ETIQUETTE OF LIFE IN ISLAM

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What does etiquette of life mean? Etiquette is a kind of manner in human life, even is only peculiar to human life. That is, etiquette is to follow a road or going alone on a road, behaving or acting that includes only human being's way of life towards himself/ herself and society. It concerns only with human being but not with animals or other creatures.

God created man in a most noble image (1) among the other creatures. Then he beared the religious responsibility upon him, and eventually it is expected to play his part in this world and to act regarding the pleasure of God. Therefore man has responsibility of belief in God, of obidience to Him and of following the message from Him through the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

Islamic Morality embraces all the facts of life. Thereby etiquette is included by it. The principles of etiquette of life in Islam are the moral principles, at the same time. Furthermore the moral life in Islam is consist of the faith, worship and acting in accordance with the satisfaction of God. According to Islam, belief and morality are the same things. There is no difference between them. It has to be counted to etiquette's advantage that the religion i.e. Islam is not a different thing from moral.

Because, to Islam, moral principles and even morality come from the foundations of the religion. Thus a religious man is not different from a good-guided man who has the real righteousness. In the following verse, it is considered in the broadest sense:

'Righteousness does not consist in whether you face towards the East or the West. The righteous man is he who believes in God and the last Day, in the angels and the Books and the prophets; who, though he loves it dearly, gives

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(1) Koran 95: 3

away his wealth to kinsfolk, to orphans, to the helpless, to the traveler in need and to beggars, and for the redemption of captives; who attends to his prayers and renders the alms levy; who is true to his promises and stead fast in trial and adversity and in times of war. Such are the true believers, such are the God-fearing.' (2)

In this way, Koran considers the true believers as the good- guided people who respect the moral principles. On the other hand, in our daily life, we sometimes observe someones who are the true- believers, but not folower of the moral principles rooted deeply in the same religious values. So they separate religion from morality in their life unconsciously However it could't abolish the fact that Islam unified the daily moral principles within the religion. Because the Holy Prophet identified his life with the divine revelations as the best example for muslims, as said in the Koran: 'There is good example in God's apostle for those of you who look to God and the Last Day and remember God always' (3)

It can be easily observed that the source of morality is religion, especially religion of Islam. In brief we call Koran as Islamic morality because of it is consist of all the aspects of religious life. It could be considered that Islamic morality is a theologic moral, but not moral theology, clearly speaking, morality comes from religion, but not vice versa. All basic virtues such as truthfulness, honesty, mercy, sincerity love, humility etc. are the outcome of that divine spark and thus are eternal and unchanging principles (4)

There is no doubt the fact that the basic rules and principles of morality are universal accepter and respected around all the world. In accordance with those above mentioned principles, it should be irresistibly claimed that only God has the right to set the moral principles and rules for us. Because He is the Creator of all human being and of the universe. He alone knows why He has

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(2) Koran 2: 177
(3) Koran 33: 21
(4) Why be Moral? The Journal of Muslim World League- Mecca, Vol. 1, Nu:8, May 1974, p. 37.

created us and what should do Islamic moral laws are neither the creation of a pious man nor of the prophet Muhammad. (5)

The morality of Islam has three aspects as following: First. The Moral of God, Second. The moral of Servant himself/herself, and the last, the moral of servant towards society in which he lives.

These aspects depend on the theocentric understanding. Without considering God as a centre of all things, it is not possible to throw full light on the essence of the moral of Islam and of course, etiquette of life in Islam.

The Islamic belief in the pure oneness of God rectifies man's attitude towards his Creator (glory to Him) when he admits to singularity in Godhead and His Lordship of all the universe, as declared in the Koran: 'He it is who in heaven is God, and on earth is God' (xliii: 84). 'Say: He is God One, God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten and has not been begotten. None is equal to Him' (Cxii). It also rectifies man's attitude towards the universe in which he and other human being amongst whom he lives exists.' (6) Because of the name of 'İslam' refers to the religion and civilisation based upon the Koran, a scripture revealed to the Prophet Muhammed in the years A.D. 610-632, we muslims look back to the Koran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad as the primary sources for everything authentically their own. These sources provide a number of teachings concerning with the nature of reality, which are accepted by all muslims and, as it were, in still the myth of Islam into the muslim consciousness. The most succinct expression of these teachings is found in the Islamic testimony of faith: There is no god but One God, and Muhammad is the messanger of God. All muslims have faith in God and in the Koran, the divine world brought by God's messanger. More generally, according to the Koranic formulation, muslims believe in God, the angels, the scriptures, the prophets, the Last Day and Predestination. (7)

