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## Islamic Ethics and the Promotion of Human Respect and Social Leniency: A Study in Light of Fundamental Islamic Teachings

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### Abstract

Ethics serves as a foundational framework for human conduct, shaping the principles that uphold human dignity and contribute to global peace. In the Islamic tradition, ethics occupy a central position, guiding both individual behavior and collective social harmony. Islam emphasizes respect for all human beings regardless of religious or social differences, and promotes compassion not only toward humans but also toward all living creatures. Islam condemns the destruction of fields, demolishing of churches and temples. No other religion has asserted social leniency and harmony more than Islam. Therefore, the basic subject of the Holy Qur'an is "The Man." We can also find its evidence in the golden teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). This research article will throw light on the need for social leniency in the modern era as compared to the West, as well as its key role in creating world pacifism and solidarity. I have adopted analytical and critical methodology to find out how Islamic ethics can perform a pivotal role to produce long-lasting peace and stability versus Western ethics.

**Keywords:** Ethics, Islam, social leniency, West, peace, human respect

### 1. Introduction

Islam, being a religion as well as a tradition, is abundant with lessons of morality, ethics, and rituals of peace. "Ethics" means the science of morality and the doctrine of moral values, helpful in establishing long-lasting peace and stability in society. This is, in true essence, the basic teaching of Islam which empowers the development of mutual cooperation among masses. The famous thinker Sir Syed Ahmed Khan defines ethics in his profound book *Tahdheeb Al Akhlaq* as: "It is impossible to attain perfection in religion and belief without a noble state of morality."<sup>1</sup> Imam Al-Ghazali, in defining ethics, is quoted as having said: "Character is a term for a firmly entrenched form in the soul from which actions emanate with ease and facility, and completion of piety and sanctity links with morality."<sup>2</sup> The word akhlaq/ethics appears in the Qur'an in the verse that says of the Prophet:

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ<sup>3</sup>

*Translation:* "Indeed, you are of lofty character."

Ethics is not only a subject but an essential element for human respect and a source of character building in society. Islam presents a comprehensive moral system that integrates the spiritual, social, and legal dimensions of human life. Its ethical framework provides guiding principles that foster social cohesion, mutual respect, and the development of a just and balanced civilization. Islamic ethics are the most requisite for the protraction and cohesiveness of the social system of society because they are apt and particular in flourishing the process of building sociality by affixing human relationships on the basis of sincerity and faith.

Islam has a comprehensive way of life that encompasses a complete moral system, which Western thinkers have introduced differently as an important aspect of its worldview. Moreover, practicing the teachings of Islam brings peace, harmony, tolerance, mutual cooperation, and social leniency. The Islamic ethical system is striking in that it not only defines ethics but also guides the human race on how to achieve it, at both an individual and a collective level. This study is penned to recognize the wide range of ethics as well as principles for circumventing vicious discord and massacre at the social level according to Islamic teachings and the way in which they can be utilized to promote the ethical values of Islam.

### Research Approach

Considering the requirement of the topic, it is noteworthy that this is a theoretical effort done to present a framework of practicality. Therefore, the methodology used is to re-examine existing literature in a descriptive way on the subject.

### Research Goal

The message of Islam is peace, stemming from its authenticity by virtue of the sacredness of its traditions along with rules and regulations originated from the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah (teachings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ). The Islamic ethical system guides human beings on how to coexist in a society of followers of different

religions under the flag of peace. The purpose of this research paper is to find the ways and highlight the roadmap of the Islamic ethical system, which can promote social leniency and harmony.

**History of the Ethical Movement**

Western ethics were expanded some 2500 years ago by the ancient Greeks when humans started to select the ideal way to live and tried to set their standards of morality for right and wrong. The Ethical movement was started by Felix Adler, who was a Professor of Applied Ethics at Columbia University, New York, in 1876, supported by the New York Society of Ethical Culture.<sup>4</sup> There were some significant agendas of this movement: in all the relations of life—personal, social, and political—the moral factor should be the supreme consideration; self-reliance; reasoned judgment; moral development; and the scientific method of the morality of life. This movement could not attain universal fame because the mere purpose of this movement was to enlighten the inner part of man. It had no social or political guideline in its agenda.

