



THE PROPHET  
MUHAMMAD  
AND  
HUMAN DIGNITY



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## Foreword

The notion of existence that our dear Prophet, peace be upon him, the divine messenger, has given us acknowledges humankind as the most honorable of all creations and the essence of the world. Humanity's nobility both by nature and creation is one of the fundamental principles of Islam's notions of existence, knowledge, and value.

It is evident that the incredible scientific and technological advancements humanity has made these last two centuries were not accomplished to protect and glorify human dignity. The century we have just left behind is already being remembered, even at this early date, as an unfortunate period in which human dignity was assaulted at an unprecedented level. We are being tested, globally, in a way we haven't been before, facing serious challenges like discrimination, marginalization, racism, violence, torture, war, unequal distribution of wealth, tyranny, colonization, uneven access to education, disrespect of laborers, abuse of all kinds, medically unnecessary abortions, hunger and famine. Humanity has turned its back to the gates of heaven, and now waits, desperate and exhausted, seemingly sealed in these problems of their own creation. The latest high-tech devices are useless. Enslaved by their own creations, humanity is searching for an exit from these dark dungeons in which they have incarcerated themselves. Thus, there is a need to reconsider where and how to find the light for which they have been longing and the ideals which they seek. As we



celebrate the Blessed Birth week, “The Prophet and Human Dignity” seems exceptionally important, and deserves to have a place in the agenda of our nation and all the nations of the world.

In Islam, the idea of “human” is centered around human dignity as epitomized in the Prophet’s timeless example of living, in his sunnah, actions and words. The general framework of this concept of dignity was concisely verbalized in the Farewell Sermon. In that historic address, delivered to tens of thousands, the messenger of mercy, peace be upon him, declared that the human life—a person’s property, honor, and the values of personhood— as inviolable. This was a declaration that Islam protects, equally for all, a person’s life, right of possession, and spiritual personhood.

According to the definition of our beloved Prophet, a good Muslim is the one who respects the human dignity of his or her brother or sister in religion as much as their life and property, and consider each other’s personhood inviolable.

We should remember that a person is deemed honorable or dishonorable by his or her conduct. No system can honor a person who does not, first, honor himself or herself through honorable conduct. The caliber of a human should not be measured by material and relative attributes like his or her race, color, wealth, or family heritage.

“There are some people who are pushed away from doorways, desperate and miserable, but when they swear, God makes them rightful in their swear” says the Prophet. In other words, using material criteria when judging human dignity may be misleading. The human is precious and honorable by definition. In the view of our beloved Prophet, people of all colors are precious, and the poor and the servant are no less honorable than the wealthy.

Humanity’s worldly and divine aspects cannot be considered separately.



Humans and their dignity are only complete with both material and spiritual aspects, with the physical body and the spirit; this whole cannot be divided. No humanistic thought or ideology can substitute for the privileged position of Islam in human dignity. A so called “human dignity” that is detached from transcendental values and not bound by any metaphysical principles does not assign the true value a person deserves, and perhaps even demotes him or her to an even lower degree of honor.

We are living through a time in which the human beings often do not value themselves or each other. Man has been downgraded to the degree of a tradable commodity, his dignity unaccounted for, damaged, trodden upon. As a result, in these situations our human qualities disappear, while efforts to dishonor, defame, and deprive both individuals and whole peoples of value have become policies at a global level. On this auspicious occasion of his Blessed Birth, we must remember once again that we are in need, more than ever, of once again exploring his struggle for dignity and his understanding of humankind. We must then share our findings with everyone from all walks of life.

It is without doubt that the Prophet’s example and guidance are the exclusive refuge for humanity to overcome all the obstacles we have fallen into, the only way to exalt our severely damaged dignity one more time, and the only path on which to attain the light for which we all yearn.

This book has been prepared by the Presidency of Religious Affairs in conjunction with this year’s theme for the Blessed Birth week: The Prophet and Human Dignity. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has been involved in making this book possible. It is my prayer to the Almighty God that it will serve to expand the reader’s horizons on this theme, and that it helps to exalt and protect human dignity everywhere.

*Professor Mehmet GÖRMEZ*  
*President*



*There are multiple factors involved in what appear to us as images that impair human dignity in the Islamic world, and it is no help to hold others responsible or to assume the charge solely on ourselves.*

# The Problem of Human Dignity in the Islamic World: An Insider's View

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The Glorious Lord has created all of existence for a purpose, and so has he done with the human being, whom he fashioned with an ability to know and love his Creator, to become his vicegerent on earth, to chase after the good and the right, and to turn his back to what is unpleasant and evil. He gave humanity reason and the freedom of willpower. In addition to a sense of faith, he also instilled in our nature feelings of embarrassment, the desire to protect our honor, mercy, virtue, a desire for goodness, fairness and justice. Thus, these qualities are not taught and adopted at a later in life; they are innate to our make-up and we discover them as we become aware of ourselves.

The Qur'an narrates the creation of man in the context of "the covenant given to God" (Maidah 5:7; Araf 7:172; Yasin 36:60), "the Trust that the earth and the mountains shrank from bearing but the human has undertaken" (Ahzab 33:72), "the human as the vicegerent of God on earth" (Baqara 2:30), "the human as an honored being" (Isra 17:70), and "the perfect pattern of creation" (Tin 95:5). God Almighty manifested his divine support to mankind by sending his messengers, starting with the Prophet Adam, to convey the true religion and enlighten us with a message of metaphysical knowledge, so that we could maintain our original nature.

In other words, the religion was revealed to the Prophets over the ages to confirm the original qualities of man. It teaches us faith, and how to protect our human qualities. This is what Islam being a “natural religion” means. For that matter, the Qur’an frequently references concepts like truth and justice, good and evil. These references are both a reminder of our origins and a call to return to our essence. When the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said “If you are not ashamed, then do what you please” (Bukhar, Adab, 78; Muslim, Iman, 57; Ibn Maja, Zuhd, 17) he taught us that a sense of modesty is a major part of belief and the essence of Islamic ethics.

Each discipline of Islamic science approaches the privileges that humanity has been given from respective angles, and develops various concepts to explain these privileges. *Kalam* (theology) deals with the idea that two kinds of messengers – the reason and prophets – have been sent to humankind. During a time of *fatrah* (a period during which no prophet is sent) there is a debate about one’s responsibility to find the truth. Sufism deals with the day of primordial covenant when we testified that God is our Lord before time and existence (this is the day of *alastu*). Islamic law tackles questions of *husun* and *qubuh* (good and bad). These concepts, and many others, refer in one way or another to the innate human qualities granted to us by the Divine. On the other hand, we also know that after sending the true message through his messengers, God Almighty gave humanity both free will and a sense of responsibility to make our own decisions. Clearly, this ability can be used for both good and evil, while at the same time, letting us be aware that we are accountable for everything we do (Zumar 39:7; Fussilat 41:46; Shura 42:30; Jasiya 45:15; Shams 91:8).

The most natural consequence of this freedom granted to mankind is that each person is held accountable for their own actions (Fussilat 41:46; Muddathir 74:38). If there is injustice, corrup-

tion, and disorder at the individual or societal level, this is because of what people do with their own hands (Rum 30:41; Shura 42:30). God does not change a person unless they change what is in their heart (Anfal 8:23; Rad 13:11). The Qur'an also reminds us of the temporary, deceiving, and misleading aspects of the world, and that there are many traps for every person – both in the internal and external worlds (Araf 7:200; Yunus 10:24; Nur 24:11, Hadid 54:20; Nas 114:1-6). Along with the honorable, positive qualities of humanity, by nature people also contain negative qualities like narcissism, haste, opportunism, a lack of gratitude, meanness, and violence (Baqara 2:30; Hud 11:9; Isra 17:11, 67, 83, 100; Anbiya 21:37; Adiyat 100:6-8). As a matter of fact, these shortcomings are what make his free will meaningful. The world is, in a sense, a field of struggle between good and evil, between reason and carnal desire. This is how the divine wisdom willed it to be, knowing that human perfection will, eventually, be victorious in this struggle. This worldly life is, for humans, a test, and in this struggle, people can reap meaning and value for their own existence, and thus attain permanent salvation in the eternal life to come.

All of the above issues are covered in the two fundamental sources of knowledge in Islam, the Qur'an and hadith. Islam carries them beyond theory to develop regulations for everyday life. Islam holds that this world is temporary, it is still important, and believes it needs to be home for good works, and peace. If we are to build a world in which peace is secured, truth and justice are ensured, and human dignity is protected, then additional regulations are required to help people realize and control their inner weaknesses and desires, for it doesn't suffice to expect reason and virtue to win eventually and that evildoers will be chastised in the hereafter. This is only possible by establishing an efficient and strong world order at national, regional, and global levels, so that those who would do evil are set back. Then the world becomes the dominion of the

good; the just will be ensured to have the might, instead of the mighty being considered just. Advocating such a system certainly entails determining rights and duties, protecting rights and preventing violations, and implementing deterring measures. In the face of dangers that may arise from the personal weaknesses of those in power, there is a need for common sense and conscience to intervene, for ethics to mediate, for the rule of law and social justice to be established, and for a strong public order. Islam's intervention in our societal life and relations among groups, its commandments and advice, gain meaning by fulfilling this purpose (Baqara 2:158, 275; Al Imran 3:104, 110; Nisa 4:58-59, 105-107; Maidah 5:33, 38, 44-50, 90; Nur 24:2, 4; Hujurat 49:11; Hashr 59:7).

This theoretical framework, summarized from the main sources of Islam, not only enables us to see the main reasons behind all the pain suffered in our world today—the blood and tears of the innocent, damaged human dignity, the violation of basic human rights—but also prevents extreme and useless optimism. Human history was never free from sufferings that originated from men themselves, and it never will be. Just like the faithful of other religions and other nations, Muslim societies also experienced many traumas, both in the present day and historically. Historically, perhaps the most tragic among them were the Mongolian invasion and the Crusades. In both of these tragedies, but particularly in the Mongolian invasion, a huge cultural legacy and treasures, books, and knowledge were destroyed, resulting in a loss of self-confidence that lingered for centuries. The Crusades were an attack on both the whole of the Islamic world and Eastern Byzantium orthodox Christianity, and struck a huge blow against the religious peace for mankind.

We, the Islamic world in the twenty-first century, are undergoing a new period of major suffering which may have a

deeper impact than the previous ones. We may not even realize it, as we are living through it. When you are living inside something, you may not fully grasp the whole picture. However, it is self-evident that the Islamic world is experiencing a huge trauma, or a serious shock. The Islamic world has lost its appetite for knowledge, which had defined Islamic civilization at the best periods in its history. Muslims had established Islam's honor not by turning their back to the world, but by appreciating this worldly life's true value and purpose by way investing in knowledge, contemplation, truth, and justice. However, for these last several centuries the Muslim ummah have lagged way behind in science and technology. Furthermore, they have been colonized under the hegemony of developed countries, and have struggled to assert their independence. Both those in political power and the political opposition have referenced religion while fighting for independence, a process during which political rhetoric has become seriously confused with religious rhetoric.

On another front, the past century witnessed conflicts between ideologies. As a result of this struggle, Muslims started to compare and contrast their religion with other religions. As Muslims began searching for their own identity within the context generated by these "others," reason and knowledge were replaced by emotion, fury, and insulation. These negative emotions obviously changed the way we perceive Islam. It is very difficult for us to realize the situation, for a person cannot truly analyze his own sources of information, his own perceptions, or his own influences. What will the impression of Islam be in the future? This question must be considered while acknowledging that both the former totalitarian regimes – those that sought "legitimacy" for Islam before the Arab Spring – and the opposition that instigated the Arab Spring benefit from the power of religious rhetoric. In a Middle East where international factions are fighting with one another, where internal

and external invasions are usurping not only resources but hope for the future – a Middle East where religions, sects, and ethnic identities are becoming fertile soil to nourish all kinds of oppression and violence – will it be only Muslims who are damaged, and whose honor is trodden on? It is not easy to guess the answers to these questions today.

In addition to these fights for independence and struggles between regimes and ideologies, the Islamic world has also witnessed the winds of democracy and freedom in the day-to-day agenda. Worn out by oppressive mentalities and regimes, democracy and freedom served as lifejackets to those in the Islamic world who fought against such tyrannical regimes. Although there are some who remain doubtful, a great majority have welcomed democracy and freedom with growing enthusiasm. Democracy and freedom are believed to be much better political systems for Muslims, both at the individual and societal levels, than Muslims have in the current situation. Social science, however, teaches us to approach a problem from many different angles and vis-à-vis many alternatives; it is usually not sufficient to reduce the solutions to one, and we must consider more than one option. The Islamic world today is running towards democracy and freedom in a rather emotional mood, while discussions on probable problems are not conducted satisfactorily enough.

The effects of positivistic philosophy, which, in the West, has almost become a matter of the past, are still vigorous among the intellectuals of today's Islamic world. As Muslims get used to liberalism, capitalism, and secularism, many people are moving away from religion as their source of values as they try to live a more "independent lifestyle" A commitment to religion is trying to survive by taking on certain forms and shapes. As outward religiosity competes closely with inward



worldliness, we are witnessing the real trauma of the Muslim's spirit, identity, and consciousness.

Secularization, as a phenomenon, developed as a result of the West's struggle against the church. It was a reaction to the hegemony of the church, its scholastic stance that opposed science, its intervention in politics, and the priority the church gave its own interests over all else. This reaction, and search for new answers, developed over a long period of time, and there are many underlying factors. Such mass movements with longterm consequences usually do not stop if they manage to arrive at the results that are foreseen in the beginning; they continue on a determined course for some time more. If this process began with the argument "separation of church and state" and has ended by separating religion and ethics from law, this is a serious problem. For ethics is in our nature; it is the essential value of our being human, not something imposed on us by others. We cannot only conceptualize ethics within individual choices, and neither can we consider it outside public space, politics, religion, and law. Anything that lacks ethics is nothing but a series of dry and deceptive rules. If we lose ethics in commerce, politics, education, family, and religious life, what remains is a skeleton without spirit.

The secularization of the West closely affected the Turkish nation during both Ottoman and Republican periods. When the Ottomans realized they were not keeping up with the western world in science and other material developments, they turned their face, very rightfully, to the West, and sent their best young minds there. However, the intentions of the initial reformers do not guide the developments of long-term, well-intentioned processes like westernization and modernization but rather the process takes its own course. And that was how it happened; the process drew its own route and unplanned developments occurred. Islamic sciences – which failed to in-

terpret the new world and thought that by simply repeating the knowledge inherited from ancient traditions they were carrying out their mission – were not able to face the modern challenges and could not produce solutions. This could only be possible by realizing the fact that minds living in the present times have different needs and conditions. Only after this realization could they then discuss and discover ways to think and behave as a Muslim in this age. Unfortunately, this did not happen, and the gap between the traditional content of Islamic sciences and the direction modern life has flowed has widened extremely. Thus, people were indirectly channeled to secularization/worldliness. The priorities of Turkish modernization, its methods and course of development, have also shaped the direction of modern-day faith in Turkey, and its character. This matter has to be taken into consideration if we are to discuss the trauma of Muslim identity and consciousness.

There are multiple factors involved in what appear to us as images that harm human dignity in the Islamic world, and it does not help us if we were either hold others solely responsible or assume the blame solely for ourselves. In addition to the developments mentioned above, most of which occurred at a global level, we have to accept that Muslims are suffering from serious deficiencies in diverse areas like providing our youth with an education on mercy; achieving social justice and balance in income distribution; ensuring equality in opportunities and rights in education; health; labor; prioritizing environmental concerns and human rights; recognizing a comprehensive consciousness in ethics and awareness of the Divine (ihsan) as inseparable parts of religious perception and education. All of these deficiencies are obviously creating obstacles for us to live dignified lives in the modern world.

In today's globalized world, more and more Muslims are facing the realities of the twenty-first century as they become

aware of the opportunities and deprivations they are now experiencing. Under these conditions, Muslims are obliged to take on a substantial and multifaceted responsibility to revive Islamic thought; to make Islamic ethics a natural component of religious awareness (*ihsan*); to reconstruct Islamic sciences; to establish a legal, administrative, and political structure to restore truth and justice; and to build a society built around mercy and social justice. It is our responsibility to become, in the words of the Qur'an, the best community which is built in the middle way and called to good (Baqara 2:143; Al Imran 3:104, 110). This is the way for us to protect the dignity of all people.



*In lineage and kinship, Prophets are the best known of human history and free from even the tiniest mote of doubt. They are the best examples and guides for dignity as much as for what is good and beautiful. They are eminent figures who presented the best of morality as they conveyed God's will down to earth, lived accordingly and reflected it in their lives.*

# Human Dignity in the Example of the Blessed Prophet

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**D**ignity carries a content that goes beyond its dictionary meaning in all languages of the world. As a term, dignity refers to the respect one holds for himself and that which he warrants from others. One's self-respect is directly connected to one's efforts to fathom the mystery of his own creation, his self-awareness and value, awareness of the Creator, and ability to lead a life in compliance with His commandments. For others to feel respect for a person, that person must reflect a composition of values. The human dignity we discuss here corresponds, in the dictionary, with some very significant terms like honor, nobility, self-respect, esteem, reputation, decency, praise, and value, all of which are moral qualities that enrich the human as an honorable being.

In lineage and kinship, Prophets are the best known of human history, and are free from even the tiniest mote of doubt. They are our best examples and guides for defining dignity, and for what is good and beautiful. They are eminent figures who exemplified the best of morality as they conveyed God's will down to earth, and they lived and reflected accordingly in their lives. In this article, we will consider the close connection between dignity and ethics, and thus try to cover the theme of human dignity, using the example of the Prophet through the framework of his morality.

The last messenger, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, epitomized in the most perfect fashion all the superior qualities of all previous Prophets. All the themes that are considered within the context of dignity or in connection with it, have their place first and foremost in the domain of good character and morality. The Qur'an describes the Prophet as follows: "You are surely of a sublime character, and do act by a sublime pattern of conduct" (Qalam 68:4). In a hadith, the Prophet says that he was "sent to perfect good character" (Muwatta, Husn al-Huluq 8; Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad II, 381). He also said "My Lord! You have fashioned my creation beautiful; make my character beautiful also" (Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad I, 403; VI, 68, 155) to offer his thanks in return for the perfect being God made him in creation. The honorable Companions of the Prophet narrated on many occasions that the Prophet, with his moral qualities, was the most superior and perfected of humankind (for some of these narrations see Bukhari, Adab 112; Muslim, Masajid, 267; Adab 30; Abu Dawud, Adab 1; Tirmidhi, Birr 69; Ahmad b. Hanbal, III, 270; VI, 236, 246).

Ethics covers all spheres of a person's life and defines his engagement with himself, his Creator, his family, communities both nearby and distant, the entire human race, and all of creation. Our Prophet's ethical example of engagement with each and every one of these spheres has been observed and witnessed, his instructions, good advice, encouragements and warnings in relation to these spheres have been preserved with precision and transmitted to the following generations by his Companions. The relevant sections of hadith collections include many detailed narrations concerning these various spheres of ethics. Indeed, some works exclusively dedicated to ethics based on narrations have been compiled from the early Islamic history. Our purpose in mentioning these, despite the wide scope, is to bring our attention to the Prophet's meticulously recorded superior qualities, which were instrumental in allowing him to attain self-respect and self-confidence, and in increasing his renown among people.

The Prophet speaks for himself, and defines his status. He declares openly some of his human features, eminent qualities, that he is a messenger of God and that he is the last of the Prophets. Often, one of the major distinctions of a person's reputation is that he descends from a pure lineage, that his parents and ancestors are very well known. Having said that, however, this is not a reason for self-praise, to claim superiority over others, or to look down upon them. Still, having a pure lineage empowers one with self-confidence, and also prevents ill-intentioned people from putting forward false and disrespectful claims about the Prophet, because his ancestry is already out there and available for research. In the Arab community during the time of the Prophet, lineage was a highly regarded matter in social relations. The Prophet recounted his father, grandfather, and the family tree of his ancestors to the Arab community. He did this because he was living among those Arabs and they would be the first community he was going to call to faith. This signifies his honorable stance and that he was regarded as honorable by others, too.

The following words, which the Prophet uttered about himself, teach us his exemplary character, leadership, and dignity - but also that he did not utter those for pride: "I am the master of the children of Adam on the Day of Judgment, and it is no boast. In my hand will be the Banner of Praise, and it is no boast. There will be no Prophet on that day – Adam and other than him – except below my banner; this is no boast. I am the first interceder and the first one to be granted intercession; this is no boast" (Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, *al-Jami al-Sagir*, I, 413).

When the Prophet was overwhelmed by the first revelation, he came home and asked his wife, Khadija, to cover him as he was concerned by what had happened. Khadija consoled him by recounting his virtues: "Do not fear! God will undoubtedly protect you. You give support to your relatives and help and clothe those in need. You are always a generous host. You are

on the path of the Truth, and you have totally devoted yourself to all that is good” (Bukhari Hadith no 3, 3392, 3953, 3955-56-57; Muslim, 160; Tirmidhi, 3637; Musnad, VI, 153; 223, 232).

These words of Khadija portray a great deal about the life and morality of the Prophet before he was assigned his mission, showing that even his previous life a very noble man. Many of his Companions are recorded referring to his good morals. His wife, Aisha, answered those who asked about his character by saying, “Are you not reading the Qur’an? His character was that of the Qur’an” (Muslim, Hadith no 746; Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, VI, 54, 95).

Morality is reflected in a person’s behavior, words, work, his relationship with others, and overtime these actions become an established character. Abdullah ibn Amr, one of those who reported on the exemplary morals of the Prophet to his Companions and the wider Muslim community, said, “The messenger avoided extremism in his conduct and speech, and said ‘The best among you are those with a beautiful character’” (Bukhari, Hadith no: 3559; Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, II, 328). There are a number of similar narrations from many Companions. Once the Prophet said, “Among you, the most pleasant to me are those with the best character” (Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, II, 328). Aisha reported that the Prophet said, “The most favorable among you are those who are favorable to their families. From among you, I am the most favorable to my family” (Tirmidhi, Hadith no: 3893). The Prophet’s wives, each one of them, recorded his conduct towards his household down to the minutest detail. All of these narrations attest to his superior virtues and honorable character. The grandeur and repute of a person within his family is more precious than any other repute, for one’s family knows his or her weaknesses better than any other person. This is often why many famous people are not as highly-esteemed within their family as they are among the wider community. Perhaps our Prophet is a unique exception in that matter. This



needs no explanation as to how important these traits are to an exemplary life.

What is essentially needed to attain a peaceful life, to become favorable to one's family and environment, to be a beneficial friend to others, and to display good character, is to strive to read and understand the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet, who was a living and concrete model of the scripture, and to acknowledge them as meaningful guides for life. The following features stand out in the example of the Prophet and need to be underlined in bold, as they are firmly established in his character: he was always truthful and never lied; he was trustworthy in the truest sense of the word, by protecting believers' property and keeping his word; he maintained justice in all his work and extended it to everyone; he never digressed from truth; he had infinite forgiveness and tolerance; he was compassionate to every one and every living thing; he prioritized women and young children for compassion and mercy; he never deprived his household and close relatives of his forgiveness, compassion, and care; he was always thoughtful of his community and he always preferred what was easy rather than making things harder for people; he took utmost care of his Companions and tried to make sure they were fine and their needs met; he was merciful towards those who sinned, people of the book, hypocrites and polytheists; he was merciful towards animals and nature; he was very patient, and persevered against all sorts of difficulty, misfortune or trouble; he was content with all that came from God; he praised God in all matters, whatever the condition might be; he was not fond of worldly property and preferred to live in asceticism; he was humble in all matters and towards any person; he treated his Companions, men and women, those people he invited to God, prisoners of war, and all living things with kindness and softness; he was the most generous of all and he distributed all his belongings among the poor; he was chivalrous, courageous and on the forefront in heroism; he was completely loyal to all those he knew; his

modesty and decency were always at the highest level one can possibly attain; he was always able to maintain his composure; he always had a smiling face, and his fury was only for the sake of God; he had an exemplary sense of humor, which always remained within ethical boundaries; he had an infinite affection for his friends and community, and possessed deep sorrow for the calamities they suffered; he always chose the easiest path for matters, especially prayer and worship. Many more themes can be added to this list. These examples are important in that they show his own honorable position, and his efforts to protect the dignity of others. They are also each evidence that, even if we show the utmost reverence, we cannot truly pay him back for all that we owe to him.

It would be useful to give a few specific examples of his dignified and honorable behavior here. Our Prophet would always turn his full face to his Companions when he spoke to them, showing the respect and affection he felt for them. When he was leaving a gathering, he always asked forgiveness from God. When he hosted visitors, he always welcomed them with his most beautiful clothes. When he came across any of his Companions, he would never turn his face to another direction before the other person did so. When he shook hands with a friend, he would never withdraw his hands until his friend did so. When he met a group from among his Companions, if he could not shake hands with them, he would at least greet them. His smile was his laugh.

If someone asked anything from him, he gave it if he had it; if he did not have it, instead of saying he didn't have it, he would remain silent. He visited believers, rich or poor, stayed with them, paid visits to the sick, and attended their funerals. He never looked down upon others; instead he protected and honored those who were insulted. He encouraged people to exchange gifts, for this fostered sincere relations between them. He would visit Ansar, the residents of Medina, greet their chil-

dren, and patted their heads. He also greeted his Companions' children and wives when he came upon them.

Our Prophet also took the utmost care keeping his community away from filthy things that spoil human dignity, and for this purpose he prohibited certain things: he prohibited nudity, as it is amenable with human dignity. He prohibited the consumption of prey animals and prey birds, domesticated donkeys, horses in general, mules, and meat of dead animals, as they are unpleasant to human nature and dignity. He did not allow people to sit on graves, unless out of necessity; this was because even the dead have honor that must be respected. He prohibited *musla*, i.e. showing disrespect to dead bodies even during war by cutting off their hands, arms, legs, or nose, and he ordered animals treated kindly, even during their slaughter. He also prohibited the killing of any living thing with a spirit. He did not allow tattoos on human bodies nor branding animals with a sear.

There are many more examples about the Prophet's good behavior - what he enjoined us to do and to avoid. We hope the examples listed above give some idea of his approach to human dignity.



*Look at yourself pleasantly, you are the  
essence of the world, You are the human, the  
eye of all beings. (Sheikh Galip)*

# Human Dignity in the Tradition of Spiritual Knowledge (Irfan)

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Our tradition of spiritual knowledge has always developed on the principle that human beings hold a position at the very center of creation, and that humans are honorable beings. God created the human as his vicegerent<sup>1</sup> on earth, of the best stature, as the perfect pattern of creation<sup>2</sup> and with honor,<sup>3</sup> as a being who undertook the Trust that the mountains and the earth shrank from,<sup>4</sup> into whom God breathed his own Spirit,<sup>5</sup> to whom God has made all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth of service,<sup>6</sup> to be a servant to Him and worship Him only,<sup>7</sup> and whom He created in His own image.<sup>8</sup>

God Almighty is manifested in humanity with all his Beautiful Names. Thus, each human is like a separate universe of his own, blessed with a nature that is like the essence and index of all visible and invisible beings. The following poem, ascribed to Imam Ali, narrates this truth:

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- 1 Baqara 2:30
  - 2 Tin 95:4
  - 3 Isra 17:70
  - 4 Ahzab 33:72
  - 5 Hijr, 15:29; Sajda 32:9
  - 6 Luqman 31:20
  - 7 Dhariyat 51:56
  - 8 Muslim, Birr, 115.

