer to the Prophet (S.A.W.) on the Day of Judgment. The Prophet (S.A.W.) regarded morality as an integral part of Islam and saw it as something that perfects iman (faith). Adversely, immorality destroys good deeds of a Muslim as all Islamic devotional activities are aimed at promoting morality among Muslims and Allah has described Himself and the Prophet (S.A.W.) with good moral qualities (Mainiyo, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The moral qualities that ought to be imbibed by all and sundry have sadly diminished in the minds of many Muslims today who are adjudged as veritable feels in the progress of any given society. This attitude helps greatly in social disorders and other vices that cause moral degeneration among the generality of Muslims. However, the practice of any religion without commitment to moral way of life is an abomination before Almighty Allah. In fact, at every point of time man needs to refer to excellent moral behaviours to monitor his relationship with Allah, with his family, with other fellow men in the society, with other creatures of the universe, and even with his innermost self. For example, moral character provides some manners in performing ritual obligations, such as, performing five daily prayers at stipulated time and also manners in reciting the Qur'an in which ablution is necessary and the likes. It shows the beauty of Islam that everything should be done in proper ways.

Muslims therefore, cannot ignore the moral behaviours because negligence of it would lead to the deviation and going astray from the straight path of Islam. In terms of relationship between man and his

fellow being, it is clearly mentioned in the Qur'an that Muslims are their brothers' keepers; thus, one should possess ethical characteristics, such as, helpfulness, kind hearted, generous, and polite to one another. Similarly, they should not be telling lies to others, spreading false and unverified news, backbiting, slandering, and other unethical deeds. If every individual Muslim abides by the prescribed codes of ethics and behaves well people can live peacefully and there would be no cases of crime such as, murder, rape, theft, incest, and prostitution and so on. Islamic moral values therefore are vividly vital because it is a basic pillar for a healthy society. It aims at establishing life's order and giving it regulation, dignity and serenity as desired by the teachings of Islam.

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