

حسن الخلق وأهميته لطالب العلم

THE IMPORTANCE OF A STUDENT OF KNOWLEDGE HAVING A GOOD DISPOSITION AND CHARACTER¹ FROM THE BOOK 'KITĀBUL 'ILM' BY SHAYKH MUHAMMAD IBN SĀLIH AL-'UTHAYMEEN

O my brothers, it is a delight for me to talk to you about *حسن الخلق* (a good disposition), and *الخلق*, as the scholars state, is the internal state of a person because humans have two states:

1. **The outer state** which is his physical character which Allah created for him, and as we all know, this external state could have a beautiful disposition, a ugly disposition or something between the two.
2. **The inner state** which can also be beautiful, ugly or something between the two.

So *حسن الخلق* is the inner state that a person naturally inherits. Just as *حسن الخلق* can be a [person's] natural disposition, it can also be acquired, in the sense that just as a person can be naturally predisposed to a beautiful character, he can also acquire for himself good character through the process of earning it by making it pliable to change.² The Prophet said to al-A'shajj 'Abdul-Qays, "Verily, you possess two such qualities which Allah loves: insight (*الحلم*) and deliberateness (*الأناة*). So he said, 'O Allah's Messenger, are they two qualities which I was created with or has Allah conditioned them in me?' He said, 'Rather, Allah has conditioned them in you.'³

As an evidence, this proves that noble mannerisms and characteristics can either be innate or acquired. However, innate mannerisms are no doubt better than acquired ones because when the

¹ Translated by Abū Amīnah AbdurRahmān Bennett.

² [TN]: The word used here is *مُرُونَةٌ* which comes from the root verb *مرن* which means 'to be pliant or flexible'. This instills the concept of bending an uncompromising thing until it takes the desired shape. Think about something that naturally coils and you will get the desired imagery.

³ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

mannerisms come naturally, they are innately a part of a person and thus require no effort on his behalf to acquire or produce. This is from the blessings of Allah, of which He gives to whomever He wills, but the one who is deprived of these [noble characteristics] can earn them by endeavouring to make himself pliable, as we will show insha Allah.

Many people subscribe to the belief that *حسن الخلق* only applies to interactions amongst creation and not to the Creator. However, this is a shortcoming in understanding because just as *حسن الخلق* applies to creation it also applies to the Creator. Thus, the subject matter of *حسن الخلق* applies to the Creator as well as to the creation. So what exactly is *حسن الخلق* in relation to the Creator?

حسن الخلق in relation to the Creator is a combination of three things:

1. to faithfully affirm (التصديق) all creedal information from Allah.
2. to put into effect and execute His rulings and laws.
3. to be patient and content in accepting Allah's decree.

The combination of these three things are pivotal to *حسن الخلق* with Allah.

THE FIRST: TO FAITHFULLY ACCEPT CREEDAL INFORMATION FROM ALLAH

Whereby a person does not succumb to doubt or hesitation in faithfully affirming creedal information from Allah because creedal information from Allah stems from pure knowledge along with Him being the truest in statement, as Allah states,

﴿ ۸۷ ﴾ وَمَنْ أَصْدَقُ مِنَ اللَّهِ حَدِيثًا

And who is truer in statement than Allâh?⁴

A [combined] requisite of faithfully affirming creedal information from Allah is that a person puts his complete trust in it (creedal information) and with a warrior spirit he defends it so as to secure himself from doubt or sceptical remarks directed at creedal information from Allah.

⁴ *An-Nisā* [4:87]

This also applies to creedal information from the Messenger. If he moulds himself on this correct disposition, it enables him to repel every doubt which the envious cite as evidence against creedal information from the Messenger. This equally applies to the Muslims who innovate into Allah's Religion or those from the non-Muslims who cast doubts in the hearts of the Muslims. Let us give an example of this: it is confirmed in Sahīh al-Bukhāri, on the authority of Abu Hurairah that the Prophet said,

إِذَا وَقَعَ الذَّبَابُ فِي شَرَابٍ أَحَدِكُمْ فَلْيَغْمِسْهُ، ثُمَّ لِيَنْزِعْهُ، فَإِنَّ فِي إِحْدَى جَنَاحَيْهِ دَاءٌ وَالْأُخْرَى شِفَاءٌ

“If a house fly falls in the drink of anyone of you, he should dip it (in the drink), for one of its wings has a disease and the other has the cure for the disease.”⁵

This is creedal information from the Messenger of Allah, and in the matters of the unseen he has no say in whatever Allah has revealed to him. This is because he is a human and humans no nothing of the unseen. Rather, Allah has told him