In Islam, ethics and religion are interlinked. Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina were the primary philosophers who excavated the realm of ethics.<sup>5</sup> The perspective of Islam is that ethics/ikhlāq is a religious ideal concept driven by the acceptance of the belief in Allah. In Islam, man is bound to do, address virtues, duties, and attitudes of the person and society related to customs, traditions, and beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

**2. Western versus Islamic Theories about Ethics**

Western philosophers and ethicist founders Plato and Aristotle delineated different theories of ethics which acquired the highest place in Western ethics until at least the era of enlightenment, suffered a transient eclipse during the 19th century, but reappeared in Anglo-American philosophy in the late 1950s. Western ethical thought has evolved through diverse philosophical frameworks, including relativism, utilitarianism, egoism, and deontology. While these theories offer valuable insights into moral reasoning, they often differ in their criteria for determining right and wrong, leading to varying and sometimes conflicting moral standards.

**2.1 Relativism Theory**

Relativism theory suggests that ethical values are correlative to distinct locations and scenarios. These values are deprived of assembling society under one social flag because there is no virtuous postulation which is competent to create social lenience among dissimilar minds. Society has variant ethical viewpoints concerning their issues. In Islam, ethical values are not planned by the human mind due to its inherent limits. It is drawn up from the Word of Allah Almighty—the Holy Qur'an—and the teachings of the Prophet (SAW)—the Sunnah. Muslims have to perform their actions according to Islamic ethical values regardless of caste, race, and color. Islamic ethics are manufactured only for the equality of human beings.

**2.2 Egoism Theory**

Egoism theory presumes that every fellow has the right to go after self-absorption, regardless of what is right and what is wrong, sanctioned by sacred guidance. Whereas it is not permissible in Islam. Everybody has to relinquish Islamic Shariah if it opposes its self-interest. Muslims have to cope with their penchants with other fellows. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said:

لَا يُؤْمِنُ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يُحِبَّ لِأَخِيهِ مَا يُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِهِ<sup>7</sup>

*Translation:* "None of you would be considered a believer till he desires for his brother what he loves for himself."

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) also said:

الْمُسْلِمُ مَنْ سَلِمَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ مِنْ لِسَانِهِ وَيَدَيْهِ<sup>8</sup>

*Translation:* "The Muslim is he from whose tongue and hands all Muslims are saved."

It is strongly encouraged in Islam for Muslims to help others for the sake of God Almighty without any material reward from society according to Islamic ethical values.

### 2.3 Utilitarian Theory

This type focuses on the expected outcomes of actions. According to this theory, actions should be judged on the basis of the materialistic benefits they impose on society. Jeremy Bentham was the founder, whereas Francis Hutcheson raised its slogan: "The greatest happiness of the greatest number." Utilitarian theory argues that an individual's behavior is considered morally right when it results in a greater number of utilities than could be achieved by any other action.<sup>9</sup>

Both utilitarian theory and egoism theory suppose the consequence of an individual's action with different approaches of assessing ethical comportment. Islam does not allow such conduction of action in utilitarian theory because it is not sufficient to consider ethics as having the greatest consequences for the greatest number, whereas Muslims prefer to follow actions which are beneficial for the whole humanity according to Islamic principles. The system of Islamic law always takes initiatives for everyone in society regardless of their religion, caste, color, and race because of the universal ethical values and principles imposed by Islam.

### 2.4 Deontology Theory

This theory also focuses on the actions themselves according to the rules and universal statements of right and wrong. In this theory, a person can fulfill his desires at his own will. He has freedom of action although its consequences undermine society. The most representative supporter of deontology theory is Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher of the 18th century.<sup>10</sup> This theory is also not acceptable in an Islamic context because the only lawgiver for the overall system is the Qur'an and Sunnah. Islam encourages Muslims not only to treat people with justice but to treat others better than how they treat them, and to treat animals with kindness also.

### 2.5 Evaluation of Western Ethical Theories

As we conclude whether an action or decision is ethically advised by Western scholars, these are the current theoretical frameworks organizations have at their disposal because Western ethics are free from religion. Theories such as relativism, utilitarianism, egoism, deontology, and virtue ethics are all products of Western understanding of what ethics are and how they are applicable to help one's decision-making process.<sup>11</sup>

Every theory has a single viewpoint with regard to ethical issues. They have different ideologies which cannot adjust with one another. Western understanding about ethics is limited and incomprehensive in explaining what is right and what is wrong. These theories are unable to provide a universal standard or rule which could explain moral judgment to all human beings. Whereas, Islam conceptualizes ethics based on the Islamic Shariah. Islam agrees with the divine command theory which was denied in Western ethical understanding.

