

MORAL SYSTEM OF ISLAM

Islam has laid down some universal fundamental rights for humanity as a whole, which are to be observed and respected under all circumstances. To achieve these rights Islam provides not only legal safeguards but also a very effective moral system. Thus whatever leads to the welfare of the individual or the society is morally good in Islam and whatever is injurious is morally bad. Islam attaches so much importance to the love of God and love of man that it warns against too much of formalism. We read in the Quran:

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in God 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 freeing of captives; to be steadfast in prayers, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you 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 God-conscious." (2:177)

We are given a beautiful description of the righteous and God-conscious man in these verses. He should obey salutary regulations, but he should fix his gaze on the love of God and the love of his fellow men.

We are given four heads:

Our faith should be true and sincere,

We must be prepared to show it in deeds of charity to our fellow-men,

We must be good citizens, supporting social organizations, and

Our own individual soul must be firm and unshaken in all circumstances.

This is the standard by which a particular mode of conduct is judged and classified as good or bad. This standard of judgment provides the nucleus around which the whole moral conduct should revolve. Before laying down any moral injunctions Islam seeks to firmly implant in man's heart the conviction that his dealings are with God who sees him at all times and in all places; that he may hide himself from the whole world but not from Him; that he may deceive everyone but cannot deceive God; that he can flee from the clutches of anyone else but not from God.

Thus, by setting God's pleasure as the objective of man's life, Islam has furnished the highest possible standard of morality. This is bound to provide limitless avenues for the moral evolution of humanity. By making Divine revelations as the primary source of knowledge it gives permanence and stability to the moral standards which afford reasonable scope for genuine adjustments, adaptations and innovations, though not for perversions, wild variation, atomistic relativism or moral fluidity. It provides a sanction to morality in the love and fear of God, which will impel man to obey the moral law even without any external pressure. Through belief in God and the Day of Judgment it furnishes a force which enables a person to adopt the moral conduct with earnestness and sincerity, with all the devotion of heart and soul.

It does not, through a false sense of originality and innovation, provide any novel moral virtues nor does it seek to minimize the importance of the well-known moral norms, nor does it give exaggerated importance to some and neglect others without cause. It takes up all the commonly known moral virtues and with a sense of balance and proportion it assigns a suitable place and function to each one of them in the total scheme of life. It widens the scope of man's individual and collective life - his domestic associations, his civic conduct, and his activities in the political, economic, legal, educational, and social realms. It covers his life from home to society, from the dining-table to the battlefield and peace conferences, literally from the cradle to the grave. In short, no sphere of life is exempt from the universal and comprehensive application of the moral principles of Islam. It makes morality reign supreme and ensures that the affairs of life, instead of dominated by selfish desires and petty interests, should be regulated by norms of morality.

It stipulates for man a system of life which is based on all good and is free from all evil. It invokes the people, not only to practice virtue, but also to establish virtue and eradicate vice, to bid good and to forbid wrong. It wants that the verdict of conscience should prevail and virtue must not be subdued to play second fiddle to evil. Those who respond to this call are gathered together into a community and given the name "Muslim". And the singular object underlying the formation of this community ("Ummah") is that it should make an organized effort to establish and enforce goodness and suppress and eradicate evil.

Here we furnish some basic moral teachings of Islam for various aspects of a Muslim's life. They cover the broad spectrum of personal moral conduct of a Muslim as well as his social responsibilities.

GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS

The Quran mentions it as the highest quality of a Muslim:

"The most honorable among you in the sight of God is the one who is most God-conscious." (49:13)

Humility, modesty, control of passions and desires, truthfulness, integrity, patience, steadfastness, and fulfilling one's promises are moral values which are emphasized again and again in the Quran. We read in the Quran:

"And God loves those who are firm and steadfast." (3:146)

"And vie with one another to attain to your Sustainer's forgiveness and to a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which awaits the God-conscious, who spend for charity in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and restrain their anger, and pardon their fellow men, for God loves those who do good." (3:133-134)

"Establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong; and bear patiently whatever may befall you; for this is true constancy. And do not swell your cheek (with pride) at men, nor walk in insolence on the earth, for God does not love any man proud and boastful. And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; for the harshest of sounds, indeed, is the braying of the ass." (31:18-19)

In a way which summarizes the moral behavior of a Muslim, the Prophet (PBUH) said: "My Sustainer has given me nine commands: to remain conscious of God, whether in private or in public; to speak justly, whether angry or pleased; to show moderation both when poor and when rich, to reunite friendship with those who have broken off with me; to give to him who refuses me; that my silence should be occupied with thought; that my looking should be an admonition; and that I should command what is right."

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The teachings of Islam concerning social responsibilities are based on kindness and consideration of others. Since a broad injunction to be kind is likely to be ignored in specific situations, Islam lays emphasis on specific acts of kindness and defines the responsibilities and rights of various relationships. In a widening circle of relationship, then, our first obligation is to our immediate family - parents, husband or wife and children, then to other relatives, neighbors, friends and acquaintances, orphans and widows, the needy of the community, our fellow Muslims, all our fellow human beings and animals.

PARENTS

Respect and care for parents is very much stressed in the Islamic teaching and is a very important part of a Muslim's expression of faith.

"Your Sustainer has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your lifetime, do not say to them a word of contempt nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility and say: My Sustainer! Bestow on them Your mercy, even as they cherished me in childhood." (17:23-24)

OTHER RELATIVES

"And render to the relatives their due rights, as (also) to those in need, and to the traveler; and do not squander your wealth in the manner of a spendthrift." (17:26)

NEIGHBORS

The Prophet (PBUH) has said:

"He is not a believer who eats his fill when his neighbor beside him is hungry"; and: "He does not believe whose neighbors are not safe from his injurious conduct."

Actually, according to the Quran and Sunnah, a Muslim has to discharge his moral responsibility not only to his parents, relatives and neighbors but to the entire mankind, animals and trees and plants. For example, hunting of birds and animals for the sake of game is not permitted. Similarly, cutting trees and plants which yield fruit is forbidden unless there is a very pressing need for it.

Thus, on the basic moral characteristics, Islam builds a higher system of morality by virtue of which mankind can realize its greatest potential. Islam purifies the soul from self-seeking egotism, tyranny, wantonness and indiscipline. It creates God-conscious men, devoted to their ideals, possessed of piety, abstinence and discipline and uncompromising with falsehood, It induces feelings of moral responsibility and fosters the capacity for self control. Islam generates kindness, generosity, mercy, sympathy, peace, disinterested goodwill, scrupulous fairness and truthfulness towards all creation in all situations. It nourishes noble qualities from which only good may be expected.