*Can you not see that the medicine you need is already with you;  
You are not aware that your pain is also from you*

*You think you are a tiny object,  
In fact, the worlds have been compacted into you.*

Gnostics consider each human like a world; his body as the earth, bones as mountains, marrows as mines, the body's insides as oceans, intestines as rivers, inner fat as swamps, veins as flowing waters, the sense of familiarity as civilization, carnal being as ruins, breath as wind, speech as thunder. Thus, by unifying in his form the images of all the worlds, the human emerges as a compacted sample, making him, in gnostic definitions, "the minor world" or "the essence of the world." Sheikh Galip describes this as follows:

*Look at yourself pleasantly, you are the essence of the world,  
You are the human, the eye of all beings.*

The beauty of the human and his creation *in the best pattern* are because he is the essence of this world. *The best pattern* is not found in images, or the material, but in the perception of the beauty (*husn* and *jamal*) and the perfection in the universe. The real beauty reveals itself when one is destined to fathom *ahsan al-haliqin*, the most Beautiful one Who has the ultimate rank of creativity, and recognize his absolute beauty and perfect attributes as one inhabits, for himself, the character of God.

Human dignity arises in the creation of humankind with a natural inclination towards faith, and a capacity to comprehend divine truths. The human cannot be considered perfect or honorable simply because of his outward appearances, strengths, and physical senses. For, in matters of strength, animals like elephants, lions, and tigers are much stronger than man. Bats are have far better hearing. When compared to man, ticks have a vastly superior sense of smell. Each animal embodies perfection in their respective ways. Humanity, however, is perfect in its nobility.

Sufis consider the human, in an absolute sense, and humanity – both at the individual and societal level – as the cornerstone of all life, the most honorable creation in existence. Both a person’s soul and physical body are precious. The human’s spirit and life are honorable, and thus deserve protection, respect, and fair treatment.

The Qur’an considers the life of one person to be as equally valuable as all of humanity; thus the dignity of one man is a universal value.<sup>9</sup> In the Sufi approach, although a man is physically not even taller than a doorway, he is still the most exalted and precious of all things and beings.<sup>10</sup>

In the Sufi thought, man resides between angel and animal. Because of the abilities he is granted, he is considered between devil and angel.

*Sometimes angels are envious of our purity,  
 Sometimes devils are afraid of our evil.*<sup>11</sup>

The human, with all his faculties, is precious; thus his life is precious. Rumi voices man’s dignity and value as follows: “The human is superior to the heavens and the earth. He is so great that he cannot even be confined in imagination and thought. If I were to say the true value of this priceless human, I and this world would both be burned.”<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the deprived human cannot recognize his/her true value. We have traveled a long distance, from the realm of eternity. Humanity fell into this realm of deficiencies, this filthy world. The human has sold its soul for cheap. We were once an invaluable satin, but have made ourselves as nothing more than a patch to a shawl.<sup>13</sup>

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9 Maidah 5:32

10 See, Mathnawi, VI, 13, 138.

11 See, *Divan-i Kebirden Seçmeler* (Selections from *Divan al-Kabir*), IV, no 38-39

12 Mathnawi, VI, 1005-1007.

13 Mathnawi, III, 1000-1001.

The verse “There is life for you in retaliation”<sup>14</sup> grants humans life and soul by imposing a sanction upon those who want to kill. This verse is followed by “o people of discernment.” This emphasizes the fact that only those able to discern the subtle meaning in this verse understand that the Qur’an is encouraging the heirs of the victim, in return for some payment to save a life, to forgive the murderer.<sup>15</sup>

Rumi approaches a murder case using this same reasoning. He asks Muinuddin Pervane to forgive a murderer who took refuge in a friend’s house. Pervane replied, “This is a matter of blood, not like anything else.” Rumi then said, “The murderer is the child of Azrail, the Angel of Death; what else does he do other than spill blood and kill people? He is by name the murderer!” Then Pervane convinced the heirs of the victim to accept blood money, thus saving the murderer.

For Rumi, the human was very important and honorable, regardless of his color, race, nation, or tribe. He accepted everyone as a potential believer; thus, every life was sacred and should be saved from murder or mischief. Once, he saved a young Greek man who was going to be executed by throwing his robe over him.<sup>16</sup>

On another occasion, at a *sama* gathering, people pushed away a drunk man who wanted to join them, and treated him with disgust. Rumi reacted by saying, “he drank the wine, but you have been intoxicated.” He respected everyone, even if he was a drunk, and believed a man’s honor should not be harmed.

For Rumi also knew, during the Prophet’s time, of a drunk man who could not kick his drinking habit, despite a legal ban

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14 Baqara 2:179

15 See, Konuk, A. Avni. 1990. *Fususul Hikem Terceme ve Şerhi*, İstanbul. III, 297.

16 Gölpinarlı, A. 1985. *Mevlana Celaleddin*, İstanbul, p. 196.



on alcohol, and despite being punished several times. When some people saw him drunk yet again, they said, “God damn him, he is not going to behave well!” The messenger of God said, “Don’t speak like that; I know that he loves God and his messenger.”<sup>17</sup>

Due to his nature, man cannot act with goodness and behave virtuously all the time. Just like pearls in the bottom of the sea are found mixed with pebbles, and gold ores are mixed with sand and dust, goodness and beauties in a man are found mixed with deficiencies and errors.<sup>18</sup>

The human has been dignified because of his heart, which is a manifestation of the divine spirit that has been breathed into him. The heart is where the name Rahman (the Beneficent) manifests itself, as shown in the following words of the poet:

*The heart of a believer is the throne of the Beneficent,  
Destroying it is a grave tyranny.*

The human is the most glorious being of the universe because of his heart; through his heart, man knows and loves God, the ultimate-Truth. In our tradition of spiritual knowledge (*irfan*), a connection is presumed between the human heart and the Ka’ba, the Baytullah, in which the former is considered to be superior to the latter. Here is what mulla Jami says about this connection:

*Baytullah was built by Halil Ibrahim,  
The heart is an epiphany for the Almighty God.*

Yunus compares the Ka’ba with the heart as follows:

*The heart or the Ka’ba, which is preferable,  
Teach me O the mindful one.  
The heart is preferable,  
For it is the station of the Friend.*

17 Bukhari, Hudud, 5.

18 Mathnawi, III, 80, 866.

Our tradition of spiritual knowledge places human dignity, which originates from the heart, at its very center. The conquest of territories and establishing countries is only successful when it incorporates the conquest and building of hearts. This approach was the main motivation behind establishing a civilization that flourished on a foundation of hearts.

Hearts are illuminated by God and his messenger. The word of God, the path of his messenger and his traditions have been the power stations illuminating our people's spiritual world. Even the universe and the heavens have been filled with the light emanating from him, and thus attained their value and honor. Believers wish for Paradise in hopes of meeting the messenger of God and attaining the Divine Beauty. A wish so beautifully expressed by Süleyman Çelebi:

*With him the universe is filled with light  
And the Paradise with beauties*

*Know this, Muhammad is the reason for existence  
Work hard, and demand his pleasure*

Believers whose hearts shone with the light of faith in God and his messenger walked in the direction of this light and established a civilization of charity, hoping to heal the hearts of those whose feelings were wounded and whose dignity was trodden upon. Soup kitchen facilities for the poor and hungry, hospitals for the sick, and orphanages for the homeless were established to this end. Charities of all sorts were established within this civilization. They provided young ladies who couldn't afford it with a trousseau. They provided funds for servants who couldn't pay for an item they had accidentally broken in the house where they worked. They provided alms pillars for the poor who were so honorable that they could not ask for help. And they established charities to help build roads in poorer districts.

Our tradition of spiritual knowledge lends the utmost importance to building hearts, but it also emphasized how false it is to destroy hearts by hurting someone's honor. Yunus declares it as follows:

*If you destroyed a heart / yours is not a prayer  
 Even seventy-two nations / cannot purify your hands and face  
 The wise master / cannot know his condition  
 He'd better not invest in the Hajj / if he ever breaks a heart.  
 The heart is the throne of God / Who looked into it  
 The unfortunate of the two worlds / is who breaks hearts.*

Attaining a worldview that prioritizes human dignity and that is based on love and selflessness is only possible through an awareness of the Divine unity. This awareness is obtained when one takes up the character of prophets and saints. For such an awareness to develop in an entire community, we must learn to appreciate each other and protect each other's dignity. This maturity of character develops through a process of spiritual growth that allows one to purify oneself, to free from holding grudges and the desire to cause mischief, and through attentiveness to others' honor and dignity. For this purpose, reciting the last three chapters of the Qur'an (Muawwidhatayn and Ihlas) are frequently advised. Because these verses help believers understand the secrets of existence, and protect them from mischief by taking refuge in God's protection, they also help believers to embrace their fellow humans with love and respect.

By observing human dignity with love and respect, we can bring warmth to our relationships, illuminate the world's darkness, close distances between people, deepen feelings, imbue our words with meaning, and learn to look at all living or non-living beings in the universe with compassion and appreciation.



*People who are qualified to give testimony in an Islamic society and are also honorable people. Losing this entitlement is perhaps the most serious loss of honor and reputation. Such a fall, into a situation where one is no longer regarded highly and whose words are of no value, is not the result of external influences; it is a fall that only an individual themselves can cause.*

# Entitlement to Testimony and How to Not Lose It

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“**R**ighteous ones” (*salihin, salihat*), “the good ones” (*abrar*), “the pious” (*muttaqin*), and “those who act upon good matters and who do them in the best possible way” (*muhsinin*) are some of the very comprehensive Qur’anic concepts which describe people who have not lost their honor and who are blessed with pleasant moral values. To be among such people is the greatest goal of a believer. Those who feature the qualities these blessed concepts carry are people who represent human dignity at its best, for they have the best morals. The common quality of these people – who never hurts others be it with their hands or tongues – is that their goodness is not for themselves only, but for others, too. In this respect, the community of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is defined in the Qur’an as “witnesses.” For, witnessing or testimony is also a *walayah*, or sainthood. And *walayah*, in the true sense of the word, means to be a source of goodness for everyone under one’s authority, and to be concerned about their well being without a moment’s pause.

Witnessing is one of the most significant attributes of the Prophet’s community: “*And in that way, We have made you a middle-way community, that you may be witnesses for the people (as to the ways they follow), and that the (most noble) Messenger may be a witness for you*” (Baqara 2:143).



For a person to become a witness, he or she has to possess the quality of “Justice.” Such a person is equipped with good, beautiful moral values, and eschews evil moral values. This is why one of the two qualities sought in the narrators of hadith (the Prophet’s sayings) is justice. If a narrator is recognized as not possessing this quality, his reports are not considered acceptable.

Justice means to be balanced in all possible aspects and able to avoid extremism. This is why the community of the Prophet is defined as a “middle-way community.” The words of a witness do not only effect the witness himself, but also the rights and laws of other people. Thus it is necessary for a witness to possess justice. Justice requires, first and foremost, a witness to be free from moral deficiencies. We can consider the license to testify under Islamic law as an important criterion for establishing human dignity. Qualities that are sought for a witness are, in a sense, qualities that qualify a human as honorable, and a protector of human dignity. The qualities that disqualify one from becoming a witness are also qualities that may damage human dignity. Benevolence, for instance, which scholars require for one to become a witness, is an indispensable hallmark of human dignity. This is why things that harm one’s benevolent qualities are also considered as damaging to one’s entitlement to testimony.

People who are entitled to testimony in an Islamic society are also honorable people. Losing this entitlement is perhaps the most serious loss of honor and reputation. Such a fall, into a situation where one is no longer regarded highly and whose words are of no value, is not the result of external influences; it is a fall that only a person himself can cause. The major factor that can lead to this fall is moral lowliness. This lack of morality, which we can consider under a general category of *fisq* and *fujr* (violation of the law; wickedness) emerges from carrying immoral qualities, like a lack of chastity and sense of shame, lying, giving up on one’s word, deviating from what is

right, tyranny, slander, and betrayal. For instance, the Qur'an warns those who slander honorable women as follows: "... *do not accept from them any testimony ever after. They are indeed transgressors, except those of them who repent thereafter and mend their ways. For surely God is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate*" (Nur 24:4-5).

For a person who can use reason and who has not lost his feelings, it is a serious damage to his honor when his words are overlooked and he is reduced to a position with no authority (*walayah*) over others. Therefore, if a person is disqualified from testimony, then it would not be wrong to say that he has lost his honor, too.

A person who has lost his honor is like a standing timber that is empty on the inside. Likewise, a human being who has lost his honor by drowning himself in wickedness is spiritually dead, for he is deprived of beautiful moral attributes. Words of grace that one should benefit from cannot make their way into his ears, and he cannot make use of the moral attributes that can spiritually enrich him.

Hypocrites, those whose words and behavior contradict one another, are described in the Qur'an as "*blocks of wood propped up*" (Munafiqun 63:4).

"The signs of the hypocrite are three: when he speaks he lies, when he promises he breaks his promise, and when he is entrusted he betrays the trust" (Tirmidhi, Iman, 14). This hadith and other hadiths list similar qualities of hypocrisy, which are also the qualities that cause one to lose his honor.

"These people have shown that what they keep in their hearts and what they utter in speech are not one and the same, that they use their willpower in this direction, and then they have shut their heart to the light of belief with their own hands and have deserved the consequence of God's sealing their hearts. They cannot fathom the essence of their actions, they cannot conduct a self-inspection of their conscience, and they

have lost the abilities to use their mind –the greatest blessing God has given humankind– and other related faculties in order to evaluate their behavior from an ethical perspective. Thus, the description of the Qur’an is a grave one, in which such people are said to have an appealing look from the outside, but who are in fact deprived of human values.” (Kur’an Yolu Türkçe Meal ve Tefsir. 2004. 5/288; D.İ.B. Yayınları, Ankara)

Honor is not about the material, physical form of the human, but about his or her non-material being and spirit. “*Assuredly We have honored the children of Adam (with many distinctions): We have sustained their traveling on the land and the sea, and provided for them (their sustenance) out of pure, wholesome things, and preferred them above many of those whom We have created with particular preferment*” (Isra 17:70). In reference to this verse, honor stands for man’s dignified position above all other creations.

Honor, in its modern usage, is a person’s self-esteem, dignity, nobility, eminence, personal value and renown. These attributes cause others to respect a person. They highlight the value of being a human who can observe, think, and choose freely. It’s the value arising from beautifying and glorifying one’s essential being.

In Islam, the human is considered to be “the perfect pattern of creation” (*ahsani taqwim*), the most honorable of all creations (*ashraful makhluqat*), the essence of the universe (*zubdat’ul alam*). It is impossible to think of a better expression of human dignity in a more comprehensive and elaborate way than this fundamental approach, which underlines the fact that the human, by nature and creation, is an honorable being.

Islam guides humanity to maintain its dignity: “*Surely We have created human of the best stature, as the perfect pattern of creation; Then We have reduced him to the lowest of the low. Except those who believe and do good, righteous deeds, so there is for them a reward, constant and beyond measure*” (Tin 95:4-6).



These verses clearly emphasize that man can protect his honor and the status of being the perfect pattern of creation only by engaging in good work. I believe this explains best the sentiment, frequently uttered in our day, “protecting human dignity.” human dignity is formed by human values. The most honorable person is the one who features the most human values, and the most piety. Also, human values are beautiful moral qualities that cover concepts like “righteous deeds” (*amali sa-lih*) and “piety” (*taqwa*).

*“O humankind! Surely We have created you from a single (pair of) male and female, and made you into tribes and families so that you may know one another (and so build mutuality and co-operative relationships, not so that you may take pride in your differences of race or social rank, or breed enmities). Surely the noblest, most honorable of you in God’s sight is the one best in piety, righteousness, and reverence for God. Surely God is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”* (Hujurat 49:13) By mentioning that humanity is evaluated not according to its tribes and families but according to its piety and righteousness, this verse shows that human dignity is very much connected to possessing the values that make humans human.

Accordingly, human dignity can be protected, first and foremost, by good character. If people fail to have the sensitivity for good character, it can be confidently argued that, with time, their dignity will erode.

Just as if a virus, entering the body may cause disease if necessary measures are not taken, unfavorable moral qualities may decay a person’s spiritual life and may even lead to its death. Thus, it is vital to protect our spirit from diseases through constant reflection; this is just as important, if not more so, than protecting our physical health from sickness. For a human is human not because of his physical body, but because of his spirit; as the poet said:

اقبل على النفس واستكمل فضائلها / فانت بالروح لا بالجسم انسان

*Turn to your spirit and try to perfect its virtues  
For you are human because of it, not because of your body*

It is the human, again, who must protect his spirit from harmful things. let us hear the poet again:

دوانك فيك ولا تشعر ودائك منك وما تبصر  
وتزعم أنك جرم صغير وفيك انطوى العالم الاكبر

*Your cure is in you, but you are not aware  
Your trouble is also from you, but you cannot see*

*You think you are a minor object  
Whereas the greatest world has been compacted into you*  
(Hak Dini Kur'an Dili, 8/5936, Eser Neşriyat ve Dağıtım, İstanbul – no date)

In order to protect human dignity, it is necessary to protect one's spirit through strong moral values. However difficult the conditions may be, and however much one happens to be challenged by his or her carnal desires and Satan's deceptions, it is necessary to abstain from behaviors that will damage one's spirit; we have to heed what our spirit calls us to do.

Protecting human dignity is directly related to good character and leading a life guided by the moral values as dictated by the Qur'an and the Prophet's sunnah. The greatest value the Qur'an aims to enrich humans with is (*taqwa*), piety and righteousness. Good character is the essence of *taqwa*, which is the criteria for superior character. This invigorating Qur'anic value is what can truly protect human dignity.

*“O you who believe! Respond to God and to the Messenger when the Messenger calls you (in the Name of God) to that which gives you life; and know well that surely God “intervenes” between a person and his heart (to cause his heart to swerve); and that He is to Whom you will be gathered.”* (Anfal 8:24)

*Taqwa* (piety, righteousness), *adab* (good character), *ihsan* (awareness of the Divine), *ihlas* (sincerity), *istiqamat* (keeping straight), *itidal* (moderation), *adalat* (justice), *amanat* (trust-

worthiness), *husn zan* (good thinking), not thinking unfavorably of others, and *insaf* (graciousness) are the values that provide humanity with life, and that protect human dignity. Acting fairly, confessing the truth, community, kind language, generosity, kindheartedness, fraternity, solidarity, truthfulness, trust, keeping one's allegiance, keeping promises, wishing for others what one wishes for oneself, not wishing for others what one does not wish for oneself, helping one another in goodness and righteousness, keeping away from enmities and evil, working for the benevolence of others, sincere friendship, humility, being simple and decent, politeness, respect, love, philanthropy, being welcoming, smiling, and being open hearted to all... these and such values are indispensable for the happiness, peace, and progress of a society.

Each moral quality that one happens to lose takes away with it a piece of honor, just like leaves from a tree.

“Those who are dragged into evil and who cannot conduct righteousness are in fact lowering themselves to being less than human, instead of moving forward from where life has begun through uninterrupted progress and benefiting from opportunities of reward, for they are spoiling their God-given abilities which were intended to raise them to the level of perfect creation.” (Kur'an Yolu Türkçe Meal ve Tefsir. 2004, 5/591, D.İ.B. Yayınları, Ankara)

This process reduces man to being “lower than beasts” (*asfali safilin*), leading him to become something other than human.

Such a lowered person may transform into a tyrant who will not blink an eye when he dishonors other people, let alone himself. To avoid such a degraded position, and to protect our own dignity, and the dignity of others, it is necessary for believers to embrace the life-affirming principles God and his messenger have conveyed.



*If you are after glory, then choose humility.  
Humility is the only set of stairs to climb up to  
the roof of glory. (Sa'di)*

# The Honor Trap of the Carnal Self

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The relationship between concepts and the ideas that they are meant to express usually have some contradictions along their points of intersection; this is natural. It deserves serious attention, however, when the lines between these contradictions and intersections are not clearly delineated, when they are confused, and when this confusion causes serious differences between perception and implementation.

It is obviously important to discuss the value the Qur'an gives and the Prophet assigns, in his words and practice, to human dignity. This paper, however, will try to draw attention to the concept of the "self," while keeping the concepts of "human value" and "human dignity" within their own domains. When the sense of "self" becomes "self-oriented," the concept of dignity is then distanced from its essence so much so that it serves as an excuse to commit dishonorable acts under the pretext of observing one's honor. What first comes to mind is the damage done to human dignity by enslavement to carnal desire; but we should not forget this aspect of humanity, where men are subservient to their carnal selves while believing they are behaving honorably. For, in both cases, one is sacrificing honor, either the honor of others or his own, to fulfill carnal desire.

I deem it more convenient that we start our analysis and evaluation from an ontological perspective. Where do the ideas that humans are precious beings, and a belief in the basic dignity of humanity, originate from? How is this idea supported? The general approach, of intellectual disciplines that do not adopt any metaphysical perspective, is that human dignity originates simply from being human, per se. Ideas based on religious knowledge, however, take God's will and grace as the primary point of action.<sup>1</sup>

Human dignity is very clearly defined in the basic sources of Islam.<sup>2</sup> "Assuredly we have honored the children of Adam,"<sup>3</sup> says the Qur'an, with emphasis. The human capacity to maintain this value in God's sight, and to be superior relative to other men, is tied to piety.<sup>4</sup> Piety, by maintaining the natural human inclination towards goodness and attaining good character, is consistent with adopting universal moral values and implementing them in life. It is important to note that according to Islam, belief in true faith is a prerequisite for piety. This is why piety alone cannot be considered a parameter to judge—in this world—a man's preciousness and his rights; this is what "in God's sight" (Hujurat 49:13) and the Prophet's practice refers to.

So, in the necessities of practical human life, we can draw parallels between scholars of Islam and Muslims, and those who consider human dignity to originate simply from being

1 For the historical foundations of human dignity as a concept and particularly for human dignity understanding of Christianity, see, Ignazio Sanna. 1997. "Mefhūmū'l-kerāmeti'l-insā- niyye fi'l-Mesihīyye (el-Katolīkiyye)", *el-Kerāmetū'l-insāniyye*, December 3-5. Unpublished papers presented in Muassasatu'l Ali'l Bayt, pp. 25-38.

2 For Islamic perspectives on human dignity, see, Ammār et-Tālibī, "Mefhū-mū'l-kerāmeti'l-insāniyye fi'l-Islām", *el-Kerāmetū'l-Insāniyye*, December 3-5. Unpublished papers presented in Muassasatu'l Ali'l Bayt, pp. 51-66.

3 Isra 17:70

4 Hujurat 49:13

human. For a believer, the source a man's preciousness and honor is God's grace, based on certain reasons and wisdom. It is, therefore inevitably necessary for a believer to observe harmony and balance between his thoughts and actions in this matter and other commandments of his religion. And for a man to retain this entitled status, he must carry out certain responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in the framework of this paper, it would be an evident inconsistency, we could say, if a Muslim approaches human dignity completely independently from religious considerations and warnings.

The "self" (*nafs* in Arabic) is used in multiple senses in the Qur'an and the hadith, therefore it has been analyzed in Islamic literature across a wide ranging set of definitions, two of which seem to stand out from the rest: 1) the human soul, or essence. This definition usually appears in works on theology and Islamic thought, and it covers themes like the essence of *nafs* and its relationship with the spirit, heart, and mind. 2) basic qualities that form the foundations for the evil attitude and carnal desires of man; a mechanism of instincts that triggers feelings like anger and aggression. This is the main definition in works devoted to character and spiritual education, and particularly among Sufi groups. Our paper will consider the *nafs* from this second definition.

Relying on the admonitions in many Qur'anic verses and invocations of the Prophet, like "My Lord! We take refuge in You from the evil of our *nafs*,"<sup>6</sup> scholars of Islam, and particularly Sufis, have dealt with the weaknesses and diseases of the carnal self. They have theorized how to heal this self, the traps

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5 For the human assuming a Trust, or responsibility, that the heaven, the earth, and mountains shrank from see Ahzab 33:72; for God creating life and death to try the humans see mulk 67:2; for the human created as the perfect pattern of creation, but that he is reduced to the lowest of the low when he fails to discern his unique value and act accordingly, see Tin 95:4-5..

6 Ibn Maja, Niqah, 19; Nasai, Jum'a, 24.

it might set and how to be protected from them, and methods to train the self to control its carnal desires; they have made deep analyses and comprehensive explanations on the matter. Harith b. Asad became renowned as “muhasibi,” which means self-inspection, because he based his Sufi understanding on such deep inner questioning.<sup>7</sup>

I am not going to delve into various aspects of self-inspection and training of the *nafs*, but will limit myself to mentioning some of its qualities within the purposes of this paper. According to Dr. Hayati Hökelekli, the *nafs* has two major features: a) It is dynamic, and it has a self-balancing system. The human self possesses psychological tensions resulting from opposite inclinations. These tensions motivate our behaviors, as some verses point to.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the human self, or ego, has the potential and flexibility to rise to its pinnacle through human action and efforts, just as much as it can be degraded by these actions.<sup>9</sup> Spiritual progress of man is possible when these tensions are balanced. b) The self has powers to grow and mature. In its primitive stage, the human self is prone to evil as instinctual desires dominate, making it difficult to abide by moral values. This level of the self is called *nafs al-ammara* (the carnal self), as taken from the usage in Chapter Yusuf (Joseph) in the Qur’an.<sup>10</sup> When a person awakens to moral con-

7 Uludağ, Süleyman. 2006. “Nefis”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, XXXII, 526-529; for perspectives on how *nafs* is studied in Islamic thought, see, Türker, Ömer. “Nefis”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul 2006, XXXII, 529-531.

8 “And the human selfhood and that (All-Knowing, All-Powerful, and All-Wise one) Who has formed it to perfection; and Who has inspired it with the conscience of what is wrong and bad for it, and what is right and good for it. he is indeed prosperous who has grown it in purity (away from self-aggrandizing rebellion against God); And he is indeed lost who has corrupted it (in self-aggrandizing rebellion against God)” (Shams 91:7-10)..