Other Western thinkers said that ethics is an aspect of law or theology rather than a branch of philosophy, but withholding this concept, they allege Islam that medieval thought did not make the sharp distinction about ethics and religion that Westerners later established between ethics, law, and religion, but such distinctions are still alien to Islam.<sup>12</sup> The Western concept of ethics has no uniformity in its meaning because they have different views about it and their thinking is blinded by prejudice.

### 3. Categories of Ethics

Ethics can be divided into two standards. The first is **theoretical ethics**, which refers to a specific genre made up of the principles of conduct (suluk), formulated from basic principles and general rules extracted from them. A person ought to follow these principles and norms in all areas and sorts of places in his individual life. The second is **practical ethics**, in which the set of rules of conduct are performed by humans through which a person has the freedom to reach his ultimate goal and avail all enjoyments and goodness according to his own desire.<sup>13</sup> Ethics are a crucial part of life which creates motivation for us toward the good life and the means to it, and guides us to maintain the balance between private individual demands and the necessities of life in society.

#### 4. Different Religious Perspectives

##### 4.1 Christianity

In different religious perspectives, we will first discuss Christianity. Christians consider ethics only as a way of spirituality. There is no guideline in the Anajeel e Muqedissa and Ehed Namma Jadeed for practical and economic matters of life. There is no proper way of marital and social life in it.<sup>14</sup>

##### 4.2 Judaism

In Judaism, there is no religious piety. After the death of Hazrat Yoosha (A.S), they became free from ethical obligations and neglected moral values fully, and also denied the equality of human beings.

##### 4.3 Hinduism

In Hinduism, some formal ethical teachings are found in Dharem Shaster. Degradation and humiliation of the poor is the common way in their society. Shooders are treated like animals and have no right to live like human beings. Muhammed Farooq Kamal, a famous ethical philosopher, says: "I have already mentioned that all the religions have a 'Messianic Hope' that a great saviour will be born to purge the world of inequality and ungodly practice."<sup>15</sup> These above-mentioned various religious definitions about ethics have no complete or comprehensive moral code of life. These may be helpful in individual character building but not for society.

##### 4.4 The Islamic Standard

The first Islamic state which was built on the basis of equality and human respect, its ethical values were not satisfactory merely due to political expediency or personal aspirations of the Holy Prophet (SAW), but rather they resulted from his faith that non-Muslims must enjoy their freedom. Allah Almighty says:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ<sup>16</sup>

*Translation:* "There shall be no compulsion in religion."

In tandem with the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the Constitution of Medina, all non-Muslims will have the freedom to choose their spiritual destiny as citizens of the Ummah.<sup>17</sup> Islamic ethical teachings consist of the universal peace-making planner. Islam is the biggest active supporter of human rights as well as animal rights.

#### 5. Evidence from the Holy Qur'an and Seerah

Especially in the Holy Qur'an and the golden teachings of the Seerah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), we find prominent glimpses of human respect and social leniency.

##### 5.1 Qur'anic Evidence on Human Dignity

Allah Almighty states in Surah al-Hujurat:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ<sup>18</sup>

*Translation:* "O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware."

In this verse, Allah Almighty mentions human dignity with character building and good deeds. The verse establishes that human diversity—different nations and tribes—is not for conflict but for mutual recognition and understanding. Nobility is not based on race, wealth, or lineage but on righteousness and ethical conduct (taqwā). Another Qur'anic verse states:

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَمٌ أَمْثَلُكُمْ مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يُحْشَرُونَ<sup>19</sup>

*Translation:* "There is no animal in the earth, nor a flying creature flying on two wings, but they are people like unto you. We have neglected nothing in the book. Then unto their Lord they will be gathered."

This verse emphasizes the nobility of human beings without discrimination of sect or religion. It also extends respect to all of Allah's creation, teaching that animals and birds are communities like humans, deserving of ethical treatment. This comprehensive ethical vision encompasses all living beings.

### 5.2 Prophetic Teachings on High Morals

Now we throw light on the brightest aspect of the Seerah of the Holy Prophet (SAW). The Prophet ﷺ said:

أَحَبُّكُمْ إِلَيَّ أَحْسَنُكُمْ أَخْلَاقًا<sup>20</sup>

*Translation:* "The most beloved by me among you are those of you whose morals and manners are best."

High morals place an ordinary person upon the same footing as that enjoyed by the devotee whose time is consumed in acts of worship. Truly, the believer can reach by means of good manners and morals the degree of one who constantly fasts.<sup>21</sup> The Prophet also said:

مَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ أَثْقَلُ فِي الْمِيزَانِ مِنْ حُسْنِ الْخُلُقِ<sup>22</sup>

*Translation:* "There is nothing weightier in the scales than good morals and manners."