قُلْ لَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي خَزَائِنُ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ ۚ إِنِّي أَتَّبِعُ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ ۚ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ ۗ أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

Say, [O Muhammad], "I do not tell you that I have the depositories [containing the provision] of Allah or that I know the unseen, nor do I tell you that I am an angel. I only follow what is revealed to me."⁶

We are required to receive this creedal information with حسن الخلق and to completely accept it, and that we have absolute conviction in what the Messenger has informed us of in this hadith. The information is authentic and truthful even if some people object to it. We know with certainty that whatever contradicts what has been proven authentic from the Prophet is indeed falsehood because Allah U states,

فَذَلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمُ الْحَقُّ ۚ فَمَاذَا بَعَدَ الْحَقِّ إِلَّا الضَّلَالُ ۚ فَإِنِّي تُصْرَفُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

⁵ Sahih al-Bukhari 3320

⁶ Al-An'am [6:50]

For that is Allah, your Lord, the Truth. And what can be beyond truth except error? So how are you averted?

Another example is a report from the Prophet which stems from creedal beliefs pertaining to the Day of Resurrection:

تدنى الشمس يوم القيامة من الخلق ، حتى تكون منهم كمقدار ميل

“On the Day of Resurrection, the sun will come so close to people that there would be left only a distance of one mile.”⁷

No matter whether this is a mile of *mukbulah* or a mile in distance, this distance between the heads of creation and the sun will be small indeed. Despite this, the people will not be consumed by its heat; although if the sun were to move just by a distance of a fingertip, the planet would burn. Someone could ask, “How can the Sun come so close to the heads of the people without destroying them?!” So what is the *حسن الخلق* with respect to this hadīth? The *حسن الخلق* is that we faithfully accept and believe in this hadīth without hesitation or reluctance, and that we positively know that whatever the Messenger has informed us of this matter then it is the truth. It is impossible to compare the Hereafter with this worldly life due to the tremendous differences between the two. If this is the case, then the believer welcomes the likes of such creedal information with an open heart and with complete assurance.

THE SECOND: TO RECEIVE HIS LAWS AND INJUNCTIONS BY PUTTING THEM INTO EFFECT AND EXECUTING THEM

حسن الخلق with respect to dealing with Allah and His laws and injunctions is done by a person accepting them and then putting them into effect and executing them. He does not reject anything of Allah’s laws and injunctions, and if he does reject something from them—regardless whether he rejects the rulings themselves or arrogantly refuses to act according to them or he refuses by acting indifferent towards them— then this is contradictory to *حسن الخلق* with Allah.

Let us take an example of this: undoubtedly, fasting is an arduous duty for man because he is required to leave off his habits of eating, drinking and conjugal relations. This is a difficult inconvenience. However, the believer who has *حسن الخلق* with his Lord happily receives this heavy

⁷ Muslim, Book 1, Hadith 402.

demand with devotion. So you find him fasting the long hot days willingly, in an agreeable manner because he has *حسن الخلق* with Allah. As for *سَيِّئُ الخلق* (bad character) with Allah, then it irks him and displeases him to accept this form of worship. Were he not afraid of the consequences, he would not observe fasting.

Another example is the prayer; truly it is a burden for some people, especially the hypocrites as stated by the Prophet

إِنَّ أَثْقَلَ الصَّلَاةِ عَلَى الْمُنَافِقِينَ صَلَاةُ الْعِشَاءِ وَصَلَاةُ الْفَجْرِ وَلَوْ يَعْلَمُونَ مَا فِيهِمَا لَأَتَوْهُمَا وَلَوْ حَبْوًا
“The most burdensome prayers for the hypocrites are the 'Isha' prayer and the Fajr prayer. If only they knew what (reward) there is in them, they would come to them even if they had to crawl.”⁸

However, the prayer with respect to the believer is the *قرة العين* (comfort of his eye) and a repose for the self. Allah states,

وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ ۚ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾ الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ
أَنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُوا رَبِّهِمْ وَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is difficult except for the humbly submissive [to Allah]. Who are certain that they will meet their Lord and that they will return to Him.⁹

For this type of person, the prayer is not difficult; rather, it is easy for him. This is why the Prophet said

حُبِّبَ إِلَيَّ النِّسَاءَ وَالطِّيبُ وَجَعَلْتُ قُرَّةَ عَيْنِي فِي الصَّلَاةِ
“Women and perfume have been made dear to me, but my comfort has been provided in prayer.”¹⁰

So *حسن الخلق* with Allah, with respect to the prayer, is that you perform it whilst your heart is tranquil and at ease. You become happy when you are engaged in prayer and you eagerly anticipate it when the time draws near. When you have prayed Fajr, you have a desire to pray Zuhr, and when

⁸ Sunan ibn Mājah, Vol. 1, Book 4, Hadith 797.

