

# Inconsistency between Qur'anic Morality and Muslim Morality in the Realm of Relation to God

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## Abstract

In this article, I shall attempt to show that certain moral character traits and moral intentions of a typical contemporary Muslim are inconsistent in terms of relation to God with the Qur'anic monotheistic approach to a moral path. If a moral agent compares these two approaches with his own moral traits and intentions by virtue of introspection, he may find a useful criterion for assessing his moral status. To reach this target, the first step is to explore briefly the intimate relation between monotheistic knowledge and morality; the second step is to describe the Qur'anic monotheistic approach to a moral path put forward by Allamah Tabataba'i; the third step is to identify, explain, and analyze the most prevalent features of the Qur'anic monotheistic approach; the forth step is to explicate the moral traits and intentions of a typical contemporary Muslim; and finally it will be clarified that the intentions and character traits of a typical contemporary Muslim are not frequently in line with moral intentions and features prescribed by the Qur'anic monotheistic approach. One may consider the

fundamental distinction between these two kinds of morality and compare them with one's own in order to be able to assess one's moral status.

**Keywords:** *Qur'anic morality, relation to God, moral features, moral intention and end.*

## Introduction

When one considers the classical sources of Islamic morality, one can identify four different moral schools distinguished on the basis of foundations, methods, and ends. These include schools of philosophical morality, mystic morality, traditional (revealed) morality, and integrated morality. In spite of what is seen in other schools, in the school of traditional morality, a comprehensive moral system has not been introduced so that “the foundations, ends, and general rules of morality would be derived from Qur'anic verses and traditions and then with reference to these foundations and rules, conflicting moral propositions would be weighed up so as to provide certain clear guidelines for moral judgments” (Ahmadpour 1389 Sh, 55). Books pertaining to the school of traditional morality at best have mainly compiled and classified traditions. While some attempts have been made in modern times, the need for constructing a comprehensive moral system based on the Qur'an and traditions, as well as the need for leading a moral life based on religion, make it necessary for contemporary researchers in the field of Islamic morality to endeavor more seriously to develop a coherent theoretical and practical framework for traditional morality.

Since ancient times, many ethicists have addressed this question: what is it to lead a moral life? Numerous devout ethicists throughout history

have expressed their great interest in the idea that their moral thoughts and lives should be compatible with religious morality or at least should not be incompatible with it. If we are to distinguish religious morality from nonreligious morality and found our moral lives on a kind of pure religious morality, we would be faced with following questions: how to characterize our pure Islamic morality? What are special features of Islamic morality? Which moral elements are highlighted in Islamic morality? After understanding the theoretical scheme for Islamic morality, do Muslims practically act on that scheme? If they do not, then how can they move towards Islamic morality?

According to a well-known division, ethics is classified under four sections with respect to human relations: (1) man's relation to God (divine ethics), (2) man's relation to himself (individual ethics), (3) man's relation to other humans (social ethics), and (4) man's relation to nature (environmental ethics). From an Islamic point of view, man's relation to God is the most fundamental one, based on which other kinds of human relations should be organized, since God is the most valuable being from which other beings derive their value. To establish a kind of proper moral relation to God, one has to appropriately know and have faith in Him. This issue (i.e., the priority of knowledge of God and of having faith in Him over the establishment of a proper relation to Him) shows that Islamic ethic is inextricably connected with the Islamic belief system.

### **God as a Deep Foundation for Islamic Ethics**

The monotheistic knowledge of God encompasses knowing His existence, His absolute life, His absolute knowledge, His absolute power, His absolute benevolence, His creatorship, His ontological and legislative lordship, His perfect attributes, and so forth. A large number of Qur'anic propositions concerning God play a crucial role in moral

beliefs, acts, and virtues, such as “and He has knowledge of all things” (2:29), “Indeed God has power over all things” (2:20), “God is the Creator of all things” (39:62), “He is the Lord of all things” (6:164), “That is God, your Lord; to Him belongs all sovereignty” (35:13), “Honor entirely belongs to God” (35:10), and “Judgment belongs only to God” (6: 57). Knowledge of this type of Qur’anic propositions may lay theoretical and practical foundations for a monotheistic attitude, through which one is able to understand God as the most valuable being in moral relations.