### 5.3 The Prophet's Last Sermon on Human Rights

Another example of high morality and ethical principles is the Holy Prophet's (SAW) last sermon on the day of Hajj. He emphasized the protection of human rights including the rights of slaves and non-Muslims. He said:

"Your slaves! See that you feed them with such food as you eat yourselves, and clothe them with the stuff you wear. And if they commit a fault which you are not inclined to forgive, then sell them, for they are servants of the Lord, and are not to be tormented."<sup>23</sup>

## 6. Core Teachings of Islam on Ethics

Islamic ethics (ikhlaq) is a religious concept driven by the acceptance of the belief in Allah, while Western ethics is free from religion, founded for materialistic purposes. In the Islamic perspective, ethics sets some standards that allow man to do, address virtues, duties, and attitudes of the person, and society is also related to customs, traditions, and beliefs. Whereas in the Western perspective, the term "ethics" and "morality" is extracted from different roots. "Ethics" is derived from the Greek word "ethos" and "morality" from the Latin "mores," meaning what is appropriate and rational.<sup>24</sup>

According to the teachings of Islam, moral knowledge automatically leads to moral responsibility upon man. Muslims are advised to stand strictly for fairness and justice, regardless of their own selves, family members, friends, or even enemies involved. The same uniform standard of impartial justice is to be applied to everyone without consideration of their race, religion, gender, rank, wealth, or any other criteria.<sup>25</sup>

In Islamic Shariah, there is a great responsibility on Muslim rulers to protect the "Zimmees" (guarantees): their lives, wealth, full freedom of offering their religious obligations, full freedom of acquiring knowledge, protection of their personal laws, and equal rights in social, economic, and political spheres in society.<sup>26</sup>

As we take a look at the historical scenario, the teachings of the Holy Prophet (SAW) can be seen as an advocate for a religiously pluralistic society like Medina.<sup>27</sup> The Muslim caliph Hazrat Umar (R.A) strictly ordered his governors to protect the rights of minorities, as he said:

1. The agreements which were committed with them must be fulfilled.
2. The responsibility to save borders was not for them.
3. They were not forced to pay heavy taxes like Jizyah and land tax. The needy people, children, women, the blind, and the aged were exempted from taxes, whereas the disabled were given the right to receive financial help from the Muslim government.<sup>28</sup>

The Covenants of Prophet Mohammad (SAW) depict his revolutionary effort to create stability of peace in a society of different nations. It is a sign of "religious pluralism" and "civic rights" of Islamic Shariah. The covenants include the Covenant of the Prophet with the Monk of Mount Sinai, the Covenant of the Prophet with the Christians of Najran, the Covenant with the Christians of Persia, and the Covenant of the Prophet with all non-Muslims, which were a practical struggle for peace.<sup>29</sup>

Ibn Ishaq discusses Mohammad (PBUH)'s social leniency and tolerance, which is the core reality of Islamic ethics, towards the visitors of Najran: "When they came to Medina, they came into the Messenger's mosque as he prayed

the Zuhur, clad in Yammani garments, cloaks, and mantles, with the elegance of men of B. al-Harith and B. Ka'b. The companions of the Prophet saw them that day and said they had never seen any deputation like that which came afterward. At the time of their prayer, they stood and prayed in the Messenger's mosque towards the east."<sup>30</sup> These are the vital ethical teachings of Islam. Islam has given great respect to all human beings. Only Islamic ethical teachings can reduce religious aggressiveness, hatred, and discrimination among different religious followers.

The great Muslim philosopher Allama Muhammad Iqbal presented the philosophy of Islamic ethical teachings. He said: "There is no way except Islam on which human beings can eradicate any discrimination of color and race. The highest purpose of Islamic teachings is to transform all human beings into a family."<sup>31</sup>

### **7. Character Discipline in Islam: Aims and Goals**

Now we will explain a general framework and universal agenda of ethics in Islam as compared to the West. The aims and goals of character discipline in Islam are:

1. Maintaining a good relationship between the individual and his Lord, whether in matters open or hidden.
2. Developing the individual's character building and enhancing morality among society.
3. Refining human behavior and implementing good manners in an individual.
4. Strengthening the willpower, tolerance, and social lenience of the individual to create peace and stability in society.
5. Formulation of rules for the betterment of humanity regardless of caste, gender, race, color, and religion.<sup>32</sup>

Islamic ethics do not neglect any portion of human life, be it spiritual or material, religious or worldly, rational or sentimental, individual or communal. There is an exemplary framework for sublime behavior. What ethicists have divided up into religion, philosophy, and law, all came together in the ethical system of Islam in perfect manner. Islam has presented a comprehensive moral code of social and political life. For example, in terms of manners, etiquette, and protocol, Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَأْذِنُوا وَتُسَلِّمُوا عَلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُذَكَّرُونَ<sup>33</sup>

*Translation:* "O ye who believe! Enter not houses other than your own until you have asked permission and saluted those in them. That is best for you, in order that you may heed."

