

A photograph of three young boys sitting outdoors in traditional Indonesian attire. The boy on the left wears a blue headband and a beige patterned shirt with a blue and white checkered sarong. The boy in the middle wears a white long-sleeved shirt and a patterned sarong. The boy on the right wears a white headband, a white long-sleeved shirt, and a red and white striped sarong, holding a yellow book. A fourth child in a green and yellow outfit is partially visible on the right. The background is a lush green forest.

Your Moral Character

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Far from being superfluous or trivial, noble character and good manners are part and parcel of Islam and are related to it in all its aspects. Indeed, noble character occupies a lofty position, which is obvious in all its rules and regulations, and the Prophet ﷺ was chosen as a messenger to perfect high moral standards.

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The Position of Good Character in Islam

1 Perfection of noble character was one of the most important objectives of the Prophet's mission

Allah ﷻ says, “It is He who raised up among the unlettered [Arabs] a Messenger from them to recite His verses to them and purify them and teach them the Book and Wisdom, even though before that they were clearly misguided.” (*Soorat Al-Jumu'ah*, 62:2) This verse reveals one of the favours Allah ﷻ has bestowed on the believers, stating that He has sent them His Messenger, Muḥammad ﷺ, to teach them the Qur'an and to purify them. Purification can only be attained by purging one's heart from such imperfections as associating others with Allah in worship, having bad moral character like hatred and jealousy and ridding one's speech and deeds of all forms of evil practices. The Prophet ﷺ once declared, “I have been sent to perfect noble character.” (*Sunan Al-Bayhaquee*: 21301) This statement makes it clear that one of the reasons behind the Prophet's mission was to elevate and perfect the moral character of the individual and society at large.

2 Noble character is part and parcel of faith and belief

When asked about the best of the believers, the Prophet ﷺ replied, “They are those who have the best character and manners.” (*Sunan At-Tirmidhee*: 1162; *Sunan Abu Daawood*: 4682)

In fact, the Qur'an uses the comprehensive Arabic word *birr* to refer to faith. As the Qur'an states, “Righteousness (*birr*) does not lie in turning your faces [during prayer] to the East or to the West. Rather, those with true devoutness are the ones who believe in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book and the Prophets...” (*Soorat Al-Baqarah*, 2:177) The word *birr* is a rather comprehensive term which includes all forms of righteousness, in



> Perfection of noble character was one of the most important objectives of the Prophet's mission.

word and deed. It is for this reason that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Righteousness (*birr*) is good character.” (*Saḥeeḥ Muslim*: 2553)

This becomes clear in the Prophet's declaration: “Faith (*eemaan*) has sixty odd branches. The uppermost of all these is the Testimony of Faith: *Laa ilaaha illallaah* (There is no god worthy of worship except Allah), while the least of them is the removal of a harmful object from the road. Shyness is a branch of faith.” (*Saḥeeḥ Muslim*: 35)

3 Noble character permeates all acts of worship

Every time Allah commands the believers to perform an act of worship, He draws their attention to its moral significance or its positive effect on the individual and society. Examples of this are numerous and include the following:

The Prayer: “Establish the prayer, for the prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds.” (*Soorat Al-'Ankaboot*, 29:45).

The Obligatory Charity (*Zakaat*): “Take *zakaat* from their wealth to purify and cleanse them with it.” (*Soorat At-Tawbah*: 9:103) Besides showing kindness and giving comfort to people, *zakaat* refines the benefactor’s “character and purges it from evil practices”.

Fasting: O You who believe, fasting has been prescribed for you just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may remain conscious of Allah.” (*Soorat Al-Baqarah*: 183) This verse makes it abundantly clear that the foremost objective of fasting is to realise consciousness of Allah by obeying His commands and avoiding all words and deeds He has prohibited. As the Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever does not abandon false speech and false conduct, then Allah has no need of his abandoning of food and drink.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 1804) Therefore, if fasting fails to effect a change in one’s character and dealings with others, it will by no means serve its real purpose.

