

Ethics from the Islamic Perspective
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Abstract

Among all reactions of Allah SWT in the heavens and earth, man is the most honoured. His knowledge, mental capacity, and how he behaves and interacts with the environment and humanity differentiates him from other creations of God. Morality, Ethics and *Akhlāq*, are three terminologies of different origins that relate to human conduct, character, behaviour, mental attitude, etc. In modern times, Muslim scholars use all three terms interchangeably when referring to the ideal human character mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah. No study on *akhlāq* is complete without the proper understanding of the status enjoyed by man in the hierarchy of God's creations. In this book chapter, the authors explored the real nature of the three terminologies (Morality, Ethics and *Akhlāq*) that refer to man's conduct and behaviour, and what differentiates them. Apart from that, the chapter also looked into the foundation on which the Islamic teaching of *akhlāq* is built. Interestingly, the authors also investigated how early Muslim scholars and philosophers understood the term *akhlāq*. Lastly, the chapter ends with some discussion on what are the parameters of *akhlāq* and *'ilm al akhlāq*.

Introduction

This chapter explores the various terms used to describe the good behaviour of man. Mainly, the chapter will provide the differences that exist when we refer to terminologies like ethics, morality and *akhlāq*. Since no discussion on human action and behaviour is complete without a proper understanding of human nature, the researchers will provide some information on the position occupied by man in the Qur'an and Sunnah. In concluding the chapter, the researchers will dwell upon ideas of early Muslim scholars and philosophers on *akhlāq* and *ilm al- akhlāq*.

The Position of Man in Islam

1. Man is placed on the highest pedestal in the hierarchy of creations.
2. He has been created in the best of forms (*Al-Qur'ān, Al-Tīn:1-4*)
3. Given the power of speech and freedom of choice (*Al-Qur'ān, Al-Rahmān:4; Al-Insān:3*).
4. The human species as a whole is the most creative and innovative in the use of the brain capacity (*Al-Qur'ān, Al-Baqarah: 31-34*)
5. Man was chosen to be Allah's *Khalīfah* (vicegerent) on earth.
6. Allah made all things created in the heavens and earth to be of service to him (*Al-Qur'ān, Al-Jāthiyah: 13; Al-Isrā':70*).¹

When compared to all existing concepts on human nature, the Islamic concept outshines as the most comprehensive and all-encompassing one. In Islam, among all creations in the heavens and earth, only man stands on the highest pinnacle to be called the best creation of Allah the Almighty. It has been mentioned in the Qur'an that God has created man most beautifully and excellently: "*We have indeed created man in the best of moulds*" (*Al-Qur'ān, al-Tīn:4*). This exalted position/stature makes man superior to angels and other luminous creations like the sun, moon, stars, etc. The greatness of man has been further explained in the following verse:

¹ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, (1997) *Human Nature: A Comparative Study between Western and Islamic Psychology*, Kuala Lumpur: IIUM, pp.171-173.

We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours above a great part of our creation.²

Having achieved a noble position in the sight of Allah does not guarantee man to be in that position forever. As explained in *Sūrah al-Tīn*, verse: 5, man will fall from the honoured position given by Allah when he transgresses the limits set by Him. As such, achieving honour or disgrace in the sight of Allah is a choice left to man to decide.

Apart from being the best creation, man in the Holy Qur'an has been addressed as the *Khalāfatullah fī al-ard* (Allah's vicegerent on earth). This esteemed position was conferred to man despite the protest and remonstrance that came from the angels on the eve of his creation. The exact dialogue that took place between Allah and the angels explains clearly the angels' reason for protest, as can be well understood from the following verse of *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*:

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said: "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?-whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (names)?" He said: "I know what ye know not".³

The exegesis on the above verse explains that the angels foresaw some negative attitudes of man, while Allah, the All-Wise saw many of the positive things that man is capable of performing on earth. As such, Allah granted man with many gifts that will enable him to carry out his duties successfully as Allah's vicegerent. Among the gifts that man acquired from Allah were, authority, freedom of action, intelligence, etc. In giving his comments on how man should use these God-given gifts, Afzalur Rahman (1988) explains:

He was to be totally independent and autonomous in his sphere of work on the earth and would be well-equipped with knowledge so that he could discover the secrets of the Universe through study, research and experience, learn to explain the forces of nature for his benefit and gain mastery over them according to his own requirements and plan.⁴

The title *Khalīfah* places man in an honoured position to be Allah's deputy; administrator; representative, etc. on earth. His position as Allah's *Khalīfah* gives him power and authority to rule, manage and preserve the earth. Al-Maududi, in his commentary of the Holy Qur'an, explains that man's status as the *Khalīfah* (pl. *Khalā'if* and *Khulafā'*) of Allah does not make him the master of the universe, but only as a deputy who is allowed to exercise the delegated powers given to him by Allah the all Supreme. He further expounds that the office of vicegerency can be used by man in two ways: either abuse the power and authority for the spread of evil and injustice or use them for things that are good for humanity.⁵

² Surah Al-Isrā':70.