⁹ Al-Baqarah [2:45]

¹⁰ Sunan an-Nisā'i, Vol. 4, Book 36, Hadith 3392.

But if you repent, you shall have your capital sums. Deal not unjustly (by asking more than your capital sums), and you shall not be dealt with unjustly (by receiving less than your capital sums).¹³

As for the third matter from having *حسن الخلق* with Allah then it is to accept patiently and contently His *أقذار* (decrees). All of us know that the Allah's decrees, which are executed in His creation, are sometimes favourable and sometimes unfavourable. Is sickness favourable to man's well-being? Never is this the case because man loves to be healthy. Is poverty favourable to man's well-being? No, since man loves to be affluent. Is ignorance favourable to man's well-being? No, since man loves to be knowledgeable. Despite all this, Allah's decrees, due to His perfect Wisdom, circumstances which are favourable to man which enable him to naturally rest assured and circumstances which are not so favourable.

حسن الخلق with Allah, in relation to His decree, is that you remain content and have faith in whatever He has ordained for you. You also know that whatever Allah has ordained for you is due to a laudable wisdom and purpose which is worthy of thanks. So based on this, *حسن الخلق* with respect to Allah's decree is that a person remains, content, compliant and faithful. This is why Allah has praised those who remain steadfast and patient and when in times of adversity they say, *إن لله وإنا إليه راجعون* (to Allah we belong and to Him is our return). He stated,

وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٥٥﴾

But give glad tidings to As-Sābirīn (the patient ones, etc.).¹⁴

As for *حسن الخلق*, as it relates to the creation, then some of the 'ulamā' define it, in particular Hasan al-Basri, as *كَفُّ الْأَذَى* (preventing harm), *بَذْلُ النَّدَى* (generosity) and *طلاقة الوجه* (cheerfulness of face). So *حسن الخلق* with respect to the creation includes three things:

1. *كَفُّ الْأَذَى* (preventing harm),
2. *بَذْلُ النَّدَى* (generosity) and
3. *طلاقة الوجه* (cheerfulness of face).

¹³ Al-Baqarah [2:279].

¹⁴ Al-Baqarah [2:155].

THE MEANING OF كَف الْأَدَى

This means that a person prevents harm to anyone else, regardless if this harm is related to wealth, body or honour and reputation. Whoever does not refrain from harming the people then he is not to be included in the definition of *حسن الخلق*. On the contrary, he is *سئى الخلق* (of bad character). The Prophet has proclaimed during the greatest gathering¹⁵ of his time that

فَإِنَّ دِمَاءَكُمْ وَأَعْرَاضَكُمْ - عَلَيْكُمْ حَرَامٌ كَحُرْمَةِ يَوْمِكُمْ هَذَا فِي شَهْرِكُمْ هَذَا

"No doubt your blood, property and your honour (chastity), are sacred to one another as is the sanctity of this day of yours in this month of yours".

If one man transgresses against another by acting treacherous towards him or physically harms him, or he encroaches on his honour and reputation, insults or back bites him then he is not *حسن الخلق* with the people. Simply because he has not refrained from harming them, and the gravity of the sin is proportionate to the rights of the person whom you have harmed. For example, to wrong the parents is the greatest form of harm that can be perpetrated against the creation, and harm done against the relatives is greater than harm done against non-relatives. Harming the neighbour is greater than the harm done against those who are not your neighbours, and this is why the Messenger said,

والله لا يؤمن، والله لا يؤمن، والله لا يؤمن! قيل: من يا رسول الله؟ قال: "الذي لا يأمن جاره بوائقه

"By Allah, he is not a believer! By Allah, he is not a believer! By Allah, he is not a believer." It was asked, "Who is that, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "One whose neighbour does not feel safe from his evil."¹⁶

THE MEANING OF بَذْلُ النَّدَى

As for *بذل الندى* then it is *الكرم* (munificence) and *الجود* (generosity). In other words, you make great efforts in being munificent and generous. The term *الكرم* is not as some people think it to be that it merely means to sacrifice one's wealth. Rather, *الكرم* is self-sacrifice [in service], to sacrifice one's position [for others] and to sacrifice one's wealth. If you see someone tending to people's needs and assisting them by disseminating his knowledge or wealth amongst them, then we apportion for him half of *حسن الخلق* because he has achieved *بذل الندى*. For this reason, the Prophet said

¹⁵ The sermon during the Farewell Pilgrimage on the day of Sacrifice at Mina.