9 Tin 95:4

10 “for assuredly the human carnal soul always commands evil, except that my Lord has mercy” (Yusuf 12:53).



sciousness, he or she starts adopting an attitude of criticism and evaluation towards himself. This is a process of “distrusting oneself,” *nafs al-lawwama* (the self-accusing soul), in which one tries to distance himself or herself from being seized by his or her subjective desires and making them less than absolute. This is a level in which the self repents for his evil actions, is self-despising, and trying to correct itself. God swears by this level of the self,<sup>11</sup> and indicates its significant value. The *nafs* that has started distinguishing good from evil, and that has developed a behavioral system based on moral principles, is called *nafs al-mulhimma* (the inspired soul).<sup>12</sup> The human self that is completely purified and has attained its moral perfection is called *nafs al-mutmainna* (the soul at rest).<sup>13</sup> A person who has reached this level is in a state of peace and fulfillment; his inner conflicts have come to an end, his troubles and tensions finished. If a person has achieved self-recognition after a moral realization and developed a full esteem of the self, then he has a soul that is well-pleased (*nafs al-radhiya*). A step further, if the *nafs* has become one with the kind of lifestyle enjoined and willed by God, it is a well-pleasing soul (*nafs al-mardiyya*).<sup>14</sup> The *nafs* at the top level of this progress is called *nafs al-kamila* (the perfect self), which stands for the person who has realized himself or herself according to the divine project of this life.<sup>15</sup>

To summarize, the human can increase his or her chances to pass this trial of life, which is the purpose of existence, if he or she can undergo a training of willpower by using the innate qualities of the soul and the blessing of reason; but they are likely to fall into serious traps if they take heed of all the whis-pers coming from the *nafs*. One of the greatest of these traps is

11 Qiyama 75:2

12 Shams 91:8

13 Fajr 89:27

14 Fajr 89:28

15 Høkelekli, Hayati. 1997. *İslam'da İnanç İbadet ve Günlük Yaşayış An-siklopedisi*. Edited by İbrahim Kâfi Dönmez, Istanbul, III, 1547-1549.

when the protection of human dignity, which is by all means legitimate and necessary, changes its nature, moving one to self-glorification and arrogance. In other words, when the sense of ego becomes egotism.<sup>16</sup> Sources on Islamic ethics use quite a number of terms to describe forms of character, emotions, and behavior that puts a person in danger of such a thing, however, *kibr* (pride) and *ujb* (self-love) are the two most outstanding of all these terms. *Kibr* is usually defined as seeing oneself superior to others, whereas *ujb* is when one perceives the merits of himself, and is overcome by a sense of pleasure and vanity without necessarily seeing others as insignificant.<sup>17</sup>

According to the information in the fundamental sources of Islam, Satan is the pioneer of those who are seized by the carnal soul, glorify it more than it deserves, and thus openly rebelling against the divine commandment. Following the trap he pulled Adam and his wife into, which resulted in their expulsion from Paradise, Satan self-proclaimed it his duty to continue deceiving humankind during their trial on earth. Towards this aim, he and his followers strive to be successful in their mission, especially by way of leading people to self-glorification. Due to such motives that are pleasing to the soul, many people simply avoid accepting the sovereignty of God Almighty in the universe. Stepping back from his unbelief would supposedly mean disregarding his honor completely, even though he has encountered many truths supported by strong evidence. Quite a number of these people are powered by what the Qur'an calls a "craving for superiority in their bosoms, which they will not

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16 For the study of egotism and evil attitudes and inclinations in Islamic sources see, Hökelekli, Hayati. 1995. "Enâniyet", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, XI, 170-171

17 Pride in religious literature stands for being deceived and consoled by temporary riches, especially the attraction of worldly life. See Çağrıci, Mustafa. 1996, 2002. "Gurur", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 1996, XIV, 212-213; "Kibir", *ibid.*, İstanbul, XXV, 562-563.

attain”<sup>18</sup> and enter into a fight to resist the apparent proofs of God. Some of these men consolidate their unbelief through tyranny, leading themselves and those following or supporting them to be completely destroyed.<sup>19</sup>

History records many such self-pleasing motives that have caused conflicts among people –men and women, young and old, educated and uneducated –and have broken the hearts of many, while lending the perpetrators a false sense of heroism. There are countless examples of family members or friends who, after long years of intimate relationship, cut off their relations and remained cut off until the end of their lives based on a word or behavior which their *carnal soul* could not bear, whereas nothing in the nature of damaging one’s honor has taken place.

Excluding those situations in which there are conflicts of interest or where the damages incurred cannot really be made up for, people decide to cut off relations usually because they have drowned in the whirlpool of wrath, or because they have been hasty, or sometimes, because of a justifiable reason. If the reason is wrath, what needs to be done is obvious: after everything has cooled down, and before expecting the other party to correct the wrong, one “himself” is supposed to convince “himself” that the situation needs to be halted, and he needs to convey this to the other party. In the case of the second option, in which a hasty decision was taken, what needs to be done is again very obvious: after a cool-headed analysis, when one of the parties realizes that he was wrong, he needs to ask for forgiveness right away and try to make up for the damage he caused; if he is convinced that he was right, instead of expecting an apology from the other party, one had better convince

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18 Mu’min 40:56

19 Descriptions of Pharaoh in various parts of the Qur’an deserve deep analysis from this perspective.

himself that forgiveness is needed and opportunities must be found to finish conflict. This is a more difficult situation, for both parties think they are in the right. If mediators do not fulfill their mission or are unable to do so, then a new process starts for both sides: each tries to develop arguments to support their position. After a while, the determined, entrenched positions turn the situation into a struggle of honor. What really lies behind both the “self” and “honor” in this composition is nothing else but the carnal soul, *nafs*.

There are numerous examples in which similar psychological processes have evolved into a societal matter and influenced the progress of an entire community and its relations with other communities very seriously. When we analyze leaders of the past who are remembered for their tyranny, extreme stubbornness, and destructiveness, we see that they often believed they were acting to protect their own honor or the honor of the society they were representing / ruling. Different examples deserve different analyses; but without doubt many leaders who ruled or guided nations also caused grave human damage were under the yoke of their carnal souls when they were supposedly representing the honor of the nation they were representing / ruling. Large masses were obviously influenced and hurt by this state of slavery that resulted from the rhetoric of “defending honor.”

Scholars of Islam have comprehensively studied the consequences of pride (*kibr*) and the virtues of humility and forgiveness in terms of happiness, both in this world and the hereafter, and they have warned believers with some worthwhile advice. We do not aim to explore these concepts with a particular emphasis, but we should not forget that the carnal soul, or *nafs*, does have a strong connection to these concepts. In order to emphasize this connection, I would like to conclude with some quotes from Sa’di and Rumi:

“The great souls do not look at themselves. Whoever is seeing himself, do not expect him to see God Almighty!”<sup>20</sup>

“If you are after glory, then choose humility. Humility is the only set of stairs to climb up to the roof of glory.”<sup>21</sup>

“The carnal soul holds in his right hand the rosary and the Qur’an, but hides a dagger and a sword under his sleeve. Do not be fooled by his holding the book and ostentation ... do not make yourself a confidant or a friend to him! He makes you come to the pool to wash yourself for prayer, and then throws you way to the bottom of the water.”<sup>22</sup>

“The mother of all idols is that of your carnal soul. For, that idol is a snake, this idol is a dragon. The carnal soul is a lighter made up of iron and rock; the idol is a spark. That spark can be extinguished by water. Can iron and rock be extinguished by water? When and how can the child of Adam be sure about himself so long as he keeps on having these two? (...) Destroying idols is easy, indeed very easy. But it is sheer ignorance to assume the carnal soul is easy to overcome!”<sup>23</sup>

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20 Sa’di. *Bostan ve Gülistan*. Translated by Kilisli Rifat Bilge, Istanbul, p. 162.

21 Ibid, 161.

22 Rumi. 1943. *Mesnevi*. Translated by Veled İzbudak, Istanbul, III, 242.

23 Ibid, pp. 74, 75.



*He is not considered a believer (truly), until  
he wishes for his brother what he wishes for  
himself.* (Bukhari, Iman, 7)

# Consciousness of Respect to Humankind in the Example of the Prophet

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**H**umankind, according to the Qur'an, is potentially the perfect pattern of creation (Tin 95:4), holds the title of God's vicegerent on earth (Baqara 2:30), and is an honorable being (Isra 17:70). In terms of human dignity, every individual is equal to one another. Addressing men as "the children of Adam," and "the people," the Qur'an refers to the human family, placing non-Muslims on the same plain with Muslims, considering them essentially as a whole.

The Islamic tradition defines non-Muslims as *ummat al-dawah*, a community of calling, considering them as another branch under the community of our Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Thus, it could naturally be said that followers of religions or faiths other than Islam are not the "other" for Islam and Muslims. It is only if they strive to formulize the "other" as opposed to seeking *tawhid*, the Divine unity, that they become something Islam and Muslims reject. Unbelief or associating partners with God, according to Islam, is a denial of the divine truth and is humanity's failure to grasp the true meaning of existence in relation to God. For Islam, people from different tribes and cultures (Hujurat 49:13), nor any individuals under classifications like "land of war" (*dar al-harb*) or minorities (*dhimmi*), constitute the absolute "other" (see Tatar, 2009: 58-62).

What is most important for us humans is to be aware of our potential, and to deserve that potential by improving it without distortion. The more each individual develops this potential, the more will he or she develop respect for himself or herself and for others; the more honorable a life they will lead, the more will they avoid behaviors and attitudes that do not comply with this honor. For human dignity covers ideal conceptions of being human in the sense of the perfection of his existence. In this regard, being conscious of human dignity is a prerequisite for absorbing other moral values. Those who cannot attain this consciousness can fall to behaviors that are not reconcilable with human dignity (A'raf 7:179; Tin 95:5).

Only through education is it possible to help each individual reach this level of consciousness and accept it as a fundamental value. Education, for an individual, starts from the mother's womb and lasts until death. It comes in every moment of life, from every one and every thing. This educational reality compels us to shape the environment around us so as to make it instrumental in helping us attain this consciousness of human dignity. It is especially important to shape this environment for children, who learn by observing everything around them and who are so ready to be influenced.

Islam advises believers to establish a righteous socio-cultural environment. It also advises that every individual undertake self-inspection to safeguard themselves from corruption, which is a serious danger if the individual happens to live in a society not righteous enough and if he engages with the ideological and cultural values therein (Saffat 37:30, 32; Ahzab 33:67-68; Furqan 25:27-29). The duty of "enjoining the good, forbidding the evil" is also directed for this purpose (Al Imran 3:110; Tawbah 9:122; A'la 87:9; Asr 103:2-3). Emigration is also envisioned for this purpose, if conditions make it necessary (Nisa 4:97; see also Canan 1984:375). Nevertheless, all these matters have to be reevaluated in the face of globalization, and new approaches and methodologies that are more fitting for the present time must be developed.



Along with this overall picture, there are also duties that families and institutions like schools should undertake. Education in all its spheres must be based on the main principle of “respect for human dignity.” The educational environment should avail the individual in the natural flow of his or her life to develop consciousness of this dignity through the use of concrete examples that he or she can observe. These observations can be followed by meaningful learning of theory about the nature of human dignity, and efforts to comprehend how the theory is reflected in the practical life. It is also necessary to develop the knowledge and skills needed for providing efficient, productive, and constructive guidance to these efforts.

The Qur’anic verses that describe the Prophet as an exemplary instructor (Baqara 2:151; Ahzab 33:21), and that describe God sharply prohibiting believers not to say things that they do not do (Saf 61:2-3), lay down Islam’s principle of teaching by example. Teaching by practice rather than transferring a theoretical knowledge has always been encouraged in Islamic history, both within the family and at other educational institutions. “One’s work reflects who the person is; his words do not count.” Muslims have always assumed it compulsory for a teacher to teach values by his or her practice (Ibn Jamaa 2012:71; Tarnabati 2008:369); and considered him or her a bad teacher if their words do not match their actions, and advised not to entrust children to his or her care (Akyüz 2010:118). It is necessary, in educating children about values, to enable them with the practices through which they can directly adopt rules and norms of these values (Özden 1998:33-34). Therefore, parents and teachers, from whom children are so directly influenced, are in a position to display, in their practical lives and character, what respect for human dignity means and how a life based on these morals looks. Young minds learn how to lead noble lives, and how to respect humankind, from the hands-on examples of these educators. They will better analyze the meaning of these experiences as they develop their powers of discernment and will internalize these values once they believe in their importance.

The education of the Prophet was completely based on respect to humankind. First, he displayed in his daily practice, what respect to human dignity meant through his actions and behavior. He never underestimated any person, even a child, by saying things like “he is very young, and he would not understand.” he cared for children with the same attention, appreciation, and love he did for adults, and advised followers to treat them like a mature man or woman, and to avoid behavior that may hurt their honor.

The Prophet greeted children in the same way he greeted adults, saying “Peace be upon you” (Muslim, Salam, 15). he exchanged civilities with them, made jokes (Bukhari, Adab, 81, 112; Muslim, Adab, 30, 5), and sometimes even joined their games (Canan 1984: 183). All these, and his other actions, indicate that he respected human dignity indiscriminately. While he valued children as equal to any other person, he never expected them to behave like adults. He accepted their childish behavior as a natural outcome of their developmental stages, and he never felt offended by them. He pleurably bore their misbehavior, and never reacted in a way that would damage their honor (Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, II, 513).

Abdullah b. Amir narrates: “I was a young boy. When one day our Prophet was visiting our home, my mom called me saying that she was going to give me something. The Prophet asked my mom: ‘What do you want to give to the boy?’ my mother replied that she wanted to give me dates. Then the Prophet said, ‘If you would not give anything, then the sin of lying would be recorded for you’” (Abu Dawud, Adab, 88). The Prophet teaches us here that a parent has to be exemplary in teaching children human dignity, and that actions and behavior that might hurt a child’s honor should be avoided.

The Prophet’s perspective on children and his relations with them reveal no instances of him treating them like objects. The Prophet’s understanding of human dignity does not comply with an approach that deems the child like clay that parents

can shape as they like; an empty sheet of paper to write whatever they want on; or an empty tape or CD to record on.

When carefully analyzed, it is clearly evident that human dignity holds a central position in the Prophet's mission of calling people to faith, regardless of any lineage, age, gender, or status. This belief in human dignity underlie his repeated efforts to get a hold of Wahshi, a man convicted of many murders and massacres, and to call him to embrace faith and be saved. He considered Wahshi a human first and foremost, although to others he was an non-believer, a murderer, a monster; the Prophet strove to save Wahshi from a dishonorable state of being. When the Prophet conquered Mecca, although he had enormous power and all kinds of opportunities to do whatever he wanted, he once again exalted human dignity as he told pagans, "You can leave, you are free! Today, there is no reproach for you" (Sarahsi 2000:x66).

The Prophet never reserved a place for any form of violence, be it material or spiritual, in his education (see Canan 1984:183). For him, violence in all its forms wears out, erodes, and destroys human dignity; thus it is harmful to education. Muslim educators who were able to comprehend the Prophet's approach in this matter have developed interesting sensitivities towards human dignity and violence. For instance, Ibn Jamaa recommends teachers to not test whether students understood a lesson by verbally asking them, but by proposing a problem and asking students to analyze it. "If the teacher asks verbally and the student answers in the affirmative, then the teacher should not try him or her with another problem, unless the student wants. For it is probable that the student may be embarrassed if it is otherwise" (Ibn Jamaa 2012:119). Unfortunately those Muslims who were unable to understand this spirit of respect have overlooked their local cultures' overriding this sensitivity. Today, scientific research has shown that individuals, especially children and youngsters, look up not to those they

are afraid of, but to those they love and respect as role models and they develop habits accordingly (see Aydın 2010:191).

The educational power of respecting human dignity is beyond dispute. Any caring and compassionate behavior that touches a man's dignity may result in immediate positive responses, like truthfulness, respectfulness, and acting independently. It is necessary to behave with knowledge and awareness. The following example, of a high school student who breaks the jug, is another useful example. Upon witnessing the breaking, the ethics teacher takes the boy to the principal. When the principal starts speaking on how important it is to respect public property, the student says that he did not do it. Disappointed with the student's behavior the ethics teacher tries to explain that he is lying. Then the principal stands up and holds the student and, says to teacher, "No, a student does not lie, you are probably wrong with what you saw!" and tells the student that he can leave. But the student returns after a very short while and regretfully asks to be forgiven: "Sir, I committed two wrong things at a time. I deserve punishment, as I both broke the jug and lied" (Kenan 2009:41).

Human dignity is not a simple matter; it should be perceived as a decisive and guiding value in shaping one's entire character, and thus it should be internalized as such. It is not sufficient for individuals to observe positive examples that emphasize respect for human dignity from early childhood; it is also necessary for people to explore the meaning behind these actions, and to comprehend and digest this meaning in all its possible dimensions. This does not happen by memorizing ready-made patterns of information, but by meaningful learning. In the process of searching for meaning, if individuals can make sense of life and existence as a whole, can build up their own worldviews and can manage to comprehend the role of human dignity within these worldviews, then they can internalize dignity as a value. The more they can internalize human dignity, the more they can establish connections between dignity and daily behavior. This can be realized with

an education that encourages individuals to develop skills like exploring knowledge, using current information to produce more reasoning and questioning, and solving problems. This is not possible with an education that only emphasizes memorization (see Aydın 2011).

A person who is conscious of human dignity and who has been able to internalize it knows how he or she should behave under certain contexts. Such a person does not deem unbecoming behaviors proper, either for himself or for others. His knowledge and behaviors do not contradict one another (Aydın 2011:171). Plato says, “The patient is free to eat or not to eat the food his physician recommends him. But when a person understands a word or an idea, then that thing which he understood has penetrated his spirit and has become a part of him. This is why the person is not free any longer before that thing that he has understood” (Tatar 2009:12).

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, did not only display respect for human dignity through his behaviors and attitudes, but he also formulated its theoretical foundations to be learned by each individual. He made use of every opportunity in this direction. But he did so in the natural flow of life, without being offensive and boring, and by trying to be interesting, contemplative and caring. For instance, he said, “he is not considered a believer (truly), until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself” (Bukhari, Iman, 7). “They are not from us who do not show mercy to the young and who do not treat the old with respect” (Tirmidhi, Birr, 15). With these words, the Prophet pointed to the connection between belief and behaving respectfully towards human dignity; it also points to the theoretical foundations of this connection, showing us the way to develop our character and actions accordingly.

Our Prophet, peace be upon him, did not confine this matter to having people memorize certain patterns of information; he gave people opportunities to embrace it with their heart by making sense of it. For instance, one day a young man came

to our Prophet and said: “o, messenger of God, allow me to fornicate?” The Companions got angry with the way that young man dared to ask such an ugly thing from the Prophet. But the Prophet did not allow them to go further with their anger to a place that could harm basic human dignity. Instead, he had the young man affectionately sit by him, so he could offer comfort. He later had a conversation with the young man to analyze what he was asking permission for and to make sense of it by reminding the young man of human dignity:

- ♦ “Would you like a man to fornicate with your mother?”
- ♦ “No, I would never like that for my mother.”
- ♦ “Hence other people do not like it for their mothers.
- ♦ Would you like it for your daughter?”
- ♦ “No, I would never like that for my daughter.”
- ♦ “Hence people do not like it for their daughters. Would you like it for your sister?”
- ♦ “No, I would never like that for my sister.”
- ♦ “Hence people do not like it for their sisters. Would you like it for your paternal aunt?”
- ♦ “No, I would never like that for my paternal aunt.”
- ♦ “Hence people do not like it for their paternal aunts.
- ♦ Would you like it for your maternal aunt?”
- ♦ “No, I would never like that for my maternal aunt.”

Then the Prophet placed his hand on his chest and said, “O God! Guide his heart, forgive his sins and guard his chastity.” (Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, V, 256)

It is recorded that this young man learned by empathy the nature of the sin he wanted to commit, and instead chose to lead a very pure and chaste life.

What lies on our shoulders, as humans, is the responsibility to impart the values of human dignity, as taught by the Qur’an and the Prophet’s practice and teachings, in ways that also uti

lize scientific data. This will show how we can make a respect for dignity part of our daily lives. We can attain this respect through a healthy community and a good education. We must also, though, gain scientific knowledge as to how best teach our youth about human dignity.

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*All of you are of Adam, and Adam was of soil. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab - except for piety and good action.*



# The Jahiliya Mindset and Damaged Human Dignity

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## INTRODUCTION

**J**ahiliya is the infinitive form of the verb *jahl*, and it connotes ignorance, loose behavior, superficial thought, deficiency in discernment, failure in managing one's reason, defeat by one's emotions, crude attitude, lack of maturity, self worship, and extreme conceit. In short, jahiliya is the opposite of what *hilm* (gentleness) stands for.<sup>1</sup> *Hilm* is defined in the dictionary to mean one acts thoughtfully even when he is furious and powerful; to be lenient; having a beautiful and strong character; thinking reasonably, being cautious, and subduing one's carnal self to abandon feelings of revenge. Whereas *jahiliya* is one's enslavement to his own passions, being controlled by overflowing instincts, showing haste in character, and behaving coarsely. It is not derived from *jahl*, that is the opposite of knowledge, but rather the *jahl* which means foolishness, disgruntlement, and lack of honor.<sup>2</sup> The most outstanding features of the *jahiliya* mindset, then, are racism, tribalism, violence, aggression, and barbarianism.

1 Najmuddīn Muhammad b. Yahya Firuzābādī, *al-Kāmūsul-Muhit*, (Mısır, ts.), I, 58; Abu'l-Fadl Jamāluddīn Muhammad Ibn Manzūr, *Lisānu'l-Arab*, (Mısır, ts.), II, 130.

2 Firuzābādī, *al-Kāmūsul-Muhit*, I, 696; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisānu'l-Arab*, XII, 146.



Jahiliya is used in four places in the Qur'an and each one of them describes a separate attribute of a society in jahiliya. *Zannu'l jahiliya*,<sup>3</sup> is a notion of ignorance in which individuals and entire societies are seeking partnership in the authority of God's decision-making; *huqmu'l jahiliya*,<sup>4</sup> refers to pagan legal systems that are far from absolute justice; *tabarruju'l jahiliya*,<sup>5</sup> meaning women flaunting their charms in public, as in the Age of Ignorance; and *hamiyyatu'l jahiliya*,<sup>6</sup> which is acting irrationally with fierce zealotry based on egotism, tribalism, and feudism. Based on these descriptions and in terms of characteristics and historical periods, we see that *jahiliya* refers not only to a period before, but also after, the advent of Islam. Anything that is contrary to the Islamic condition is within the domain of *jahiliya*. So, its frame of reference is not temporal with regards to the pre-Islamic period only; it covers all kinds of beliefs and practices that contradict Islamic thought in all times.<sup>7</sup>

Having *jahili* attributes, either on an individual or societal level, is no different than "standing on the brink of a pit of fire."<sup>8</sup> Islam has saved individuals from the narrow mindset of *jahiliya* based on tribal arrogance and transformed them to adopt an overarching mindset of community – or *ummah* – that transcends one's tribe or clan. For each human is created by God equal in terms of liberties and rights. Islam holds the human, whether Muslim or not, with respect as the most honorable among all things created by God, for which the Qur'anic verse "Assuredly we have honored the children of Adam"<sup>9</sup> is

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3 Al Imran 3:154

4 Maidah 5:49-50

5 Ahzab 33:33

6 Fath 48:25-26

7 Izutsu, Toshihiko, 1975. *Kur'an'da Allah ve İnsan* (God and the Human in the Qur'an), Translated by Süleyman Ateş, Ankara: Kevser Yayınları, p. 190.

8 Al Imran 3:103

9 Isra 17:70

proof. Every human, thus, is precious and honorable simply as a being, as opposed to other attributes like where he lives, his race, language, sex, and color. Islam has saved the personality of man from melting away in the tribal bigotry of *jahiliya*, and enabled him with the freedom to produce ideas and values of a universal dimension. Islam's struggle was to defend the human from the human, and to protect one's dignity over the other.

### A. WHAT DOES HUMAN DIGNITY MEAN?

Human dignity stands for honor, self-esteem, virtue, self-control, and helping others have respect for themselves. The most distinctive quality of man is that he was created with abilities like speech, reason, choice, and the responsibility to elevate a civilization both in a material and spiritual sense. Wherever a person might be born, he is entitled to enjoy freedom, dignity, and other rights. Making such a person into a slave, discriminating against him, and not recognizing his proper legal status indicate a *jahiliya* mindset. This is why Islam fought against *jahiliya* from its very first day, and instituted the principle of equality in the abode of Truth, instead of the discrimination that defined the *jahiliya* caste system. Humans, with respect to their being human, are equal in life and death, in rights and liabilities, before law and God, and in this world and the next.

Islam rejects in absolute terms any thought that assumes some humans are superior to others because of their innate qualities. All humans are the servants of God and all of them originate from the same source.<sup>10</sup> The Blissful Prophet, peace be upon him, said in his Farewell Sermon "All of you are of Adam, and Adam was of soil. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab – except for piety and good action,"<sup>11</sup> as he declared

10 See, Hujurat 49:13

11 Hamidullah, M. 1969. *İslam Peygamberi* (The Prophet of Islam). Translated by S. Mutlu- S. Tuğ), Istanbul, II, 66.

every human to be equal before law. This legal principle is settled firmly in Islamic history through the establishment of the might of the law instead of the law of the mighty. There are many examples we have from Islamic history where equality before the law was impeccably practiced. Nevertheless, although Islam continues its struggle to protect human dignity both in theory and practice, there are still very serious complications in today's world.

## B. EXAMPLES OF VIOLATED HUMAN DIGNITY

### 1. Sense of Justice

Justice is the opposite of discriminatory and unfair behavior. It means to restore, to give one's due, and to make equal and similar.<sup>12</sup> Justice in this sense refers to fairness in speech and action, and to a balance between what is given and what is deserved. Striving to establish justice, therefore, is a natural means to protect human dignity, either at a local or global level. Usurping other people's rights is a grave societal disaster, and as such, any violation, wherever and however it happens, should be despised. The Qur'an's call to justice is as follows: "*O you who believe! Be upholders and standard-bearers of right for God's sake, being witnesses for (the establishment of) absolute justice. And by no means let your detestation for a people (or their detestation for you) move you to (commit the sin of) deviating from justice. Be just.*"<sup>13</sup> When a Companion of the Prophet approached him to treat a criminal who was from a noble line, the Prophet said, "Those before you were destroyed because they used to carry out the punishment on the weak and did not carry it out on the noble. By the one who has my soul in his hand, if Fatima were to do that, I punish her."<sup>14</sup> The

12 al-Isfahāni, Rāgīb. 1986. *al-Mufradāt fi Garībi'l-Qur'an*, Istanbul, p. 487.

13 Maidah 5:8

14 Bukhari, Hudud, 12; Muslim, Hudud, 8.

Prophet declared universal principles so justice would prevail in all walks of life. Even before he was assigned his divine mission, he was actively involved in the Alliance of the Virtuous (hifl al-Fudul) in the Mecca of *jahiliya* to protect the rights of those whose property was usurped, whose honor was defiled, who were not allowed to freely observe their faith, or murdered. The basis for social peace and trust in a society is by acting in compliance with the principles of justice and fairness.<sup>15</sup> For, trust does not exist in a social order where justice is harmed, and this lack of trust is a heavy blow to societal peace and civilizational progress.