³ Surah Al-Baqarah: 30.

⁴ Afzalur Rahman (1988), *Muhammad: Encyclopedia of Seerah*. Vo. 6. London: Seerah Foundation, p.1

⁵ Seyyed Abu A'la Al-Maududi (1992), *The Meaning of the Qur'an* (7th edn.) Lahore: Islamic Publication (PVT) Limited.

In Islam, man is born with the *Fitrah* (primordial nature). *Al-Fitrah* in the Arabic language renders several different meanings that reveal the many positive and interesting dimensions of human nature. One meaning of the word *Al-Fitrah* explains that man comes to this world without any stain of sin. This Islamic concept of *Al-Fitrah* rejects the doctrine of the “Original Sin” as espoused in Christianity. The other meaning of *Al-Fitrah* as stated in the Holy Qur’an explains that naturally man has been born as a believer in Allah the Almighty.⁶

Further exploration into the topic of man in the Holy Qur’an reveals that he has a dual nature; body and spirit (*Rūh*). The Holy Qur’an explains that after creating Adam (P.B.U.H.), Allah breathed into him His spirit: “Behold! Thy Lord said to the angels: “*I am about to create man, from sounding clay form mud moulded into shape; “When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him”* (Al-Qur’ān, Al-Hijr: 28-29; Ali, 1989). As such, all human beings who are the progeny of Adam (P.B.U.H.) are made up of two elements; the physical body, which represents clay, is mortal, and the *Rūh*, or the spirit, which is immortal and leaves the body upon death of an individual.

Man, who has been made the most honoured creation of Allah, is also entrusted with the *Amānah* (trust) from Allah; “We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it- he was indeed unjust and foolish” (Al-Qur’ān, Al-Ahzāb:72). The word *Amānah* in the Holy Qur’an has diverse meanings. *Amānah* can be referred to as reason, intellect or the faculty of volition. The other aspects of *Amānah* also mean the power and authority given to man through the office of vicegerency. Last but not least, *Amānah* could also mean the sum total of all the decrees, commands (*Amr*) and prohibitions (*Nahy*) present in the *Sharī‘ah*.⁷

Another aspect of man, which is contained within the Islamic concept of human nature, is that man has been given the *Mīthāq* (covenant). Through this covenant, humanity as a whole has accepted Allah to be their Lord and Cherisher while they were in the form of spirits in ‘*Ālam Al-Arwāh* (in the realm of the spirits). This contract between man and his Lord has been made long before he was born into this world. The Holy Qur’an explains about this contract in *Sūrah Al-A‘rāf*:

When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam from their loins-their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): ‘Am I not your Lord (Who cherishes and sustains you)?’- They said: ‘Yea! we do testify!’ (This), lest Ye should say on the Day of Judgement: ‘Of this we were never mindful’.⁸

According to Afzalur Rahman, through this covenant, Allah has imbued in the heart of every human being the knowledge that He is Allah the One and the Only Lord Who deserves to be worshipped. The content of this covenant is retained in man's subconscious mind as potentiality that can be brought to consciousness. Factors like type of education, social environment, etc. could never totally affect or tarnish the covenant. Still, the least they could do is to pervert and prevent the covenant from coming to the conscious part of the human being. In addition to this, Rahman

⁶ Surah Al-Rūm: 30

⁷ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak (1997), Op cit. pp. 96-98.

⁸ Surah Al-A‘rāf:172.

