**May 18, 1917**

**Distinct Moral Excellences of the Honored Companions: Result of the Holy Prophet’s Teachings**

I bear witness that none deserves to be served besides Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah.

After this, I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.



Blessed is He who made the stars in the heavens and made therein a sun and a moon giving light! (25:61)



And He it is, Who made the night and the day to follow each other, for him who desires to be mindful or desires to be thankful. (25:62)



And the servants of the Beneficent are they who walk in the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, Peace! (25:63)



And they who pass the night prostrating themselves before their Lord and standing. (25:64)



And they who say: Our Lord, avert from us the chastisement of hell; surely the chastisement thereof is a lasting evil; (25:65)



It is surely an evil abode and resting-place! (25:66)



And they who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and the just mean is ever between these. (25:67)

These verses and those that follow mention the moral characteristics that should be the goal of a true Muslim.

The first verse, however, states:

Blessed is he who made the stars in the heavens and made therein a sun and a moon giving light!

This is a sample of how the Holy Quran frequently sites examples from the external surroundings in order to draw our attention towards the internal and spiritual. As is in this case the intent is to draw attention towards certain moral characteristics that man should acquire, but the words that draw our attention are:

He who made the stars in the heavens.

We are told that you observe the sun in the external environment and know that it is the source of light and heat from which other sources of heat and light evolve. You also notice that the moon borrows its light from the sun. There are also other planets and stars that you observe possessing variable degree of light.

**Holy Prophet is the Spiritual Sun**

Holy Prophet Muhammad is the spiritual sun whose spiritual strength and light has an effect upon others. Those influenced by this energy, turn into spiritual moons and stars. The Holy Prophet is quoted in the *Hadith*:

My companions are like the stars.

The companions according to their strength and capability benefitted from the light of the Holy Prophet’s example. Further on in this very segment we come across the words:

And the servants of the Beneficent are they who walk in the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, Peace!

There are other verses like this in the Holy Quran that mention the moral characteristics essential for the believer to acquire. Are these character traits merely theoretical propositions without any practical application like some other religious scriptures have proposed? For example the proverbial turning of the other cheek mentioned in the Bible although we do not observe it in practice. Has the Holy Quran presented an imaginary profile of the servants of the Beneficent and we do not know if it is possible to be put into practice? If we ponder upon the Holy Quran and the historical example of the companions, may Allah be pleased with them, we come to the conclusion that the Holy Quran is not describing an imaginary characteristic. In fact it indeed represents the character of those pure souls who kept company with the Holy Prophet. How excellent was the response of the noble lady Aisha when someone asked her, “You have spent time with the Holy Prophet, tell us about his character?” Her befitting reply was, “Have you not studied the Holy Quran, his character was the Holy Quran!” In other words the excellent examples of high morality and guidance towards their acquisition in fact represent the practice of that pure soul the Holy Prophet Muhammad. The excellent teachings of how to be steadfast, patient, righteous in dealings, dutiful, united, doers of good etc, were put into practice by him. In my opinion it is not an imaginary profile, in fact it is also a reflection of the character of the companions of the Holy Prophet who closely emulated his example in their daily lives and interactions.

**A profile of the deeds of the honored companions**

The Holy Quran has not presented us with imaginary sketches. For example these characteristics:

Successful indeed are the believers,

And those who keep a guard on their prayers. (23:1, 9)

This also is not an imaginary picture. Those believers are indeed successful. Who are humble in their prayers, who shun what is vain, who restrain their sexual passions and those who are keepers of their trusts and their covenant.

