

Moral Conduct of the Noble Prophet (s) - Part II: Family and Social Ethics

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Abstract

This article explains the view and conduct of the Prophet (s) regarding family and social relations so that it will be possible for people to understand and follow his example in these areas. Since the Prophet (s) was the ethical model and the one who perfected noble ethical qualities, human beings can benefit from his advice and thus be successful in the various dimensions of their family and social life.

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1. Family Ethics

Respecting One's Parents

In the eyes of the Prophet of Islam (s), parents have a high station. This is because after mentioning obedience to Himself, God orders us to

respect our parents (Quran 17:23). A man came to the Prophet (s) and said: “O Prophet of God (s)! Give me some advice.” The Prophet (s) said: “Do not ascribe any partners to God even if you are burned. Listen to your father and mother, and be good to them, regardless of whether they are alive or have passed away” (Harrani 1404 AH, 41).

One day, the Prophet (s) came to visit a young man who was about to die. However, death had become very difficult for him. The Prophet (s) called him and asked: “What do you see?” He said: “I see two frightening individuals standing in front of me, and I am afraid of them.” The Prophet (s) asked: “Does this person have a mother?” His mother came forward and said: “Yes, o Prophet of God, I am his mother.” The Prophet (s) asked: “Are you happy with him?” She said: “No. I was not happy with him. However, because of you I am now pleased with him.” Then, the young man fainted. When he woke up, the Prophet (s) once again called him and asked: “Now, what do you see?” He said: “Those two individuals have left, and now two luminous beings have come, who I am happy to see.” Then the man died (Zamani 1368 Sh, 1:140).

Spouse Selection

Marriage is one of the things that can help man attain perfection and has a lofty status and great value in Islam. The Prophet (s) said: “There is no edifice in Islam dearer to God than marriage” (Hurr al-‘Amili 1409 AH, 14:3). In his words, marriage is a way to achieve chastity: “Marriage is the best way to terminate the unchaste glance, enjoy chaste sexuality, purity, and human nobility” (Muhaddith Nuri 1408 AH, 14:153).

The Prophet (s) would warn single people and encourage them to marry. One day, the Prophet (s) asked a young man: “Do you have a wife?” He said: “No.” The Prophet (s) said: “Is there a problem that

prevents you from doing so?” The man said: “No.” The Prophet (s) asked: “Are you healthy and strong?” He replied, “Yes, by the grace of God.” The Prophet (s) then said: “Then get married; otherwise, you would be one of the transgressors” (Nuri 1408 AH, 14:155).

A young man came to the Prophet (s) and asked him for some advice regarding marriage. The Prophet (s) said: “Yes, marry! And choose a religious wife [for yourself]” (Shaykh al-Tusi 1407 AH, 7:401).

Being Kind to One’s Spouse

The Prophet (s) behaved kindly and justly towards his wives. He would patiently bear their foul-mouthed talk and anger. Some of them were so disrespectful that they disclosed his inner secrets. For this reason, some verses of the Quran were revealed that threatened and rebuked them (66:3-5).

In the words of the Prophet (s), if a man tells his wife that he loves her, she will never forget it (Kulayni 1407 AH, 5:569). He also said: “When a man slaps his wife, God tells the key holder of Hell to slap him seventy times with the fire of Hell” (Muhaddith Nuri 1408 AH, 14:250).

Behavior towards Children

The noble Prophet of Islam (s) said: “Every tree has a fruit, and the fruit of the heart is the child” (Payandeh 1382 Sh, 333). In the mornings, he would benevolently place his hands on the heads of his children and grandchildren. He considered the smell of a child to be the fragrance of Paradise. He also said: “Kiss your children often” (Hurr al-‘Amili 1409 AH, 21:485).

One day, the Prophet (s) had placed one of his children on his knees and was kissing them when an elderly man came to visit him. When he saw the Prophet (s), the man said: "I have ten sons, but I have never kissed any of them even once." The Prophet (s) became very upset upon hearing this, to the extent that the color of his face turned red and said: "If someone is not kind to others, God will not be kind to him" (Hurr al-'Amili 1409 AH, 21:485). He also said: "The best of your children are daughters" (Tabrisi 1412 AH, 219), and "You should begin giving gifts to your daughters" (Shaykh al-Saduq 1376 Sh, 577). He also said: "Honor your children and behave towards them nicely" (Hurr al-'Amili 1409 AH, 21:476).

2. Social Ethics

Being Just

The Prophet (s) said: "An hour of justice is better than seventy years of worship in which one's nights are spent praying and one's days are spent fasting" (Muhaddith Nuri 1408 AH, 11:317). It has been narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri that one day the Prophet (s) was distributing wealth amongst them when a man came to him and said: "O Prophet of God! Be just!" The Prophet (s) said: "Woe to you! If I am not just, then who is just?! If I am not just, I will have failed" (Tabrisi 1390 AH, 121). The Prophet (s) would even equally distribute his glances when he talked to his Companions (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:121).