Even though it is necessary to know a set of doctrinal propositions regarding God by reading books or taking courses, this level of knowledge is not sufficient at all to develop a divine ethical system. In other words, in addition to gaining acquired knowledge of these doctrinal propositions, one has to enliven it and possess in his heart a type of semi-conscious and conscious *knowledge by presence* about the content of these propositions in order to construct a proper moral relation to God.<sup>1</sup> At a higher level, appropriately directing one’s psychological inclinations, one should strengthen his faith in these teachings in order to have practical commitment to their contents. Man’s desires may not be in agreement with his practical knowledge. Hence, making psychological desires, inclinations, and feelings in agreement with the practical requirements of knowledge of God is what is referred to as faith in God in the religious context. Thus, respectively inactive acquired knowledge, active and live acquired knowledge, semi-

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<sup>1</sup> Knowledge has two kinds: *acquired knowledge* and *knowledge by presence*. Acquired knowledge can be inactive or active, just as knowledge by presence can be semi-conscious and conscious. Semi-conscious knowledge of God is what most people have without any control over it; conscious knowledge is a deep understanding of God that man can strive to gain via his moral voluntary acts (Misbah Yazdi 1394 Sh, 1:243-45).

conscious knowledge by presence, conscious knowledge by presence, and strong faith may help liberate one from moral obliviousness and obtain a moral spiritual insight on his journey to perfection (Misbah Yazdi 1394 Sh, 1:153-56).

On the basis of these types of knowledge of God and faith in Him, a moral agent can establish and employ a unique system of moral education, which Allamah Tabataba'i calls the Qur'anic monotheistic approach to a moral path. As stated by Allamah Tabataba'i, if one wants to cultivate moral virtues and eradicate moral vices, there is naturally no way except inculcation and practice in a way that he performs acts proportional to moral virtues so continuously that he gradually develops an enduring habit. For instance, suppose a person is going to eradicate a bad trait of cowardice and cultivate a good trait of courage. Then he has to employ dangerous, horrible measures to closely observe the possibility of taking risks, the pleasure of taking such measures, and the ignominy of escape. The close observation of this practice progressively forms an enduring habit of courage and eliminates the trait of cowardice. Accordingly, even though man cannot directly gain or remove moral traits, he is freely able to adopt effective measures, which gradually result in gaining or removing them (Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 1:351).

Allamah Tabataba'i categorizes different approaches to moral paths in three groups in terms of human ends and motivations: admirable mundane ends, otherworldly ends, and divine ends. He believes that the system of moral education was depicted by ancient ethicists through admirable mundane ends (first approach), by prophets through otherworldly ends (second approach), and by the glorious Qur'an through divine ends (third approach). In the first approach, virtues were encouraged and vices were discouraged with respect to admirable mundane ends reflected in popular praiseworthy opinions (i.e., the end

of moral education was determined by people's praise). Everything regarded by people as admirable was adopted and everything regarded by people as deplorable was abandoned. A number of these popular praiseworthy opinions are expressed in the following propositions: a feeling of contentment and avoidance of financial expectations may cause glory and special social status in the eyes of people; covetousness can bring about a life of degradation and abasement; knowledge leads to personal glory and high reputation; and so forth.

In the second approach, prophets invited people to obtain virtues and abstain from vices, introducing genuine otherworldly ends as consequents of worldly deeds. For example, in the glorious Qur'an, people are called by prophets to endeavor in the way of God by sacrificing their souls and possessions, to be patient, and to refrain from wrongdoing in return for rewards in the Hereafter: "Indeed God has bought from the faithful their souls and their possessions for paradise to be theirs" (9:111), "Indeed the patient will be paid in full their reward without any reckoning" (39:10), "There is indeed a painful punishment for the wrongdoers" (14:22). The first two approaches share the fact that in the light of their guiding manners, moral vices are driven away by opposing virtuous acts, and the end in both of them is becoming practically virtuous, while, as we will see, the third approach is different in these regards (Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 1:351-53).