The statements of 'There is no but God, and all thing that has an Islamic element to it takes this declaration of God's unity', are the starting points of the

(5) Ibid., p.36
(6) Ebrahim A. el-Khouly, Islam and The Pillars of its Faith, Islam and Contemporary Society, Published by Longman, London, 1982, p. 47.
(7) William c. Chittick, The Islamic Concept of Human Perfect, p. 500.

Islamic Thought. İn brief, God, The Ultimate Reality is one, and everything other than God comes from God and is related to Him. No true understanding of anything is possible unless the object in view is defined in relationship to the divine. All things are centered on God. (8)

In the first stage of etiquette which is the one of appearance of Islamic morality, muslim should arrange his/ her actions and behaviours relating to God's pleasure and centering on Him. He should be trust towards God, and not have an attemp to deceive Him. In the presence of God, his inner and outer life should be one; not separated from each other, not different. Then, if we want to live in an appropriate way for etiquette of Islamic life, first of all we have to know that God is every where with us, aware of what the heavens and earth contain. Just as God says as following:

'Are you not aware that God knows what the heavens and earth contain? If three men converse in secret, He is their fourth; if five, He is their sixth; whether fewer or more, wherever they be, He is with them. Then, on the Day of Resurrection, He will inform them of their doings. God has knowledge of all things.'(9)

The second aspect of the principles of the Islamic etiquette is that one should be truthful, honest, sincere towards him/herself. The limits of the rules of etiquette are the limits of his life itself. Islam, as a complete way of life, provides a comprehensive code of behaviour for all spheres of individual activities as human activities. This code falls into five normative categories: The prohibited and disagreeable which are not to be done; the permitted which is ethically neutral; and the desirable and the obligatory which are woined by Islam. (10)

To turn back to where the discussion started. The irdividual has three kinds of responsibility: The first concern of the Islamic responsibility is individual's relationship with his/her own self and conscience. Islam instills in man a sense of answerability to God with respect to his own self. He is responsible to God for purifying his soul; for keeping himself in check from being

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(8) Ibid., p.501.
(9) Koran 58: 7
(10) Why be Moral?, p. 36

driven away by low desires and passions. In effect, what Islam seeks to achieve through this is to awaken the individual's conscience and sensitivity, and develop the whole of his/ her personality. (11) Then, the individual has to respect for the both of his soul and body purifying the first and cleaning the later, if we want to have a suitable life for the Islamic etiquette.

The second concern of the Islamic responsibility from the view point of that the individual's responsibility to God, above already mentioned.

Here, the third and the most concern of the Islamic responsibility is the main point of our discussion. This kind of responsibility, in fact, depends on the two responsibilities before. It is called as social responsibility that reflects the Islamic etiquette with ist all outward aspects in social life.

The social responsibility enbraces the whole life of man. It is concerned with the soul and conscience of the individual, even with the whole of his/her personality and his/her entire conduct. It is concerned at the same time, with the establishment of the institution of family and its proper functioning.

As we all know that Islam does lay down social responsibilities on the level of family life, and treats its members equitably in respect of their rights and duties in conformity with the principle of justice vhich is the basis of the Islamic social life. Islam establishes the nexus of mutual responsibility between individual and the community, and vice versa, imposing upon the parties rights and responsibilities in an equitable manner. (12)

According to the etiquette understanding of Islam, the etiquettes of life should be taken care and established on the firm foundations of mutual responsibility so that all its members have an equitable share of assets and liablities, of rights and duties. Because the family is the first pillar for the structure of a society. Islam, however, does not stop at this point. Having developed the foundations of the family giving it some responsibilities and duties, and awakened the consience of it, Islam urges the individual to take another step forward i.e.full participation in the life of the community, imposing upon him the principles of Islamic etiquette.