This again is not an imaginary description. It represents the character of the believers who kept company with the Holy Prophet and followed his example. For someone who has difficulty understanding these verses this is what the Holy Quran is telling us. Those believers who practice these tenets will be as successful as were the companions of the Holy Prophet. We come to the conclusion that the honored companions as a group and a nation had this high moral caliber described by the Holy Quran. This was even acknowledged by their critics while writing the history of Islam. They readily admit that the change brought about in the character of his companions by the Holy Prophet Muhammad is depicted in these verses describing the characteristics of the servants of the Beneficent. This is indeed the truth! In the thirteen years of his stay at Makkah, the Holy Prophet brought about this miraculous change in their character. What we are being told by the Holy Quran is that these were people like you whose character underwent this remarkable change by following the excellent example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

**Another Excellence of the Holly Quran**

The pure pages of this Holy Book, has mentioned the outstanding traits of their character but does not mention the contemptible habits they got rid of. This would have given a hint of their previous shortcomings. They had in fact reached such a high level of spiritual development that their previous faults were not worth mentioning. Mention is therefore made only of those excellent morals that they had acquired as a result of following the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and from the exposure to his spiritual light and its purifying effect. The words of the Holy Quran are:

And the servants of the Beneficent are they who walk in the earth in humility (*hownun*).

The Arabic word *hown* stands for tranquility, dignity and humility. This does not mean that they move about with their heads hanging down or avoid walking fast. Walking over here means someone having a good demeanor. In other words their character in dealing with other people is such that it is dignified, tranquil and humble. The use of the Arabic word *hown* also gives us a clue to their previous behavior. In the days of ignorance the Arabs were famous for their arrogance and inequity in dealings with others. Now their whole way of dealings had undergone a revolutionary change. We do not find any inkling of haughtiness, tyranny or inequity in their dealings. All interaction carried out with dignity, serenity and listening to other’s opinion is done with patience. Maintaining one’s dignity does not signify exultation. The word *hown* does not mean humiliating oneself before others, but rather indicates maintaining human dignity which is a mark of excellence in humanity. Humility means bending for the sake of others or respecting and honoring them. Some people feel it below their dignity to show respect to others. One who does not respect others, cannot respect himself. Remember an arrogant individual who does not respect the dignity of a person cannot respect the dignity of his own soul. The most prevalent spiritual illness amongst the Muslims is this that they do not respect the rights of their brethren, but are eager to get their own rights. Someone has stated quite appropriately in this Persian couplet:

Humility is part of the natural circumstances of a beggar

It becomes a good deed only when adapted by the powerful.

Our condition is quite the opposite, even a poor man feels degraded by showing humility. He thinks that if he shows respect towards an individual that person might attribute his behavior to his abject state.

**The Disease of Arrogance**

Arrogance it seems has infested the poor more than the rich. They want respect for themselves but do not want to respect others. Man should be aware of the rights of others and only take his right to the extent he is willing to give others their rights. It is not appropriate that we expect others to respect our rights but are not willing to be respectful to theirs.

In this day and age there are many who consider it quite appropriate to usurp the rights of others for their own benefit. A new philosophy has emerged that says it is quite appropriate to take away the rights of others for one’s personal benefit. A German professor has written a book on this subject and laid great stress upon the validity of this behavior. He has focused upon the validity of this behavior amongst nations in their mutual dealings but such behavior permeates into the character of an individual who is also part of a nation. In the end their condition becomes the same as it was of pre- Islamic Arabia where enmity prevailed amongst brethren.

**Human rights**

The Holy Quran has frequently drawn our attention towards the rights of others and has greatly emphasized the need to honor them. This does not mean that one should not take what is rightfully his. Awareness for one’s rights is so fervently ingrained in human nature that one is not in need of a preacher or a sermon to make him aware of these. There is however a natural inclination towards avarice, therefore it was more essential to lay stress upon the rights of others. It is incorrect to say that this verse is abrogated. Some commentators have said that this command was abrogated by the commandment to fight the disbelievers. This is incorrect for defensive warfare is undertaken only for the sake of one’s own rights and dignity when it is impossible to do so otherwise. One should, however, be ready to give the rights to others as much as he wants to get his own. This is the only appropriate way to give the right guidance for man’s spiritual development. The Holy Prophet fully recognized the rights of others even during the state of war.

This is a description of a moral standard but there certainly exist such individuals who do not want to follow the right path. Regarding such individuals the Holy Quran instructs the believer in these words:

And when the ignorant address them, they say, Peace!

This means that one should avoid interaction with such people and be prepared to defend himself against them.