4 The immense rewards Allah ﷻ has in store for those who observe good character Textual proofs from the Qur’an and the *Sunnah* to this effect are numerous, including the following:

- Good character will be the heaviest righteous deed to be placed on a person’s scale of deeds on the Day of Judgement:

The Prophet ﷺ said, “No deed that will be placed on the scale of deeds [on the Day of Judgement] will be heavier than good character. Indeed, a person with good character will attain the rank of those with a good record of voluntary fasts and prayers.” (*Sunan At-Tirmidhee*: 2003)

- It is the very deed that will lead people to enter Paradise the most:

When the Prophet ﷺ was asked about which act leads people to enter Paradise the most, he replied, “Piety and good character.” (*Sunan At-Tirmidhee*: 2004; *Sunan Ibn Maajah*: 4246)

- Of all people, those who have good character will be the closest to the Prophet ﷺ on the Day of Judgement:

The Prophet ﷺ said, “The dearest to me among you and the nearest to me on the Day of Judgement are those who have the best character.” (*Sunan At-Tirmidhee*: 2018)

- The Prophet ﷺ guarantees a house in the highest part of Paradise to those who have good character:

“I guarantee a house in the surroundings of Paradise for those who give up arguing, even if they are in the right; and I guarantee a house in the middle of Paradise for those who abandon lying even when joking; and I guarantee a house in the highest part of Paradise for those who have good character and manners.” (*Sunan Abu Daawood*: 4800)



> Good character is one of the meritorious deeds in the sight of Allah and serves to give us a sense of inner fulfilment and happiness.

Distinguishing Features of Noble Character in Islam

Noble character in Islam is characterised by unique qualities which distinguish it from all other faiths, including the following

1. Noble character is not confined to a particular type of people

Almighty Allah has made people into different shapes, colours and languages. They are all equal in His sight, and no one has an advantage over another except in piety and noble conduct, as the Qur'an states, "O mankind, We have created you of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another; verily, the most honourable of you, in the sight of Allah, are the most pious of you." (*Soorat Al-Hujuraat*, 49:13)

Indeed, noble character characterises Muslims' relationship with all members of society: There is no difference whatsoever between rich and poor, black and white, Arab and non-Arab, or a prince and a pauper.

How to Treat Non-Muslims

Allah ﷻ commands us to show kindness and courtesy to everyone without exception, for justice, kindness and mercy are aspects of good character which a Muslim observes in his words and deeds with Muslims and non-Muslims alike. A Muslim ought to embody good character traits as a means to call others to this great religion of Islam.

The Qur'an says, "Allah does not forbid you from being good to those who have not fought you on account of your religion or driven you from your homes, or from being just towards them. Allah loves those who are just." (*Soorat Al-Mumtahinah*, 60:8)

Allah only forbids us to make friends with those belligerent non-Muslims who fight us because of our religion. He also forbids us to admire their way of life which clearly upholds unbelief and polytheist practices, as the Qur'an states, "Allah only forbids you respecting those who made war upon you on account of [your] religion, and drove you forth from your homes and backed up [others] in your expulsion, that you make friends with them. Whoever takes them for friends are wrongdoers." (*Soorat Al-Mumtahinah*, 60:9)



>A Muslim always maintains high moral standards when dealing with people regardless of their religion or race.

2. Noble character is not confined only to human beings

Good treatment of animals

The Prophet ﷺ once mentioned that a woman deserved punishment in Hellfire because of a cat that she had restrained and left it to starve to death. He also mentioned the story of a man whom Allah had forgiven after giving a thirsty dog some water to drink: “A woman entered Hellfire because of a cat which she had tied, neither giving it food nor setting it free to eat from the vermin of the earth.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 3140; *Saheeh Muslim*: 2619)

He also said, “While a man was walking along a road, he became very thirsty and he found a well. He lowered himself into the well, drank and came out. Then he saw a dog panting and eating mud because of excessive thirst. The man said, ‘This dog has become exhausted from thirst in the same way as I.’ He lowered himself into the well again and filled his shoe with water and gave the dog some water to drink. Allah thanked him for his good deed and forgave him.” The people asked, “Messenger of Allah! Is there a reward for us in serving these animals?” “Yes,” he replied, “There is a reward for serving every living thing.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 5663; *Saheeh Muslim*: 2244).

Preservation of the environment

Islam instructs us to make the world a better place by utilising the earth’s natural resources to build a civilization and engage in development and production for the general welfare of mankind, while at the same time trying to preserve such resources and prevent others from abusing or unnecessarily wasting them. Corruption in all its forms and by whatever means it may be caused is frowned upon in Islam and abhorred by the Creator Himself, as the Qur’an states, “Allah does not like corruption.” (*Soorat Al-Baqarah*, 2:205)

In fact, Islam is so concerned about this issue that it goes as far as to direct its adherents to do righteous deeds and engage in such things as cultivating the land even in times of great turmoil and under terrifying circumstances, such as the Day of Judgement. As the Prophet ﷺ once instructed, “If the Day of Judgement takes place [and you recognise the Event], while a man is holding a palm-tree seedling [to plant in the soil], let him, if he can, plant it.” (*Musnad Ahmad*: 12981)



> Islam urges its adherents to safeguard the environment.