(1988) also believes that despite the perversion and prevention caused by wrong education and negative social influence, the covenant as a potential lay embedded in the subconscious mind of man and it will emerge to reality in response to the positive external stimuli. Factors that have always invited and called humanity to the remembrance of God the covenant, are the prophets, heavenly Books, inviters to the Truth from among the followers of the prophets, a good social environment, proper and correct education, etc.⁹

Man being the vicegerent of Allah was also elevated in his stature and position when he was taught *Al-Asmā'* (attributes of Allah/ the beautiful names of Allah) by God Almighty Himself. The reference to man as the recipient of 'the names' has been stated in the following verse:

And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: "Tell Me the names of these if ye are right." They said: Glory to Three: of knowledge we have none, save what Thou has taught us: in truth, it is Thou who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom".¹⁰

As a result of Allah teaching *Al-Asmā'*, Adam and his progeny were able to achieve the status of being the most knowledgeable of all creations in the heavens and earth. Muslim scholars differ in their opinion concerning the exact meaning of *Al-Asmā'* mentioned in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, verse 31. In giving his comment on the view of early Muslim scholars on *Al-Asmā'*, this is what Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1989) says:

The names of things: "according to commentators means the inner nature and qualities of things, and things here would include feelings. The particular qualities of feelings which were outside the nature of angels were put by Allah into the nature of man. Man was thus able to love and understand love, and thus plan and initiate, as becomes the office of vicegerent."¹¹

According to Langgulong (1986)¹², *Al-Asmā'* mentioned in verse 31 of *Al-Baqarah* refers to *Al-Asmā' Al-Husnā* (the 99 Beautiful Names of Allah) mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. He further expounds that these beautiful names represent the attributes of Allah given to man as potentials that need to be actualized and developed in the life of an individual Muslim. By doing so, the individual will be able to fulfil and perform his duties and obligations that will turn out to be *'Ibādah* (acts of worship done in seeking the good pleasure of Allah). Whatever the meaning deduced from the word *Al-Asmā'*, one fact that stands out without any ambiguity is that man has been exalted in his potential and knowledge compared to what has been given to the angels. On the subject of knowledge given to the angels and man, Zafar Afaq Ansari's opinion states that *Al-Asmā'* means an immense and unlimited potential of knowledge. He further asserts that the knowledge given to the angels is limited and specific compared to man, who is bestowed not only with knowledge but also with the capacity to generate new knowledge.¹³

⁹ Afzalur Rahaman, (1988), Op cit. pp. 9-10.

¹⁰ Surah Al-Baqarah: 31-32.

¹¹ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, (1989), *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Maryland: Amana Corporation, Note no. 48, p.24.

¹² Hasan Langgulong, (1986). *Manusia dan Pendidikan: Suatu Analisis Psikologi Modern dan Pakar-pakar Pendidikan Islam*, Jakarta: Penerbit Pustaka Al-Husna, pp.263-264.

¹³ Zafar Afaq Ansari (ed), (1992), *Qur'anic Concepts of Human Psyche*, Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought (Pakistan), p.5.

Man, when compared to the angels, has the freedom of choice to react and respond to the many of the biological, psychological and sociological (environmental) demands of his mundane life. In his choice, man can be either good or evil; a righteous or a perverted transgressor towards what has been instructed in the Holy Qur'an. This has been stated in the Holy Qur'an:

We showed him the way; whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will).

¹⁴ A similar statement on the freedom of choice has also been mentioned in Surah al-Balad, "Have We not given him two eyes, and a tongue and two lips, and shown him the two highways (of good and evil).¹⁵

Besides man, the other creation of Allah that is a 'rational' being and enjoys the freedom of choice is the *jinn* (genie). However, the freedom enjoyed by the *jinn* is limited compared to man.¹⁶

Another aspect of human nature is that, man is forgetful. In the Holy Qur'an, one can read the forgetful nature of man in the story of Adam AS. As the father of humanity, he ate the fruit of the forbidden tree together with his companion Hawa AS, while he was in the garden of paradise. This incident has been mentioned in the following verse below:

We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam, but he forgot: and We found on his part no firm resolve". This nature of being forgetful is a trait that has been inherited by all of Adam's progenies.¹⁷

Compared with other concepts of human nature, particularly from the West, the Islamic concept is unique as it provides a holistic understanding of man. The Islamic concept gives an all-encompassing and comprehensive information on man, explaining his pre-existence before coming to this world, his life in this world and eventually what awaits him when he completes this earthly life. Man's origin goes back to the spiritual world known as *Alam al-Arwah* (the realm of spirits). At the time when the spirit comes in contact with the mortal body, man has been granted the honour as *the Khalifatullah fi al-ard* (Allah's vicegerent on earth) when the spirit is blown into the foetus in the mother's womb, together with it the *Fitrah* (primordial nature of being good, pious and God-consciousness), the *Asma* (names and attributes of Allah), the *Mithaq* (covenant), the *Amanah* (the trust) and the freedom of choice and intellect ('*aql*) are all imbued in him.