## 2. Gender Discrimination

Wealthy and free women of the *jahiliya* Arab society were able to protect their status, whereas poor women – even if they were free – and concubines were not able to attain a similar status of authority - both within the family and the community. The jahiliya mindset perceived these lower class women as deceiving and seducing the men, and thus as being lower than men in rights; thus they were exposed to all sorts of violence by their masters. The women did not have the position or authority to propose a viewpoint and to be consulted with. “Consult women, but oppose them” was a proverb frequently uttered among the people of *jahiliya*.<sup>16</sup>

The free women could rise in the social strata when they gave birth to a son, but concubines and other women who were abducted after raids did not have any value. For an Arab of the jahiliya, his concubine was no more precious than his she-camel. For others, the young and beautiful concubines were only a commercial commodity.<sup>17</sup>

15 See Nisa 4:135

16 See, Zabidi. 1994. *Taj al-Arus*, Beirut, II, 454.

17 See, Altuntaş, Ramazan. 2007. *Bütün Yönleriyle Cahiliye*, (Jahiliya in All Its Aspects) Istanbul, p. 186.

A father could give away his daughter to any man he liked depending on the bridal price; there was no need to ask for her consent, for she did not have the right and freedom to choose her husband. If it was understood that the girl was not a virgin when she married, this would be a great disaster for her family, a filth to be removed, and an honor that was damaged. The only way to remove this filth was her execution, an honor killing, a decision taken by the family. Daughters were despised, whereas if a boy were born, the father would be joyous, and because this was a reason for great honor, would host a feast and celebration. If the child were a girl, “his face became overcast, and he is (as if choking inwardly) with suppressed anger”; this was an omen for future calamities.<sup>18</sup> Other than this psychological attitude towards women, there were physical assaults as extreme as burying daughters alive, as mentioned in the Qur’an: “*And when the female infant, buried alive, is questioned for what crime she was killed.*”<sup>19</sup>

Islam canceled all kinds of discrimination based on gender, commanding that women and men are a whole, and both are equally accountable before God. In his historic Farewell Sermon, which is by definition a human rights declaration, the Blessed Prophet decreed an end to discriminatory behavior towards women, and laid down universal principles that favor positive differences: “observe the rights of women and fear God in this matter. Women have been entrusted to you by God, and their honor and decency have been legitimate to you under your oath to God. You have rights over women, and women have rights over you.”<sup>20</sup> Despite all these warnings and advice, if there is still violence against women - a majority of which have fatal consequences - Islam is not responsible for this; it

18 Javad Ali. 1993. *al-Mufasssal*, Baghdad, IV, 653. See, Nahl 16:58–59; Zuhuf 43: 18.

19 Takwir 81:8-9

20 M. Hamidullah, *el-Vesâikuš-Siyâsiyye*, Beyrut, 1987, s. 360; a.mlf., *İslam Peygamberi*, I, 275.

shows that *jahiliya* mindset has yet to be removed from hearts and minds.

### 3. Racial Discrimination

The value system conveyed by the Prophet assumes the diversity of colors and languages as signs of God.<sup>21</sup> According to the Qur'an, men are all from the same roots,<sup>22</sup> and there is no ontological difference. The Prophet delivered another universal message in the following words: "God does not value your body or physical form; he values your hearts and behavior."<sup>23</sup> Discrimination based on ethnic differences is tyrannical in terms of human rights. The warning of the Prophet in this respect is very clear and meaningful: "The one claiming a racial cause is not one of us."<sup>24</sup> "All of you are of Adam, and Adam was of soil. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab – except for piety and good action,"<sup>25</sup> As can be seen from the examples above, the Prophetic message adopts a universal language that encompasses all humanity. It is, again, not a failure of Islam, but the resurgent mindset of *jahiliya* that leads to the ongoing ethnic conflicts around the world. The Prophet warned that discrimination based on color is a character of *jahiliyya*. When one of his Companions, who despised another believer because of the color of his mother, the Prophet told him, "You are a man who still has some of the *jahiliyya* in him."<sup>26</sup>

### 4. Class Discrimination

The Qur'an considers class discrimination as something based on self-proclaimed elitist perceptions as one of the paths that lead humans to arrogance.<sup>27</sup> In the age of *jahiliya*, being

21 See Rum 30:22

22 See Nisa 4:1

23 Muslim, Birr, 33; Ibn Maja, Zuhd, 9.

24 Muslim, Imara, 53, 54, 57

25 Ahmed b. Hanbal, *Musnad*, V, 411.

26 Bukhari, Iman, 23.

27 Layl 92:8-11

wealthy was a sign of elitism, as was seeing oneself as self-sufficient and independent from God. This perception led people to grow attached to worldliness, and opened the gates to living in opposition to God. The chapter Cave (Kahf) verses 32 through 36 is a very relevant set of verses in the Qur'an. Such people, who place wealth in the place of God and who think their wealth will make them live forever,<sup>28</sup> deny the Day of Judgment, life after death, and prophethood, both with their lifestyles and their words.<sup>29</sup>

There are multiple examples in the Qur'an about how this elitist mindset could manifest itself through action or religious thought. The elites of the Midian people threatened Prophet Shu'ayb and his followers with expulsion from their home: "The leading ones among his people, who were arrogant and oppressed the others, said: 'We will surely banish you, o Shu'ayb, and those who believe in your company from our township, or else you will return to our way (of faith and life).'"<sup>30</sup> A similar example was undertaken by people of the *jahiliya* mindset against the Blessed Prophet. A handful of the governing elites in Mecca opposed the Prophet and his call by making up all sorts of slander, trying to create resistance among the public.<sup>31</sup> This new call coming from the Prophet had the goal of saving people from political influence and sovereignty, and transforming society to one that highly regarded social justice, that recognized no superiority based on color, wealth, or economic status. He hoped to create a society where superiority was determined by one's usefulness to the society – a worldview that renovated human dignity. In the first years of Islam, only a few wealthy people embraced the faith; a great majority of believers were poor, many of whom were former slaves. The prominent figures of Quraish displayed an arrogant contempt

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28 Humaza 104:1-3

29 Fussilat 41:15; Yunus 10:7; Duhan 44:35; Jasiya 45:24.

30 Araf 7:88

31 Sa'd 38:6-7



for the poor believers, both in status and values; they did not want to be considered on a par with them, and when they visited the Prophet they proposed to keep the poor believers away. Upon this, God warned his messenger as follows: “*And do not (in the hope of persuading the chieftains of the unbelievers) drive away any of those (poor believers of humble social standing) who, in the morning and afternoon, invoke their Lord, seeking His “Face” (i.e. the meeting with Him hereafter and His eternal, good pleasure). You are not accountable for them in anything, just as they are not accountable for you in anything, that you should drive them away, and so become among the wrongdoers.*”<sup>32</sup> This is a warning to all believers, a fundamental rule to follow, and disallows us from recognizing any privilege or treating people differently because of their social status or wealth. The parameter of value in Islam is the consciousness of accountability towards God.

## CONCLUSION

*Jahiliya* is a word which represents a lack of knowledge, acting without pondering the consequences, an inability to comprehend God’s will and his verses, and a failure to discern how evil it is to rebel against God. So long as individuals and communities continue to idolize their caprices, and to lead lives in opposition to God’s will, there will flourish all kinds of abuse, tribalism, partisanship, oppression of the weak by the powerful, gender discrimination, persecution, tyranny, and other human rights violations. The protection of human dignity can only be ensured by belief in and practice of divine teachings. Those who do not adopt a worldview based on Divine Unity and lead their life accordingly, cannot truly speak for justice and compassion, at either a local or global level. To restore human dignity that has been trodden upon, one must seek honor in the blessings conveyed by God and his messenger.



*A believer is the brother of a believer. He neither oppresses him nor humiliates him nor looks down upon him. The piety is here, (in the heart). It is a serious evil for a believer to look down upon his brother in belief. All things of a believer are inviolable for his brother in faith: his blood, his wealth and his honor. (Muslim, Birr, 32; Tirmidhi, Birr, 18)*

# Underprivileged Groups and Human Dignity

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Islam is the true religion, and it devotes particular value to the human being, human dignity, esteem, honor, and reputation. For Islam, social relations among individuals, within the family, and in society, along with basic human rights and liberties, social collaboration and solidarity, are all extremely important. The blessed Prophet of this religion encourages his followers to provide economic, psychological, and social care and support for underprivileged sections of the society; he never approved of humiliating, despising or isolating any kind of minority group: *الْمُسْلِمُ أَخُو الْمُسْلِمِ لَا يَخُونُهُ وَلَا يَكْذِبُهُ وَلَا يَخْذُلُهُ كُلُّ الْمُسْلِمِ عَلَى الْمُسْلِمِ حَرَامٌ عَرَضُهُ وَمَالُهُ* “A believer is the brother of a believer. He neither oppresses him nor humiliates him nor looks down upon him. The piety is here, (in the heart). It is a serious evil for a believer to look down upon his brother in belief. All things of a believer are inviolable for his brother in faith: his blood, his wealth and his honor” (Muslim, Birr, 32; Tirmidhi, Birr, 18).

We can classify social groups which are in need of care, support, and aid in the following ten groups: children, orphans, the youth, the elderly, the disabled, victims, the poor, the lonely, and the unemployed.

## 1. Children

Children have the highest importance regarding protection. They are the future of families and society. They are the most precious blessing entrusted to us by God. There are responsibilities and duties on the shoulders of parents, families, and society with respect to children. The most significant of these duties is to raise them in good health and with love, compassion, and mercy. The spiritual health of children is as important as their physical and mental health.

Just like the biological makeup of children is affected by leaving them unattended, not paying attention to their health, or physical violence, their spiritual nature will be negatively influenced when they are not treasured enough or taken seriously, when they are scolded or deprived of love and compassion. Love, care, and compassion are as important to a child's development as the mother's milk. This must be the reason our Prophet, peace be upon him, loved and prized children in general and his grandchildren in particular (Ibn Maja, Adab, 14). When he heard a baby cry, he preferred to cut the prayer short by choosing shorter verses (Bukhari, Adhan, 65). He was extremely displeased when female children were despised and badly treated (Ahmad, IV, 151), and he prohibited killing of children without exception, even in times of war (Malik, Jihad, 3).

Treating children with love, care, and compassion, and raising them with good character, are important both for this worldly life and the life to come in the hereafter: *اَكْرِمُوا اَوْلَادَكُمْ* "واَحْسِنُوا اَدَبَهُمْ" "Treat your children generously, teach them good manners" (Bukhari, Adab, 18). Good manners and upbringing also refer to a quality education. Raising children with good character, teaching them about God, the Prophet, the Qur'an, religious duties, the good and the bad, what is allowed and what is forbidden, living in discipline, and with good manners are among the responsibilities parents have to their children. And these duties can be carried out best with love and compassion.

Parents have to treat their children with fairness, not to hurt their feelings or honor. The Prophet said, *إِتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْدِلُوا فِي أَوْلَادِكُمْ* “Avoid disobeying God and be fair among your children” (Muslim, Hibat, 13).

Along with parents, teachers, too, must be careful in treating children with care, love, and compassion. Depriving children of love, deceiving them, reprimanding them, using indecent words, not paying attention to what they are saying, not answering their questions, and not showing care to their wishes will without doubt cause incurable wounds in their hearts and spirits. It is necessary to avoid such unbecoming behavior against children, and take them as seriously as we do adults, for today’s children will be tomorrow’s professionals or administrators.

## 2. Orphans

An orphan, according to the Qur’anic terminology, is a child before the age of puberty, one of whose parents is dead. When he or she comes reaches puberty, they are not considered an orphan any more. Even if the parent who is alive or the guardian are wealthy, the orphan child still needs compassion and mercy, protection and care, education and upbringing, attention and support. God Almighty reveals to us in the Qur’an that it is very important to take care of orphans, that their property should not be violated and that such violations are a grave crime and are like consuming fire (Nisa 4:2).

*Wali*, the guardian, who takes on the duty of safeguarding and representing the orphan, is supposed to protect his or her property and not wastefully consume from it (Ibn Maja, Wasaya, 9). Islam brought an end to such violations in the Age of Ignorance (*jahiliya*) and enjoined legal protection and guarantees over orphans (Nisa 4:127). Our Lord is not only asking us to provide protection for orphans, but also that we should give due care to them with kindness and good behavior (Nisa 4:8,

36; Baqara 2:177, 215). The Prophet praised the wealthy who gave to orphans in charity and reviled those who abused orphan's rights (Nasai, Zakat, 81).

Motivated by the Prophet's sayings like, مَنْ عَالَ ثَلَاثَةً مِنَ الْأَيْتَامِ، “Who takes good care of three orphans, it is as if he (or she) had spent his night in prayer, his day fasting, and a full month fighting in God's cause with his sword” (Ibn Maja, Adab, 6) or أَتَا وَكَافِلُ الْيَتِيمِ فِي الْجَنَّةِ كَهَاتَيْنِ وَأَشَارَ بِإِصْبَعَيْهِ بَعْنَى السَّبَابَةِ وَالْوُسْطَى “I and the person who looks after an orphan and provides for him, will be in Paradise like this (putting his index and middle fingers together)” (Tirmidhi, Birr, 14; Bukhari, Adab, 24), muslims have tried to provide protection for orphans by opening orphanages and other facilities reserved for their service.

During the Age of Ignorance, orphans were mistreated, and such violations are seriously admonished in the Qur'an and by the Prophet, who himself was raised an orphan (Ibn Maja, Adab, 6). Islamic belief and ethics, therefore, strictly enjoin Muslims to observe orphans' rights, to treat them kindly, and to be careful not to harm their honor.

### 3. Youth

Islamic scholars classify a person when he or she comes of age, within puberty, as a youth. Depending on the child's biological development and conditions of the regional environment, puberty age is usually between 12 and 15.

Youth is the most significant, critical, and problematic period of a person's life, for it is a period of education as they experience physiological, spiritual and emotional development, change, and engagement in terms of developing good character, culture, and habits. It is a time in which their education, interest in various jobs, and careers begin developing, while they also begin to acquire a sense of identity, character, and

personality. This is a period when a person develops good or bad habits, and continues to learn useful or harmful knowledge as they move towards adulthood.

Educating the youth - who are extremely energetic, dynamic, emotional, and fragile during these years - is obviously very important. Their education is not yet complete, they have not yet decided on a career, not yet found a job, and is in need of his parents' support. It is a period when there is a need for tolerance regarding their mistakes, failures, or certain misbehaviors. This tolerance will help them pull themselves up, and to become honorable, well-adjusted adults.

#### **4. The Elderly**

Human life is a series of stages from being a baby to childhood, youth, adulthood, and elderliness. Each of these stages comes with unique beauties and challenges. Old age is the final stage of human life in which certain physiological and spiritual changes emerge, knowledge and experiences synthesize and are conveyed to the youth, and problems like loneliness and harmony arise.

Old age makes itself noticeable with decreasing capacities of perception, memory, and productivity, in addition to a growing indifference to one's environment, a sense of self-insulation, and losing pleasure in life.

The old person has reached this age as he accumulated experiences of all kinds, and in a sense has almost completed his mission in this life. He or she has raised their children, educated them, married them, and helped them find jobs, and finally helped to raise grandchildren. His or her wish in this final stage of life is to stay near their children, love their grandchildren, and to be treated with respect. Their greatest fear is to be pushed aside and abandoned.

Their worn-out bodies and the suffering of certain diseases are difficult to bear. In the past, families were larger and the elderly used to stay together with their children, living in love and respect, whereas modern life has often sentenced them to living alone in their apartments or in nursing homes.

Islam and the blessed Prophet enjoins us to treat the elderly with respect, love, care, compassion, and mercy: *لَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ لَمْ يَرْحَمْ صَغِيرَنَا وَلَمْ يُوقِرْ كَبِيرَنَا* “They are not from us who do not show mercy to the young and who do not treat the old with respect” (Tirmidhi, Birr, 15).

Respect to the old can be shown by listening to what they have to say, never using any offensive words towards them, and by taking care of them; this is what the Prophet practiced and advised (Ibn Sa'd, V, 451). he said, *إِنَّهُ مَنْ لَا يَرْحَمْ لَا يَرْحَمْ* “He who shows no mercy to the people, God, the Exalted and Glorious, does not show mercy to him” (Muslim, Fadail, 65). *الرَّاحِمُونَ يَرْحَمُهُمُ* “The Compassionate one has mercy on those who are merciful. If you show mercy to those who are on the earth, he Who is in the heaven will show mercy to you.” (Abu Dawud, Adab, 66).

Care and love are what the elderly need most, as they keep them engaged and thriving, like bread and water. Love is a result of care, compassion, and mercy. Lack of care and attention cuts his or her connection with this life. When not shown enough care or attention, the elderly may become depressed.

When people who were held in esteem for the entire life feel they are losing their importance and being paid less attention, then they may want to retreat from life. It is indispensable to the well being of the elderly for them to be welcomed by both individuals and society.

Pleasing the elderly is earning God's good pleasure, and by serving them people are entitled to the blessings in heaven.



A significant dimension of serving one's elderly parents is to share the same home with them, and to not exile them into the loneliness of a nursing home. One cannot sentence his parents with a more grave punishment than separating them from their grandchildren and leaving them alone. Islam and the Prophet encourage treating the elderly with privilege. It is prohibited to harm the elderly, even during war, and non-muslim elderly are exempt from tax. The elderly person who is not fit to fast do not have to observe Ramadan fasting (Baqara 2:184). If one cannot feel strong enough to pray standing, he can do so while sitting or even lying down.

“Calamities would shower on you, if it was not for God's bent-over elderly, nursed babies, and grazing animals” (Ajluni, II, 2). مَا أَكْرَمَ شَابٌ شَيْخًا لِسِنِّهِ إِلَّا قِيَصَ اللَّهِ لَهُ مَنْ يُكْرِمُهُ عِنْدَ سِنِّهِ “Whoever does a favor to the elderly when he is young, God will return his favor in return when he himself gets old” (Tirmidhi, Birr, 75).

Old age is a natural phenomenon and an inevitable reality, as it is an incurable last stage of life (Abu Dawud, Tib, 1). Societies will not find serenity if they hurt the elderly and push them aside, away from sight and care.

## 5. The Sick

Human get sick, “because we are created to be weak” (Nisa 4:28). Therefore it is an obligation for us to protect our health by taking good care of what we eat, how we dress, our hygiene, and other rules of a healthy life, which is a priority for happiness: نِعْمَتَانِ مَغْبُوتُونَ فِيهِمَا كَثِيرٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ الصَّحَّةُ وَالْفَرَاغُ “There are two blessings that many people fail to make the most of (or are deceived about): good health and free time” (Tirmidhi, Zuhd, 1). The value of something is usually realized when it is lost, just as we remember to be thankful of our health when we get ill. Illnesses are each a separate trial,

reminding us of God and the reality of death, softening our hearts with compassion, in addition to teaching us how to raise awareness and be precautious about protecting our health.

Despite all measures and protections, one can still fall ill, or get wounded after an accident, and even become disabled. In this case, both physical and spiritual healing should be implemented in addition to close care by the family.

A sick person has to do two things: heal physically by way of diet, medication, or if necessary, operation (Abu Dawud, Tib, 1), and to pray, invoking God for healing, and not giving in to despondency. For it is only God Who creates healing, through the medicine produced by plants he created. Praying to God for healing and reading verses of healing from the Qur'an are psychologically healing.

Having said that, it is never enough to suffice with prayer only; this is not in line with the Qur'an and the Prophet's practice.

Illnesses are a part of being human, just as much as being healthy is. Regardless of age, people are prone to get sick at any time. Family support with kind treatment and tenderness are helpful in comforting the sick person. The Prophet, peace be upon him, visited the sick (Bukhari, Janaiz 2, 80; Marda, 11) and ordered his Companions to do so as well (Bukhari, Janaiz, 2).

Visiting a sick person is a duty for believers, for it is a blissful behavior rewarded in multiple ways: it helps raise the hopes of the sick; with his pain shared and lightened, he is saved from loneliness, enthused and invigorated, his social relations and friendships consolidated (Tirmidhi, Adab, 45; Nasai, Janaiz, 53). Such visits help reduce pain by sharing and conversation, thus they are a highly rewarding moral behavior that is most pleasing to God.

## 6. The Disabled

The disabled are people who are born without some of their physical, mental, spiritual, perceptive, or emotional abilities, or have lost them later in life to a certain degree that they have difficulties keeping up with the rest of society, and are unable to meet their daily needs. Considering the odds, it's likely most people have a family member or friend who is disabled, or someday will be one themselves. Everyday, people become disabled in multiple ways, either through the weakening of their health, through paralysis, or after an accident, a heart attack, an embolism, or an infectious disease.

Islam gives priority to social relations. While doing so, Islam does not discriminate between the disabled and the healthy, but encourages the latter to take care of the former. The Prophet is reported to have reprimanded those who made fun of the blind by placing obstacles in their way (Ahmad, I, 217, 309). Khadija, the Prophet's wife, described the Prophet when the first revelation came as *تَحْمِيلُ الْكَلِّ* “the guardian of the weak.” The word *al-kall* in this report means someone who is weak and unable to do things by himself, in need of support from others. Thus, this word corresponds to all kinds of disability. This description is evidence that Prophet was protecting the poor, the weak, and the disabled, and strived to ease their difficult situation even before he became the Prophet. Respecting the disabled and honoring them helps to improve their spirit.

Helping the disabled is a rewarding act. Guiding the blind, taking care of the deaf and mute (Ahmad, V, 168-169), is a humane as well as Islamic, duty. The Prophet, who was a real guardian over the disabled, said aiding and supporting the disabled is an act of charity (Ahmad, I, 217, 309, 317). *مَنْ تَرَكَ مَالًا فَلَوْرَثَتِهِ وَمَنْ تَرَكَ كَلًّا*. *فَالَيْنَا* “Whoever (among them) dies leaving some inheritance, his inheritance will be given to his heirs, and whoever dies

leaving a debt or dependents or destitute children, then I am their supporter” (Bukhari, Fara'id, 25).

Leaving the disabled unattended and in a desperate situation, calling them various names, and seeing them as no better than beggars and unproductive individuals, will damage their honor; such behaviors are in no way compatible with Islamic ethics, for they are sinful acts that violate other people's rights.

## 7. Victims

People may happen to be victimized by a number of disasters or events: earthquake, flood, avalanche, hurricane, fire, traffic accident, drought, famine, disease, physical wounds, tyranny, torture, violence, internal divisions, mischief, war, economic hardship, poverty, hunger, and death. These disasters and troubles harm people's lives or property. Believers should be calm, cautious, and patient in the face of such situations; they should not rebel or protest, should learn from such experiences, and correct himself or herself and turn to God. They should try not to wail after what was lost, and to not lose spirit. Facing such disasters with patience should not prevent people from searching for both material and spiritual solutions. They should start treatments if they are diagnosed with an illness; if they have been abused or mistreated they can seek their rights by filing a court case. They can pray and ask God to bless them with things better than what they lost, and do whatever else is required - but they should never turn rebellious.

It is a human and Islamic duty to comfort people when they are victimized in one way or the other. A good believer stands alongside his brothers and sisters during such times, as much as in good times. The Prophet said: *الْمُسْلِمُ أَخُو الْمُسْلِمِ لَا يَظْلِمُهُ وَلَا يُسْلَمُهُ وَمَنْ كَانَ فِي حَاجَةِ أَخِيهِ كَانَ اللَّهُ فِي حَاجَتِهِ وَمَنْ فَرَّجَ عَنْ مُسْلِمٍ كُرْبَةً فَرَّجَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ كُرْبَةً مِنْ كُرْبَاتٍ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَمَنْ سَتَرَ مُسْلِمًا سَتَرَهُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ* “A believer is a brother of another believer, so he

should not oppress him, nor should he hand him over to an oppressor. Whoever fulfilled the needs of his brother, God will fulfill his needs; whoever brought his brother out of a discomfort, God will bring him out of the discomforts of the Day of Resurrection, and whoever screened a believer, God will screen him on the Day of Resurrection” (Bukhari, Mazalim, 3).

This eloquent hadith summarizes how believers must treat those suffering from discomfort or trouble. Feeling delighted when a misfortune befalls a person, remaining indifferent to his situation, abstaining from offering condolences in the case of death, and other misbehaviors hurt human dignity, and are not compatible with the ethics of the Qur’an.

## 8. The Poor

The Qur’an uses two words for poor: *faqir* and *miskin*. *Faqir* is someone whose income does not meet his basic needs. Since they have at least a certain amount of income, some people may even “suppose them wealthy because of their abstinence and dignified bearing, but you will know them by their countenance, they do not beg of people importunately” (Baqara 2:273). *Miskin* is a poor wretched person: *أَوْ مُسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ* “a poor wretch in misery” (Balad 90:16). As understood from this verse, *miskin* is a more desperate situation than *faqir*; it is helplessness poverty that is evident from outside.

Wealth and poverty are social realities of human life, and this has been so throughout history, for societies need both. God’s decision to bless with his wealth, or not, is certainly a factor in one’s being rich or poor; but one’s making the best of his mind and abilities, and working hard to make certain things possible, are also influential factors (Nisa 4:32). Our Prophet sought refuge in God from poverty (Abu Dawud, Salat, 367). Nevertheless, there are many people who cannot save themselves from poverty or may unexpectedly lose their wealth despite their hard work and efforts. Based on these realities, and to

protect the poor, Islam assigns a certain portion of the wealth of the rich for the poor: “those in whose wealth there is a right acknowledged” (Ma’arij 70:24-25).

It is a commandment of Islam, from the first days of its revelation, to observe the rights and needs of the poor (Balad 90:15-16). By way of practices like *zakat* (charity), *sadaqa* (alms), aid (*infaq*), and expiation (*kaffarat*) Islam encourages believers to extend a helping hand to the poor. Islam enjoins those who break their oath (Maidah 5:89), who cannot fast during Ramadan because of health or old age (Baqara 2:184), and “those who declare their wives unlawful for them (by using against them that abhorred expression) and thereafter wish to go back on their words” (Mujadilah 58:4) to help the poor for expiation. The rich are ordered to pay in charity (fitra) before the Ramadan festival (Muslim, Zakat, 23).

The poor are one of the social groups that need support most, and there are many verses in the Qur’an encouraging believers to provide help for them. The Prophet was committed to serving the poor and eliminating poverty in society from the early days of his mission.

Islam and its blessed Prophet enjoins the rich to take care of the poor, but without despising them and showing the utmost care not to hurt their honor while helping them; but it also teaches the poor not to adopt any sort of hostility or antagonism or envy towards the wealthy.

