

Good-Naturedness in Islam: Its Signs and Effects

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The present article offers a glimpse into the concept of good-naturedness as defined and emphasized in the Qur'an, hadiths, and as practiced by believers. Furthermore, the methods of behaving towards wrongdoers and reinforcing good nature, as well as the signs of good nature on a personal and social level are also described.

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Good-Naturedness in Islam: Its Signs and Effects

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Translated by **Mohammad Javad Shomali**

Abstract

For those who strive to perfect themselves, good nature, or Husn al-Khulq, tends to be at the top of their list during the spiritual journey. Indeed, good-naturedness has been emphasized in the Qur'an and hadiths, as God's prophets possessed the highest level of it as they touched everyone's hearts with their warm-heartedness, mercy, and kindness.

The present article offers a glimpse into the concept of good-naturedness as defined and emphasized in the Qur'an, hadiths, and as practiced by believers. Furthermore, the methods of behaving towards wrongdoers and reinforcing good nature, as well as the signs of good nature on a personal and social level are also described.

Introduction

Wise people strive to achieve perfection and this in turn requires many attributes, the best of which is good-naturedness. Treating people kindly with a friendly and smiling face gives happiness. Good nature brings much more than the mere benefits one gains from society, for it also relieves and gladdens the heart, and it does not nest in anyone but those having strong roots of true humanity, philanthropy, and forbearance. Because of this, good-naturedness signals the presence of all these great virtues.

God embraces all virtues and therefore those who are virtuous are close to God as if God embraces them. Good nature is the connection of different virtues, a criterion for judging personalities, and a key milestone on the road towards honour, glory, and charisma.

Our beloved Prophet and Imams admired good nature and effusively praised those embellished with it and inspired people by all appropriate means.

Islamic Terms

There are numerous concepts for moral virtues in Islam. The most comprehensive term is that of “Good nature” or “Husn al-Khulq” used in many religious texts.

Husn refers to ‘goodness’ and is the opposite of Qubh or ‘badness’¹. Khulq and Khuloq are singular words that refer to an “inner or spiritual quality” and have the same root as Khalq or the ‘Physical quality’². Hence, Husn al-Khulq is an inner quality. It includes qualities such as gentleness, forbearance, affability, and courtesy³. Good qualities are to become habitual to eventually shape good nature.

Most Islamic references deem Husn al-Khulq as that which includes affability and respectfulness. Imam Sadiq said, “Husn al-Khulq means to soften your behaviour, to purify your words (that is, not to use rude words), and to treat your brothers amiably.”⁴

The opposite of Husn al-Khulq is Su al-Khulq, which stems from anger, causing a person to become bad-tempered. God and people both dislike these qualities. People distance themselves from those who are bad-tempered. Imam Sadiq said, “A bad-tempered person tortures himself.”⁵

Good Nature in the Qur’an and hadiths

A person with a good nature touches people’s hearts and magnetizes them towards themselves. For this reason, as God perfected the prophets’ knowledge and gave them impeccable traits, God also bestowed mercifulness and kindness on them for their guidance.

Their good-naturedness allowed for them to treat people with kindness and mercy since they longed to guide people to fulfil God’s aims.

Their noble way charmed everyone, melting the people’s hearts and guiding the truth-seekers. The Quran portrays Prophet Muhammad’s good nature:

It is by God's mercy that you are gentle to them; and had you been harsh and hard-hearted, surely they would have scattered from around you. So, excuse them, and plead for forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs. (Qur'an, 3: 159)

The Prophet’s good-naturedness was a key factor in his attractiveness. His good nature was a blessing

for him and all people. God says to the Prophet:

And indeed, you possess a great character. (Qur'an, 68:4)

The Prophet's excellent character shone brightly enough to be entitled "Great" by God Himself and certainly his good nature is a part of his great character. Moreover, as stated in the verse, people naturally keep away from harsh and hard-hearted people; both qualities are direct causes of loneliness.

Thus, the essence of human relationships and friendships is the closeness of hearts provided by good nature.

Social unity comes along with good nature. Some exegetes listed different qualities to explain good nature: Patience, generosity, running affairs and forbearance to guide people towards God, and refraining from greed and jealousy⁶.

"Great character" is more than just "Good nature" – It is a combination of all human virtues. Since the Qur'an contains all moral virtues, in some hadiths "Great character" is defined as Qur'anic conduct⁷.