3. Noble character in all aspects of life

The Family

Islam stresses the importance of noble character among all members of the family, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “The best of you are those who treat their wives the best, and I am the best of you in this respect.” (*Sunan At-Tirmidhee*: 3895)

- Despite being the best human being of all time, Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ shared household chores with his wives and helped around the house, as ‘Aa’ishah ؓ, one of his wives, once said about him, “He used to help his wives with the housework.” (*Saḥeeḥ Al-Bukhaaree*: 5048)
- He also used to joke with his family members. ‘Aa’ishah ؓ said, “I accompanied the Prophet ﷺ on a certain journey when I was young and thin. The Prophet ﷺ asked the people to move on, and they marched ahead. Then he turned to me and said, ‘Come on, let us have a race’. I raced him and I won the race. He did not mention this incident again. However, when I later put on more weight and I forgot all about this incident, I accompanied him again on some other journey. He asked the people to march ahead, and they did. Then he asked me to race him. I raced him, but he won. The Prophet laughed and said, ‘This was to make up for my previous defeat.’” (*Musnad Ahmad*: 26277)



Trade

Because people’s love of wealth may get the better of them and prompt them to engage in forbidden practices, Islam stresses the importance of observing noble character which serves to put an end to such practices. The following are some examples of the points Islam stresses in this respect:

- It warns traders who deal with fraud against a severe punishment on the Day of Judgement, as the Qur’aan states, “Woe to those who give short measure or weight; those who, when they take a measure from people, exact full measure, but when they give them a measure or weight, hand over less than is due.” (*Soorat Al-Mutaffifeen*, 83:3).
- It urges traders to show kindness and leniency, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “May Allah have mercy on a man who is kind when he buys, when he sells and when he demands his due.” (*Saḥeeḥ Al-Bukhaaree*: 1970)

Industry

Islam advises workers to observe a number of ethical principles and standards, including the following:

- To be as highly proficient at their jobs as they possibly can. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Allah likes to see that when you do something that you do it well.” (*Musnad Abu Ya'laa*: 4386, *Al-Bayhaqee's Shu'ab Al-Eemaan*: 5313)
- To honour their obligations, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “The signs of the hypocrite are three: when he speaks he lies, when he promises he breaks his promise and when he is entrusted he betrays the trust.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 33)

4. Noble character under all circumstances

There are no exceptions whatsoever when it comes to talking about good moral character in Islam. A Muslim is required to follow the dictates of Islamic law and observe noble character even in times of war and in difficult times, for there is no such thing in Islam as the end justifies the means. In other words, bad or unfair methods of doing something are by no means acceptable even if the result of that action is good or positive.

It is for this reason that Islam has laid down rules and criteria which govern Muslims' behaviour even in times of war so that they would not succumb to fits of rage, driven by intolerance which feeds their anger and satisfies hatred and malicious and selfish tendencies.

Some War Ethics in Islam

1. Islam commands justice even with non-Muslims and warns against wronging them in any way

The Qur'an says, “Do not let the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety.” (*Soorat Al-Maa'idah*, 5:8) That is, do not let your enmity for your enemies exceed the limits and turn you away from justice in either words or actions.

2. It strictly forbids treachery and betrayal when dealing with the enemy

Islam forbids treachery and betrayal even against the enemy, as the Qur'an states, “Allah does not love treacherous people.” (*Soorat Al-Anfaal*, 8:58)

3. It strictly forbids mutilation of dead bodies of enemies

It declares mutilation of corpses strictly impermissible, as the Prophet ﷺ once ordered, “Do not mutilate people.” (*Saheeh Muslim*: 1731)

4. It prohibits the killing of non-combatants, destroying the environment and causing corruption in the land

Upon despatching a military expedition to the northern borders of the Roman territory, Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq ؓ, the first Rightly-Guided Caliph and the best of all the Prophet's companions, addressed its leader, Usaamah ibn Zayd ؓ, saying, “Do not let your army kill young children, old people or women. Do not uproot or burn palms or cut down fruitful trees. Do not slaughter sheep, cows or camels, except for food. You will come across some people who have set themselves apart in hermitages; leave them to accomplish the purpose for which they have done this.” (*Taareekh Ibn 'Asaakir*, vol. 2, p. 50)

Some Aspects of the Prophet's Life and High Moral Standards

The Prophet ﷺ was the epitome of good character and personal integrity. When 'Aa'ishah رضي الله عنها, one of the Prophet's wives, was asked about the character of the Prophet ﷺ, she replied, "His character was the Qur'an." (*Musnad Ahmad*: 24601; *Saheeh Muslim*: 746) This means he translated the noble teachings of the Qur'an into reality.