Poverty is a problem for social administrations and the rich, too, for they might find themselves in danger if they remain indifferent to the problem:

وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ  
 “Spend in God’s cause (out of whatever you have) and do not ruin yourselves by your own hands (by refraining from spending. Whatever you do,) do it in the best way, in the awareness that God sees it. Surely God loves those who are

devoted to doing good, aware that God is seeing them” (Baqara 2:195).

This verse relates “spending in God’s cause” to “ruining oneself by one’s own hands.” This verse may be interpreted as to mean if the wealthy do not spend for the poor, they will put themselves in danger, a danger that reveals itself through antagonism towards the wealthy and towards the state due to the spread of poverty and hunger. Thus attending the needs of the destitute is a duty for both the state and the rich, and human dignity is protected in this way.

### 9. The Lonely

People do not live alone in isolation, but with other people in social settings, for a person cannot provide for all their needs all by himself. Children are in need of their parents, the elderly in need of friendship. Women need men and men need women. Due to various reasons like wars, earthquakes, traffic accidents, fires, disaster, and death, people can be left all by themselves. Children whose parents have died, men or women whose spouse is dead, people whose families have passed away, people who are desolate and alone...

Being all alone is often disastrous for people, even though they may be very rich in material goods. It is unbearable not to have a companion with whom to talk, with whom to share. Such a lonely person will suffer even more if he is also ill, weak, disabled, or poor. Islam encourages social solidarity to provide support for those who are left alone, for life can only continue through collaboration and help, and pain diminishes by sharing, support, and consolation.

The human needs other people’s support not only when they are children; support is needed when one comes of age, becomes ill or crippled, is poor or left alone. The lonely chil-

dren, elderly, and women are those who should be cared for most.

a) Lonely children: Children may lose their parents due to reasons like accidents, disasters, or divorce, and this leaves them alone, in need of others' help. Some of these children are homeless, who have abandoned their families to live in the streets. These children have either escaped from a restless family environment, or violence that they suffered from their parents, or because they were trapped by criminal gangs. In the background of this escape are economic problems, cultural conflicts and corruption, and distorted family structures. The psychological, social, and economic support families usually provide in the countryside, cannot be compensated for by public institutions in the city. This has negative effects on the family and often leaves children disorderly and unattended. Additionally, factors like divorce, unofficial marriages, children from other wives, and single parenthood may also be influential in leading children into the streets. Some children are also employed in various ways to contribute to the family budget, and this may cause the family to lose their control over him, make him give up education, and isolate him from his peers. Those children who cannot get used to the working environment are likely to quit their jobs and they choose limitless and irresponsible liberty in the streets, which is pushing them further away from social life. This is an improper situation that damages human dignity.

b) Lonely elderlies: Some people are lonely because they have lost their children and families, thus there is no one to take care of them. They are heartbroken and loneliness destroys their spirit. It is a necessity for faith to embrace such elderlies, for "loving the created is because of the Creator" in the words of Yunus Emre.

c) Lonely women: Women can become lonely because of divorce or after the death of their husbands. Some women re-



turn to their parents' home, and later might get married again, while some other women do not or cannot marry and keep on living with their parents. There are also other women who have never married and always lived with their parents, but who are left alone after their parents pass away. In all these and other possible cases, women might suffer from loneliness and abuse unless they have some permanent income. Such lonely women need the support of her brothers or sisters, if any, uncles or other members of her family. If they are all by themselves, then they need to be supported by either the state, by wealthy believers, and by foundations or other kinds of NGOs. This is a human and Islamic duty, and as precious as one's prayer, fasting, and jihad.

It does not comply with the Islamic ethics and human dignity to not support and provide care for lonely men and women, children, elderly, and disabled. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, provides the best example in the way he supported the lonely individuals of his community (Bukhari, Faraziz, 25).

## **10. Unemployed**

The first people on earth made use of the blessings of their planet by hunting, ranching, and farming, and through this they were able to provide for their needs. As the human population increased, people were no longer able to provide for themselves. Labor branched out to include the exchange of goods by trade, and transactions conducted by money. In time, trade has gone beyond local boundaries and has become a global phenomenon. Industry has developed, adding new branches of work, with growing numbers of products and with many varieties. Those who have worked hardest and become proficient in manufacturing or business have become wealthy. And those who failed to do so have become poorer.

As population growth has made finding a job difficult, some people are unemployed. Unemployment is a difficult thing to bear, for if the unemployed does not have any external source of income, there is no way for him to meet his basic needs.

Unemployment is a social problem, and parents, wealthy people, and administrators have to take on certain duties and responsibilities to solve this problem. The wealthy should open up opportunities for employment by establishing places of work or plants, and invest in fields of production. This is, in a sense, a thanksgiving to God for what he has blessed them with. It is a form of worship to provide employment for a person so that he can look after himself and others depend on him.

On the other hand, it is also a reality that there are many unemployed who are unemployed simply because they don't like working, they don't show persistence, and they fail to show contentment. Others, however, who are content with what they have found even though it is not well-paying, are not left unemployed. Contentment and leading a frugal life are like treasures which never run out. Those who are content do not suffer from hunger or unemployment, poverty or restlessness. Employers should observe the rights of their employees, they should not treat them unfairly and mistreat them. A believer should act as prescribed in the following hadith: لَا يُؤْمِنُ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يُحِبَّ لِلنَّاسِ مَا يُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِهِ وَحَتَّىٰ يُحِبَّ الْمَرْءَ الْمَرْءَ لَا يُحِبُّهُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ “one among you cannot have true faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself” (Ahmad, III, 278). The greatest responsibility in this matter falls onto the *shoulders of administrators*, who are expected to develop projects and make investments in order to lower unemployment rates.

Despising the unemployed because of their situation – which is indeed one of the most serious societal problems – and treating them as if they have no value are not compatible with human dignity and Islamic ethics.

*To conclude*, each society has various groups of people who are in need of care, support, and aid; children, orphans, the youth, the elderly, the sick, the disabled, victims, the poor, the lonely, and the unemployed. Islam and our blessed Prophet teaches us to take care of those who are in need. Mistreating them, humiliating them or offending their dignity is not in line with the Qur’anic and Prophetic character. Such behavior will hurt one’s honor, and are truly grave sins.

*Every human being, whether disabled or healthy, is God’s vicegerent on earth. Just like his life and property, his dignity is also immune from harm. The following saying of the Prophet, peace be upon him, which he uttered as he was once circum-ambulating the Ka’ba, describes human dignity very concisely:*

*“(O Ka’ba!) You are so lovely and your fragrance is pleasant! You are so glorified, your eminence is so exalted! I swear by God in Whose hands Muhammad’s soul is that a believer’s eminence is even loftier than yours in the abode of God. His property, soul, and honor are greater than your honor”* (Ibn Maja, Fitan, 2)



*'Do not despise the people of ruins,  
There are ruins with treasures inside.'*

*(Ibrahim Haqqi of Erzurum)*

# Becoming a Blessed Human

**Dr. Ülfeŧ Görgülü**

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I was returning from a seminar. I was able to check in for the plane at the last minute and sat back in my seat in a rush, exhausted. After I greeted the passenger sitting next to me and wished her a safe trip, a long conversation followed. When she learned that I was working for the Presidency of Religious Affairs, she told me a story from her childhood. She told me that the good advice and teaching on faith her late grandfather had given her still rang in her ears, and she missed those sweet talks with him. She shared with me one piece of good advice her grandfather frequently repeated: “My child, live such a life that God’s creating you was worth it!”

My Lord! What a wise saying this was! The moment I heard it I started offering my thanks to God for allowing me to hear it, which prompted questions that flooded my brain almost simultaneously. Has mankind been able to live a life that was worth God’s creating it? Have we really performed enough to deserve honor? Have we been able to fathom and appreciate the blessing of our life? Have we really strived enough to become the Blessed human, to soar to a status superior to that of angels?

That God created man, that he gave him life by breathing from his own spirit, making him his vicegerent on earth, choosing him as a servant to speak to – aren’t these proofs for man’s most esteemed status God appropriated for him? Despite

angel's reservations that man can cause disorder and corruption and shed blood on earth, God sounds like he favored his servant when he replied to the angels, "Surely I know what you do not know," and after teaching him the names he commanded them to prostrate before him (Baqara 2:30-34). The human was honored by his Lord and he honored the earth as a creature of dignity.

Each of us is born into this world as a member of the Prophet's (Adam's) family. Our Creator took an oath four times to declare to the universe our perfect pattern of creation (Tin 95:14). He blessed us with honor and eminence (Isra 17:70) and named us his vicegerent on earth. He gave us heart, pointing to his Glorified Abode. The universe has been created for us; all existence has been given to our service, to our discretion. messengers have been sent, the gates of heaven opened, and the message was revealed. If only the human – who often assumes that honor is possessing knowledge, status, position, wealth, or proximity of those who own those things – could fathom that real honor is being a true servant to the lord of the worlds and a member of the community of his messenger, the mercy to all worlds. While God Almighty prizes us as such, we measure human dignity by material criteria and social status. It is not human dignity that we talk about, but his prizes.

O my Lord! We have become alienated from ourselves since we have distanced ourselves from you. We cannot know our value, nor the value of others. We have failed to become the Blessed human. We, humanity, are failing the class of being human! We have made slaves of what You created free. Slavery was the greatest blow to human dignity. We thought we were free when we were, in fact, under the yoke of carnal desire. We have enslaved ourselves. Lost, off the course, our compass broken, humanity is on the cliff of ego, being dragged to the edge. We are throwing ourselves into danger with our own hands. We have spoiled ourselves.

How pitiful...

Objectifying women

Babies exterminated in the womb

Our youth that we have sacrificed to alcohol and drugs, not as Abraham offered his son, Ishmael, to God

Everyone who is made an "other," abused, discriminated, victims of terror and torture

Exploiting labor, damaging honor, violating rights

Seeds that could not sprout and thus withered. Branches that died before Spring arrived

Hands that meet weapons instead of pencils

Hearts that beat for revenge and hatred instead of love  
Chests that tremble with fear; cries and moans under torture

Remember the bullet, deprived of love, which penetrated the love-filled heart of

Muhammad of Palestine, on the lap of his father, before the eyes of the entire world

Zainab had just taken her seat with her brothers and sister at the table her mother had set in their courtyard when a Scud missile landed... What was blown apart was not their small bodies; it was human dignity. It was human conscience gone bankrupt.

Each time we stabbed the knife, we did not stab it into the victim, but into our own hearts...

We pitied our selves!

We should have worn the crown of good manners, the dress of piety... women and men, young and old, mother and father, children and brothers... altogether. We should not have directed our hands or tongues to the soul, property, honor,

dignity of a brother or sister (Muslim, Birr, 32). Our hearts should have trembled at the sight of someone feeling cold. We should have helped the fallen ones rise; we should have lost sleep over someone who is heartbroken. Children of Africa, Arakhan, children of the world, our children should not have died from famine and drought, while we were filling our stomachs to the brim...

And our Lord is dismayed with us! Remember when our lord said to his messenger: “*Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor has He become displeased with you*” (Duha 93:3). I am afraid he is displeased with us. We have ruined ourselves.

We were the reasons for the revelation of chapters hujurat and humaza. “*Woe to every one who slanders and vilifies, who (sees himself above others because he) has amassed wealth and (without expending it in God’s cause and for the needy) counts it (in greedy love for it)*” (Humaza 104:1-2). We remembered then that we were brothers. What sort of a brotherhood would it be if we derided, defamed, and insulted one another with nicknames; if we did not avoid suspicion, spied on one another, and backstabbed (against one another) (Hujurat 49: 10-12)? The revelation condemns those who defame people’s honor and slander their decency (Nisa 24:4).

Our family was once our greatest treasure. Respecting parents was preceded in importance only by obeying God (Isra 17:23). Now, we do not have any room for these people, through whom we have come into existence. Our lord gave us our mates that we may move towards and find rest in them, and he has engendered love and tenderness between us (Rum 30:21). We have consumed both love and compassion. Since violence has become the medium of communication, our homes are left without peace and honor. We have preferred not to use our language – so sweet that it can enchant even a snake to come out from its hole – for love and compassion, but to criticize, curse, humiliate, and to hurt one another. We closed our ears



to what the learned ones said: “Do not hurt any object (let alone humans).” We have despised the servants of the Beneficent one, we have been defeated by our ignorance (Furqan 25:63). our children used to be our heavenly flowers; we have stripped them of their colors and fragrances. We have not killed them for fear of poverty, but we have mercilessly massacred their spirits, destroyed their tiny worlds with our giant ambitions and caprices. The only difference between us and our children is age; aren't we equal in dignity and eminence? Whereas our Prophet declared: “They are not from us who do not show mercy to the young and who do not treat the old with respect” (Tirmidhi, Birr, 15). If only we could obey his word, observe his practice...

O the messenger of God! In dignity and honor, a slave is no different from a free man in your eyes, and so equal are the poor and the rich, the women and the men, the minor and the senior, the black and the white. You declared in your Farewell Sermon (Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, V, 411) that each man was equal, and superiority could only be gained through piety and righteousness. If only we could grasp that... You said, “The best person is the one who is useful to people,” (Bukhari, Maghazi, 35), but we do not have contests for goodness in our world.

You taught us that God has entrusted women to us (Muslim, Hajj, 19). For men, however, it was not uncommon to treat women like slaves they could master. You pointed to the fact that the path to heaven and perfect faith was through love (Muslim, Iman, 22), but we could not be guardians of love. You reminded us that speaking unfavorably about a believer's honor and decency was one of the gravest sins (Abu Dawud, Adab, 35), but we could not hold our tongues. You stood up and honored the funeral of a non-muslim and said that he was a human (Muslim, Janaiz, 81); but we have not truly appreciated the value of our own friends. Even while you were beholding the beauty of the Ka'ba, the house of God, you declared that the honor and immunity of a



believer was greater than the honor of Ka'ba (Ibn Maja, Fitan, 2); but we have not abstained from defiling each other with our own hands and words.

We have learned from you how honorable, in God's eyes, some people are when you said, "There are some people who are pushed away from doorways, desperate and miserable, but when they swear, God makes them rightful in their swear" (Muslim, Birr, 138). Similarly, the poet said "Do not despise the people of ruins / There are ruins with treasures inside." But we have closed our ears to this truth and have not abstained from despising the poor. "Servants of God, be brothers and sisters" (Muslim, Birr, 25) you warned; but we could not, and instead we have become enemies; we have produced enemies.

O the messenger of God! Now we regret what we have done, and we want to repent. We want to purify ourselves. We want to purify our hearts that are spoiled with all kinds of sin by asking forgiveness. It is our wish to refresh our faith and our allegiance. We want to recompense for all we have done by restoring the hearts we broke, the honors we damaged, and the rights we violated. So as to become a human worth his or her creation and to acknowledge your mission as a messenger, teacher, and the best role model sent to us, we are extending our hands to testify our faith and take the oath one more time: "I testify that there is no deity but God and Muhammad is his servant and messenger."





*Whereas you have filled the universe with all  
your being*

*Don't you think you are only your life Come  
into the heart*

*You are the soul of the universe*

*(Ibrahim Haqqi of Erzurum)*

# The Honorable Trial of the Honorable Being

**Rukiye Aydođdu**

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Everything started with a question:

“Am I not your Lord?”

“Yes, we do bear witness.”<sup>1</sup>

In a time before time, before the earth and seven layers of the heavens were created, when only he was present, the Lord of the Worlds wanted to create a vicegerent for Himself. And so he did, from “dried, sounding clay, from molded dark mud”<sup>2</sup> and breathed into him from his Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

He attained life from that Spirit, he was honored with it; the children of Adam have always possessed a part from him. With that Spirit he was able to name things<sup>4</sup> and so glorified became he that angels prostrated him.<sup>5</sup>

The universe was given to the service of this honorable being.<sup>6</sup> Whatever was in the heavens and on the earth were now under the command of his vicegerent; the earth as a wide

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1 Araf 7:172

2 Hijr 15:26

3 Sajda 32:9

4 Baqara 2:33

5 Kahf 18:50

6 Jasiya 45:13

expanse<sup>7</sup>, the night as a garment. Sleep was made for him to rest, and day was made so he could rise to life and go about his daily livelihood.<sup>8</sup> His lord raised the mountains for him so that the earth does not shake,<sup>9</sup> decorated the night with stars for him to show him the way in darkness.<sup>10</sup> As a sign of his mercy, he first sent forth the wind as glad tidings, and then sent bountiful rains to raise all kinds of plants on earth.<sup>11</sup> This most honorable<sup>12</sup> being of all existence, who was equipped with ears, eyes, and a heart, was precious because he could think, reason, and draw lessons as he observed all these blessings his lord had bestowed for his benefit. For he was the only creation who knew his lord as the lord when he was asked, and who was honored to be his servant.

The human shouldered the Trust, from which every other creation had shrunk. He will always put on his lord's crown of dignity because he preferred him "with particular preferment" above many of those whom he created.<sup>13</sup> His light will always shine forth from the face of this honorable being, for he was created in the perfect pattern of creation.<sup>14</sup>

This honor was given to him by God. This is why he always held an eminent status in the universe: just because he was human. Honor, the core values of dignity and esteem that he was innately graced with, these are what distinguish him from the rest of existence and make him human.

His lord took this honorable being as his addressee; he spoke with him; he revealed to him. When he deviated, he

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7 Nuh 71:19

8 Furqan 25:47

9 Mursalat 77:27

10 An'am 6:97

11 Furqan 25:48

12 Nahl 16:78

13 Isra 17:70

14 Tin 95:4

sent him books and messengers to find his way. The duty of the messengers, the pride of humankind, was to honor humans and increase their knowledge and value. When man's values, virtues, and knowledge of the divine began to wane, the lord held out his hand and never left him alone. he sent messengers as bearers of glad tidings and warnings.<sup>15</sup> Each of these messengers epitomized human dignity and taught people how to carry this dignity as a medal of honor pinned on their chest.

Abraham was honorable when he was loyal to his lord and passed the trial of submission.

Jacob was honorable in the lands of Canaan as he patiently waited for his son.

Joseph was honorable when he was thrown into the well, protected his chastity, and when he was tried with imprisonment.

Job was honorable as he welcomed all the troubles, for they were from his lord.

Noah was honorable when he challenged the flood with his faith.

When he was fighting the extremism of his people, Moses was honorable as he split apart the sea with God's leave.

Human dignity was exalted by the messengers, who were sent to lead humanity.

The messengers of God were ordained with virtues like belief, piety, righteousness, ethics, justice, loyalty, mercy, decency, patience, modesty, humility, and all other qualities that make us human, so as to illuminate our path for a life lived with dignity.

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15 Baqara 2:213

And humanity was honored one last time by the last representative of messengers, the Seal of Prophethood, the illuminating light,<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Mustafa.

Just as the dawn comes after the darkest moment of the night, his light shone across the earth and heavens in that Age of Ignorance (*jahiliya*) when people were slaves and they were traded in the markets, when children were buried under scorching sand, and humanity was suffering with the pains of all varieties of ignorance. That light reminded people who were estranged from their lord that they were human. The values and qualities that had made man honorable were quite different before Islam.

In that age in which mankind was more predatory than the hyena, people were honorable and respectable only to the extent their ancestors were. Thus their honor was nothing more than their ignorant greed and pride.<sup>17</sup> Honor could only be inherited from forefathers through power, nobility, and wealth. People of *jahiliya* thought their honor increased when they wastefully distributed their wealth in ostentation. Honor was only for the members of one's own tribe, as wars between tribes and blood feuds lasted for decades. In this context of violence, tyranny, and persecution, man persecuted his own soul by worshipping gods other than their lord, alienating themselves from him. Whatever made the human bow before things other than his lord dishonored man, and distanced him from his essence.

In the midst of all this violence and wickedness there came the messenger of God. He was given the mission to restore human dignity by eliminating all false means of honor and declaring that man could be honored only when he prostrates before God. he reminded those who were drowning in the darkness of ignorance of what it mean to be human on earth and how honorable they were - be they women or men, rich

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16 Ahzab 33:45-46

17 Fath 48:26



or poor, slave or master - simply because they were all God's servants: "o people! Know this well that your lord is one and your father is one. All of you are of Adam, and Adam was of soil. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab – except for piety and good action."<sup>18</sup>

This illuminating light, the messenger of God, elevated human dignity at a time when humankind was undergoing a serious trial of honor; he restored it to where it was meant to be, and introduced the vicegerent of the earth to himself.

Thanks to the Prophet, women remembered they were humans too. Women, who had been considered as a curse,<sup>19</sup> were now perceived as a human, as members of society. They were servants of God as much as men were. Women who were hurt, whose honor was defiled, who were treated as slaves, earned their honor with the Prophet, and became as worthy as crystals; they were approached with kindness and elegance.<sup>20</sup>

Children have earned their value as minor humans with the Prophet. The baby daughter, whose father's face darkened and choked with anger upon her birth,<sup>21</sup> became the most beautiful God-given blessing. This young child was now to be given a good name,<sup>22</sup> a good upbringing,<sup>23</sup> and treated as honorably as any human deserved.

There were no obstacles for Uthama, whose father Zayd was a former slave who was humiliated and despised, to become a commander of the army – just as there were no obstacles for Ibn Umm Maktum, a disabled Companion who was blind, when he lead his community in prayers. Within his com-

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18 Ibn Hanbal, V, 411

19 Ibn Hanbal, VI, 240

20 Bukhari, Adab, 111

21 Zukhruf 43:17

22 Abu Dawud, Adab, 61

23 Tirmidhi, Birr, 33

munity, the Prophet did not discriminate by nobility during legal trials and punishments. His daughter Fatima was no more privileged or disadvantaged than the Fatima b. al-Asvad of the mahzum tribe when it came to establishing justice.<sup>24</sup>

Any wrong committed against human dignity or to a person's physical or spiritual person was treated as a crime. This was why the Prophet warned Abu Dharr to cleanse himself from the impurities of *jahiliya* when Abu Dharr uttered unbecoming words about Bilal, the Prophet's caller-to-prayer, and his skin color.<sup>25</sup> A man deserves humane treatment, whatever language, religion, color, or status they happen to possess. The dead corpse of a man is as honorable as he was while alive, even if he was a follower of a different religion; this was why the Prophet rose up to honor the funeral of a Jew.<sup>26</sup> Any behavior that humiliated and damaged human dignity was to be prohibited, for the life, property, and honor of mankind were declared immune from any harm. life, property, mind, family, and faith are sacred values to be protected. Causing physical harm, conducting material or spiritual violence, speaking unfavorably in one's absence, slandering, making fun of, looking down upon, even thinking unfavorably about him or her, was prohibited as being damaging to dignity. For the human is as precious to the universe as an eye pupil is for a human. Treating man pleasurably and never hurting his heart are as rewarding as worship. Breaking man's heart, which is the throne of the Divine, the manifestation God looks upon, is as severe a crime as destroying Ka'ba, the house of God.

After restoring the quality of honor to man, the source of all virtues, the Prophet, the mercy to all the worlds, decorated man with the qualities of Islam, one by one. he exemplified, through his hand, tongue, and conscience, the best of gen-

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24 Bukhari, Hudud, 12

25 Muslim, Ayman, 38

26 Muslim, Janaiz, 81

erosity, modesty, decency, selflessness, philanthropy, mercy, compassion, justice, tolerance, and all other virtues that make us human, setting an example to last centuries. Because of his example, kindness to women, respect to the elderly, and compassion and mercy to children have developed

In order to make an honorable life possible, The Prophet of mercy advised on all matters of life, down to the smallest detail. He taught us how to protect our hearts from spiritual diseases, how to progress without burdening ourselves with hatred, and how to worship our lord. He also taught us human relations, and good manners for conversation, eating, and clothing. He presented to us all the information needed so we could stand up for life as an honorable being, so we could determine a proper perspective, and so we could struggle in life without compromising our dignity.

The light emanating from the messenger of God, an unequalled mercy for all the worlds,<sup>27</sup> will continue to illuminate our path in the ages to come. The principles he brought will suffice to remind us when we forget who we are, become alienated from ourselves, or fail to recognize the image in the mirror when we look at it. We need them, in fact, right now, as our honor is being seriously tested and we search our identities, personalities, and the very reason of our creation. man is imprisoned in his physicality by the yoke of hasty daily occupations. he is isolated from his metaphysical dimension, his ethical responsibilities and values of faith. his mission on the earth is detached from the world beyond. With a false belief that he could liberate himself by moving away from spiritual values, the modern human has locked himself into new dungeons – the carnal soul, history, society, technology, media, economy, and fashion. he has become a machine, a cog in the wheel, trying to live a life separate from the concepts of law, rights, ethics, and faith. It is a model of man who cares more

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27 Anbiya 21:107



about how he looks rather than who he really is, ambitiously seeking his dignity in the crowds. he is ego-centered, irresponsible, and greedy. Freed from feelings of fraternity, selflessness, mercy, and cooperation, the philosophy of the modern man is not “a man is a brother to his fellow man,” but “a man is a wolf to his fellow man.” he is not moved at all by the sight of a boy grabbling in the trash for food, by a woman selling tissues in the cold of the street, or by those slain in war. It is indeed, perhaps, the clearest evidence of humanity’s lost honor when one is not disturbed at all by the damage of others’ honor. having endured this test of his honor for centuries, the human can continue to survive with dignity, the foundation of all virtues, only if he becomes aware of the Divine source of his honor - that he is blessed with life originating from this Divine source’s spirit, and when he realizes the wisdom behind the adventure of existence in the universe.





*Human dignity is the primary value necessary for human life. The way a person articulates himself, and the form he maintains throughout his life, fashion his personality accordingly. The quality of this personality dictates the amount of honor a man has. This nature of being is what makes the emergence of human rights meaningful.*

# The Case of Human Dignity

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**H**uman dignity collocates in the dictionary with concepts like respect, self-esteem, distinction, and honor. Human dignity stands for the qualities that distinguish man from the rest of creation. While sharing mutual qualities with other things, there is a distinctive set of values which places man apart, and from which the value of the self or human dignity emerges.

Dignity flourishes as one develops an identity and a self awareness over the years. Along with dignity comes the expectation that others will behave in a similar way. As a concept, human dignity indicates that man is a value in and of himself, and that he is an authentic part of life with his spiritual and physical presence.

Human dignity is the primary value necessary for human life. The way a person articulates himself, and the form he maintains throughout his life, fashion his personality accordingly. The quality of this personality dictates the amount of honor a man has. This nature of being is what makes the emergence of human rights meaningful. Human dignity is not present only in human rights declarations, but also in the foundations of many different religions, all of which engage the term with very subtle definitions. According to the Islamic faith, the human is an honorable being, and he has been created to

be beautiful and superior in both his physical and spiritual structures. In Islam, every human is equal to one another in the house of God. In relation to this, man attains special value through his good work, behavior, and character, and this character defines his dignity, his sense of self. In Christianity, human dignity is founded upon purification from sins and the state of being with God. In other words, the human is a creation by God, and carries divine traces. Thus, no society, rule, or social order should violate human dignity, which is the basis of human rights.