¹⁶ Al-Bukhari and Muslim

اتَّقِ اللَّهَ حَيْثُمَا كُنْتَ، وَأَتْبِعِ السَّيِّئَةَ الْحَسَنَةَ تَمَحُّهَا، وَخَالِقِ النَّاسَ بِخُلُقٍ حَسَنٍ

“Have taqwā of Allah wherever you may be, and follow up a bad deed with a good deed which will wipe it out, and behave well towards the people.”¹⁷

And this means that if you are treated unjustly or harmed, then you should pardon and overlook. For Allah will praise in Jennah those who pardon and overlook the faults of the people. He states,

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَاطِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ

الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٣٤﴾

134. Those who spend in prosperity and in adversity, who repress anger, and who pardon men; verily, Allāh loves Al-Muhsinūn (the good-doers).¹⁸

Allah also states,

وَأَنْ تَعْفُوا أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ﴿٢٣٧﴾

237. And to forego and give is nearer to At-Taqwa (piety, righteousness, etc.).¹⁹

An unavoidable thing when people interact with each other is that you will experience some harm from him, and so the attitude he should adopt is one of pardoning and overlooking. So let him know in all certainty that if he pardons, overlooks and graciously forgoes then this enmity which exists between him and his brother will blossom into friendship and brotherhood:

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ۗ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ

كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

34. The good deed and the evil deed cannot be equal. Repel (the evil) with one which is better (i.e. Allāh ordered the faithful believers to be patient at the time of anger, and to

¹⁷ At-Tirmidhi Book 1, Hadith 61.

¹⁸ Aali ‘Imrān.

¹⁹ Al-Baqarah.

excuse those who treat them badly), Then Verily! he, between whom and you there was enmity, (will become) as though He was a close friend.²⁰

Those who are familiar with the Arabic language, look carefully at what the outcome results in, given that the اذا here denotes الفجائية (suddenness), “Then Verily! he, between whom and you there was enmity, (will become) as though He was a close friend.”

However, is every person granted success in this? Of course not:

﴿ ٣٥ ﴾ وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا ذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ

But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except one having a great portion [of good]. (35)²¹

Here we have a question: are we to understand from this that pardoning the transgressor is something praiseworthy and required in all circumstances? Let it be duly noted that pardoning and foregoing is only praiseworthy if pardoning remains the praiseworthy thing to do. This is why Allah states,

وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِّثْلُهَا ۖ فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۗ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ

﴿ ٤٠ ﴾

And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes rectification, his reward is [due] from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers.²²

So Allah associates pardoning and foregoing with rectification. Can pardoning lead to non-rectification? The answer is yes because perhaps the one who commits this crime against you is an evil man who is notoriously known for his evil and corrupted ways. If you were to pardon him, this could enable him to persist in his evil and corrupted ways. So in such a scenario what is best:

²⁰ Al- Fussilat.

²¹ Al- Fussilat

²² Ash-Shūraá

that we pardon him or we impose on him a punishment for his crime? The latter is the best option here because it brings about rectification.

Shaykh al-Islām said that rectification is an obligation but pardoning is a recommendation. If pardoning were to lead to a missed opportunity of rectification then preference has been given to the recommendation over an obligation and this is not how the shar'iah works. Therefore, what Ibn Taymiyyah has said is correct.

THE MEANING OF طَلَاقَةُ الْوَجْهِ

As for طَلَاقَةُ الْوَجْهِ (cheerfulness of face) then it is defined as a person displaying a happy countenance. The opposite of طَلَاقَةُ الْوَجْهِ is عُبُوسُ الْوَجْهِ (a frowning face). In relation to this, the Prophet said

لَا تَحْقِرَنَّ مِنَ الْمَعْرُوفِ شَيْئًا، وَلَوْ أَنْ تَلْقَى أَخَاكَ بِوَجْهِ طَلْقٍ

“Do not consider any act of goodness as being insignificant even if it is meeting your brother with a cheerful face.”²³

طَلَاقَةُ الْوَجْهِ instils in the person who meets you or is coming in your direction a feeling of affection and friendliness and it makes one happy to be in your presence. If, however, you greet the people with a frowning or angry face then the people will keep clear of you and they will not be happy to sit and talk with you. As a result of constant frowning, you could even suffer from high blood pressure. Having a happy disposition and a cheerful face is one of the most effective remedies for preventing high blood pressure. And this is why doctors advise the one who suffers from this ailment to stay away from things that provoke him or make him angry because this will only exacerbate his state. So cheerfulness of heart and face eradicates this ailment because a person who expresses a cheerful state becomes endeared to the people.

These are the three pivotal foundations of حَسَنُ الْخُلُقِ when interacting with the people.

²³ Muslim Book 16, Hadith 1506