In the third approach (i.e., the Qur'anic approach to a moral path), a moral agent is theoretically and morally trained in virtue of monotheistic knowledge so that the moral vicious traits cannot persist or be created due to the lack of their sources. In the first two approaches, moral vices are pushed back, whilst in the third approach they are removed and eliminated by means of eradicating their origins. The primary end and motivation according to the third approach are only divine pleasure, and other secondary divine ends, if any, are explained

in virtue of satisfying the primary end.<sup>2</sup> Knowledge and faith can give rise to good intentions for carrying out morally right actions and on the other hand hinder bad intentions for performing morally wrong acts. Consequently, due to the practical requirements of his knowledge and faith, a faithful knowledgeable person cannot easily intend to do morally wrong acts. When he cannot easily intend to do morally wrong acts, naturally he performs less wrong acts. When he performs less wrong acts, personal vicious qualities capable of being reinforced by morally wrong acts are gradually weakened. Thus, it seems reasonable that one can diminish and finally eliminate vicious qualities if one does not naturally intend morally wrong acts and so does not do them. Furthermore, vicious qualities may have their roots only if one carries out his actions on the basis of his egoistic mundane and otherworldly ends. If these ends were replaced with divine ends, vicious qualities would lose their origins. On the other hand, it seems rational that numerous divine intentions and ends derived from monotheistic knowledge and faith can improve virtuous qualities.

Assume one has certain knowledge of, and faith in, the Qur'anic monotheistic propositions such as "Indeed all honor belongs to God" (4: 139); "Power altogether belongs to God" (2: 165); and "That is God, your Lord; to Him belongs all sovereignty" (35: 13). In this case, one cannot think of the following intentions or ends: (1) developing a close relationship with an influential famous person *to achieve honor in the eyes of people*; (2) attaining high social positions to increase one's political power *in order to suppress the opposing party*; or (3) executing a financial plan to multiply one's material possessions *to pursue worldly pleasures*. The first intention entails the assumption that people can grant honor and that developing a close relationship with them involves a set of

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<sup>2</sup> The exclusivity of the divine end (that is, to act only for divine pleasure) is a distinct feature of the third approach.

reprehensible qualities and acts like hypocrisy and flattery, while believing in the proposition that all honor belongs to God discards this assumption and the vices that come with it. With the second intention appear blameworthy qualities like self-interest and trampling on people's rights, whereas the one who believes that power altogether belongs to God refrains from these vices, because he recognizes that if he has power, it belongs to God and he has to exercise it in God's way. The third intention leads to such culpable qualities as seeing oneself and one's possessions as independent beings, whereas having faith in the proposition that all sovereignty belongs to God, one will avoid that false viewpoint.

### **Moral Properties within the Framework of Qur'anic Morality**

The monotheistic morality regards God as an essential core for all theoretical and practical activities. That is to say, thanks to deep knowledge of and strong faith in God's existence and attributes, man pursues divine ends in his moral acts. It seems reasonable to assume that a typical contemporary Muslim who possesses a set of common qualities, traits, and conducts would lack deep knowledge, strong faith or divine ends in his theoretical and practical activities (further explanation will be put forward in the next sections). Hence, on the one hand, his ends and intentions are of mundane or otherworldly types (the first and second approaches). On the other hand, serious concern and strong will for acquiring deep knowledge of and strong faith in God are not noticeable in his activities. Therefore, instead of Qur'anic monotheistic morality, he is perceived to have a popular or otherworldly morality.

To provide evidence for inconsistency of this typical contemporary Muslim's morality and Qur'anic morality, I need to explain some of the most prevalent properties of the monotheistic approach to a moral path

in more detail. The most prevalent properties of monotheistic morality include remembering God (attention to Him), loving Him, submission to His will, being pleased with what He decides, fearing His punishment, hoping for His mercy, trusting and entrusting Him with one's affairs, giving thanks to Him, supplication, repentance, pleading to God for forgiveness.

### **Remembrance (DHIKR) and Love (HUBB)**

Remembrance of God is one of the most important and effective methods in moral and spiritual ascension and training. Remembrance of God makes divine good attributes exert overwhelming influence over human character traits in a way that after a while, man can see the signs of these good attributes in his soul (Misbah Yazdi 1390 Sh, 177). The adoption of this method contributes substantially to the ascension of man from the lowest animal stages towards the highest peaks of human perfection.