While some of the human spirit's windows open onto gloomy corridors, others open onto illuminated corridors of mercy. In the press, as breaking news, we see more and more acts of evil, like tyranny and murder, theft or war. These acts of evil represent the dark side of human nature. As a matter of fact, there is a greater capacity for sacrifice and altruism in man's essence than there is for aggression. Understanding and empathy should have bigger roles in our lives, for human dignity can only be established on their foundations.

Empathy is to understand and feel the pain and suffering of other people, and to make them realize they are not alone in their difficulties. Those who are able to say "Your pain is my pain" are more prone to being charitable and altruistic. The roots of ethics are embedded in the sense of empathy; those who can understand the victims of pain, danger, and deprivation want to protect their families and communities from that kind of suffering. As Aliya Izetbegovic wrote, "Sympathy felt for the victim is not something to be found in one's cognitive ability; it can only be found in the spirit, that is, in a principle transcending this world. However intense one's reasoning, thinking, or discretion, it is still not enough to explain and legitimize even one life sacrificed for justice and truth."<sup>1</sup> These

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1 This quote has been translated from the Turkish edition of late Izetbegovic's book *Tarihe Tanıklığım* published in English as *Inescapable*



words have stuck in my mind for quite some time. We are living through times in which egotism has gone pandemic; how can we, then, explain certain people who give up their personal interests to benefit others; who sacrifice themselves for righteousness and truth, so that ballads of freedom and justice can be sung? What inspires them? Which psychological stimulus distinguishes the nobles of this age from others? What gives the human his honor?

Those who persistently maintain a pessimistic view of human nature argue that if a person behaves honorably and altruistically, he is in fact looking after his own interests; that what appears to be a generous action is in fact motivated to ensure help from others for yourself. According to skeptics, we help others to avoid the feelings of shame and guilt that will arise if we don't help – or because we want to improve our self-esteem, to be recognized by others as philanthropic and good.

However, there are cases of help offered without anyone else witnessing it – or even help that cannot be seen, for under specific circumstances, it might be punished with violence. Humankind has witnessed such heroic actions during times of war and depression. A psychological survey conducted on people who saved Jews from Nazi genocide describes the saviors as extraordinarily emphatic individuals. Such people cannot stand to see others suffer, and they take immediate action to stop it. To see others living in destitution or helpless triggers empathy, a voice inside them that says, “I cannot be happy in a world in which others are not.” Human dignity, in this sense, is the ability to respond to the moans of the victim, the “other.”

Recent research has found that it is in man's nature to feel benevolently toward other people. Altruism stands in between our ordinary humanity and our transcendent “angelic” aspect; it resides somewhere in the middle of the friction between spirituality and science. on the one hand, spiritual disciplines con-

sider man as a morally evolvable being that can excel towards perfection; on the other hand science does not ascribe to man a more sacred place in relation to other life.

Our age is witnessing a war between narcissism and altruism. Groups and individuals in the narcissistic domain believe their groups to be privileged and superior, and view other groups as potential enemies. For those who are altruistic, however, all people are equal and equally valuable, and those outside of their groups are potential friends. The narcissist assumes that the rights and claims of his group should be prioritized, that the lives of others can easily be forsaken, and that he is a better man if he only helps members of his group; whereas for the altruist no group can have a priority over other groups, for all lives are sacred. The altruist believes he would be a better person if he helps members of other groups, too.

Normally, ethics, virtues, and idealism are internal brakes that prevent people from hurting each other. Ethics supports one's self-control and prevents evil from spreading further. Nevertheless, sometimes the ideals we have devoted our lives to drag us into the waters of tyranny, and hurting others for the sake of our lofty goals might become not only an acceptable, but also a sacred, duty.

It is usually a group setting in which evil actions are legitimized in the excuse of ideals. One may believe in the legitimacy of aggressive methods to reach so-called lofty goals when there are people around who confirm the righteousness of the path one is taking. A group is always more extreme than the totality of its individual members. Groups that are inclined towards evil can easily subdue doubts and opposition rising from within the group; if they cannot, then they either stigmatize those doubters through betrayal, or they inflict punishment on them. Remember that during the French Revolution, the guillotine was used more for internal enemies than external

enemies. Each revolution, each ideology, generates voices of betrayal from within.

Let us not forget that ethics stands in the face of the “other.” Mercy is enough for us to stand up against evil. Human dignity is dependent on asserting the dignity of all existence. Tyranny has no honor. Each person that carries inside him even a lone spark of divine serenity will be rewarded with as much dignity as he deserves.



*Human rights, which relate to a person's material and spiritual aspects, arise from human dignity and are inseparable qualities of being human. These rights are inviolable and command respect.*

# Islamic Law and Legal Judgments Based on Human Dignity

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## Honor Is To Be Human (adamiyyat)

The Qur'an places a strong emphasis on human dignity, as clearly expressed in this verse: “*Assuredly we have honored the children of Adam.*”<sup>1</sup> As for the word choices in this verse, the word “human” is not used, and the emphasis on honor is connected to Adam, the father of humankind. This is a very powerful sign that human dignity arises from being the children of the same parents, Adam and Eve. Then, the honor is *Adamiyyat*, which means being human.

The Prophet pointed to this conclusion in his Farewell Sermon: “*O people! Know this well that your Lord is one and your father is one. All of you are of Adam, and Adam was of soil. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab – except for piety and good action.*”<sup>2</sup> Chapter Hujurat, verse thirteen, also refers to the same truth.

The holy Qur'an and its applied form, Sunnah, or the practice of the Prophet, lay out certain qualities of human dignity.

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1 Isra 17:70

2 Ahmad b. Hanbal, V, 411; Tabarānī, *al-Kabīr* (pblsd. Hamdi as-Salafī), Musul 1404/1983, XVIII, 12; a.mlf., *al-Avsat*, Cairo, 1415, V, 86; Bayhākī, *Shu'abu'l-imān*, Riyad 1423/2003, VII, 132; Haythami, *Majmau'z-Zavāid*, Beirut 1412, III, 586, 595; VIII, 160.

“We brought you into existence;” “breathed into him out of his Spirit;” “We said to the angels: ‘Prostrate before Adam!’ They all prostrated but Iblis did not;” thus he was dispelled from divine mercy,<sup>3</sup> and God made Adam his vicegerent on earth.<sup>4</sup> These, and many other verses in the Qur’an point to the unique position God has bestowed on humankind and their dignity.<sup>5</sup> That the universe has also been given to the service of humankind is also a sign of this honor.<sup>6</sup> According to the Prophet Muhammad’s sayings<sup>7</sup> (peace be upon him) man is equally honorable when he is alive or dead.<sup>8</sup> This must be the reason the Prophet ordered men, after a battle, to dig graves for the dead of his enemy, and prohibited any form of mistreatment of their corpses.<sup>9</sup>

The holy Qur’an prescribes human rights, and the Prophet guided his community to observe them. Based on these two sources, Islamic jurists have produced a rich historical collection of jurisprudence.

In this context, since the damage caused by defiling human dignity and honor leaves behind deep wounds, it is considered the worst of human rights violations, and among the major sins. Such violations are not only perceived as shameful in Islamic societies, but are also listed among serious offences against common law.

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3 A’râf 7:11; Hijr 15:28-44; Sa’d 38:71-88.

4 Baqara 2:30; An’am 6:165; Yunus 10:73; Naml 27:62; Fâtr 35:39; Sa’d 38:26.

5 Râgıb, *al-Mufradât*, “h.l.f”

6 Baqara 2:29; Ibrahim 14:32; Nahl 16:14; Hajj 22:65; Luqman 31:20; Jâsiya 45:13.

7 Mâlik, “Janaiz”, 45; Abu Dawud, “Janaiz”, 60; Ibn Maja, “Janaiz”, 63; Ahmad b. Hanbal, VI, 58, 100, 105.

8 Kâsânî, *Badâi’u’s-sanâi’*, Cairo 1327-28/1910, I, 300.

9 Ibn Hisham, *as-Siratu’n-Nabawiyya*, Cairo 1415/1994, II, 557; M. Hamidullah. 1981. *Hz. Peygamber’in Savaşları* (tr. Salih Tuğ), Istanbul p. 90.

## 1. The honor of Being human (adamiyyat) and Some of Its outcomes in Practice

Human rights, which relate to a person's material and spiritual aspects, arise from human dignity and are inseparable qualities of being human. These rights are inviolable and command respect. On the one hand, human dignity, in its general sense, necessitates respect for basic human rights; while on the other hand, God's creating every individual with features unique to him or her<sup>10</sup> requires respect as well.

Protecting human dignity is, first and foremost, the responsibility of a person himself. The one who demands respect should first be respectful to himself. This is usually possible in two ways: the first is by self-management, i.e. one should protect himself from being enslaved by carnal desires that defile his character.<sup>11</sup> God reproaches the person who has surrendered to his carnal soul, and thus has trodden on human dignity by eschewing consciousness and lowering himself to the level of the beasts.<sup>12</sup>

The second way to practice self respect is by engaging in good works that assert being human. Engaging in good works also has two dimensions, the first of which is that these works should be honorable. The Prophet taught that God delights in honorable work as it befits his majesty, and he does not if the work is not befitting of his Divine Dignity.<sup>13</sup> The second dimension of good work is that a person should engage in activities that help him develop his skills. Each individual has skills in different fields.<sup>14</sup> The major factor towards achieving honor is to develop these unique skills. Personal abilities are God-given

10 Qiyama 75:4

11 Araf 7:179; Furqan 25:44; Jasiya 45:23; Tin 95:4-6

12 Araf 7:176; Kahf 18:28; Ta Ha 20:16; Furqan 25:43; Qasas 28:50; Jasiya 45:23

13 Tabarānī, *al-Kabir*, III, 131; Haythamī, VIII, 344.

14 Isra 17:21; Zukhruf 43:32

gifts to humankind. Other people are in need of these skills, and society is obligated to help bring someone's potential to light. If a person is not working to develop his skills, even though he was given the opportunity to do so, he does not deserve respect. Such people, in a sense, become a burden on their families and the general society; they cannot maintain their dignity within the family nor outside it.

Each ability is a potential strength. If one fails to make use of them, and prefers to live off, or beg for, help from others, this is disrespectful to himself, in the first place. Begging, the Prophet emphasizes in his words, is covetousness and dishonorable,<sup>15</sup> and he praised labor and hard work.<sup>16</sup> Begging is no different than being a parasite, which is obviously not honorable<sup>17</sup> in the least: "It is better that one among you should go and bring a load of firewood on his back and he should sell it and be independent of people, than that he should beg from people, whether they give him anything or refuse him."<sup>18</sup>

When a Companion came to beg, the Prophet asked him if he had anything to sell at home. Then the Prophet sold some his items and asked him to buy an axe for himself to cut firewood. Two weeks later the man came with ten dirhams. The Prophet then said: "This is better for you than that begging should come as a spot on your face on the Day of Judgment. Begging is right only for three people: one who is in grinding poverty, one who is seriously in debt, or one who is responsible for compensation and finds it difficult to pay."<sup>19</sup>

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15 Muslim, Zakat, 103

16 Abu Dawud, "Buyū", 77; Nasāi, "Buyū", 1; Ibn Māja, "Tijārāt", 1, 64; Dārimī, "Buyū", 6

17 Isra 17:70

18 Bukhārī, "Musākāt", 13, "Zakāt", 50, "Būyū", 15; Muslim, "Zakāt", 107; Ibn Māja, "Zakāt", 25.

19 Abu Dawud, Zakat, 26; Ibn Maja, Tijarat, 25.



According to Islamic law, it is compulsory (*fard*)<sup>20</sup> for every individual to work so long as he or she is physically able to do so; begging for such a person is not lawful.<sup>21</sup> For begging is a shame not only to this world, but to the hereafter.<sup>22</sup> Umar, the third Caliph, has the conviction that labor is a more rewarding act than jihad.<sup>23</sup> Hasan b. Ziyad, one of the students of Abu hanifa, rules it appropriate that when a traveler, who is supposed to wash himself for prayer, has neither water nor money, can clean himself by *tayammum* (ablution with clean soil), so as not to abase himself by asking water or money from others.

The reason charity of *fitr* is to be given right before the *eid* (festival) of Ramadan is to enable the underprivileged to free their hearts from the distress of deprivation, at least to a certain degree, so that they can also join a nationwide celebration. It is indeed a humiliating, honor-wounding situation for the poor, both within the larger society in and in the family, when not everyone can celebrate the *eid*. This wound can seriously stain social relations. This is why the Prophet said, “*Do not compel the poor to beg or demand door to door today.*”<sup>24</sup>

Another outcome of human dignity’s presence is as follows: no hierarchy shall be determined, nor shall any one enjoy a privileged status based on qualities or belongings that come by birth through creation, which is beyond one’s free will; these differences cannot be seen as a means of superiority, praise, or as a reason for humiliation; these differences cannot even be a reason for competition during any contest; they cannot be grounds for prejudices; nor can they be used for prestige.

20 Sarahsi, XXX, 245.

21 Sarahsi, XXX, 271.

22 Ibn Maja, Zakat, 26; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 441.

23 Sarahsi, XXX, 245.

24 Mālik, *al-Muvatta’* (Rivāyatu M. b. al-Hasan, pblshd. T. an-Nedvi), Damascus 1413/1991, II, 150; Dārakutnī, *as-Sunan*, Beirut 1386/1966, II, 152-153; Bayhakī, *as-Sunanu’l-kubrā* (pblshd. M. A. Ata), Mecca 1414/1994, IV, 175.

There is a direct proportion between what makes a human unique and precious, and the harmony between his actions with the values ingrained in nature.<sup>25</sup> When one of the Prophet's Companions wounded Bilal by calling him "the son of a black woman," the Prophet reminded this Companion that what determined the value of a person was doing good work.<sup>26</sup>

Another incident with a similar theme is as follows: As reported by Abu Hurayra, there was a black woman, Umm Mi-hjan, who used to sweep the mosque. One day, the Prophet did not see her around and asked about her. The Companions thought they should not have bothered the Prophet with the loss of someone in her position, so the Companions did their last service to her and had the funeral by themselves. The Prophet rebuked them and said, "Should you not have informed me?" he then asked them to show him her grave, where he later offered his funeral prayers.<sup>27</sup>

Being human is the primary attribute, common denominator, while all other worldly differences like achievements and wealth are secondary, acquired later on. These differences should not be taken as criteria in establishing social relations, or as grounds for a hierarchy of superior-inferior definitions. For the Caliph and the ordinary citizen, and the master and the slave, are first and foremost brothers and sisters. If they are both believers, then they are brothers in faith; if not, then in being human.

Mankind are brothers in being human, as they are honored with being the children of the same parents; they are members of the same family, and each are responsible for protecting each other's human dignity. *"All men are but God's family. The most pleasing in the abode of God are those who treat others*

25 Hujurat 49:13

26 Bayhaki, *Shu'abu'l-Iman*, Bombay 1423/2003, VII, 130.

27 Bukhari, Salat, 72, Janaiz, 5, 55, 66; Muslim, Janaiz, 71; Abu Dawud, Janaiz, 34, 57; Nasai, Janaiz, 43, 76; Ibn Maja, Janaiz, 31, 32.

*best and who are useful to people.*"<sup>28</sup> This hadith is important for it emphasizes brotherhood, whose function is as a set of relations in which goodness has the central role. So, there is a law that arises from this brotherhood, crowned by the honor of being the children of the same parents.<sup>29</sup> Failure to observe or underestimate this law is damaging to human dignity. There are many examples which show us that the Prophet did not resort to any kind of discrimination based on social belongings, and that he always took human dignity as the basis in mutual relations. For instance, in 627 CE, when there was a serious famine outbreak in Mecca, the Prophet sent to Abu Sufyan and Safwan b. Umayya, then the leaders of the city, 500 Dinars to be used for the poor, despite the fact that Meccans were heavily implicated in all kinds of torture and atrocity against the Prophet and Muslims.<sup>30</sup> He sent to Abu Sufyan, again in this time of famine, a sizeable amount of precious *ajwa* dates.<sup>31</sup> The Prophet regularly provided financial aid for a Jewish family, who continued to benefit from it even after his passing away.<sup>32</sup> When Sumama b. Umayr, the leader of the Yamama tribe which after embracing Islam was extremely mistreated by Meccans, halted cereal delivery to Mecca during the famine, Meccan pagans asked the Prophet to solve the problem. The Prophet wrote a

28 Bazzār, *al-Musnad*, nr. 6947; Abu Ya'la, *al-Musnad*, Damascus 1404/1984, VI, 65, 106, 194; Tabarānī, *al-Avsat*, V, 356; a.mlf., *al-Kabīr*, X, 86; Kudāi, *Musnadūsh-Shihāb* (pblshd. Hamdi as-Salāfi) Beirut 1407/1986, II, 255.

29 Nisa 4:1

30 Sarahsī, *Sharhu's-Seerah al-kabīr*, Beyrut 1417/1997, I, 70; a.mlf., *al-Mabsūt*, X, 92; Ibn Ābidīn, *Raddu'l-muhtār*, Cairo 1272-1324, II, 67; V, 420; Muhammed Hamidullah, "Hudeybiye, *DIA*, XVIII, İstanbul 1998. p. 298.

31 Sarahsī, *Sharhu's-Seerah al-kabīr*, I, 70; IV, 76; a.mlf., *al-Mabsūt*, X, 92.

32 Abū Ubayd, *al-amvāl*, Beirut 1406/1986, s. 605.

letter to Sumama, asking him to start delivery of food and other basic needs, which he did.<sup>33</sup>

It is necessary to establish international organizations to be able to solve conflicts that may arise due to natural differences or belongings.<sup>34</sup> Even before he was blessed with revelation, the Prophet had actively participated in the Alliance of the Virtuous (hilf al-Fudul) which was founded to protect the weak and the poor whose rights were violated. The following expressions in the pact signed by this Alliance reads almost like a rebellion of nature against injustice: “By God, if any person suffers from any kind of unfair treatment and tyranny in the city of mecca, we will take action altogether as one body until that person is reinstated with his rights, regardless of him being a good or a bad person, someone from among us or from outside.”<sup>35</sup> It is a significant message to the world by the Prophet when he said if he were to be invited to such an alliance, he would join it again without losing a second, even after he started his mission as the messenger of God.<sup>36</sup> Believers, at the least, have to establish such organizations among themselves to be able to support those who are honorably striving to claim their rights.<sup>37</sup> This is a very urgent need for the Islamic world considering the conditions they happen to be living through.

As each person is granted with free will and the capacity to reason, everyone is responsible for the choices he or she makes. These choices should be respected by others; such choices

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33 Buhārī, “Salāt”, 76, 82, “Husūmāt”, 7, 8, “Maghazi”, 70; Muslim, “Jihād”, 59-60; Abu Dawud, “Jihād”, 114; Nasāī, “Masājid”, 20; Sarahsī, *Sharhuṣ- Seerah al-kabīr*, IV, 182; a.m.f., *al-Mabsūt*, X, 25; Ibn Ābidīn, III, 229; Asri Çubukcu, “Sümame b. Ūsāl”, *DĪA*, XXXVIII, Istanbul 2010, s. 131-132.

34 Baqara 2:109, 191, 193, 217; Nisa 4:75; Anfal 8:72

35 Muhammed Hamidullah, “Hilfū'l-fudūl”, *DĪA*, XVIII, Istanbul 1988, pp. 31-32.

36 Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 190, 317.

37 Hujurat 49:9

could be about anything, including one's personal choice to belong to any group.<sup>38</sup>

Depending on one's natural being and to a certain degree with the influence of the environment, a person may move towards a certain community and feel a sense of belonging with them. This could be any institution that helps shape the spiritual domain of life, like a religion, sect, or a spiritual group, or any other organization that has formed around a social engagement, like a foundation, party, society, or club. It is a very natural situation that different people may choose different institutions, and so long as there is no bigotry and fundamentalism, then people should respect each other's convictions. It is also very natural to discuss these choices under certain conditions, and this is also quite a normal, very human situation. Resorting, however, to violence of any kind, physical or psychological, is not approved by fundamental sources of Islam. Violence is a reason for conflict.<sup>39</sup>

## **2. Some Judgments in Islamic Law Based on Human Dignity**

There are multifarious judgments under different disciplines of Islamic law which were based on human dignity. Covering all of these judgments would produce a paper at least as long as a doctoral dissertation, if not longer. So, we will be selective in this paper as we will touch on some examples which we think exemplary enough to give a general idea about Islamic law from the perspective of human dignity.

It is an unfortunate reality of the history of mankind that one of the most frequently committed acts of crime was people being humiliated and exposed to dishonoring behavior. Wars are filled with such acts of evil. The conversation the

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38 Kahf 18:29; Fussilat 41:40; Insan 76:3

39 See, Baqara 2:256; Yunus 10:99; Nahl 16:125; Kafirun 109:6; Taha 20:24-44.

Queen of Sheba had with the nobles of her people teaches us that violation of human dignity was, and has always been, an inescapable consequence of wars. When she received a letter from the Prophet Solomon inviting her and her people to faith, her nobles told her, “*We dispose great power and we dispose great daring but the decision is yours, so consider what you will command.*” She said: “*When kings enter a country, they cause destruction and corruption in it, and make the noble (ones of its inhabitants) abased. This is what they really do.*”<sup>40</sup>

Despite many efforts globally devoted in this direction, this human condition has persisted. For instance, millions of women were raped during WWII.<sup>41</sup> Even more recently, more than 40,000 Muslim women were systematically raped by Serbs during the Bosnian War in 1992, leaving behind a still lasting sense of humiliation in the Muslim world.<sup>42</sup>

The Blessed Prophet, peace be upon him, abolished all kinds of torture during war or in any other situation. The Prophet conveyed to mankind in a blessed saying (*hadith qudsi* – a meaning that was revealed from God but put in words by the Prophet) that God said, “Do not torture my servants.”<sup>43</sup> he further made his position very clear when he said, “Do not torture any being God gave life,”<sup>44</sup> and he further warned people directly at times when he said, “Do not torture.”<sup>45</sup> One of the directions<sup>46</sup> the Prophet gave to the military units he sent

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40 Naml 27:20-44

41 Ahmet Özel, *İslam Devletler Hukukunda Savaş Esirleri*, Ankara 1996, p. 68-69.

42 See, Ahmet Özel, p. 62, 68-69.

43 Ibn Abî Shayba, *al-Musannaf*, Haydarâbâd 1288/1968, IX, 423; Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 172-173; Tabarâni, *al-Kabîr*, XXII, 272

44 Tabarâni, *al-Kabîr*, III, 218; Zeyla’î, *Nasbu’r-râye* (pblshd. M. Avvâme), Beirut 1418/1997, III, 120; Heysemî, VI, 376.

45 Muslim, Jihad, 2; Abu Dawud, Jihad, 82; Tirmidhi, Seerah, 48; Jihad, 14.

46 Ahmad b. Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, IV, 172, 173.

for war or for reasons of security was never to inflict torture to any living being,<sup>47</sup> even when their fiercest enemies were captured, he never allowed Muslims, especially those who came early to the faith and suffered enormous violence, to inflict harm on others. For instance, Suhayl b. Amr, the spokesperson of Quraish, was a great orator and poet who abased Muslims and provoked his tribe for war. When Umar asked the Prophet to give him permission to “uproot Suhayl’s front teeth,” the Prophet rejected him and he said, “I cannot torture, otherwise God will torture me.”<sup>48</sup>

Abolishment of torture by the Prophet is a very important decision, for torture is a very grievous, dishonorable, hurtful, humiliating act that dates back deep into history; today it is considered as a crime against humanity.<sup>49</sup> Torture is categorically prohibited, no matter who its target – be it a servant, slave, a free man, suspect, convict, or prisoner of war; and regardless of one’s religion, language, or ethnic identity. Torturing animals is also prohibited.<sup>50</sup>

The principle of reciprocity in international law is not valid, according to Islamic jurists, in the case of torture, even though the other side is using it. There are examples of this from early Islamic period. Amr b. al-As and Shurahbil b. al-Hasana sent with Aqabe b. Amir al-Juhani to the Caliph Abu Bakr, the head of a commander from the enemy side who was killed during a battle in Damascus. When Abu Bakr was not at all pleased with this, Aqaba said the enemy was treating Muslims in the same way. Abu Bakr warned him and soldiers as he said, “Why are you following the Persians and Byzantines, when we have the

47 Tabarani, *al-Mu’jamu’l Kabir*, III, 218.

48 Vâkidî, *al-Maghâzî*, Beirut 1966, I, 107; Ibn Abî Shayba, XIV, 387; Bayhakî, XIV, 387.

49 Bukhari, *Mazalim*, 30; *Zabaih*, 25; *Maghazi*, 36; Abu Dawud, *Jihad*, 110.

50 Ibn Majah, *Zabaih*, 10.

Book of God and the practice of his messenger Muhammad, peace be upon him.”<sup>51</sup>

Islamic scholars agree on five fundamental values which they think every individual and every society should possess and which set the common point of agreement among all religions in terms of happiness in the hereafter and for an honorable life in this world. Formulated as the “purposes of shariah,” these values are religion, life, mind, family, and property. These values are indispensable, their protection is necessary, and they are innately owned by every person as a result of his or her being human only.<sup>52</sup> These are fundamentally fixed for all people for all circumstances without any discrimination. During his Farewell Sermon, which the Prophet delivered during his one and only hajj pilgrimage, he declared that the life, property, honor, and decency of every person was inviolable, after which he repeated three times: “Do not do injustice!” “Do not do injustice!” “Do not do injustice!” he even assigned those who were present to pass this knowledge onto others who were not.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the *raison d'être* of the State, which is the highest possible institution of a society, is to protect these values. The legitimacy of a State, thus, is in direct proportion with how much a State achieves or fails to observe this protection. For instance, the rights of non-muslim citizens in an Islamic state, rights pertaining to freedom of faith, protection of their lives, property, mental capacity, honor and decency are under the guarantee of the muslim government, for they are innately

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51 Tahāvī, *Sharhu mushkili'l-āsār* (pblshd. Shuayb el-Arnaūt), Beirut 1415/1994, VII, 404-405; Bayhakī *as-Sunanu'l-kubrā*, IX, 132; Ibn-ū'l-Mulakkin, *al-Badru'l-munīr*, Riyad 1425/2004, IX, 104.

52 Juvayni, *al-Burhān* (plshd. A. ad-Dīb), Davha 1399, II, 923-964; Shatībī, *al-Muvāfakāt* (pblshd. A. Dirāz), Cairo, ts. (al-Maktabatu't-Tijāriyyatu'l-kubrā), IV, 27-32; İ. Kāfi Dönmez, “Maslahat”, *DİA*, XXVIII, Ankara 2003, p. 82.