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(11) Sayyid Qutb, Mutual Social Responsibility in Islam, trans. by., Z. I. ANsari, The Journal of Muslim World League- Mecca, April 1974, Nu: 7, p. 41.

(12) Sayyid Qutb, Mutual Social Responsibility in Islam, p. 43.

First of all, each one and every individual are expected to play his/her part in this endeavour in order to behave and act in accordance with the Islamic understanding of family.

Namely, man is the head of a family. Therefore he has to manage all the external things to ensure all the needs of his family, for that reason, he should have some job and business. In family, a husband is charged with teaching religious and worldly knowledge to his wife and children, and be always gentle, polite and tender- hearted towards them.

The wife is responsible to her husband and children for the maintenance of her house in a safe and sound way, for recognising her husband as the head of the family to be attached to him with her chastity honour and loyality with perfect devotion to her husband inside and outside home, (13) and then, both of them has to train their children as to the principles of Islamic etiquette, showing them how to treat the mother, the father and each of them.

A society which makes up of families is based on some main principles and rules. These come from the divine teaching, i.e. the basic unity of beings, knowledges and values, in every community throughout the human history. It is widely known that the rules in all society are consist of the etiquette of life. In an Islamic society they are considered as the basic objects of faith related to the understanding which centered on the One God.

The later authorities derive three principles that form the core of all Islamic intellectually and, especially the life: the declaration of God's unity (Tawhid), prophecy, and eschatology, or return the God. In theory all muslims agree on this concept, but in practice, they have interpreted their meanings in wide variety of ways, but without abolishing the main Koranic principles. Naturally, the majority of muslims has not been concerned with anything more than the basic catechism. (14)

This fact clearly proves that the moral principles or laws and the etiquette of life prastically differiantiate in every community even they don't abolish the essential meaning of religion in question. But the interpretations of religious

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(13) M. Soymen, Catechism, trans.by., I. Ekmeleddin, D.R.A., Ank., 1979, p. 129-130.
(14) William c. Chittick, The Islamic Concept Of Human Perfection, p. 500.

practises as etiquette, should not be done in isolation from the meanings of these practices in a religious or theological context.

To make a summary of the main points of the lecture, we can assert that etiquette of life in Islam is not only part of an social life, but also is as such much more deeply rooted in Islamic morality than explanation in terms of ordinary activities of social life. But taken by itself, i.e. as an ordinary activities of social life, it is totally insufficient in making justice to the religious significance of all kinds of etiquette concerning with the general way of living.

As we have claimed above, religion and morality form the whole of human life, according to Islamic Thought. Thus, etiquette of life makes up of unifying religion with the life and vice versa. In this sense, obidience to God is not only a logical conclision to our belief in the creator of the universe; it is the fulfilment of the purpose of creation itself. God says in the Koran: 'I have not created the jinn and man except to worship me.' (15) In Islam every human activity could be an act of worship, if it is done within God's injunctions (16) Thereafter, if the misguided person doesn't accept true guidance, then he alone will have to bear the concequences of his error, and its concequences will extend to none else. (17)

Moral principles of Islam and the etiquette of life convey individuals and communities to the peace, happiness and redemption from anxiety in theboth of abodes.

Some may argue that Islam has too many specified rules. To obey them is to make life very unpleasant. No human being has ever come out with a simple answer for what constitutes human happiness or unhappiness. It may well be argued that the spiritual righteous life is the most conducive to sublime joy and real happiness. All specified rules of behaviour laid down in Islam are within the capabilities of an ordinary human being. Man is free to follow them or to go astray. If he choses to follow them, then God promises to help him/ her in his/her strife, as the Holy Prophet Muhammad declared in the Farewell Pilgrimage as following: 'I have left among you something, i.e. God's Book, by which, if you hold to it, you will never again go astray.'

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(15) Koran 51:56
(16) Why be Moral?, p. 37.
(17) Sayyid Qutb, Mutual Social Responsibility in Islam, p. 44.

Consequently, etiquette of life in Islam is a way of manner which the whole of individual and mutual social responsibilities are based on the moral principles of Islam. So, it is possiple to separate religion from morality and etiquette of life from morality, nor religion, in accordance with the Islamic perspective.

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