In commercial transactions and legal matters, Allah commands:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ<sup>34</sup>

*Translation:* "Allah doth command you to render back your trusts to those to whom they are due; and when you judge between people, that you judge with justice."

In political manners, Islam has stressed the protection of the rights of non-Muslims. Islam has given the right of ruling to everyone. Islam has encouraged universal cooperative values among nations. Islamic ethics do not leave out any portion of human life—be it material or spiritual, religious or worldly, rational or sentimental, individual or communal. In all cases, there is an exemplary framework for lofty behavior.

In this regard, Islam has presented the perfect comprehensive model of ethics for the world. This is the apt guideline for social, economic, political, and marital affairs of life. In Islamic teachings, human consistency and individual estimation have a significant place. Today there is a great need for social leniency and harmony among different religions. Islam has the vital ability to gather all nations under one roof.

Islam is not only a religion but an invitation to peace for all people until the Day of Judgment. So it is very essential to understand the Islamic message with its core reality and with the help of the Qur'an and Sunnah. The Islamic ethical system and its common message of dignity and equality help to minimize the scope and scale of current dispersion between Islam and the West. In this world, Islamic ethics lie in its moral authenticity and its virtue. Islamic teachings should be referred to and used in current inter-religious and political conflicts.<sup>35</sup>

### 8. Recommendations for Creating Social Lenience and World Peace

Therefore, here are some recommendations for creating social lenience among society and the stability of world peace:

1. The meaning of Islam is "Peace," and the Islamic ethical system is based on Islamic law. God Almighty made Islamic law according to the nature and need of the whole humanity.
2. The Islamic teachings should be studied keenly because only Islamic ethical teachings are so flexible, having the capability to fulfill the requirements of the modern age.
3. Different seminars and conferences should be held among academic fellows.
4. Research theses must be written by scholars in universities on ethical aspects in Sirah.
5. Different NGOs and welfare trusts should play their active role for the sake of universal peace.
6. Islamic ethical teachings should be spread all over the world to eradicate inequality and discrimination.
7. Muslims would have to be the role model of the Islamic ethical system in society.
8. Electronic and print media should perform their positive and active role to resolve this burning issue through talk shows, programs, and academic articles by research scholars.

### 9. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Islamic ethics provide a comprehensive, divinely guided, and universally applicable framework for promoting human respect and social leniency. Unlike Western ethical theories—relativism, egoism, utilitarianism, and deontology—which are fragmented, human-centered, and often contradictory, Islamic ethics are grounded in divine revelation (the Qur'an and Sunnah) and offer consistent, practical guidance for all aspects of human life. Islam's emphasis on the dignity of all human beings regardless of race, religion, or social status, its protection of non-Muslim rights, its compassion toward animals and all creation, and its practical model of social leniency established in Medina collectively present a complete moral system. The teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, as exemplified in his last sermon, his covenants with non-Muslim communities, and his daily interactions, provide a timeless model for creating peace, harmony, and mutual respect in any society. In a world plagued by religious conflict, discrimination, and ethical relativism, the Islamic ethical system offers a viable and powerful pathway to lasting peace and global solidarity.

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- <sup>29</sup> John Andrew Morrow, *The Covenants of the Prophet Mohammad with the Christians of the World* (Kettering: Angelico Press, 2013), p. 65.
- <sup>30</sup> Mohammad Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Mohammad*, translated by Alfred Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 27.
- <sup>31</sup> Muhammed Rafique Afzal, *Guftar e Iqbal* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1969), p. 7.
- <sup>32</sup> Suzanne Haneef, *Islam the Path* (USA: Library of Islam, 1996), p. 99.
- <sup>33</sup> Qur'an, Surah al-Nur (24): 27.
- <sup>34</sup> Qur'an, Surah al-Nisa (4): 58.
- <sup>35</sup> Syed Abu Alamodoodi, *Khilafet o Mulookiat* (Lahore: Idara Terjuman Al-Quran, 1986), 1:293.