Most of Luqman's guidelines for his son revolves around treating people and reflects some important aspects of good nature, such as modesty, geniality, and gentleness whether in words or actions:

Do not turn your cheek disdainfully from the people, and do not walk exultantly on the earth. Indeed, God does not like any swaggering braggart. Be modest in your bearing, and lower your voice. Indeed, the ungainliness of voices is the donkey's voice. (Quran, 31: 19)

God also instructs people to speak kindly:

Speak kindly to people, and maintain the prayer, and give the zakat. (Qur'an, 2:83)

Here, speaking kindly can also refer to treating others compassionately. The same style is found in the verse "***He says no word but that there is a ready observer beside him***"⁸, in which "saying a word" refers to "performing any deed."

Similarly, in the verse "eating the possessions of an orphan" may also refer to "any kind of misuse" ⁹.

The following verses reveal the significant influence of good nature over people, especially foes. It is only with high standards of decent behaviour that one can respond to negative conduct with good ones. It is no doubt a difficult quality to have as it requires self-control and purity of heart, especially from desiring revenge. These qualities are achievable through a long process of self-purification:

Let the two of you go to Pharaoh. Indeed, he has rebelled. Speak to him in a soft manner; maybe he will take admonition or fear. (Qur'an, 20:44)

Repel [evil] with what is best. [If you do so,] behold, he between whom and you were enmity, will

be as though he were a sympathetic friend. But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except the greatly endowed. (Qur'an, 41:35)

Thus, the Qur'an praises good nature, gentleness, benevolence and soft-heartedness. The Qur'an also presents the character of the Prophet as the best example of these virtues, and such an excellent personality that could be considered one of his miracles.

Good-Naturedness in hadiths

Piety and good-naturedness go hand in hand; the Prophet said, "Most of my followers will enter heaven due to their piousness and good nature."¹⁰

Imam Ali said, "A believer's book of deeds begins with the good nature of its owner"¹¹ and "The most faithful one of you is the most good-natured one."¹²

According with, two narrations from the Prophet, good-naturedness is so significant that it is the first thing to be weighed on the Day of Judgment as it is the most valuable quality¹³.

Good-naturedness is important enough to be a criterion for comparison between believers. The Prophet was asked "Whose faith is the deepest?" and he answered "The faith of him who shows the best conduct."¹⁴

Imam Sadiq said "Among the believers, the one with the best conduct has the strongest faith."¹⁵

A true believer normally hides his personal problems and sadness and keeps them to himself; he or she manages not to reveal it through his or her facial expressions or conduct. Instead, a believer displays a cheerful face and amiable character. Imam Ali said "The happiness of a believer is in his face and his sadness is in his heart."¹⁶

The Prophet said, "Conciliate him who broke ties with you; forgive him who has wronged you; give to him who has refused you, and treat well him who mistreats you."¹⁷

Thus, not only should we kindly treat those who have treated us the same, but we should also compassionately and benevolently accept, help, and be generous with those who mistreat us. This is like how God treats wrongdoers. He wants and decides the best for them and does not seek revenge from His servants, no matter how much they insult Him through disobedience.

This hadith may also explain why good nature is introduced as one of the two main factors for entering heaven and why it is a sign of deep faith. Qualities such as forbearance, generosity, modesty, and beneficence should combine in a person who wants to follow the codes mentioned in the hadith above; therefore, good nature as explained in Islamic teachings includes an array of other qualities on itself.

Employing Husn al-Khulq and its limits

The intrinsic value of having a good nature and its consequent actions towards all people is portrayed in the Qur'an, hadiths, and lifestyle (Sunnah) of the Prophet and Imams.

-Good nature among the believers

As said earlier, treating each other in the best possible way is a highly valued quality for believers to uphold. The Qur'an praised the Prophet's companions for their exemplary behaviour:

Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and those who are with him are hard against the faithless [who fight against the truth] and merciful amongst themselves. (Qur'an, 48:29)

Thus, Muslims ought to be cordial, thoughtful, helpful, empathetic, respectful, and polite towards one another.

-Behaviour towards wrongdoers

Certainly, corruption conflicts with the spirit of religion and damages society. Good-naturedness is to be held with wisdom: both reason and religion deem it unwise and downright wrong to accept corruption. Though good-naturedness is a valuable quality, it is also important to discourage wrongdoers. Believers are commanded to enjoin what is right and forbid wrongdoing.

