

“I WAS ONLY SENT TO PERFECT MORAL CHARACTER”

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Description: An explanation of a Prophetic saying which emphasis the importance of good character. And good character includes our relationship with the Creator, ourselves and those around us.

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Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said: "I have only been sent to perfect good moral character."^[1]

The purpose of all the revealed books has always been inner purification. Prophet Abraham prayed to his Lord to send to his descendants a Messenger who would recite His signs to them, teach them the scripture, and purify them. God answered his prayer by sending Prophet Muhammad. God says: **"It is He who has sent amongst the unlettered people a Messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to purify them, and to instruct them in the scripture and wisdom,- although they had been, before, in manifest error."** (Quran 62:2)



He also says:

"Likewise, We have sent unto you a Messenger from among yourselves, who recites unto you Our revelations and purifies you, and teaches you the scripture and wisdom, and teaches you that which you did not know." (Quran 2:151)

This great purpose is what Prophet Muhammad declared when he said: **"I have only been sent to perfect good moral character."**^[2]

The "good moral character" referred to here is comprehensive. It includes how we conduct ourselves with our Lord, how each of us relates to his or her self, and how we treat other people.

The Prophet's statement implies there are two types of good moral conduct. The first is common knowledge. People know it instinctively. The other type is that which

completes and perfects it. This cannot be known without God's guidance through revelation. The Prophet was sent to teach it to the people as part of the message he brought.

The Prophet's guidance in this matter is vast. Many books have been written about it. One of the most famous hadith in this regard is where the Prophet said: **"Nothing weighs heavier in the balance on the Day of Judgment than good character. God hates that which is wanton and base."**[\[3\]](#)

The Prophet was asked what causes the most people to enter Paradise. He said: **"Fear of God and good character."** He was then asked what brought the most people to the Hellfire. He said: **"The tongue and the private parts."**[\[4\]](#)

The Prophet's servant Anas observed: "God's Messenger had the best character of all people."[\[5\]](#)

He also said: "I served the Prophet for ten years and he never once rebuked me. He never once said about something I did: 'Why did you do that?' and he never said about something I didn't do: 'Why didn't you do that?'"[\[6\]](#)

An-Nawwas bin Saman asked the Prophet about righteousness and sin. He replied: **"Righteousness is to exhibit good character. Sin is what disturbs your heart and you hate for others to know about it."**[\[7\]](#)

The Prophet said: **"The believers who have the most perfect faith are those who have the best character, and the best of them are those who are best to their womenfolk."**[\[8\]](#)

He also said: **"The most beloved and nearest of you to me on the Day of Judgment will be those of you with the best character. The most detestable and remote from me on the Day of Judgment will be those who are babblers, those who put people down, and those who are vainglorious."**[\[9\]](#)

It is enough for us to look at the Prophet's life, his relationship with his Lord, and how he treated people of all walks of life - his household, his relatives, his Companions, and his enemies.

Once the Prophet borrowed money from a man, and the man came demanding payment, speaking very harshly. The Companions wanted to respond to the man's harshness, but the Prophet said: "leave him alone. The one who has a right to something is allowed to speak."[\[10\]](#)

Whenever the Prophet borrowed something from someone, he would always return it with more and pray for that person. He used to say: "The only reward for a loan is complete repayment and praise."[\[11\]](#)

Abd Allah bin Salam was one of the leading Jewish scholars in Madinah. He was just-minded and a seeker of the truth. When he heard about Prophet Muhammad's arrival, he went to have a look at him. When he saw the Prophet's face, he knew that it was not the face of a liar. The first thing he heard the Prophet say was: "O people! If you spread the greeting of peace among you, feed those who are in need, maintain family relations, and pray at night while people are sleeping, you will enter Paradise with ease."[\[12\]](#)

Abd Allah ibn Salam was able to read from the Prophet's countenance the signs that he was honest, trustworthy, and pure-hearted. Such a countenance is only for people whose hearts are truly pure, whose conduct is righteous, and who devote themselves to God.

The Four Foundations of Good Character

There are many ways to exhibit good character. However, it all goes back to four essentials.

1. **Patience:** It takes patience to be obedient to God, and to be gentle and kind under trying circumstances. It takes patience to swallow back anger and exercise self-restraint. Patience is necessary for the qualities of forgiveness, pardon, and self-restraint.

God says:

"Let them pardon and overlook. Do you not wish that God should forgive you? And God is Forgiving and Merciful." (Quran 24:22)

2. **Decency:** This is the quality that helps people abstain from base and ignoble behavior and turns their hearts to that which is noble and high-minded. A decent heart will be honest with the Creator and to those he or she deals with.

3. **Courage:** This is the quality that inspires people to greatness and generosity and prevents them from succumbing to anger and rash behavior.

4. **Justice:** One needs to be moderate in one's behavior. Every noble character trait stands between two ignoble traits at opposite extremes. For instance, gentleness is a good character trait, akin to kindness. However, taking it to an excess leads to indignity and humiliation, while being neglectful of it leads to harshness, cruelty, and severity. Generosity is another good and desirable character trait. Taking it too far leads to reckless spending and wastefulness, while neglecting it makes one a greedy, envious miser.

People naturally possess many good qualities and character traits, some of which they learnt from their parents or picked up from their social environment. These qualities become part of their personalities.

Prophet Muhammad said to Ashajj Abd al-Qays: "You possess two qualities that God loves: gentleness and forbearance."^[13] In some narrations of this event, Prophet Muhammad goes on to tell Ashajj that God made these traits part of his natural disposition, to which Ashajj replied: "Praise be to God who placed within me two qualities that God and His Messenger love."^[14]

How to Develop Good Character

1. **Striving.** To strive within yourself to exhibit good character traits and refrain from bad ones. God says: "**Those who strive for Our sake, We will guide them to Our paths.**" (Quran 29:69) Good character is part of God's guidance.
2. **Self-assessment.** This means to look back on one's behavior. Those who call themselves to account benefit from it in all aspects of their lives. This is why God swears by the "self-reproaching spirit" in the Quran. Al-Hasan al-Basr? explains that the self-reproaching spirit describes the spirit of the believer.
3. **Aspiring for the best.** We should aspire to be the best we can be, and this includes our behavior. We should seek out and even create opportunities to exhibit good behavior.
4. **Substitution.** We should find alternatives to the bad behavior that we exhibit, alternatives that allow us to express and develop our good traits.

We are influenced by the people around us, by our families, classmates, colleagues, and friends. However, the greatest influence over us is the influence we have upon our own individual selves, in how we approach and understand ourselves, train ourselves and censure ourselves. This means we need to recognize our faults and our weaknesses as well as our virtues and strengths.

O God! Help us to see the weaknesses within ourselves and help us to overcome them. Do not leave us without Your assistance for a moment.

Footnotes:

[1] *Musnad Ahmad*

[2] *Musnad Ahmad*

[3] *Sunan al-Trimidh?, Sunan Ab? Daw?d*

[4] *Sunan al-Trimidh?*

[5] *Saheeh al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[6] *Saheeh al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[7] *Saheeh Muslim*

[8] *Sunan al-Tirmidh?, Sunan Ab? Daw?d*

[9] *Sunan al-Tirmidh?*

[10] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[11] *Musnad Ahmad*

[12] *Sunan al-Tirmidh?*

[13] *Saheeh Muslim*

[14] *Sunan Ab? Daw?d*

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