The people of pre-Islamic Arabia were certainly incognizant of such behavior. In fact they took pride in responding to ignorant behavior with even greater ignorance. This was a famous verse from their poetry:

Beware the one who treats us ignorantly

We will treat him with even greater ignorance.

Islamic teachings are quite contrary to this mindset. It does not say to respond to ignorance in a more ignorant manner but rather not to respond and distance oneself from such people.

**Believers’ relationship with Allah the Most High**

The next verse mentions another quality of the believers:

And they who pass the night prostrating themselves before their Lord and standing

They spend their day in doing their business but the night is spent in standing before the Lord. It is quite true that this worship is a recompense for their work during the day. The Holy Prophet was told:

Rise to pray by night except a little. (73:2)

The reason for this is mentioned further on in the same chapter:

Truly thou hast by day prolonged occupation.

What this means is that during the day the Holy Prophet could not find time to worship besides the five daily prayers, due to his numerous duties of teaching religion. This does not mean to stay up all night praying:

Allah imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope. (2:286)

The truth of the matter is that if before falling asleep an individual remembers Allah and gets up early in the morning to say his prayer, he has spent the night in worship. We learn from the *Hadith* that the Holy Prophet did not carry on much conversation after the *Isha* or late evening prayer and went immediately to bed. Thus the hours of sleep were also spent in worship. A Muslim is given an excellent opportunity to remember Allah at bedtime and to continue His remembrance as soon as he gets up. This is as if he spent his whole time in remembrance of Allah. In stating that the believers spend their nights standing before the Lord they are also reminded of their previous state before accepting Islam. How they spent their evenings in pursuit of pleasure, drinking and dancing. What a remarkable change was brought about by the Holy Prophet Muhammad! Not only did they give up their merry making but used their time in a productive manner. After this verse the Holy Quran states:

And they who say: Our Lord, avert from us the chastisement of hell; surely the chastisement thereof is a lasting evil;

This is a prayer in recognition of and for seeking protection of the Lord from such harmful behavior.

The next verse identifies another one of their characteristics:

And they who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and the just mean is ever between these.

The rights of other human beings are given priority over the rights of Allah. Now their own personal rights are related in these words:

When they spend, they are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and the just mean is ever between these. Extravagance means spending against the commandments of Allah and parsimony relates to not spending in the way of Allah. The individual who spends his wealth in submission to the Command of Allah and in seeking His pleasure is not guilty of extravagance. If, however, he spends even a penny in disobeying the commandments of Allah he is guilty of extravagance.

**Disobedience of Allah the Most High**

It is not that one should spend on one thing and not another but rather the spending for customs one chooses to follow that go against the Word of God and are prohibited. One disobeys God in following such traditions and a believer ought not to exceed the limits. Extreme caution needs to be taken not to spend contrary to the Will and Pleasure of Allah. Neither should there be any reluctance or miserliness in spending for the Pleasure of Allah. Allah’s pleasure lies in fulfilling the rights and responsibilities assigned to the believer. Falling short of doing so and being parsimonious in spending for this purpose is going against the Pleasure of Allah. For example if one is niggardly in spending for education of his children it falls under the category of being parsimonious. Similarly an individual who spends all his resources in support of marriage or funeral customs is guilty of extravagance. The correct path is:

And the just mean is ever between these.

In another verse of the Holy Quran the same idea is expressed in these words:

And make not thy hand to be shackled to thy neck, nor stretch it forth to the utmost (limit) of its stretching forth. (17:29)

Shackling the hand to the neck means holding back on spending and miserliness while stretching it forth to its utmost limit implies extravagance. Moth extremes are prohibited and the middle course is advised.

**Summary**

Three things have been pointed out in the three verses I have discussed today.

1. About the rights of others. To be cognizant of the rights of others while demanding your own and be not the least hesitant in giving them.
2. About the rights of God. While you spend the day in honest dealings with humanity, try to supplicate at night to get closer to God.
3. About your own person. Not to be extravagant and to avoid parsimony when the need arises for spending in Allah’s way. Always stick to the golden mean.