A person can remember God with his tongue or/and heart. Remembrance of God with the tongue is a principal instrument for the practice of attending to God. It is a sort of exercise to pay more attention to God with the heart. The remembrance of God with the heart is the most genuine relation between man and God and the source of human moral and spiritual perfection. Remembrance of God with the heart comes in degrees: (1) paying heed not to act against divine will; (2) remembering the fact that one is always in the presence of God, who is watchful of his inward and outward acts; (3) being as if one sees God with the light of one's heart (Misbah Yazdi 1390 Sh, 124-31). To keep heeding God, it is suitable for man to change his attitude towards all things around him in a manner that he considers what he sees in the world to be a disclosure of divine magnificence, power, knowledge, wisdom, beauty, and majesty. At a higher level, one may not have an

independent look at the creation but only take God into consideration and view all things as His effects.

The quantity<sup>3</sup> and quality<sup>4</sup> of the remembrance are emphasized by the Qur'an. With regard to the quantity, one has to frequently or even incessantly pay attention to God and invoke Him with the tongue and heart so that in those states God will protect him, help him, and treat him with His mercy and attentiveness.<sup>5</sup> The quality of remembrance pertains to its depth in that one should recollect God as his only beloved so intensely that, burning in love for God, he completely forgets himself and everything else. It is more influential to pay heed to the divine essence, which contains all divine names and attributes, than to a single attribute. It is an advantage of the remembrance of God that it prevents people from committing sins. It also results in the rest of the heart (Qur'an 13:28), felicity (8:45), being remembered by God (2:152), and being far from devils (43:36), and from a wretched life (20:124).

Love is one of the most precious moral and spiritual possessions of human beings, and man needs to carefully see how he uses this precious moral possession and what his object of love is. From a monotheistic standpoint, God is the only beloved, and if there are other things that man should love, it is because of their relation to God (Naraqi 1413 AH, 3: 141-42).

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<sup>3</sup> "O you who have faith! Remember God with frequent remembrance. And glorify Him morning and evening" (Qur'an 33:41-41).

<sup>4</sup> "[T]hen remember God as you would remember your fathers, or with a more ardent remembrance" (Qur'an 2:200).

<sup>5</sup> The one who is poor says, "O the All-Sufficient," the one who is ill says: "O the Healer." See Tabataba'i (1417 AH, 9:96).

When one's love for God dramatically grows, he wants to constantly think of God, of His best names, of His perfect attributes, and of His attentiveness, mercy, and grace. The enchantment of love for God may attract man so profoundly that he keeps remembering God at every moment and sees himself in the presence of God everywhere. And the strength of yearning for God detaches him from all things and guides him towards God. In that case, he views every beautiful, good thing as an instance of God's eternal perfection, His limitless beauty, and His infinite goodness. This sort of love, replete with rationality, does not belong to anything but God. The delight and rapture of this love leads to a change in thoughts and acts: intellectually, one does not look at anything independently of its connection to God and recognizes His mark on it; and practically, one does not will, want, hope, fear, adopt, abandon, laugh, or cry except for the sake of God and in His way. Those who become immersed in the divine love, do not choose their actions based on their virtues or vices; rather, God's pleasure becomes their sole criterion for doing or not doing something. Such people do not care about the virtue or vice of their action, people's praise or blame, or even Heaven or Hell; their only intention and end is to please God (Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 1:396 – 72). Love for God can end in obeying God and His Prophet (Qur'an 3:31), and in God's love for man.

### **Submission (TASLIM) to God and Being Pleased with Him (RIDA)**

To embrace Islam is to submit to God. To submit to God is to assent to divine ontological decrees like destiny and ordainment, and to divine legislative decrees like God's command and prohibition. Islam has different levels in this sense: (1) to accept God's commands and prohibitions by saying the twofold testimonies (*shabadaatayn*) whether the heart adheres to them or not; (2) to adhere wholeheartedly to all true doctrines and to act accordingly in spite of the possibility of committing mistakes in some cases; (3) to train animal powers, which

are inclined to mundane whims and adornments: on this level, man can serve God so faithfully that he sees himself in the presence of God, there remains no opposition in his heart to divine ontological or legislative decrees, and he devotedly submits to God (virtuous traits such as submission to God and being pleased with Him are at this level among the requirements of Islam and faith); (4) to realize—after complete servitude and pure submission to divine will—that nothing has an independent causal efficiency, that possession belongs only to God, and that it is in His possession that he can serve Him (Tabtaba'i 1417 AH, 1:295-98).