> The Prophet ﷺ was the epitome of good moral character.

Humility

- The Prophet ﷺ was so humble that he did not like people to rise to their feet upon his arrival and he even forbade them from doing so. Although no one was dearer to his noble companions than the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, they would not stand up for him when they saw him coming, for they knew that he disliked that. (*Musnad Ahmad*: 12345; *Musnad Al-Bazaar*: 6637)
- Before 'Adiyy ibn Haatim رضي الله عنه, an Arab notable, embraced Islam, he came to Madeenah to find out about the new faith. "As we were making for [the Prophet's] house," he later recalled, "there met him an old feeble lady with some children who asked him to stop and he stopped for a long time while she was telling him of her needs. I said to myself, 'This is certainly no king; he does not behave like Chosroes or Caesar.'" (*Musnad Ahmad*: 19381)
- His actions and movements while in the company of his companions were characterised by homely simplicity and utter humility, so much so that a stranger would not be able to tell who he was. Once, a man came and said, "who amongst you is Muhammad?" (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 63)
- Anas ibn Maalik رضي الله عنه said, "Any of the female slaves of Madeenah could take hold of the hand of Allah's Messenger and take him wherever she wished." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 5724) The expression "take hold of the hand of Allah's Messenger" is an indication of his extreme kindness and prompt response to the young and the weak. This report reveals the Prophet's utter humility, in that it mentions his readiness to attend to the needs of some of the most vulnerable members of society, women and female slaves.
- Once he declared, "A person who has an atom's weight of pride in his heart will not enter Paradise." (*Saheeh Muslim*: 91)

Mercy

- The Prophet ﷺ said, "Those who are merciful will be given mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One above the heavens will have mercy on you." (*Sunan At-Tirmidhee*: 1924; *Sunan Abu Daawood*: 4941)

His mercy embraced countless aspects, including the following:

■ **Mercy towards children**

- A Bedouin once came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, “Do you kiss your children? We do not kiss them.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Can I put mercy in your heart after Allah has removed it?” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 5652; *Saheeh Muslim*: 2317)

On another occasion, a man saw the Prophet ﷺ kissing his grandson, Al-Hasan ibn ‘Ali, and said to him, “I have ten children, but I have never kissed any of them.” The Prophet ﷺ looked disapprovingly at him and said, “He who does not show mercy to others will not be shown mercy.” (*Saheeh Muslim*: 2318)

- Once he carried his granddaughter Zaynab while standing in prayer, and he put her down gently when he prostrated. (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 494, *Saheeh Muslim*: 543)
- If he heard a baby crying while the mother was praying behind him, he would shorten the prayer so that the mother could attend to the baby’s needs. Abu Qataadah ؓ narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said, “When I begin the prayer, I always intend to make it long; however, if I hear a baby crying, I shorten it, as I do not wish to cause his mother any distress.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 675; *Saheeh Muslim*: 470)

■ **Mercy towards Women**

The Prophet ﷺ urged his companions to look after girls and show kindness to them; he used to say, “Whoever is in charge of any of these girls and treats them well, they will be a shield for him against the Fire.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 5649; *Saheeh Muslim*: 2629)

He even stressed that women must be given their rights and be well cared for and commanded Muslims to make this issue their concern and to advise one another to

do so: “Take good care of women.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 4890)

He was a shining example of kindness to family members. He once sat beside his camel and put his knee for Safiyyah ؓ, one of his wives, to put her foot on, in order to get onto it. (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 2120)

Whenever his daughter Faatimah ؓ came to visit him, he would get up to welcome her, take her by the hand, kiss her and make her sit where he was sitting. (*Sunan Abu Daawood*: 5217)

■ **Mercy to the weak members of society**

- The Prophet ﷺ commanded people to sponsor orphans and look after them. “A person who takes care of an orphan and I will be like this in Paradise,” he once said, joining his forefinger and middle finger together by way of illustration. (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 4998)
- He considered a person who looks after a widow or a poor person just like a war-



rior who fights for Allah's cause, or like one who performs prayers all night without slackness and fasts continuously and never breaks his fast. (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 5661; *Saheeh Muslim*: 2982)