Trustworthiness

Even after he had announced his prophethood, the enemies of the Prophet (s) in Mecca would still bring their most valuable possessions to him and ask him to take care of them while they were away. It never

came to their minds that he might appropriate their wealth for himself. They had given him the title “the Trustworthy One” (al-Amin).

Keeping One’s Promise

Before and after the beginning of his mission, the Prophet (s) gave a lot of importance to keeping one’s promise. He would always fulfill his pledges, whether with his friends or his enemies, and if the other side did not break the pact, the Prophet (s) would remain loyal to it. The following examples attest to this:

1. In the Age of Ignorance, a group of chivalrous young men from the Quraysh made a pact called the “Pact of al-Fudul,” in which they pledged to defend the rights of the oppressed. One of the participants in that pact was the Prophet (s), who remained loyal to that pledge. Even after the beginning of his mission, whenever he remembered it, he would say: “I am not going to break my pledge even if I am given the most valuable blessing in exchange” (Huwayzi 1415 AH, 1:476).

In 6 AH, the Prophet (s) decided to go to Mecca to perform *‘umrah*. He set out for Mecca with a group of his Companions. On the way, he was told that the Quraysh had heard about his journey and had prepared themselves for a battle with him, because they had sworn not to let him enter Mecca. Since the Prophet (s) had not travelled to make war with anyone and only wanted to perform *‘umrah*, he negotiated with the Quraysh and a pact was made between them and the Prophet (s), which was called the “Treaty of Hdaybiyyah.”

Respecting People

Imam al-Husayn (a) said:

I asked my father about the gatherings of the Prophet (s). He (a) said: “In his gatherings, the Prophet (s)

would give every person his due [respect]. Every person would think that they were the most noble of people. His gathering was a gathering of forgiveness, modesty, truth, and trustworthiness. In them, no voice was raised ... [and] people were humble. They would respect the elderly and be loving to the children. They would place the needs of the poor ahead of their own. They would protect the strangers and help them. (Majlisi 1403 AH, 16:152)

The Prophet (s) said: “If someone respects his Muslim brother, he will have respected God” (Shaykh al-Saduq 1413 AH, 4:16). Once, a person entered the mosque, so the Prophet (s) stood up and made a place for him. The person said the following in astonishment: “O Prophet of God! There is a lot of room here; [there was no need to stand up and make a place for me]. The Prophet (s) replied: “The right of a Muslim upon another Muslim is to stand up and make a place for him if he sees that his brother wants to sit down” (Ibn Hisham n.d., 2:318).

Showing reverence towards other human beings was a habit of the Prophet (s). When he participated in the burial ceremony of a Jew in Medina, a group of the Companions also took part in the burial. However, they expressed their unhappiness. After the Prophet (s) heard their unhappiness about the aforementioned action, he addressed them and said: “Was this Jew not a human being?” So, the Companions became silent (Delshad Tehrani 1383 Sh, 2:79).

Forgiveness

With his kindness, the Prophet of Islam (s) would overlook the mistakes of others and forgive them in an exemplary manner. He considered it as one of the greatest ethical traits for a man to forgive the person who has wronged him (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:107), and he saw

forgiveness as the reason for a person's nobility: "I encourage you to forgive. This is because forgiveness amplifies your nobility. Therefore, forgive [others] so that God may honor you" (2:108). The Prophet (s) himself forgave a Jewish woman who had intended to take his life and relinquished taking revenge from her (Ibid.).

Respecting the Elderly

The Prophet (s) said: "God will protect against the dangers of the Day of Resurrection the one who understands the sanctity of the elderly and respects them because of their old age and weakness." He also said, "Respecting the elderly is like respecting God" (Shaykh al-Saduq 1406 AH, 189). The Prophet of mercy (s) encouraged people to respect the elderly saying: "The person who does not respect the elderly is not from us" (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:165). He would also say, "Blessings lie with the elderly" (Majlisi 1403 AH, 72:137).

Being Good to One's Neighbors

A person came to the Prophet (s) and complained to him about a neighbor who bothered him. The Prophet (s) told him to be patient. The person went away and after some time he came back and repeated his complaint. The Prophet (s) also repeated his previous response. The person came back a third time and complained again. This time, the Prophet (s) said: "On Friday, when the people come for the Friday prayer, place your household items on their path. When the people ask you why you have done that, tell them the story of your annoying neighbor." The person did exactly what the Prophet (s) told him to do. In order to protect his dignity, his neighbor told him to take his stuff back home and promised that he would not annoy him after that (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:668).

The Prophet (s) said, “Gabriel was always advising me about [being good to] neighbors till I began to think that neighbors would inherit each other” (Tabrisi 1412 AH, 48).

Caring for Orphans

It is reported that on one Eid al-Fitr, the Prophet (s) saw an orphan who was wearing old and tattered clothes and was looking at the other children in the celebration with a sad face. The Prophet (s) went to the little child and said to him, “Today, I want to be your father!” So, he held him in his arms and caressed him. The child became happy because of this fatherly love. The Prophet (s) said: “The most beloved of your homes in God’s eyes is the one in which the orphan is respected” (Ishaqi 1385 Sh, 225).

