

ALI 441:Religion and Morality (Part II)

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Outline

- Summary of Week One
- Difference between akhlāq and ahkām
- Religion and moral growth
 - Removing negative character traits
 - Developing sublime character traits
 - Developing a higher purpose
 - Transforming behavior into character
 - Reviving human moral agency
- Conclusion

Summary

- Do we need religion for morality?
 - Do we need God for morality?
 - Do we need scripture for morality?
- A person can have some good morals even if he does not believe in God.
- Belief in God (Islamic theology) helps us in developing morality.
- Human beings have the ability to know good and evil.
- Qur'an reminds us of our moral responsibility and urges moral growth.

Akhlaq and Ahkam

- The ahkam of Islam define human actions and states.
 - Acts of worship: prayer, fasting, hajj.
 - Human interactions: trade, marriage, eating.
- The akhlaq of Islam define the state/character of the soul.
 - Positive character traits: humbleness, compassion
 - Negative character traits: prejudice, arrogance, jealousy
- The purpose of the ahkam is to develop akhlaq.

And I have not created the jinn and human beings
except to worship me (Qur'an)

Religion and moral growth

- Human beings have a potential for moral growth.

Surely I was only sent to complete the most noble of character
Holy Prophet (s).

And grant me the most sublime of character traits

Imam al-Sajjad

- The role of religion is to aide us with our moral growth.

Removing Negative Character Traits

- Radhail: negative character traits
 - Eg. jealousy, envy, anger, pessimism
- Fadhail: positive character traits
 - Eg. humbleness, generosity, sacrifice, forgiveness
- Tazkiyah is the act of removing negative character traits before adorning the soul with positive character traits.
- The act of tazkiyah is a continuous process.

Developing Sublime Character

- Mahasin al-akhlaq: good character traits.
Eg. being charitable, hospitable, compassionate
- Makarim al-akhlaq: most noble of character traits.

Narrator: what is the definition of good character?

Imam al-Sadiq (a): to be kind in your behaviour, and pure in your speech, and to meet your brother with a smile.

Developing Noble Character

Imam al-Sadiq (a) was once asked to define makarim al-akhlaq. He (a) said:

“to forgive the one who has wronged you,
and make relations with the one who has cut-off from you,
to give to the one who has denied you,
and to speak the truth even if it is against your interests.”

Developing a Higher Purpose

There are three levels in the intentions for moral actions:

- a. Acting for the sake of paradise or fear from hell fire.
- b. Acting morally because it befits the status of a human being.
- c. Acting morally for the sake of Allah (S).

I became your abd because you are worthy of devotion.

Imam Ali (a).

Developing a Moral Character

- Behaviour: the actions which are visible to others.
Eg. giving charity, praying, speaking truthfully.
- Character: the state of the soul which is not visible to others.
Eg. being charitable, being selfish, being humble or arrogant.

The signs of a believer are five: precaution in privacy, charity in poverty, patience in difficulty, forbearance in anger, and truthfulness in fear.

Imam al-Sadiq (a).

Exercising Moral Agency

- A human being is a moral creature.
- A human being has the ability to know right from wrong.
 - Emotions, reason (utilitarianism) or conscience.
 - We revealed to them good actions. (al-Anbiyaa: 73)
 - O Wasibah, ask your heart, ask your heart, ask your heart. Holy Prophet (s).
- The role of religion is to revive human conscience and to urge him to act upon it.

Moral Agency and Ahkam

- The ahkam define the boundaries of the faith.

Haram cannot be made halal, and wajib cannot be made mustahab.

- Even if something is not wajib, a believer may want to obligate it upon himself.

Eg. environmentalism, animal rights

- Even if something is not haram, a believer may want to avoid it.

Eg. exploitation of resources in developing countries.

Conclusion

- Morality is a state of the soul.
- Morality is not limited to not harming others.
- Allah (s) has given human beings a moral compass.
- The role of religion is to revive the human moral compass.
- The role of religion is to aide human moral development.
- The purpose of Islamic laws is not to limit human moral agency.