When man manages to make his will accord with divine will, there will be no event in the world or no divine command and prohibition that he finds against his own will. This kind of accord of man's will and divine will indicates man's submission to God. There are some obstacles in the way of this accord. These obstacles include various kinds of ignorance and sensual desires. The way to overcome ignorance is to make serious attempts to achieve acquired knowledge and knowledge by presence. However, human sensual desires and psychic wants are comprised of physiological wants, emotional wants, and mental wants. Physiological wants lead man to beastlike inclinations (i.e., lust and anger), bodily pleasures, and natural agreeable things (e.g., enjoyable weather), and push him away from bodily pains and natural disagreeable things. Emotional wants consist of *metaphorical* love (*'ishq majazi*) for the created, unfounded hostilities, and delusive likes and dislikes; for instance, a soldier may have a great respect for his commander that results in obeying even his wrong orders. Mental wants encompass misleading thoughts pertaining to endless unattainable wishes, great regret for what happened, and unrealistic wishes for what will happen. Wealth, power, good reputation, and social positions are among the factors that attract human carnal appetites. If these carnal

appetites conflict with what God wants, then most people probably tend to prefer their wants and so do not submit to divine will.

There are two effective strategies in this context: (1) trying to abandon one's wants; (2) trying not to care much about one's carnal wants. The first strategy is to live at the moment and to experience the present time. The one who implements the first strategy transcends the endless long-lasting wishes, internal attachment to his properties, arrogance, greed, envy, being delighted with other people's confirmation, desire for changing others, the passion of being perfect in the eyes of people, and unnecessary constant worries. If one cannot put his carnal wants aside, he is able at least not to care much about them. Otherwise, he does not submit to God and takes his carnal whims to be his god (*Qur'an 25:43*).

If one has submitted to God, then he has obeyed His command (*Qur'an 40:66*), has been guided (*3:20*), has certainly held fast to the firmest handle (*31:22*), and has pursued rectitude (*72:14*).

Man's pleasure and contentment with God implies that he is not displeased with what God has willed and is not pleased with what displeases God; he would be happy with what God has or has not done. Therefore, submitting to the divine will, a person can possibly be pleased with God's ontological acts and legislative decrees (*Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 1:388*). If a person is really pleased with God, he will be permanently happy; since he loves God and sees all things as arising from divine will, he does not care about comfort or hardship, pleasure or pain, sickness or health, wealth or poverty, life or death, and so on. Man's pleasure with God proceeds from love for Him (*Naraqi 1378 Sh, 767*).

Pleasure with God may result in the great success (*Qur'an 5:119*), God's grace (*9:59*), the peace of the soul, being with God's righteous servants, and being admitted into Paradise (*89:27-30*).

Submitting to, and being pleased with, God are two mental states which require a monotheist to obey God and be pleased with divine ordainments and decrees. These two moral stations are contingent on deep knowledge, strong faith, and pure feeling: knowledge of, and faith in, the fact that God is omniscient, omnipotent, all-wise, and absolutely benevolent; that He is fully aware of His servants' good; that in His ordainments and decrees He assigns the best to them; that He loves His servants much more deeply than they love Him. Hence, a monotheist wholeheartedly feels an overwhelming love for his Lord, a type of love which does not permit him to see the disagreeable and worldly pains and to be unhappy if he sees them, because he realizes that there is profound wisdom behind them. He is happy with worldly pleasures and the agreeable not for themselves but for them being derived from divine will.

### **Fear (KHAWF) and Hope (RAJA')**

Fear, from a monotheistic perspective, is of two kinds: (a) culpable fear, which does not originate from sins or from awe of God and realizing His majesty; (b) commendable fear, which originates from sins or from awe of God (Naraqi 1378 Sh, 1:245). Hope is also of two kinds: (a) culpable hope, which lies in someone other than God; (b) commendable hope, which lies in God. Both fear and hope refer to future events, and they are not contradictor: one can at the same time fear his sins and have hope in God's mercy and grace. But as opposed to fear and hope, there are two qualities that are considered to be grave sins: being fearless in committing sins and despairing of divine mercy (Misbah Yadi 1390 Sh, 357-59).