With the above-given gifts of Allah, man has been given the greatest honour as the best of creations. Being born with the *Fitrah*, man is good by his nature. There is a great possibility that the human *Fitrah* which is pure at birth can be hindered from its full bloom during puberty and in later years of man's life due to wrong education and negative social environment which are averse to the nature of the *Fitrah* itself. When the qualities or potentials of the *Fitrah* and the *Asma* are blocked from being actualized in man's life, he becomes a perverted transgressor in his nature and

¹⁴ Surah Al-Insan: 3.

¹⁵ Surah Al-Balad: 8-10.

¹⁶ See Mustansir Mir, (1987), *Dictionary of Quranic Terms and Concepts*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc.

¹⁷ Surah Taha: 115.

at times rebellious against God. Wrong education and a negative social environment cannot change man's *Fitrah*, but the least they can do is pervade, pollute and distract it from its proper functioning.¹⁸

In the discussion on man in Islam, we also come to know that man who comes from the *Alam al-arwah* is on a spiritual journey. From the spiritual world, he stops in this mundane world for a transitory period, eagerly yearning to return to his original abode in the spiritual world after experiencing bodily death. Before completing its mundane life, the human soul has to undergo three transformational stages in its psychospiritual development starting with *Nafs al-ammarah*, *Nafs al-lawwamah* and finally ending with *Nafs al-mutmainnah*. According to Islam, the reason why man who has been given the *Fitrah*, *Khilafah* and other bounties and honours has to undergo these stages could be well explained and interpreted as nothing more than trials and tribulations set by Allah to verify those among mankind who are good and obedient and those who are bad and evil.¹⁹

In concluding the preceding discussion on human nature from the Islamic perspective, it can be said that man shares some of his basic characteristics found in the animal kingdom, and at the same time, inherits some angelic and Godly attributes. Man, in his desire for food, sex, anger, greed, rivalry etc. resembles the animals. While being interested in singing the praises of God and in performing other meritorious acts of devotion he resembles the angels, and finally in showing love, care, kindness, sympathy, empathy, etc. man emulates some of the godly attributes of Allah SWT. The laxity on the part of man in developing and actualizing the angelic and godly attributes makes him go steep and deep in his animal nature. Due to this, he becomes a perverted transgressor and goes beyond all limits set by Allah in the Holy Script of Islam. Adversely, when man develops and actualizes the angelic and godly attributes he becomes an angelic and godly individual who gains the good pleasure of Allah the Almighty. It has been envisioned in the Holy Qur'an and Ahadith of the Last Prophet that such an individual will taste happiness in this world and everlasting felicity in the hereafter.²⁰

***Akhlāq* and its Synonyms**

The Arabic word *akhlāq* used by Muslims all over the world is also related to some of its synonyms in other languages. Words like moral, ethics, *sulila* and the like are all associated with human behaviour and character. All these terms mainly refer to the good behaviour of man or humanity as a whole. Although all these terms carry similar meanings on the surface, when analyzed, one can make a difference in the scope of these terms. The following will be an analysis of the different terms used to describe the human action:

1. *Akhlāq*

Etymologically, *akhlāq* is an Arabic word. It is the plural of the word *Khuluq*; which carries the meaning of behaviour, attitude or attitude.²¹ In a way, this word is related to the word *Khalqun*,

¹⁸ Mohd Abbas, (1977), Op. cit. pp.91-93.

¹⁹ Mohd Abbas, (2013), *Iqbal's Theory of Personality: A Contrastive Analysis with Freud*, Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, pp. 95-106.

²⁰ Ibid. pp. 172-173.