If a wrongdoer carelessly continues to engage in crime, especially if made public, believers must responsibly advise the wrongdoer in a reasonable, logical, and friendly way, as the Qur'an says,

"Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best." 18

While gently and empathetically advising them – with good intentions for their success – to discontinue the misconduct, the counsels should include reason, hadiths, laws, and the Quran for the wrongdoer to carefully consider public and personal benefits, as well as the results of his action.

-Flattery

It is unfortunate that some take flattery as good behaviour and when they want to be amiable, they use flattery especially when they are dealing with the rich. They degrade themselves calling it good nature. The best sign of this is their mean expressions dealing with the poor. This negative quality is a heinous sin that calls for God's wrath.

The Prophet said, "Whenever a sinner is praised, God's Throne is shaken and He is angered." 19 It is necessary to distinguish between flattery and good manners to avoid falling for flattery when one lavishly compliments by mixing true and false qualities.

-Humour

One sign of having a good nature is joking with others in a light-hearted manner, consequently making others happy and allowing them to temporarily forget their problems; of course, bearing in mind that it does not intentionally or unintentionally insult others. The Prophet said, “I may tell jokes although I will never say anything other than the truth.” 20

Once Imam Sadiq asked Yunus Shaybani, “How do you joke with each other?” and he replied “We rarely do so.” The Imam said “Don’t be afraid to joke. It is a sign of good-naturedness to joke with your brothers to make them happy. The Prophet also joked with people to cheer them.” 21

-Overlooking sins and offences

As explained earlier, good nature is not the same as being indifferent towards sins. To build a decent society suitable for having a pleasant life, it is necessary to properly deal with wrongdoers given their harmful actions as a hindrance to society’s stability through supporting moral values and opposing their actions in a friendly manner, without anger and insult.

Tolerance comes into play in dealing with sinners, and not sins, by focusing on their merits to bring the best out of them; when we want the bright beam of hope to shine in their hearts once again for them to accept religious teachings. The Prophet said to Ibn Jundab, “O Ibn Jundab! To the sinners whom you would like to preach, say just good things.

Pray hard that God may guide them, and ask God for their repentance.”22

-Muslim scholars and mystics on good-naturedness

Ghazali counted good nature as one of qualities a good friend should have; to be good-natured, it is necessary to balance all four inner powers (or internal faculties), namely knowledge, anger, desire, and justice.

He believed good nature is an essential quality in friendship, because it is possible for a wise man who understands realities clearly to follow his temptations and oppose his knowledge when he loses himself to his anger, lust, fear, or stinginess. Once this happens, he cannot be a good friend²³.

Junayd of Baghdad said, “There are four things that help one reach the highest levels of perfection even when he lacks knowledge and good deeds: forbearance, modesty, generosity, and good nature. The last one is the sign of deep faith²⁴.

-Anecdotes

Once, the Prophet appointed Imam Ali to confront three people who intended to kill the Prophet. During the battle, one of the three was killed and the other two were arrested. They were presented to the

Prophet and received their verdict.

At this point, Gabriel appeared to the Prophet and told him to free one of them for he had a good nature. When he was freed and realized that he has been forgiven God because of his good nature, he embraced Islam. The Prophet said about him, “He was one of the people whose good nature took them to heaven.” 25

On one occasion, one of Imam Sajjad’s relatives spoke to him in a rude manner and eventually swore at him in front of some bystanders. The Imam did not respond and the person left. Then, the Imam decided to go to his relative’s house, and he asked the onlookers to accompany him to see how he would respond. Certain that the Imam was planning on taking revenge, they instead heard him reciting the following verse on their way to his house:

The Pious [are those who] ... suppress their anger, and excuse [the faults of] the people, and God loves the virtuous. (The Quran, 3: 134)

When they arrived, the Imam called his name and asked him to come out. The relative came out prepared to fight, thinking that was the Imam’s intention. Instead, Imam Sajjad said, “My brother, moments ago you came to my house and said what you wished.

If what you said about me was true, I ask God to forgive me and if it was not, I ask Him to forgive you.” Moved by the Imam’s kindness, he kissed the Imam’s forehead and said, “What I said about you was wrong; it suited me more.” 26

Reinforcing good nature

Some people are gifted with good manners by nature, a blessing not everyone has. However, with practice one can reinforce good nature and manners to the extent that it becomes a person’s second nature.