Fear and hope are two mental states that people experience in different situations of their lives. From a monotheistic standpoint, it is morally wrong to fear anything but God's justice (Qur'an 5:44) and to have hope

in anything but God. Fear of God is a special feeling of modesty, weakness, and misery a servant experiences before God's glory, might, omnipotence, and majesty (Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 19:113; Qur'an: 79:40-41). Hope in God is a desirable feeling a servant experiences before His mercy, grace, attentiveness, generosity, benevolence, and absolute beauty. Therefore, what a monotheist should fear is the consequences of his sins before the station of divine justice, and what he should have hope in is His mercy and generosity. The monotheist servants of God fear that they may be deprived of His intimate companionship and presence even for a moment, and they hope that God will keep them in His intimate companionship and presence by His mercy and benevolence (Qur'an 18:110).

### **Trust (TAWKKUL) and Entrustment (TAFWID)**

To trust God is to appoint God as the trustee and to give Him control over all affairs, as He is the Master of all sovereignty (Kashi 1379 Sh, 94). To trust God is to rely on, and to have confidence in, God in every matter insofar as God is the only independent dominant cause and other causes do not have genuine and independent efficiency in themselves. When a person aims to take an action by resorting to ordinary causes, he must regard God as the only independent cause directing the affairs of the Creation and regard himself and ordinary causes as lacking independent efficiency. Nevertheless, it does not follow that he should not use the ordinary causes; he just ought to deny the independent efficiency of himself and of ordinary causes (Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 11:219-20). Thus, it is obligatory for the monotheist to trust God (Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 12:31; Qur'an 33:3). If a person trusts God, God grants him the requirements of a good, happy life and He suffices as a trustee, for He is the highest cause to which all causes of the world are subordinate. So, if He, as a trustee, wills to do something for someone, He will succeed and nothing can stop Him (Qur'an 65:3).

To entrust affairs to God (Qur'an 40:44) is to return affairs to God so that He looks after them. Trust, entrustment, and submission are approximately synonymous, but there are delicate differences among them: On the plane of trust, a servant of God adopts God as his trustee in order for Him to make changes in what seems to be his own possession. On the plane of entrustment, a servant returns to God what is attributed to himself, recognizing that the affairs are not his possessions. On the plane of submission, recognizing that the affairs are not his possessions, a servant is completely compliant and obedient to what God wills, regardless of what is attributed to him. Therefore, trust, entrustment, and submission are three prominent stations of servitude. Submission is ordered as the highest, then entrustment, and at the end trust (Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 17:334).

### **Giving Thanks to God (SHUKR), Supplication (DU'A), Repentance (TAWBAH), and Asking God for Forgiveness (ISTIGHFAR)**

To give thanks to God for a blessing is a way of talking about it. It is realized in two ways: (1) to remember God with the tongue and with the heart when benefiting from it and (2) to employ the blessing where God is pleased with. With regard to the fact that all things are His blessings and He has decreed that all His blessings should be used in His way, giving thanks to God at the time of using them requires that His station of Lordship should be remembered with the tongue and with the heart, and all things should be applied in the way of worshiping Him (Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 4:40). Giving thanks to God increases the blessings (Qur'an 14:7), keeps people away from His punishment (4:147), and is integral to worshiping Him (2:175).

In requesting various things, one takes benefit from the requested, and supplication is an instrument by means of which the supplicant attracts the attention of the supplicated in order to fulfill his requests.

Supplication is the request for God's attention and grace, the one who possesses an absolute realm in which all things, all servants, and their all requests are located. A person should supplicate God "beseechingly and entreatingly" (Qur'an 7:55) by putting exclusive faith in Him (40:14). He should select good requests and ask God only, without relying on other causes (Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 2:32-34). God is near His servants and answers their calls (Qur'an 2:186).

Repentance consists of two parts: (1) expressing regret and deciding to start serving God, the servant turns towards God; (2) God clemently turns to the servant first by helping him turn towards Himself and then by forgiving his sins (Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 4:244). A servant's turning towards God is always between God's two turnings to him (Qur'an 4:17). Since servants are not independent in any circumstances, they need divine help and mercy in order to turn to Him and repent. After God clemently turns to his servants, they are able to turn to Him by means of pleading to God for forgiveness. Then, due to His mercy and grace, God accepts their repentance (Tabataba'i 1417 AH, 1:134). The fulfillment of repentance depends on knowing the sin. To come to know the sin, one should take three things into consideration: (1) that he has kept himself away from God by committing the sin, (2) that he was happy at the time of committing the sin, and (3) that he has not compensated for the sin while God was watching him (Kashi 1379 Sh, 40). When he gains this kind of knowledge, he should purify his heart: he should cease committing the sin immediately, decide to desist from it in the future, and compensate for his previous faults (Naraqi 1431 Sh, 3:49).