²¹ Louis Ma'luuf, (1984), *Munjid fil lughah wal a'laam*, Darul Masyriq, Lunnan, p.194.

which means creation. In turn, the word *Khalqun* is related to *Khaliqun*, which means creator. According to Kamus Sinonim, the word *akhlāq* is explained as *adab*, behaviour, attitude, character, good morals, manners, moral, temperament and courtesy.²²

2. Moral/Morality

Moral goes back to its Latin origin. *Mores* or *Moralitas* in Latin means "manner, character, proper behaviour") is the differentiation of intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are distinguished as proper and those that are improper. Morality can be a body of standards or principles derived from a code of conduct from a particular philosophy, religion, or culture, or it can derive from a standard that a person believes should be universal. Morality may also be specifically synonymous with "goodness" or "rightness."²³

3. Ethics

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Ethic (from Greek Ethos, character) is the systemic study of the nature of value concepts, 'good', 'bad', 'ought', 'right', 'wrong', etc. and of the general principle which justifies us in applying them to anything; called moral philosophy (from Latin: *mores*, customs)²⁴ Angel defined ethics as "The standard of norm and codes of conduct or behaviour sanctioned by a society to regulate and foster uniformity of behaviour within a society."²⁵

4. Susila

The word *susila* is derived from Sanskrit. According to Encyclopedia Indonesia, *Susila* refers to the behaviour of an individual that goes in tandem with the accepted norms of society. Another term used in the Malay world to describe good and ethical behaviour is the word '*budi*'.²⁶ This word carries a range of meanings like politeness, common courtesy, good practice, nobility, etc. which form a set of practices accepted by people in a community or a certain geographical location. Particularly, when it is said '*budi bahasa*' it refers to one's refinement in the use of the Malay language. Budi bahasa can be referred to as the ethical choice of vocabulary in a written or spoken form. Moreover, it explains the language and the vocabularies that are well thought of its implication and sensitivity to the readers or partners in a conversation. This sort of ethical language usage is mainly appealing, soothing and most importantly it honours and respects the reader or listener.²⁷

The terms morality and ethics which refer to man's action are in most instances taken for granted that they mean the same thing. Going by the definitions provided earlier on, reveal the fact that there exists a difference in what is referred to as morality and ethics. The difference highlighted in the 'Living Issues in Philosophy' is:

²² Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, (1992), *Konsepsi Pendidikan Akhlaq menurut Muhammad Iqbal*, Banda Aceh: Fakultas Tarbiyah Institut Agama Islam Negeri Jami'ah Ar-Raniry, p.9.

²³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morality>.

²⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, (1972), Vol. 8 London Inc, p.752.

²⁵ Barsto et al., (1996), *Management Concepts, Theories and Practices*, Sydney: Alyn and Bacon Inc., p.738.

²⁶ Ensiklopedia Indonesia, (1984), Vol.6, Icthiar Baru-Van Hoove, Jakarta, p.3386.

²⁷ Mohd Abbas, (1992), Op. cit. pp.10-11.

The terms morals and ethics are closely related in their original meanings. The former comes from the Latin morals, and the latter from the Greek ethos. Both mean “the customs or way of life” Modern usage of morality refers to conduct itself and ethics to the study of moral conduct.²⁸

If morals refer to the manners, mannerisms, behaviour, etc. of an individual or individuals in a society, then ethics refers to the philosophical debate of an action, whether it is good, bad, ugly and so forth. In other words, morality is the practical aspect of ethics, while ethics is the theory or philosophical part of moral teaching.

In explaining the differences that exist among the three terms; ethics, morality and *akhlāq*, Harun Din has highlighted some of the major differences:

1. The source of *akhlāq* goes back to the teachings of the revelation. As such, it has a divine origin. While morality and ethics are value systems designed by man for the use of man. They are not based on revelation but on human thinking and ideas: mainly on human ideas like philosophy, etc.
2. *Akhlāq* as a system of controlling human behaviour ensures happiness and a blissful life in this world and the hereafter. Whereas morality and ethics provide happiness in this world only.
3. The principle teachings of *akhlāq* are universal. While morality and ethics are more regional. As such, they are bound by geographical boundaries. They vary from one country to another, one region of the world to the other.
4. *Akhlāq* as a system for classification of human actions has the ability and strength to make people follow its rules for the reward awaits the individual in the hereafter. Conversely, morality and ethics are lacking in this aspect. People follow ethical and moral rules according to their wishes.²⁹

Despite the differences highlighted above, in modern times Muslim scholars use terms like Islamic ethics, and Islamic Morals all referring to the ethical principles stated in the Islamic teachings of *akhlāq* and in no way they should be assumed or referred to Western understanding or notions.

***Akhlāq* as the Islamic Value System**

The Islamic teachings of *akhlāq* act as a value system for the Muslims. It is very different in many ways. It is universal and never changes over time (from the time of the prophet till to the present time).