53 Ahmad b. Hanbal, V, 72.



entitled to these rights.<sup>54</sup> In the case of non-muslim citizens suffering from injustice just because of their faith, the Prophet, peace be upon him, said he himself would plead against the perpetrators on the Day of Judgment: “Fear God in the matters with non-muslim citizens. Whoever treats a non-muslim citizen with injustice/tyranny, or unfairly limits whatever he is entitled to the full use of, diminishes his right, forces him to work more than his capacity, or usurps his property without his will, I shall plead for him on the Day of Judgment.”<sup>55</sup>

The Qur’an stipulates in clear terms very heavy penalties for violations of these values<sup>56</sup> in order to protect them and for deterrence.<sup>57</sup>

Islamic law recognizes the defense of these values justifiable in accordance with human dignity, any such defense as a reason for lawfulness, and those who lost their lives while defending their lives,<sup>58</sup> religion,<sup>59</sup> property,<sup>60</sup> family and honor<sup>61</sup> are given the glad tidings of martyrdom, which is one of the most honorable statuses one can be blessed with.<sup>62</sup>

The Qur’an and Sunnah, two major sources of knowledge in Islam, rule violation of decency and honor as a heavy crime and stipulate legal penalties, for it incurs a serious damage to people’s honor and is humiliating in public view. The most significant example of this crime was when Aisha, the Prophet’s wife, was slandered with an accusation of fornication. The

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54 See Köse, Saffet. 2003. *İslam Hukuku Açısından Din ve Vicdan Özgürlüğü* (Freedom of Religion and Conscience in Islamic Law).

55 Abu Dawud, Imarat, 31-33.

56 Baqara 2:178, 179; Maidah 5:33, 34, 38, 45; Nur 24:2, 4.

57 Sarahsi, al-Mabsut, Cairo 1321-24, X, 110.

58 Abu Dawud, Sunnah, 29; Tirmidhi, Diyat, 21; Ibn Maja, Hudud, 21.

59 Abu Dawud, Sunnah, 29; Tirmidhi, Diyat, 21.

60 Bukhari, Mazalim, 33; Muslim, Iman, 226; Nasai, Tahrim, 22-24.

61 Abu Dawud, Sunnah, 29; Tirmidhi, Diyat, 21.

62 Nasai, Tahrim, 23.

Qur'an declares that those involved with this crime have violated the principles of good opinion (*husn-i zan*) and presumption of innocence (*aslī berâet*), and have levied a humiliating accusation, thus committed a major sin. The Qur'an also absolves the Blessed Aisha, emphasizing her being a most decent and honorable woman.<sup>63</sup> The Prophet lists accusing a chaste woman of illicit sexual relations<sup>64</sup> among the major seven sins, while the penalty of this crime is flogging with eighty stripes and that their testimony<sup>65</sup> are never to be accepted.<sup>66</sup> The leaders of this conspiracy against the Blessed Aisha were penalized accordingly.<sup>67</sup>

Islamic jurists take the example of Prophet Adam and his wife Eve and judge that all the children of Adam, like their parents, are innately blessed with the honor of freedom. Thus, freedom is an essential status of being human; slavery is an accidental or secondary situation.<sup>68</sup> Freedom is honor.<sup>69</sup>

Slavery is an ancient institution with a legal status in the law; it is not a structure that Islam has devised and introduced to the world. Based on a rule that dates back to Roman law, a debtor becomes the slave of the lender when the former fails to pay back; for this rule alone there have been ongoing wars throughout history.

Since slavery is not a status that befits human dignity, Islam had to deal with this problem that was already present. However, due to social and psychological conditions at the time, it

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63 Nur 24:12, 16, 23.

64 Bukhari, Hudud, 44-45; Abu Dawud, Hudud, 34.

65 There are different interpretations in the doctrine.

66 Nur 24:4

67 Abu Dawud, Hudud, 34; Ahmad b. Hanbal, VI, 34, 35.

68 Sarahsi, XVI, 158; Kasani, VI, 126, 270; Ibn Maze, al-Muhitu'l Burhani, Beirut 1424/2004, V, 245; IX, 224.

69 Sarahsi, VIII, 6, 10, 51; XIX, 96; Kasani, II, 238; IV, 138, 155, 160; VI, 129.

would not be possible to abolish slavery with an early and drastic decision. Therefore, this problem had to be solved gradually, across a span of time. What Islam first did was to improve the life standards of slaves. The Qur'an, for instance, enjoins good behavior towards slaves, slave-girls, and servants.<sup>70</sup> The Prophet forbade calling them names like "my slave," "my slavegirl," but instead "my son," or "my daughter,"<sup>71</sup> and ordered believers to treat them kindly.<sup>72</sup> He also strived to abolish slavery by constantly encouraging emancipation in return for ransom, or for rewards in the hereafter. The Prophet himself assigned Uthama b. Zayd, the son of a slave and a slave-girl, when he was only 18, as the commander-in-chief of the army in which so many senior believers were found, for the Prophet believed in his skills and he wanted to show to the world a most rare example to fight against a master vs. slave classification. When some people were unable to absorb this situation as they could not rationalize a youth commanding an army of prominent Companions, and they started to speak out, the Prophet said he assigned Uthama for he knew he had the merits for the job.<sup>73</sup>

Since freedom and human dignity are innately given to mankind, abandoned children who are found by others are also considered as free by definition, until otherwise proven. Kasani, a hanafi jurist (d. 587 AH/1191 CE) rules on this issue as follows: "An abandoned child is free given apparent circumstances. Umar and Ali ruled such a child to be free. For in the case of children of Adam, freedom is essential. All men are children of Adam and Eve. Both were free. A child born out of free parents is also free. Slavery is an accidental (*arizi*) situation.

70 Nisa 4:36

71 Ahmad b. Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, II, 444.

72 See, Bukhari, *Iman*, 22; *Adab*, 44; *Itk*, 18; *At'ima*, 55; Muslim, *Ayman*, 40/42; Abu Dawud, *Adab*, 124/*At'ima*, 50.

73 Ibn Sa'd, *at-Tabakātu'l-kubrā* (pblsbd. İhsan Abbās), Beirut, ts. (Dāru Sādir), II, 190.

Until the accidental is proven, it is a principle to rule by the essential.”<sup>74</sup>

In ethical terms having good opinions and a mental capacities that are free from prejudice, and in legal terms a presumption of innocence, are natural outcomes of man’s being honorable. Unlike the Christian doctrine of *original sin*,<sup>75</sup> Islam assumes every human to be born pure with the attribute of *essentially innocent*, which sets the basis in day-to-day relations. This has its definition in Islamic law as “Innocence is essential” (Majalla, Article 8). Charging the children of Adam and Eve with the responsibility of their eating the forbidden fruit (*peccatum originis*) results in a situation in which every human is born with this burden, dishonored. Being born with an accusation of a crime he himself did not commit is not compatible with innate human dignity. Whether cleaning him through baptism brings back his honor is a different matter worth discussing in a different text.

According to Islamic law, being human is a presumption of innocence. A person is innocent until his crime is proved, he is free from debts until it is proven otherwise, and he is free until his slavery is proven. The burden of proof is on the one who claims otherwise.

*The Majalla* (a reputable book on Islamic law) lays down the principle of “on secondary attributes, non-existence is essential” (Article no 9), thus placing the burden of proof on matters like debt or crime on the side which claims their existence. The Prophet said: “Proof by evidence is on the plaintiff, oath is on the defendant.”<sup>76</sup> This hadith has been documented in the *Majalla* in article number 76 “Proof is on the prosecutor, oath on the defendant,” which is explained in article 77: “Proof is

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74 *Badāi’uṣ-ṣanāi’*, VI, 197-198.

75 Baqara 2:134, 141.

76 Bukhari, Rahn, 6; Tirmidhi, Ahqam, 12, Ibn Maja, Ahqam, 7.

necessary to prove opposite of what appears on the outside, and oath is to make the essential permanent.”

According to Islam, the man is born clean and pure, and this state is by principle permanent throughout his life; this is why proof is required from the prosecution to prove otherwise. When the prosecutor fails to produce any evidence, the oath of the defendant on his or her innocence is sufficient to indicate legally that the pure state is still valid.

The non-existence of a creed like original sin gives way to one of the fundamental principles in Islamic law: personality principle in both crime and penalty. This is in fact a gift of Islam to the history of legal thought in the world.<sup>77</sup>

Islamic jurists have developed various rulings based on human dignity, one of which is as follows. The man is an honorable being, thus regardless of his faith (believer or non-believer), social belonging, dead or alive, he is pure and clean. Being pure and being honorable are necessary outcomes of one another.<sup>78</sup> There are judgments based on this principle. For instance, the remains of a person, believer or non-believer, are clean;<sup>79</sup> a woman's milk is clean, and thus, a non-believer woman can be a wet-nurse.<sup>80</sup>

The crime of bribery, according to one of the most significant judgments in Islamic family law, has a negative effect on the principle of *kafa'ah* (mutual likeness/equality) in the marriage. Islamic jurists did not see a person who takes bribes equal to a righteous girl who is superior in moral perfection,

77 An'am 6:164; Isra 17:15; Fatir 35:18; Zumar 39:7; Najm 53:38

78 Māvardī, *al-Hāvi'l-kabīr*, Beirut 1414/1994, III, 8; Muhammad Ulayyish, *Minahu'l-Jalīl*, Beirut 1409/1989, I, 50; Zekeriyya al-Ansārī, *Asna'l-matālib*, Beirut 1422/2000, I, 10; Behūtī, *Keşşafü'l-kınā'*, Mecca, 1994, I, 193.

79 Sarahsī, I, 47; Alauddīn es-Semerkindī, *Tuhfetü'l-fukahā'*, Beirut, 1405/1984, I, 53.

80 Sarahsī, XV, 127.

no matter how high a bureaucratic position, professional career, or reputation this man could possibly have. Jurists hold the honor of having a lifestyle given to the devotion of faith and moral perfection, as superior to any other status where justice and honesty are not found.<sup>81</sup>

The Qur'an severely prohibits dishonoring behavior when helping other people. The prohibition is on "putting the receiver under obligation and taunting,"<sup>82</sup> "spending bad things in alms and in God's cause,"<sup>83</sup> and taking any social belonging like religion or ethnicity as the basis while helping others.<sup>84</sup> The Qur'an encourages people to give alms in secret rather than openly,<sup>85</sup> to find those who are poor but who do not ask from others because of their abstinence and dignified bearing,<sup>86</sup> to give only for the good pleasure of God,<sup>87</sup> and not even to expect thanks in return.<sup>88</sup>

Taking these verses and the Prophet's hadith that God will not speak with nor look at those who recount obligations of the debtor<sup>89</sup> as the basis, Islamic jurists rule that dishonoring others by what one has lent is forbidden (*haram*).<sup>90</sup>

Both in the Qur'an and the hadith, dishonoring others by what one has lent is corresponded with the word (*mann*). Jurists define this word as seeing oneself as "the one who bestows

81 Ibn ʿAbidin, *Raddu'l-muhtâr*, II, 322.

82 Baqara 2:262-264

83 Baqara 2:267

84 Baqara 2:272

85 Baqara 2:271

86 Baqara 2:273

87 Baqara 2:272

88 Insan 76:8-9

89 Muslim, Iman, 171; Abu Dawud, Libas, 25; Tirmidhi, Buyu, 5; Ibn Maja, Tijarat, 30.

90 Abû Bakr Osman ad-Dimyâtî el-Bakrî, *Hâşiyetü İ'âneti't-tâlibin*, Beirut 1415/1995, II, 353.

on others,” and they listed the implications of this behavior in the daily life as follows: speaking of his help everywhere all the time, exposing the identity of the person he helped, expecting thanks, prayer, service, respect, support, priority, a privileged status in the community, and having his own work done by others.<sup>91</sup>

Based on the Qur’anic command not to dishonor others with one’s help and advice to give it in secret, as well as the glad tidings of a special treatment by God the Prophet gave to those who help others in secret - so much so that if they gave with their right hand,<sup>92</sup> the left is not aware of this – jurists conclude that helping without revealing it is by far more virtuous.<sup>93</sup>

Two of the best reflections of the care given not to hurt feelings of the poor are the books of *zimam* and alms pillars. Books of *zimam* were the records of purchases on credit kept by shops. In the month of Ramadan, the wealthy would disguise themselves, visit shops in the neighborhood, and would check these books to pay off the accounts of the poor and have their names removed. They would leave simply by saying “may God accept this.” In this way, neither the poor nor the rich would know each other. Also, alms pillars were another symbol of Ottoman elegance. Erected in certain locations of a neighborhood, these pillars were elevated stones with a hollow top which was suitable for putting some money into. So, the rich, who were supposed to pay for his charity, or who simply wanted to give away some alms, would leave his money on these pillars, while the poor would take only as much as he needed. Again nobody knew who was giving or taking the alms. Those who were in need, but who could not ask from

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91 Abū Bakr Osman ad-Dimyātī el-Bakrī, II, 353.

92 Bukhari, Adhan, 16; Zakat, 13, 16; Hudud, 19; Muslim, Zakat, 91; Tirmidhi, Zuhd, 53

93 Abū Bakr Osman ad-Dimyātī al-Bakrī, II, 350.

others could benefit from these pillars without degrading themselves.<sup>94</sup>

## Conclusion

The Qur'an and its human form of expression, the Prophet's sunnah, peace be upon him, and the legal judgments based on these two sources of Islam reveal very clearly the value Islam places on human dignity. The cultural formations regarding human dignity have taken a positive direction over the course of history in Muslim societies, while also generating a rich legacy of thought for further consideration in today's world. Importantly, these legacies include: dynamics like human dignity arising from *adamiyya*, or being human; brotherhood and sisterhood of all people as children of Adam and Eve; presumption of innocence (*asli berâet*) as a fundamental legal principle; the uniqueness of every individual because of God's unique care for everyone in creation; free willpower granted to mankind; man's privilege to communicate with his lord with no need for an intermediary. These are all proofs for humans being an honorable creation. What follows these proofs are the efforts of individuals to protect this God-given honor, behaving in congruence with the natural values granted by creation, and others respecting him so long as he continues to maintain his dignity.

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94 A. Süheyl Ünver, "Sadaka Taşları", *Hayat Tarih Mecmuası*, no. 11/35 (year: 3, vol:2), December 1967, Istanbul, p. 12-13; Hasan Özönder, "Türk Mahallelerinde Sadaka Taşlarının Yeri ve Önemi", *Uluslar Arası IV Türk Kültürü Kongresi, Bildiriler*, Ankara 1997, vol. II; Nidayi Sevim, *Medeniyetimizde Toplumsal Dayanışma ve Sadaka Taşları*, Istanbul 2009; Mustafa Armağan, *Geri Gel Ey Osmanlı*, Istanbul 2007, p. 272







*Values education is not only the product of a certain religious, philosophical, or political view; it is an education with a universal character. Its main objective is to build a more accommodating, just, and peaceful world by way of an educational system based on universal human values.*

# Values Education: Human Dignity and Responsibilities

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## **Introduction**

For the last several centuries, the main idea behind almost all educational systems around the world has been to convey the present culture to younger generations, to inform them in this way as much as they can, and thus develop thought in science and technology. We can confidently argue that very significant achievements have been attained within this framework both in quality and in quantity worldwide. For, while education used to be a field accessible exclusively by the rich and the noble, today educational opportunities are more open to individuals from all walks of life. The question is how has this situation benefited humanity collectively? Have we attained a happier and more peaceful status compared to the past? Or are we suffering a global crisis in the true sense of the word?

Considering the modern civilization and lifestyles of modernity, no one can claim that it is because of lack of knowledge or education that we are where we are today. It is a fact that the leaders of nations in different fields of activity usually reach their positions after top quality educations. If it were a matter of education, the developed countries of the world should have solved problems pertaining to being human as they developed

in science and technology. However, there seems to be a highly contradictory state of being.

The so-called modern education, which has influenced the entire world directly or indirectly, instead of bringing peace, happiness or hope for a future on behalf of all humanity, has prompted violence of all kinds, as wars and conflicts have caused a severe socio-economic injustice both within a nation and among nations, thus resulting in a loss of hope from a great majority of mankind. Moral corruption, that used to be confined to certain locations in the past, has come to dominate the whole world as a result of globalization.

What could be the reason that led to these negative developments? How has humanity come to this point? In this article, we will try to explore answers for these questions in the context of “values education” and “human dignity and responsibility” which are very closely related to the Islamic context of values education. The article is divided into the following sections: a) Factors that paved the way for values education, b) Features of values education, c) Responsibilities of Muslims in the context of values education, d) Conclusion.

### **A. Factors That Paved the Way for Values Education**

Today’s social scientists believe that the problems we are facing globally have been generated by the educational philosophy of the last few centuries. Thus, it is important to analyze this philosophy that is still in use and develop a new one for education. The basic principles of the so-called modern education that was developed three centuries ago based on the theories of philosophers like Newton, Bacon, and Descartes. The underlying principles of these were as follows: 1) The universe is a mechanical system constructed in a series of blocks 2) The human body operates like a machine, and operations could be done in parts independent ly from the whole body, 3) Society

is in a constant mode of competition to be able to continue its survival, 4) Different human cultures are natural enemies, and this is more evident in other living species, 5) Material progress has no limits, and progress is only possible with technological development and economic growth, 6) Mankind has the right to exploit nature.<sup>1</sup> These were the ideas that shaped contemporary education in the seventeenth century.

In response to many of the above-mentioned complications produced by this modern system of education and thought, some scientists argue that our current problems cannot be solved with this system, and a considerable revision is needed. Eva Norland says the following: “We have started to think that the only way to save the future for our children and grandchildren, and save the planet, is to restructure our system of education. We are beginning to look for better education.”<sup>2</sup> Some thinkers are proposing to replace the current system of education and thought with different forms of education that are characterized by “unity” and “interdependence.” one of these forms is values education, on which a number of studies are being conducted in many countries today.

The basis of values education is to generate a human awareness of responsibility over all living and non-living existence on earth. In the epicenter of this awareness should be the “ability to appreciate and love.” This new thought, as opposed to the former modern education, stipulates, in Gregory Bateson’s words, studying phenomena as wholes instead of as fragments, as belonging together instead of as parts, and as circular instead of as chains of linear cause and effect.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Eva Norland, “New World-New Thinking-New Education,” in *Learning Peace: The Promise of Ecological and Cooperative Education*, ed. Betty Reardon and Eva Nordland, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 6.

2 Ibid, p. 10.

3 Ibid, pp 7-8.

Contemporary education had two main purposes: Keeping the respective system or nation ahead of its competitors and keeping the managers of the system in power by popular support. According to Betty Reardon, neither one of these two purposes have fully succeeded. Even though the communist system, the enemy of the Western democracy, collapsed, as a matter of fact, both sides have exhausted their capacities to maintain a limitless arms race; they've manipulated the destinies of the rest of the world, but have also come to a point where they are now unable to satisfy the authentic needs of their own peoples.<sup>4</sup>

Not only the authentic material needs, but perhaps more importantly “they experienced spiritual poverty, with unprecedented levels of alienation, widespread feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness, among all income groups. Worldwide, educational system are in deep crisis.”<sup>5</sup>

The social structures of nations have begun to deteriorate as individuals are feeling less happy, which has severely influenced all institutions of a nation, primarily the family. Unfaithfulness and discord between couples result in divorce, the fruits of which are individuals with diverse problems. Cohabitation without wedlock and an increase in abortion have not only caused serious health problems but also disproportioned world population with an enormous increase in boys.<sup>6</sup>

These moral problems are not confined to individual or societal domains; they are epidemic around the globe. As a result of the globalization process, which is predominantly con-

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4 Betty Reardon, “Learning Our Way to a Human Future,” in *Learning Peace: The Promise of Ecological and Cooperative Education*, ed. Betty Reardon and Eva Nordland, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994, ss. 22-23.

5 Ibid, p. 23.

6 Judith Baonister, “Shortage of Girls in China: Causes, Consequences, International Comparisons, and Solutions,” <http://www.prb.org> (08.12.2003). p. 1.

sidered as a diaspora of capitalism, there are only a very limited number of people who are enjoying abundance and prosperity, and a great majority, especially in underdeveloped countries, are unable to meet even their most essential needs. Wars, conflicts, and violence are not confined to regional territories, as they have effects on all countries of the world. Ecological balance has also been distorted with negative effects on climate, plantation, life styles of living things and species in nature.<sup>7</sup>

What are the features of a values education? We have to specify here that values education is not merely an instruction of a few religious, moral, or esthetic values, but rather it refers to a wider and more comprehensive content and purpose. Let us now take a look at the basic principles and features of values education.

## **B. Features of Values Education**

Values education is not the product of a certain religious, philosophical, or political view only; it is an education with a universal character. Its main objective is to build a more accommodating, just, and peaceful world by way of an educational system based on universal human values. Its target audience is all of humanity.

*Values Education Deals with Problems of a Global Nature:* The priority of this educational system is given to problems with a social and global nature, and to basic humanitarian needs. Values education takes into consideration the health, prosperity, and happiness of mankind as a whole. It envisions a rich context, and never reflects exclusively the worldview of one particular religion, culture, or ideology. It is necessary for us to understand universal values. Values education aims to explore universal human values that enable justice and equal-

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7 Mustafa Köylü, *Küresel Ahlak Eğitimi*, İstanbul: DEM Yayınları, 2006, pp. 7-8.

ity for all individuals and works to develop a medium scaled universal moral content.

*Values Education Is Pluralist:* Values education rests upon pluralism and a consciousness of responsibility. Just as in the way that systems in nature need functional cooperation and different forms of life for survival, pluralism and a sense of responsibility are essential for a just, peaceful, and cooperative social system.<sup>8</sup> This condition is valid and important for all democratic societies. For a democratic society in a sense means a safe and secure society. Safety is connected predominantly to the welfare of the society, which is further connected to a just, honorable, and violence-free life style. A safe society is a healthy society in physical and psychological terms. The pluralist nature of values education is important also in the way it approaches religious and cultural differences not as obstacles but as richness. Schools, therefore, should adopt these differences not as problems, but as opportunities to learn about faith traditions and cultures of other people.

*Values Education Proposes Positive Alternatives:* An important feature of values education is that it does not emphasize negativities and draw people's attention to them, but on the contrary it proposes positive alternatives. Therefore, the purpose is not to stand against wars, socio-economic injustice, and violations of basic human rights, but to engage in some critical thinking on what to do for peace, justice, and for the better understanding and protection of human rights. The primary goal of this education is first and foremost to elevate individuals who uphold human dignity without any discrimination, who respect human rights, and who wish to found a just society. Again, it is not the purpose of this education to make clear the harms of war, injustice, and environmental destruction, but to teach how peace, justice, and ecological balance can be established and protected.

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8 Reardon, p. 34.



*Values Education Is for Everyone:* Some social scientists assume that values education can only address adults,<sup>9</sup> but the target audience of this education is in fact everyone in all formal and non-formal educational levels. If global problems are relevant to everyone regardless of age and gender, then the educational system should adopt everyone as the target audience. There can certainly be variations in content and methodology, which will be determined by providers of education.

*Values Education Has a Humane Philosophy:* The main philosophy of values education is to enable every human being to become aware of his or her humanity by eliminating all internal and external obstacles on the way to this awareness. Values education aims to help students in understanding individual qualities like human rights, honor, dignity, and esteem, and issues like social justice in developed and developing countries. From the perspective of teachers, values education stands for what should be done to analyze global problems, like underdevelopment, solutions to get rid of underdevelopment, and what can be done to establish a new international economy and world order. The scope of values education is to study from different viewpoints the realities of present time in the twenty-first century, while taking into consideration the conditions of the developing world.

*Religious Teachings Have an Important Place in Values Education:* Religious and ethical teachings play an important role in realizing the purposes of values education. Many religions and the faithful of those religions who are considered to be antagonistic to each other do in fact share many commonalities.<sup>10</sup> If Christians are longing for a just, loving, and peaceful

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9 Peter Jarvis, "Globalization, the Learning Society and Comparative Education," *Comparative Education*, vol. 36, no 3, (2000), p. 353.

10 For common moral values in different religions, see, Peggy Morgan and Clive Lawton. *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions*. Edinburg University Press, 1999; Sumner B. Twiss and Bruce Grelle. *Explorations in Global Ethics: Comparative Religious Ethics and Interreligious Dialogue*.

Kingdom of the lord; if Buddhists are speaking of a true peace based on an interconnectedness of the entire existence; if Muslims are emphasizing social justice and fraternity; if Hindus are voicing a cosmic reality that all existence is interdependent,<sup>11</sup> then there is no obstacle for members of different religions to cooperate. Active cooperation is needed to find solutions and to take giant steps for a better society. Every religion must have things to propose with respect to values education in order to solve global moral problems. Thus, it is important to benefit from different religious and ethical traditions, rather than the teachings of one religion only. The purpose is not competition but solidarity.

It is not only religions, but also teachers of religion, that are extremely important in values education. Inspired by the religion they are teaching, teachers of religion are in a position to lead the effort in dispelling evil from the society. They should even try to benefit not only from believers, but also from non-believers or from those who feel themselves spiritually weaker.

To conclude this section, the solutions for global problems as a whole are through raising world citizens who are aware of these problems, which is possible if all people of the world, believer and non-believer, administrator and citizen, rich and poor, old and young, women and men, can observe a system of common values and are educated in this direction.

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Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000; Mustafa Köylü, *Dünya Dinlerinde Ahlak*, Istanbul: DEM Yayınları, 2010.

11 Hope S. Antone, "The Challenges of Globalization to Religious Education: Some Experiences and Reflections from Asia," *Religious Education*, vol. 73, no. 3 (Summer 2002), p. 234.

### C. Responsibilities of Muslims in the Context of Values Education

Muslims do have an important place and responsibility in values education. Considering the Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings and lifestyle, we can certainly argue Islam is absolutely a religion of responsibility. We can discuss these responsibilities as follows:

The Qur'an teaches, before anything else, that no person is created without a purpose, and that everyone will be held accountable for all the good and bad things he does in this world.<sup>12</sup> If mankind is created as the most honorable of all creation (*ashraf al-mahluqat*) (95:4), if he has a status potentially loftier than even that of angels (38:72), then he cannot be left without a purpose.

The Qur'an also signifies the importance of individual responsibility.<sup>13</sup> Every person will account personally for all his actions, good or bad. This means that no one can blame others for his or her own responsibilities. Having said that, the Qur'an never loads people with a responsibility that is beyond their capacity; on the contrary it holds people responsible in the framework of the conditions and opportunities they are granted with.

The Qur'an holds everyone, regardless of their faith, responsible individually. But it lays an additional duty on Muslims who are expected to observe their responsibilities towards followers of other faiths. While the Qur'an describes Muslims as the best community that has emerged from among all humanity, the emphasis is not on their being muslim, but because of the mission they are taking on, which is "enjoining the good, forbidding the evil" (3:110). Thus, according to the Qur'an, believers "protect one another, enjoin the good and for-

12 See the following Qur'anic verses 7:172; 23:115; 29:2, 4;75:36

13 On individual responsibility, see, 6:164; 17:15; 34:25; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38

bid the evil” (9:71), whereas hypocritical or unbelieving societies are described with opposite attributes (9:67). The Qur’an holds not only individuals and societies, but also administrators responsible with this duty (22:41). According to the Qur’an, the main purpose of Islamic community is to spread goodness and beauty, and to eliminate evil.<sup>14</sup> Thus cooperation in righteous works is not a voluntary act, but an order on Muslims (5:2).