"*Istighfar*" is to ask God for forgiveness after committing sins and "*maghfirah*" is to cover sins. When a person asks God for forgiveness, He attends to His sinful servant and takes away his sins. Divine forgiveness covers all sins (Qur'an 39:53). What can motivate servants to

ask God for forgiveness is divine attributes such as “all-forgiving”, “all-merciful”, and “all-affectionate.” Asking God for forgiveness is regarded to be an effective way to eliminate sins, to avoid punishment, and to achieve salvation and the remission of sins (Tamimi Amidi 1393 Sh, 517-18). After committing sins, a monotheist is bound to entreat God to excuse and forgive him so that he remains in the way of God’s servitude (Qur'an 3:174).

### **Morality of a Typical Contemporary Muslim**

Assume that in the realm of relation to God, a typical contemporary Muslim who likes to be moral possesses the certain moral traits that will be mentioned. By the term “typical” I mean that there are Muslims in the contemporary world to the moral traits of whom the moral traits of this given contemporary Muslim are more or less similar or identical. Therefore, two assumptions are excluded: (a) there is no Muslim in the contemporary world to the moral traits of whom the moral traits of this given contemporary Muslim are more or less similar or identical, and (b) all Muslims who live in the contemporary world have moral traits similar or identical to the moral traits of this given contemporary Muslim. On this account, the assumption (c) is that this typical contemporary Muslim possesses moral traits that there are Muslims in the contemporary world whose moral traits are more or less similar or identical to.

To show the truth of the assumption (c), our observations and experience in communicating with each other can be employed. This kind of observations and experience, where careful and detailed, at least can show that some of the Muslims we communicate with have the following moral traits, but if we are supposed to provide exact statistics that indicate how many Muslims, and to what extent, have moral traits

similar or identical to the moral traits of this typical contemporary Muslim, we need scientific investigations based on statistical data.

The moral traits of this typical contemporary Muslim in his individual and social life may be characterized as what follows: the role of God is quantitatively and qualitatively limited in his life, and the properties of the monotheistic approach are not found in his morality. Quantitatively, he tends to pay heed only to his mundane concerns, sensual wants, and physiological needs.<sup>6</sup> Qualitatively, even in his prayer and fasting, he does not deeply pay attention to God but thinks about his works, concerns, and needs. He may admit that the quantity and quality of his attention are not acceptable; nonetheless, he does not take appropriate measures in this respect.

In answering the following questions, I attempt to explain the moral approach of this typical contemporary Muslim:

- Does he deeply remember God with his tongue and heart as the Glorious Qur'an instructs?
- Does he purely love God? Does the rapture of the love for God cause him to act only for His pleasure?
- Does he completely submit to God's will? Is he pleased with whatever God wills, including blessings and calamities, and with whatever He commands?
- Does he fear God only and have hope in Him alone?
- Does he trust God in carrying out every single act and entrust his affairs to Him?
- Is he grateful to God for His infinite blessings? Does he beseechingly and entreatingly supplicate God? Does he appropriately repent and plead to God for forgiveness?

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<sup>6</sup> Note that it cannot be of positive moral worth for a monotheist to pay attention exclusively to these things all the time.

The moral practices of this typical contemporary Muslim lack many of these monotheistic features. He scarcely remembers God in depth within a twenty-four hour period; he does not exclusively love God, and his heart is filled with the love for worldly affairs; he does not like to submit to divine will; he often complies with his own carnal wants; he thinks of himself as directing the affairs in the best way; he gets unhappy and displeased with calamities and divine commands; he fears many things other than God, such as poverty, sickness, death, other people; he has hope in many worldly affairs, such as his knowledge and power, children, parents, friends; he trusts his own potentials and powers more than he trusts God; thinking of himself as directing all affairs, he does not entrust them to God; he forgets to thank God for His countless blessings; he does not beseechingly supplicate God; and he does not properly repent and plead to God for forgiveness.