According to Al-Attas (1995), “the Islamic value system, culture, thought and civilization are not merely philosophical elements aided by science, but one whose source is revelation which is confirmed by religion and affirmed by intellectual and intuitive principles.”³⁰

²⁸ Harold H. Titus & others, (1986), *Living Issues in Philosophy*, Wadsworth Publishing, 8th edition, Belmont: California, p.145.

²⁹ Harun Din, (1986), *Manusia dan Islam*, 3rd. Edition, Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Watan Sdn. Bhd., pp.148-149.

³⁰ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, (1995), *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, p.4.

In addition to the above, the definition provided by Alhabshi et al. (1994) of Islamic value system states:

Islamic value system is based on the ultimate truth and is beneficial for the entire humanity. These values are unchanging, suitable for all time and space and should be acceptable and approved by all societies and therefore they have universal applicability, which serves as proof of their universality and dynamism. Since religion is a rational tendency of human beings, the Islamic value system is similar to those values that originated from other heavenly religions.³¹

An in-depth analysis of the Islamic value system will explain to any researcher that its edifice is based on the following principles:

1. On the concept of the Oneness of God and One Ummah,
2. On the servitude to Allah, and
3. On the concepts of fairness and justice to human beings and nature.³²

“Islamic society is an austere moral and balanced society. It is egalitarian, universal society and primarily theo-centric, based on principles of equality, justice and discipline, freedom, rights for the individuals and society and mutual interaction of the believers. Society is for the believers and the believers are for the society. It believes in accountability and above all it believes in the total welfare of every member of society³³.”

Zafar Iqbal further explains that the Islamic value system is guided by the Divine rule and reinforced by the Shariah which provides a collective code of ethics. Islamic rule and regulations are derived from the teachings of the Qur’an, the Sunnah of the Prophet, the consensus of the Ummah and the safeguard of the learned people who are custodians of the faith.³⁴

***Akhlāq* According to Classical Scholars and Philosophers**

Classical Muslim scholars and philosophers also gave their views on what *akhlāq* is. There are many similarities found in the views of early Muslim scholars and philosophers on the subject of *akhlāq*. According to Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), *akhlāq* is a state or attitude (*hai’ah*) that is rooted in the human soul. From there all human actions emanate easily without any force and deep thinking. Actions emanate spontaneously without much consideration. If the emotions and attitudes are good, praiseworthy and in tandem with human rationality and Islamic principles, they are called good *akhlāq*. On the contrary, if what emanates from the human soul is evil, then those emotions and attitudes are deemed as bad *akhlāq*.³⁵ Al-Farabi (870-950) a Muslim philosopher and scholar thinks that *khuluq* is the state of the soul entity that propels man to act spontaneously without any deliberation. Actions that are good and wholesome are termed ethical, while those that are bad, unpleasant and evil are termed unethical.³⁶

³¹ Syed Othman Alhabshi & Haji Ghazali Aidit, (1994), *Islamic Values and Management*, Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM) Malaysia, p.13.

³² Ali Salim Khalfan, (1999), *The Principles of Educational Administration: their Islamic Ethical Dimension and Implications for Human Resource Development*, Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, p.29.

³³ M. Zafar Iqbal, *Teachers Training the Islamic Perspective*, (1996), Lahore: Institute of Policy Study, Syirkah Printing, p.23.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 40.

³⁵ Al-Ghazali, (n.d.), *Ihya’ Juzu 3*, Cairo: Mashadil Husein, p.46.

³⁶ Mohd Nasir Omar, *Maskawayh’s Social Ethics: Love and Freedom*. Journal of Institute of Islamic Understanding

To Ibn Maskawaih (932-1030), *akhlāq* refers to “A state of the human soul (*halun lin-nafs*), that motivates an individual to act spontaneously without thinking and reflection.³⁷ Similarly, to Ibn Sina (980-1037), the word *akhlāq* “is a vibration that happens in the human soul that has the sensation... *akhlāq* is a thing or condition that is there right from the very beginning in the life of an individual.³⁸

In analyzing the above views of the Muslim philosophers, it can be said that the source of human *akhlāq* is the soul. In other words, *akhlāq* is the manifestation or the mirror of the soul. Whatever good or evil exists in the soul will be reflected through the human action and mental attitude. A parallel view has been highlighted by ancient and modern Western philosophers when they spoke on the human personality. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C), who was a great philosopher and orator during the Hellenistic period of Rome asserted that “the face is the image of the soul”.³⁹ When the soul or heart of an individual is free from vices, thereupon will emanate good and praiseworthy *akhlāq*. On the contrary, when the soul/heart is polluted or contaminated with evil intentions and desires, an individual becomes weak, and this leads him to all evil and degrading behaviour. Concerning the human behaviour which relates to *akhlāq* and the human soul, Muslim scholars have classified *akhlāq* into two categories:

1. *Akhlāq al-Karimah* or *Akhlāq Mahmudah*
2. *Akhlāq al-Mazmumah*

Muslim philosophers like al-Farabi (872-950), Ibn. Sina (980-1037), Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) and others, who came in contact with the philosophical ideas of Greek philosophers felt elated and mesmerized with their philosophy of life and issues related to Man and the human soul. To enrich their knowledge and understanding of the subject they were researching, they made a marriage of ideas from the Qur’ān and Sunnah with what was acceptable from the Greek philosophers. Munawwar (2010) highlights early Muslim philosophers borrowing ideas from Greek philosophers, by stating the following remarks:

Miskawayh (422/1030) was the first Muslim philosopher to write a systematic ethical treatise, by combining Greek ethics with Islamic teachings. Isfahani (433/1050) and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (673/1274) made similar attempts; through Isfahani, Islamic philosophical ethics was introduced into the Sunni Muslim world, and through al-Tusi, into the Shi’ite Muslim world. In combining Greek ethics and Islamic tradition, Miskawayh’s *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* (Refinement of Character) was pioneering in the field of Islamic philosophical ethics. It deals with subjects like the search for ultimate happiness, the domestic economy, children’s education and moral therapy to overcome sadness and the fear of death.

At this junction of the discussion on *akhlāq*, it should be highlighted that *akhlāq* explains the condition of the human soul from which all human actions emanate, while *‘ilm al akhlāq* is the philosophical debate on what is ethical and what is not. *‘Ilm al akhlāq* helps in the refinement of the human character, behaviour and mental attitude towards a nobler human behaviour. Like

Malaysia (IKM). 4 (1):86, p.102.

³⁷ Asy-syeikh Faisol bin Ali Yahya Ahmad, (1989), *Sistem Kaderisasi Rasulullah SAW*, (Trans. Salim Wahid), Solo: Pustaka Montiq, p.104.

³⁸ Ibid, p.103.

³⁹ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, (2013), Op. cit. p.64.

Tasawwuf, the debate in *'ilm al akhlāq* also includes how one can purify one's heart from all degrading acts. Khalfan (1999), highlighted the following about the function of *'ilm al akhlāq*:

1. To provide a means of organizing and controlling the soul so that it could give rise to moral character, good manners and virtues in order to achieve happiness (*sa'adah*) both in this world and the Hereafter.
2. To study the faculties of the soul, their qualities and their effects on human character and conduct since it is the soul that induces a man to perform a particular action.
3. To express concisely theories of the refinement of the soul, principles of self-control and the role of knowledge in enhancing wisdom, discipline and various ways of moral correction.
4. To suggest ways of correcting moral defects so that the soul may become free from vices and evil intentions. The most effective way to restore one's ethical conduct includes association with virtuous people, accompanying religious people, observing friends and listening to one's moral defects from his enemy.
5. To verify that the ultimate goal of ethics which is happiness in this world and in the Hereafter, which could only be attained through moral perfection and disposition, and the purification of the soul.⁴⁰

Sufism

Sufi practices also emphasize a great deal on being ethical. As a movement, Sufism took the guiding principles of morality mentioned in the Qur'ān and Sunnah and designed a method on how to transform the ideal moral teaching of Islam into a reality. Similar to the schools of thought in Islamic Jurisprudence, Sufism also has different schools within their approach, but all lead towards attaining a common goal that seeks the good pleasure of Allah. Some common themes found among the various Sufi sects concerning human conduct and ethical behaviour are purification of the heart (*Qalb*), disciplining of the *Nafs* (desires), *Zuhd* (abstention) and *Faqr* (poverty). As a way to discipline the heart, mind and soul, Sufis perform rigorous spiritual exercises by fasting, *Zikr* (meditation) and performing the supererogatory prayers (*Nawafil*) in addition to the five obligatory prayers done daily). In their effort to attain a good position in the sight of Allah, Sufis pay much attention to the qualities of humility (*tawadu*) and selflessness (*ithar*). For them, the human ego, which can easily be distracted from its real purpose in life, should be subdued or made conscious of its journey back to Allah, through spiritual training. Sufis aspire to avoid overindulgence in worldly pleasure by practising solitude, silence, hunger and nightly vigilance.⁴¹