Caring for the Poor

The Prophet (s) announced that the way to become closer to God is to love the poor. He himself loved the poor very much and said: “My God ordered me to love poor Muslims” (Harrani 1404 AH, 315). The Prophet (s) would never allow belittling the poor and would say, “You must know that the person who disdains a poor Muslim is like the person who has treated the divine rights with contempt. On the Day of Resurrection, God will not show respect for such a person unless he repents. If someone shows respect to a poor Muslim, then on the Day of Resurrection, he will meet God while God is pleased with him” (Hurr al-‘Amili 1416 AH, 12:266).

Empathy with People

The Quran always invites Muslims to help one another in good deeds (5:2). The Prophet (s) gave importance to the affairs of every servant of

God and said the following in this regard, “The person who wakes up in the morning but does not care about the affairs of Muslims is not a Muslim. Also, if someone hears a person crying: ‘Oh Muslims! Help me!’ but does not go for help, then he is not a Muslim” (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:164).

As the Prophet (s) said, “The example of the connection, friendship, love, and mercy between the believers [and their giving importance to the destiny of one another] is the example of a living body; if a part is in pain, then the other parts sympathize with it” (Payandeh 1382 Sh, 382).

The Prophet (s) also said: “A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim. He does not consider it lawful to oppress him, and he does not leave him [in difficulties]. God will fulfill the need of the person who tries to fulfill the need of his brother [in faith]. And, God will remove a hardship of the Day of Resurrection from the person who removes a hardship from a Muslim. Also, on the Day of Resurrection, God will cover the faults of the person who covers the faults of a Muslim” (Hakimi 1380 Sh, 5:109).

Moreover, he said, “From His servants, God created a people who fulfill the needs of other people. They love to be kind [to others] and they consider generosity to be nobility. And, God loves good qualities” (Harrani 1404 AH, 52).

It is reported that Imam Ali (a) went to the market to buy a shirt for the Prophet (s). When he (a) gave the shirt to the Prophet (s), the latter asked him how much it had cost. When Imam Ali (a) told him the price, the Prophet (s) said, “If the seller is ready to take this shirt back and return the money, then take it back and buy a simpler shirt in place of it.” Imam Ali (a) went back to the marketplace, and the seller

accepted the shirt back. Imam Ali (a) took the money and went back home. Then, he set off with the Prophet (s) to the marketplace. On the way, the Prophet (s) saw a slave-girl who was crying. He asked her why she was crying, and she replied: "I have lost the money that my family gave me to buy groceries with. I am scared to go back home." The Prophet (s) gave a portion of the money to the girl and said: "Buy whatever you want with this and return home." Then, he went to the market and bought a shirt that was worth one third of the price of the previous shirt. On the way back home, he saw the same slave-girl sitting sadly on the side of the road. He asked her: "Why have you not returned home?" She said: "O Prophet of God! It has become very late, and I am afraid that when I go home, my family will punish me." The Prophet (s) went with her to ask her family to forgive her. When they reached her home and met with her family, the Prophet (s) asked them not to punish the slave-girl. Out of respect for the Prophet (s), they forgave her and then freed her (Shaykh al-Saduq 1376 Sh, 238).

Kindness to Religious Minorities

The kindness of the Prophet (s) was shown to all human beings, regardless of whether they were Muslims or not. Even though he was the leader of the Islamic society, through his conduct he would encourage people to pursue good not only for Muslims' society but also for humanity in other religious communities. One day, a Jewish person who had lent the Prophet (s) some money came to him and asked him to return it. The Prophet (s) said: "I do not have anything now to give you." The Jewish man said: "I will not let you go until you give me back my money." The Prophet (s) replied: "Then I will sit here with you." So, he sat there for a long time until the Companions came and threatened the Jewish man. The Prophet (s) looked at them and said: "Leave him alone." They said: "O Prophet of God! He has imprisoned you here!"

He replied: "God did not send me to oppress a non-Muslim." When the sun arose, the Jewish man said: "I wanted to test you. I testify that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad (s) is His servant and messenger. I will soon give away half of my wealth for the sake of God" (Qummi 1369 Sh, 160).

The Prophet (s) stated: "I am the enemy of the person who bothers a non-Muslim who has made a pact with the Islamic government" (Muhammadi Reyshahri 1386 Sh, 8:504). He also warned Muslims in the following manner: "If someone kills a member of a religious minority who has made a pact with the Islamic government, he will never even smell the fragrance of Paradise" (Mubarakfuri n.d., 407).

The Prophet (s) had a Jewish neighbour who became ill. So, he personally went to visit him (Ibn Ash'ath n.d., 159). Also, once, some Jews invited his daughter Fatimah (a) to take part in a wedding. The Prophet (a) agreed and sent her to their wedding (Majlisi 1403 AH, 43:30).

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