- He regarded showing kindness to the weak members of society and giving them their rights a strong reason to gain Allah's victory over the enemy as well as gaining more means of sustenance: "Seek help among your weak ones, for you are given provision and help only because of the weak amongst you." (*Sunan Abu Daawood*: 2594)

■ Mercy towards animals

- The Prophet's comprehensive sense of mercy extends even to animals and insects. He urged people to show kindness to animals and warned them against harming them or laying loads on them which are more than they can bear. He said, "Allah has prescribed proficiency in all things. Thus, if you kill, kill well; and if you slaughter, slaughter well. Let each one of you sharpen his blade and



> Once, seeing a mother bird flapping its wings in desperation after some of its companions had taken some of its chicks away, the Prophet ﷺ disapprovingly said to them, "Who has distressed this bird by taking her young? Give her chicks back to her at once."



> Allah's messenger ﷺ likened a person who looks after a widow or a poor person to a warrior who fights for Allah's cause, which is a highly meritorious deed in the sight of Allah.

let him spare suffering to the animal he slaughters." (*Saheeh Muslim*: 1955)

- Once he noticed a mound of ants which had been burned up. "Who has set fire to this?" he asked. One of his companions replied, "We have." "No one should punish with fire except the Lord of the fire," he disapprovingly said. (*Sunan Abu Daawood*: 2675)

Justice

- The Prophet ﷺ upheld justice under all circumstances and judged by Allah's rule even if that was against one of his closest family members, in compliance with Allah's command, "O you who believe, be upholders of justice, bearing witness for Allah alone, even against yourselves or your parents and relatives." (*Soorat An-Nisaa*, 4:135)
- When some of his companions came to intercede with him on behalf of a noblewoman who had committed a theft so that she would be spared the punishment, he said, "By Him in whose hand is Muhammad's soul, even if Faaṭimah, the daughter of Muhammad, committed a

theft, I would cut off her hand.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 4053; *Saheeh Muslim*: 1688)

- When he declared all forms of usury (*riba*) forbidden, he stated that the first usury he declared entirely remitted was that of Al-‘Abbaas ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib, his own uncle: “The person whose usury I claim authority over is Al-‘Abbaas ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib; it will be abolished, all of it.” (*Saheeh Muslim*: 1218)
- A civilized and cultivated society in his estimation is one in which the weak can claim their rights without fear or hesitation: “Woe to the nation whose individuals do not give the weak his due in full.” (*Sunan Ibn Maajah*: 2426)

Benevolence and Generosity

- The Prophet ﷺ was the most generous of all people, and he was most generous of all in the month of *Ramadaan* when Jibreel met him; Jibreel used to meet him every night in *Ramadaan* until the end of the month and teach him the Qur’an. When Jibreel met him, he would be more generous in doing good than a blowing wind [which comes with rain and prosperity]. (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 1803; *Saheeh Muslim*: 2308)
- He never denied the request of anyone who asked him anything. Once a man came to him and asked him for something. The Prophet ﷺ gave him a flock of sheep filling the area between two mountains. The man was so happy that he returned to his people and called them to Islam, saying, “Embrace Islam, for Muḥammad is so generous that he gives in charity without fearing poverty.” (*Saheeh Muslim*: 5423)
- Once he received eighty thousand dirhams, so he placed the amount on a mat and gave it in charity, not turning away anyone who asked him for something until the full amount was distributed. (*Mustadrak Al-Haakim*: 5423)
- **On another occasion**, a man approached him and made a request for something, and the Prophet ﷺ said to him, “I do not have anything right now, but you can buy something in my name, and I will certainly pay for it when I get the money.” ‘Umar ؓ turned to him and said, “Allah has not made it compulsory for you to do something beyond your capacity.” This comment offended the Prophet ﷺ a great deal. The man then said to him, “Spend in charity without fearing poverty, for the Lord of the Mighty Throne will not decrease your wealth.” The Prophet ﷺ smiled and his face was radiant with happiness. (*Al-Ahaadeeth Al-Mukhtarah*: 88)
- When the Prophet ﷺ returned from the Battle of Hunayn, some new converts from the Bedouin tribes who were eager to get their share of the spoils of war followed him. They drove him to a tree where one of the uncouth Bedouins snatched his mantle off his shoulders, thinking it was part of the spoils of war. “Give me back my mantle,” he said, “for if I had as many camels as the trees [around here], I would divide them all among you. You know very well that I am neither miserly, nor deceitful, nor cowardly.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree*: 2979)

May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, for he is indeed the epitome of excellent moral character in all aspects of life.