Prophet Muhammad as the Embodiment of *Akhlāq al-Karimah*

Concerning the praiseworthy *akhlāq* (*Karimah*), the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) has been praised by God in the Qur'ān. He was the last of all the Messengers appointed by Allah (SWT). As such, he was given all the noble characteristics found in the earlier prophets. He should be rightly called the integrated personality, as all special qualities found in other prophets culminated in him. Being the last prophet, Allah the Almighty educated and guided him through the revelation, for him to be the role model, who can lead the whole of humanity towards the path of virtue and righteousness. For having such great qualities, some scholars used the term '*Insan al-Kamil*' (perfect man), when they referred to the Prophet (PBUH). The Prophet's way of life is the manifestation of all the moral teachings one finds in the Qur'ān. He should be rightly called the 'living Qur'ān'. This fact has been testified by his beloved wife Aisyah (R.A) when she was on the character of the Prophet. She said that the Prophet's *akhlāq* was the Qur'ān. One can find ample references in the Qur'ān that explain his good character. In the following verses, Allah praises the character and personality

⁴⁰ Ali Salim Khalfan, (1999), Op cit. pp.36-37.

⁴¹ Munawar Haque, et al. (2010), *Ethics and Fiqh for Everyday Life: An Islamic Perspective*, Gombak: IIUM Press, pp. 5-8.

of the Prophet: “We sent thee not, but a mercy for all creatures”⁴². “Verily you have in the Prophet of Allah an excellent model, for him who fears Allah and the Last Day and who remembers Allah much”⁴³. “O Prophet, truly We have sent thee as a Witness, and a Bearer of glad tidings, and a Warner, And as a Summoner unto Allah by his command, and as a Lamp that gives *bright* light”⁴⁴. “Surely, a Messenger has come unto you from among yourselves; grievous to him is that you should fall into trouble; *he is* ardently desirous of your *welfare*; and to the believers *he is* compassionate, merciful”⁴⁵. “Allah and His angels send blessings on the Prophet. O ye who believe! you *also* should invoke blessings on him and salute *him* with the salutation of peace”⁴⁶. “We have not sent you but as a universal (Messenger) to men giving them glad tidings and warn them against sins but most men knew not”⁴⁷. “And thou (standest) on an exalted standard of character”⁴⁸.

It is believed that only by following the footsteps of the Prophet, one can attain a good personality. For the Muslims to reach the status of *Insan al-Kamil* or *Insan al-Soleh*, one has to carry out all commandments of Allah, as stated in the Qur’ān and leave all prohibitions.

Conclusion

This chapter on the Islamic perspective of ethics deals with the various terms and terminologies used in Western and Eastern perspectives to explain the behaviour and mental attitude of man. Ethics, *akhlāq* and other synonymous terms explained in the chapter form an important part of man’s daily life. Without any exception, people of all professions need them. In this research on the Islamic *akhlāq*, the researchers explored the depth of meaning carried by ethics, morality, *akhlāq*, *adab* and *susila* in the various societies in the East and West. It has come to light, that if all these terms are given serious consideration in human life man there would be peace and harmony in society, nature and the universe at large. Through this study, it has become clear to the researchers that all other terms other than *akhlāq* and *adab*, are systems developed by man for the benefit of man in this world. While the Islamic concepts of *akhlāq* and *adab* that govern the behaviour of man go back to the teachings found in the Qur’an and Sunnah of Prophet SAW. As such, in Islam, the ethical behaviour of man is what has been decided by God for the benefit of society. In addition, the *thawab* (reward) for one who follows the teachings of the *akhlāq* and *adab* in Islam is a rewarding one, not only in this world but also in the hereafter. In the Islamic teachings of *akhlāq*, there exist role models among Prophets and pious men; the most ideal role model will be the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). All pious men and their stories also appear to reflect the lifestyle and behaviour of the Prophet (PBUH).

⁴² Surah Al-Anbiya 21:107

⁴³ Surah Al-Ahzab 33:21

⁴⁴ Surah Al-Ahzab 33:45-46

⁴⁵ Surah Al-Taubah 9:128

⁴⁶ Surah Al-Ahzab 33:56

⁴⁷ Surah Al-Saba 34:28

⁴⁸ Surah Al-Qalam 68:4