It is a remarkable thing that in both the Qur’an and the hadith, *maruf* (the known) and *munkar* (the denied) are used respectively to correspond good and evil. This is evidence that the good and the bad are both naturally known, in general, by all people. This points to an opportunity to cooperate with followers of other faiths in a wide range of fields to uphold moral values.<sup>15</sup> This is why the Qur’anic criticism of People of the Book is not towards all of them, but a certain group among them. This means there are people with whom Muslims can work together with for human values (3:68). The Qur’an also praises those members of People of the Book who engage in good work.<sup>16</sup> A cooperation in this manner was achieved even before the Prophet started his mission. He joined the Alliance of the Virtuous (hulf al-Fudul) which was established to ensure security in a territory that covered Mecca, Taif, and Medina (then Yathrib). He actively participated in struggles against those who violated peace within this triangle. This Alliance had taken the following decisions: “By God, we will stand by the oppressed and take action as one hand until the oppressor reinstates his right. This unity will last until the sea distills a piece

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14 See, 3:104, 110, 114; 9: 71, 112.

15 Zafar Ishaq Ansari, “Some Reflections on Islamic Bases for Dialogue with Jews and Christians” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. XIV, no 3, (Summer 1977), p. 443.

16 3:113, 199; 5:82; 13:36

of wool, as long as the mountains of hira and Sabir continue to rise on the face of the earth, until financial justice is restored.”<sup>17</sup>

Another example of the Prophet’s cooperation with non-muslims in righteousness and useful work is the Medina Constitution he signed with the Jewish community.<sup>18</sup> The stipulations of this pact are very exemplary of the Prophet’s behavior in his good relations and cooperation with non-muslims, unless they are actively involved in an act of aggression towards him.<sup>19</sup>

### D. Conclusion

Humanity has attained unprecedented wealth and prosperity as a result of the developments in science and technology. All countries to a certain degree have reached a level of success in terms of education which have been instrumental in these developments. However, although we can talk about a collective progress in the material sense, humanity has also been dragged into a collapse in terms of moral values. Some social scientists have been very critical of modern education as they saw it as the main reason for this collapse, and they have endeavored to find solutions, one of which is values education. All religions and faiths can contribute to the values education, but Islam has a lot to propose in this field. If Muslims are the most beneficent community from among all humanity, and if Islam is a universal religion, then there are important duties and responsibilities on Muslims in this matter. As a matter of fact, many Qur’anic verses and Prophetic hadith are levying this duty on believers’ shoulders. It is then our responsibility to help our fellow men to return to their essence through a system of values education, and thus make a more prosperous society possible.

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17 Muhammed Hamidullah, *Islam Peygamberi I* (Istanbul, İrfan Yayınları, 1980), pp. 56-57.

18 See, Hamidullah, *ibid*, pp. 198-231.

19 Ansari, p. 443.



*The fact that the human can make his or her own decisions, that they can determine objectives, and conduct their affairs by reason sets the ethical basis of human dignity. Human dignity enables people to see humanity not as an instrument but as a an object.*

# Human Dignity: Source, Limitations, and Foundations

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## **The Need for a Conceptualization of Human Dignity**

“**H**uman dignity” is a given quality of the human nature; it defines identity and personhood. Its inviolability is categorically ensured as it is not externally granted by someone else. Certain things are classified by their honor, while others by their value. Things that are measurable with a price, high or low, are classified by **value**. In order to delineate the uniqueness of the human from other things, we use **honor** instead of value

In recent years, the growing conviction that the human is being ill-treated, regarding his or her physical body and human rights, has brought the concept of human dignity to the forefront as a protective shelter. We have undergone somewhat extreme developments like sperm banks, surrogate motherhood, stem cells, cloning, plastic surgery, and many other technologies. These developments have resulted in discussions about the limitations of the rights a human being can exercise over his or her body. In the political sphere, the discourse of equality for every human being has never been practically expedient. Thus, human dignity must be used instead to guarantee at least basic human rights. Even in the case of crimes against humanity, hate crimes, or any type of material or nonmaterial violence, human

dignity provides a useful resort, and this makes further legal regulations necessary. Due to this and other similar reasons, human dignity is inevitably being used as a red line in order to protect human inviolability, an aspect which has a rather defensive (apologetic) quality.

This defense reveals itself in medicine in the following manner: the modern discourse purports that “the human has rights over his or her body” as a premise, as opposed to the conviction that the body has rights to be observed by the human; this leads to a false belief that the human holds an infinite power of disposition over the body.<sup>1</sup> Determining the limits of control a human can enjoy over his or her body, or other bodies, is a major issue. By necessity, it falls within the interest of fields as diverse as medicine, ethics, law, religion, etc. It is important to support implementations which do not prevent medical progress and do not give rise to legal and ethical problems. In order to find a balance within this new discourse of individualism, it’s important that the authority of religious and ethical values impose thoughtful limits so that man cannot abuse his or her own body, or the bodies of others.

“Bounds of God” is the term used in the Qur’an; it refers to inviolable rights arising from human dignity.<sup>2</sup> The command “not to taunt while almsgiving,” or the divine admonition that was supposedly revealed after the incident in which Abdullah Ibn maqţum was hurt, and all other divine interventions made in favor of humanity show us the Qur’an’s framework for hu-

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1 The following verse of the Qur’an warns us of the situation in the face of an uncontrolled exploitation of the human body: “*I will surely lead them astray and surely engross them in vain desires; and I will surely command them, and they will surely slit the ears of cattle; and also, I will surely command them, and they will surely alter God’s creation. “Whoever takes Satan for a confidant and guardian instead of God has indeed suffered a manifest loss”* (4:119). (It is useful to remember that the stem cell for the animal cloning is generated from slitting the animal’s ear.)

2 See 2:187, 65:1.



man dignity. To put it more clearly, “bounds of God” (*hududullah*) set the territory within which human dignity is protected.

The conceptualization of human dignity starts from the idea of a Being who grants this honor in the first place, and that is where its inviolability rests. It is either religion, ethics, or the state which stand out as the authority from which principles to protect human dignity arise, given the circumstances. Discussing this issue vis-à-vis these multiple authorities directs the matter to another dimension. It is problematic when there are so many different authorities trying to protect human dignity. Some thinkers reject this conceptualization as they argue that it gives way to exertion of authority while preventing achievements in medicine.<sup>3</sup> They consider human dignity to be subjective, voluntary, and unfounded; it offers totalitarian regimes the potential to abuse men in the service of their own interests, to strengthen those who want to dominate people.<sup>4</sup>

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3 See Pinker, Steven. 2008. “The Stupidity of Human Dignity,” *The New Republic*.

4 We must credit Pico della mirandola, the Italian thinker, as one of those who used human dignity as a term in relation to philosophy and religion to protect the human against totalitarian exploitation. his posthumously published work oration on the Dignity of man was significant in that it was a philosophy on the human and it challenged some basic tenets of Christianity. Pico della mirandola (1463-1494) was one of those Christian thinkers who knew best the Kabala teachings that included the mystical trends of Jewish theology and who was able to amalgamate them into his own doctrine. he also tried to reinterpret theologically the names and attributes of God and the trinity issue in reference to Jewish theology. What makes Pico important for us is that the teacher of this renowned figure is acknowledged as the source of humanism. he is Elia del medigo, the Jewish thinker who was a follower of Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Ibn Rushd seems to have influenced France through Siger de Brabant, the Netherlands through Spinoza, and the Italian Renaissance through Elia del medigo. We should not miss the point that those who conceptualized human dignity in the West are in fact students of Ibn Rushd.

## Religious and Ethical Foundations of Human Dignity

The fact that a human can make his or her own decisions, that they can determine objectives, and conduct their affairs by reason sets the ethical basis for human dignity. Human dignity enables people to see the human not as an instrument but as an objective. The human, according to ethical foundation, has ambitions and objectives, while other things are instruments to attain them. Instruments are not conscious beings. If this is the case, the human dignity that comes with birth does not allow any person to become an instrument to serve the objectives of others. “Treat other people as you would like them to treat you” is the golden rule which also established the parameters for human dignity. Being harmed contradicts human dignity just as much as harming others does; they are interrelated. Incarcerating a person contradicts human dignity; however by being involved in a crime that necessitates incarceration, this person has caused others to treat him without dignity.

When Martin Heidegger, in his *Letter on Humanism*, speaks of humanity’s unique world, he is referring to the fact that the human is an *objective being* par excellence, not an instrument. This unique world is constructed in the nature he or she happens to inhabit and the metaphysics that attributes a meaning to it. This philosophical root is what makes the human feel his or her difference from the rest of all universal existence. And this root is the source of all the norms and values like dignity, honor, and self respect. These norms must be transformed into values, values that must be struggled for so that human dignity can make its presence felt. What differentiates the Prophets and those equipped with prophetic values as *active makers of history* is the struggle they underwent for these values, the struggles they underwent so humanity could realize its dignity.

This metaphysical or religious root is more vividly expressed in the Holy Scriptures, including frequent references

to the noble status man possesses in the universe. “God created the man in his own image”<sup>5</sup> in the Old Testament sets the religious foundation for human dignity in Judeo-Christian tradition, which corresponds with the phrase *kevod ha-beriyot* (the dignity of the created), not with *kevod ha-adam* (human dignity), in Hebrew to show that God is the source of human dignity. The Qur’an is even richer in its selection of terms to point to humanity’s distinguished status among all creations. The human is the *vicegerent* of God on earth and has taken on the *trust*; he is not only granted with rational faculties (*lubb, fuad, sadr, kalb, nuha, hijr*), but he has been supported with divine revelation (*lutf* and *fadl*); all signify the eminence of humankind.<sup>6</sup>

### **Do People Have Equal Share from the Dignity?**

In the field of law, human dignity is discussed under the heading of “natural law.” Our natural condition is the strongest foundation for “all are equal.” Preventing any harm based on universal equality necessitates us to go deeper, down to the natural state of being that precedes all other recognitions. We must base human dignity upon this foundation. The end-result of this act has been accepting the existence of basic rights for us to acknowledge that any violation of rights is a violation of human dignity, and to enable every individual to stand up against violations regardless of identity (in affiliation to religion, sect, ethnicity, etc.). This is essentially what underlies the discourse of basic rights and liberties like life, property, and freedom of thought.

Do people have an equal share from dignity, then? This answer is very significantly related to the answer of the question whether all humans are equal. Another point to consider, regarding this question, is the difference of humans from other

5 Genesis 1:26

6 Nisa 4:83

classes of existence. Are human beings different from other forms of existence in their relative degrees or is it a difference of class? This difference of class is valid for all humanity, making each human equal in his difference from other beings. Does this equality of difference qualify each man to be equal to another? If we were to ask this question in the context of human dignity, does *being* human make everyone equally respectable? Or, is it added values on top of being human that make man honorable and respectable?

From the Qur'anic perspective, each human is created with their dignity and respectability under divine protection. The following verse that mentions human dignity compares him with other beings. Thus human dignity lies foremost in the differences between humankind and other beings, and also the added value that humans possess.

*“Assuredly We have honored the children of Adam (with many distinctions): We have sustained their traveling on the land and the sea, and provided for them (their sustenance) out of pure, wholesome things, and preferred them above many of those whom We have created with particular preferment.”<sup>7</sup>*

That humankind has been decreed honorable and respectable is by all means true. However, it is also true that there are occasions in which this honorable being loses his honor. In this case, human dignity is related directly to one's acquisitions and actions, and thus its source becomes embedded in ethics. What makes ethics manifest and meaningful is the human's possessing free will that enables him to choose different actions - that he becomes his agent in the truest sense of the word. From the perspective of ethicists in philosophy, what earns the agent honor from his ethical actions is either evading evil actions (as in I. Kant) or doing good things (as in A. Gewirth).

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7 Isra 17:70

The religious contribution to human dignity is in its relationship to human free will – how man’s chosen actions relate to God. Human dignity is a potential that can be activated by belief and action. *“Surely We have created human of the best stature, as the perfect pattern of creation. Then We have reduced him to the lowest of the low. Except those who believe and do good, righteous deeds, so there is for them a reward constant and beyond measure.”*<sup>8</sup>

The existence of dignity and its continuation are bound to the following covenants: to believe; to guide oneself to truth; to produce value; and to strive to protect the values on which human life rises. True belief enables the human with the power to question, and with an ability to produce results that are not far from truth. The verse about the Sleepers of the Cave (ash-ab-1 kahf), who were able to overcome the societal constructs they were living within, narrates that embracing belief inspired them, first, to search for truth, and then empowered them with a courage to act accordingly.

*“They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance. And We strengthened their hearts”* (Kahf 18:14). This true bond makes many further discoveries of ungiven truths possible. With this power of discovery, friends in the cave were able to express the truth of *“Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth,”* with a courage to proclaim it as they *“rose up”* (iz qamu).<sup>9</sup>

This dual power, enabled by having the truth well settled in one’s mind and heart, further makes deeper investigations possible. While saving one from false associations, it also grants ability and courage to develop true associations. The *iz qamu* phrase in the verse refers to a standing in this nature, and a power to produce new values (as Arabic word for value is *qiyamah* originating from the same root with *qamu*). Finding

8 Tin 95:4-6

9 Kahf 18:13-14

the truth (the rational process) and the power to articulate it (process in the heart) helps one to discern between whether what he or she does is right or wrong, for the Sleepers of the Cave utter the following words at the end of this process: “*Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and we never invoke any deity apart from Him (they believe with certainty); if we did so, we would certainly have uttered an enormity (they know with certainty).*”<sup>10</sup>

We can deduce from this verse that true belief and guided thinking produce right values. This determination to strive for those values are the source of human dignity. Those who are in such a search are “raised to life from death” and a light is set for them on their direction as described in the following verse:

*“Is he who was dead (in spirit), and We raised him to life, and set for him a light by which he moves (without any deviancy) among people, is he like the one who is as one lost in depths of darkness, from which he cannot get out?”*<sup>11</sup>

The Qur’anic association of human dignity with belief, guided thinking, and value-guided action intersects with the existentialist definition of human dignity. Existentialism, which defines the human as the sum of his thoughts and actions, considers man’s willpower to go beyond the **determining quality of societal conditions** he lives within as the best way to define him. This emphasis on the willpower that lies at the very core of human freedom is the major definitional feature of existentialism. M. Heidegger, J. P. Sartre, and G. Marcel are critical of modern times as this awareness of existence and meaning are disappearing. The existence is not a static, but instead a dynamic, field of definition. man features a dynamic structure that cannot be reduced to the static causality laws of nature and that cannot be defined under universal concepts. Thus, speaking of the human as an existence is actually speaking of him as

10 Kahf 18:14

11 An’am 6:122

a potential or becoming. We can jump from here to discussing the identity of the human and what it really is, but we will also continue taking opportunities to elevate human dignity from being just a nominal acceptance to its actualization.

### **The Source of Human Dignity: The Human Identity and What It Really Is**

The questions of 'who and what,' should be answered by taking into consideration what he has brought from birth and what he has later acquired.

The **Who** question relates to the agent. The answer to Who relates to what a person was able to generate out of his intellectual and physical efforts. The reactions a person gives in personal, social, or political matters are also included in these efforts. Thus, the human identity is a dynamic structure that can be developed over time. It is not earned by birth, but through a process of social experience and action-based engagement. The communication of an individual with other people, with society, nature, and God enables him to actualize himself and become aware of his own value. The identity of an individual is a product of this process. The human becomes an individual as he becomes aware of his potential to render himself differently from others. The ability to become an individual is also the source of human dignity. Therefore, the human is a being that is becoming. He becomes an agent and becomes liberated via social engagement, and as he becomes liberated he rejects all hierarchies that have a potential to dominate him.

The human acquires his individualism and identity from the main social structure he will himself produce. Identity is the competency to be free from any societal, political, historical, religious or cultural identities, and, on the contrary, to benefit from those identities, revise them, and produce a new culture that can surpass them. That is why questions that pertain to human identity have to be answered by what he himself

has produced and given meaning to. Qualities that have not been determined and produced by the individual renders the human as nothing more than a transporter of created values. Then, the human is not a source of values, but what has been instrumentalized. Thus, a man's legacy, instead of his being, becomes more meaningful, and he is an instrument in transporting culture or tradition.

The question of **What** about the human relates to how he is defined by objective criteria that are developed under external conditions. These conditions bring to the fore what the human really is while defining him and classifying him according to categories other than his individuality. This enslaves him to established or given paradigms, and alienation. Each system that determines, guides, or forms us against our will is inevitably a new method of alienation. Evaluating all people in the light of objective data produced externally is a way to form total identities; this is done best by ideologies.

Attributing the source of human dignity not to the human himself but to objective fields like race, nationality, religion, or culture, and devaluing human individuality under these total identities is the most widespread way of identity distortion. Efforts to define the human not with the answers for **who** but for **what** makes the human an object. Identification based on totalistic data produces hegemony, and the human assumes his value according to his position within this hegemonic construct, resulting in a sense of what the Qur'an calls "the Fire whose fuel is humans."<sup>12</sup> The human is in a way sentenced to burn in the fire of this world (conflicts, world wars) – a fire he himself has produced with his two hands – this is an analogy to Chapter al-masad (Tabbat) – i.e. with his material and intellectual capacity.

12 See, Can, Osman. 2006. "Kimsiniz? Nesne, Yalnızca Bir Nesne!" in *Radikal*, December 2-3.



## A Quantitative and Qualitative Frame of Definition

The human can adapt, with his physical structure, to the world he lives in, yet with his spiritual being he also does not confine himself wholly to the finiteness of this world, and he intuits that he has an essence that will continue his existence even after its destruction. This semantic construct from which this intuition of continuity arises saves man from the infertility of self-identification with his material aspects and material network of relations. In this context, Ludwig Binswanger, one of the founders of existentialist psychology, highlights a very significant point when he says that the world of objects, biological instincts, and natural laws (*umwelt*) which the human has to abide by should not be allowed to dominate over the human's own world of consciousness, intelligence, and spirit (*Eigenwelt*). The superiority of the human, in his conscious and intellect, should be the dominating power. This approach tries to establish a parallelism between the human and God, and rejects Freud's view (*Homo natura*) which accepts man with his biological instincts, and tries to seek parallelism between the human and nature instead. There are common features between man and nature, but there are also common features with the supernatural. Deciding which of these aspects should weigh more in this scale of relationships delineates systems of thought from one another.

Religion defines the human not based on his instincts, but his rational and intuitional capacities. This does not mean that his instincts are considered non-existent. For, everything that is instilled in the human nature, including instincts, does have a meaning. These instincts are not evil by themselves. Evil emerges when the human cannot control his inner domain of passion where instinct rules. The human can control these instincts with his reason and intuition, and thus lead a balanced life. The Qur'an defines the situation in which the human loses

his capacity to reason, and allows instincts to dominate him, as “sickness.” This shows that this instinct-driven life is a mental illness.<sup>13</sup>

To define the human anthropologically, his qualities like consciousness, reason, or the ability to speak, are put forward. Another quality that has to be included is religion. This dimension is discovered during man’s relationship with himself, with other people, environments, and God. In a religious relationship, the human is not defined by his spiritual aspect only. For, there is a physical body and network of relations (ethical domain) which assume some sort of dynamism through this spirituality. The human’s desire to transcend himself and the overwhelming conditions of his social environment, to not be encapsulated by his physical existence, results from his relationship with divine qualities.

The Qur’an emphasizes that, so long as the human maintains his connection with these divine qualities, his life will flourish through an exaltation of his values and norms – assuming he continues to build upon these values.

*“We do not abrogate any verse or omit it (leaving it to be forgotten) but We bring one better than it or the like of it.”<sup>14</sup>*

*“We displayed to them sign after sign, each greater than the other.”<sup>15</sup>*

This verse explains that each succeeding prophet conveyed a more perfect form of religion than their predecessors. This perfection is a result of religion’s inclination to be gradually freed from local characteristics, and to assume more universal principles.

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13 Baqara 2:10

14 Baqara 2:106

15 Zukhruf 43:48

## The Human Search for Meaning: The Meaningful Resident of The Meaningful Universe

Another question that paves the way for human dignity to rest on a religious and ethical foundation is whether man has a frame of meaning or whether he resides in a meaningful universe. Arguments that the human does not live in a meaningful universe, thus his efforts to lead an honorable life are in vain, rises from the existential circles. The meanings men held were being disputed by existential philosophers in the twentieth century.

We can remember here J. P. Sartre with his *Nausea*. he wrote about the meaninglessness of his existence after pondering the meaninglessness of all existence; we remember Albert Camus with his novel *Rebel*, where he argued that we have been on a constant uprising against a foolish life; and we remember F. Kafka who made the absurdity of the universe a cornerstone of his thought, and questioned how it was possible to lead a meaningful life in an absurd universe.

Existentialism argues that the principles of life do not exist as an essential part of man's nature, but are created later, by man. For existentialists, existence precedes essence. This is why there is no natural law, no divine purpose, no objective significance, or a hierarchy of values that we must live in harmony with. On the contrary, we create all these values in the process of existence. The only reason they are valuable is because we choose them; they possess no value in and of themselves.

B. Russell describes this lack of a meaning as follows:

*“That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the*

*ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the débris of a universe in ruins.*"<sup>16</sup>

Russell is saying that the human creates values with his capacity, and idealizes them only to chase after them. He thinks it is better to worship the ideals we create ourselves instead of worshipping the matter which is the ultimate creator of the universe, which Russell believes is nothing but matter:

*"Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned to-day to lose his dearest, to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of Fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built.*"<sup>17</sup>

Nihilist postmodernism, which argues, in a similar fashion, that there are no objective values, has created an ethical relativity and proclaimed a void of meaning within the universe. Although both existentialists and nihilist postmodernists concur that the universe is a meaningless domain, they differ in their reactions to this void of meaning. Existentialists argue for an authentic "I" for the human, with which the human must rebel against this void, whereas nihilists believe there is no such authentic "I," thus it is not possible to start a rebellion or struggle based on a truth or a value of truth. This nihilist approach has resulted in an opposition to all other worldviews.

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16 Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship", *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell 1903-1959*, Robert Enger ve Lester Dennon, ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), 67.

17 Ibid, 72.

There is a meaning in existence, as opposed to what B. Russell and other existentialists argue; and in order to have a meaningful existence we need to take this meaningfulness into consideration. The human will either harmonize with this construct of existence he finds himself within, or will rise for a rebellion. Harmonizing oneself with a world that is believed to be a result of blind chance does not make life more meaningful. If the universe and all the events in it are nothing but a game played by blind coincidences, and if we are to include ourselves in this game, all the values we are going to produce and all the contributions we are going to make will be nothing more than a part of this larger meaningfulness. Just as in Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World*, all we can do is to try to raise good citizens by social engineering. Our modern world seems to be moving towards contributing to this "void of meaning" instead of challenging the existentialists' bleak, meaningless universe.

In his *The Courage To Be*, Paul Tillich argues that the human has to continue his existence by creating a meaningful life despite the objective meaningfulness of the life itself. Nevertheless, in the modern forms of life, we can rarely notice any person who can start a rebellion against meaningfulness to create a meaningful territory for himself. Ironically, in the Nihilist worldview which denies God and objective values, there is no room even for the "I" who would attain value by rebelling against this void of meaning. The Nihilist thought perceives the human model who determines his own fate as an illusion and it should be destroyed. The so-called "I" is only a product of non-personal powers like linguistic habits and traditions. As opposed to existentialists, who project struggle to create a meaning and truth in a meaningless universe, nihilists reject even the existence of meaning and truth as concepts; they stand up against all worldviews.

## Actualization of Human Dignity and Consciousness of the Self True Knowledge and True Action

Action is as equally important as thought in the development of the self. The ego, or the self, emerges in the form of both thinking (Descartes, *cogito*) and action (Kant, *categorical imperative*). The thought can reveal its real power once it transforms into action. The world is not a field of ideas that is perceived and recognized only through concepts; on the contrary, it is a field of actions that needs to be reconstructed by constant action. That is why, true action, as much as true thought, is needed. God's creation is not one direction; by instilling in their nature a sense of significance, it can be said that he expects his creatures to be a part of their process of being. The constancy of the created existence abiding by the principles of its purpose is part of the natural process; it does not occur via occasional external interventions. Let us follow this thought in the following verses of the Qur'an:

*"He creates everything and determines its destiny."*<sup>18</sup>

*"Our Lord is He Who creates everything and endows each thing with its particular character, and then guides (it to the fulfillment of the aim and purpose of its existence)."*<sup>19</sup>

The human can learn along with history. This shows, not determinism, but human creativity as manifested in science, ethics, arts, and religion. This is about an anthropology that points to a development and expansion of human nature.<sup>20</sup>

The human is not a *fait accompli* being; on the contrary, as he has been granted free will, he has the right to take his own

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18 Furqan 25:2

19 Ta Ha 20:50

20 See, Binswanger, Ludwig. 1963. "Freud's Conception of Man in the Light of Anthropology", *Meaning-in-the-World. Selected Papers of Ludwig Binswanger*, Jacob Heedleman (translated by) Basic books, New York.

decisions, a flexible creation who can stretch into infinity. This flexibility and potential is a situation of becoming that reveals itself within a process. This becoming is different than the so-called “becoming” that reminds of hegelian-marxist dialectics and which reduces the man into a puppet of history. The human decides what he wants to become and this decision forms the history. Dialectic starts from the opposite end, the human turns history upside down, and history is not solely history but the history of humankind as well. The human is not a passive being that simply walks along the process that leads to an inevitable (good or bad) end; on the contrary, he is a free being who shoulders the responsibility of maintaining this process.

### Conclusion

Humanity has done all we can to seek opportunities to establish a more secure and prosperous life in this world. Our sensitive connection with the material world and our efforts to make it safer for us is a story of complete failure when it comes to engage with other religions, races, sects, i.e., other “I”s who also live in the same material world. All the wars, ethnic cleansings, Crusades, denial and extermination politics of colonization are proofs of man’s inability to coexist with others; these proofs are records of **crimes against humanity**. The fact that we are today in a position to pass laws under a heading like “hate crimes” is another evidence of our failure in being a true human. An Arab proverb reads “Justice substitutes where love is no more.” It seems our future is bound with laws and rules, where our human quality has failed. Hatred or discrimination against a person for the simple reason that he follows another religion or is a member of a different race is becoming a crime. This law and many other efforts to protect men from other men have this common denominator: they come to our table through a conceptualization of human dignity. What we should not forget, however, is that when regarding matters of humanity, legal regulations are not enough to solve our prob-

lems. These issues are multifold, and it is necessary to make effective use of religion and ethics as they speak to the inner self of man.