His intentions and ends, if he tries to lead a moral life, are similar to the intentions and ends depicted by Allamah Tabataba'i in the first and second approaches to moral paths. In other words, he is preoccupied with worldly and otherworldly ends. His worldly ends are derived from our common moral culture; for example, if a storekeeper treats people kindly, they go to his store more frequently, and consequently he sells more. His otherworldly ends are restricted to those of keeping away from Hell and going to Paradise. For instance, those helping the poor are rewarded in Paradise and those killing the innocent are punished in Hell. The moral approach of this typical contemporary Muslim is not compatible with the third approach to a moral path insofar as moral end is concerned. In the third approach, the central foundation of ethics is God and divine pleasure is the ultimate moral end. According to this approach, one is expected to consider only divine pleasure as his end in his relation to God and others.

With respect to the preceding line of thought, it may be realized that the moral features and ends of this typical contemporary Muslim are inconsistent with the moral features and end of Qur'anic morality in the realm of his relation to God. Our observations and experience in communicating with other Muslims roughly confirm that there are Muslims in the contemporary world whose moral features and ends are more or less similar or identical to the moral features and ends of this typical contemporary Muslim. Thus, it follows that there are Muslims in contemporary worlds whose moral features and ends are inconsistent with moral features and ends prescribed by Qur'anic morality. Once this kind of observations and experience sufficiently expand, one may regard it as very likely to conclude that if scientific investigations will be conducted on the basis of empirical statistical data, they will show that the number of Muslims whose moral features and ends in the realm of relation to God are similar to the moral features and ends of this typical contemporary Muslim and, therefore, are inconsistent with Qur'anic morality is considerable. However, it is the task of empirical studies to discuss this issue more exactly.

It serves as a criterion for assessing one's moral status to compare Qur'anic morality and the morality of this typical contemporary Muslim in the realm of relation to God. Comparing them makes it possible that after recognizing our own moral traits, motivations, and ends by means of introspection, we understand what personal features and ends that we have are not compatible with the moral features and ends and are in line with those of the typical contemporary Muslim. This understanding provides a relatively clear conception of our current moral status and of our desirable moral status. It may also guide us to make moral progress.

This article has focused on human relation to God as the most fundamental relation in Qur'anic morality. It is also important to

discuss other moral relations (i.e., relation to oneself, other people, and nature), but the explanation of elaborate issues concerning every one of these relations requires independent inquiries. Based on those inquiries, it can be made clear that Qur'anic approach to a moral path is distinct from other moral paths. This distinction can be explained in terms of a monotheistic standpoint, moral ends and motivations, more emphasis on certain moral truths, different evaluation, and the like.

## Conclusion

Among different schools of Islamic morality, Qur'anic morality as a comprehensive moral system has not been discussed so much. On the other hand, a large number of Muslims who are devout and practice morality genuinely want to lead their lives based on Qur'anic morality. This article addresses two questions in this regard: What is Qur'anic morality in the realm of relation to God and is it consistent with the morality of a typical contemporary Muslim? And is it possible for us to have a criterion for assessing our own moral status by comparing these two kinds of morality with our own morality? In answering the first question, the article has gone through certain stages: first, the intimate relation between Qur'anic morality and Islamic belief system specially monotheism was briefly discussed; second, as specified by Qur'anic morality, divine pleasure was seen as the ultimate moral end and motivation; third, the features of Qur'anic morality such as remembrance, love, submission to God, being pleased with Him, fear, and hope in the realm of relation to God were explained; fourth, I assumed that there are Muslims in contemporary world whose moral traits and ends are more or less similar or identical to a given typical contemporary Muslim. It has been stated that our everyday observations and experience support this assumption and it is likely that empirical investigations would confirm a stronger assumption; then it was made clear that the moral features and ends of this typical contemporary

Muslim are not in agreement with the features and end of Qur'anic morality. Therefore, his morality is not consistent with Qur'anic morality built upon special moral features and ends. In answering the second question, it was stated that one can explore the moral features and ends of Qur'anic morality and the lack of these in the morality practiced by that typical contemporary Muslim and then, one can realize by means of introspection the requirements of which of these two kinds of morality is fulfilled by one's own current moral features and ends. Accordingly, one may find one's moral defects and weaknesses in this regard.

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