With the firm decision to make positive changes, striving to practice good manners becomes a part of a person’s personality, and he or she will soon witness pleasant results. Just as exercising strengthens and builds muscle, practicing good manners fortifies and refines the soul.

In Ghazzali’s *Ihya Ulum ud-Din*, good nature is brought forth when a person’s mind is balanced by wisdom and when the two faculties of anger and lust are controlled by the intellect and religious rules. This can be achieved in two ways:

1. Through God’s blessing; to be born with a perfected mind and controlled anger and lust. This will naturally result in good nature. People who are given such blessing do not need a tutor. Prophets are examples of people who have such quality in their nature.

2. Through practice. This requires a person do what a good-natured person would naturally do, and gradually these actions will become easier to the extent that they become second nature²⁷.

Also, in Ghazzali's *The Alchemy of Happiness (Kimiyyay-e Sa'adat)*, associating with well-mannered people is the third way to reinforce good nature:

3. To associate with those who have good manners and actions; Once a person is influenced by them, his or her actions and behaviours improve even without being aware of its effect²⁸.

Additionally, considering that bad-temperedness and bad manners are caused by arrogance, anger, grudge, miserliness, and jealousy, it becomes clear that if one is to have good nature in all aspects one must get rid of all these negative qualities. Therefore, to gain this precious quality many other virtues are to be implemented and for without them good nature will not be manifested.

The causes of bad-temperedness

The opposite of good nature is bad-temperedness. It includes rudeness and bitterness, and it is a result of anger, just as good nature results from patience. Without a doubt, bad manners isolate a person by creating a gap between him and both God and society.

People naturally detest an ill-mannered person; he or she is never free of pain and despondency, as Imam Sadiq stated, "He who is bad-tempered will suffer."²⁹

For anyone to eliminate his or her moral vices, the root cause should be discovered. The following discusses some of those causes:

Physical conditions and emotional pressure

Aggressiveness is one vice that may occur due to physical cases triggered by weakness, fatigue, tiresome work, and excessive activity. Furthermore, various physical illnesses also lead to changes in behaviour. Aggressiveness can sometimes stem from living in unsuitable environments, causing mental and emotional complexes.

Improper upbringing

Another factor that leads to bad-temperedness is ill upbringing at home. Poor parenting or bullying at school can lead to mental disorders, eventually resulting in aggressiveness³⁰. It is important to note that acquiring virtues is only possible through divine assistance. A person should make as much effort as possible while simultaneously asking for God's help³¹.

The Prophet said, "Good morals is a divine blessing. When God loves someone [due to their acts and intentions] He gives them good nature, and when He detests someone He gives them bad manners."³²

The signs of good-naturedness

Imam Ali said, “Good-temperedness relies on three things: avoiding sins, pursuing permissible (halal) sustenance, and generosity towards the family.” 33

Below are some specific guidelines to achieve good-naturedness:

-Being humble towards people

-Knowing how to talk, that is, how to choose kind and pleasant words and avoid being sarcastic or rude.

-Smiling and cheerfulness: The expression on a person’s face can positively or negatively affect people’s energy. A beautiful yet unhappy face does not have the same effect that an average-looking cheerful face. A calm and happy demeanour has a soothing effect on others, eventually gaining people’s love, because good nature is real beauty.

All in all, we do not need to be told that greed, jealousy, aggression, idleness, hatred, swearing and backbiting are vices to be avoided. Qualities such as talking less, thinking more, patience, cheerfulness, wanting good for others, and loving and disliking for the sake of God are admirable qualities. Those who try to equip themselves with these virtues will naturally have good manners and become attractive to others.

Social and personal effects of good nature

There are many rewards for a person who is good-natured both in this world and the hereafter. Some of these rewards are listed in the following:

Effects in this world

Stronger friendships

People dislike aggression and bad manners, and they tend to distance themselves from people who hold those characteristics. On the other hand, good manners attract people and strengthen friendships as the Prophet said, “Good manners make friendships last longer.” 34

Being pleasant and gentle is one of the most practical traits to have in socializing that attracts people’s affection and makes one’s words more effective. Therefore, the Prophet said, “O sons of Abdul Muttallib, you cannot make everyone’s life easier by your wealth, so make it easier by your kindness.” 35

The Prophet also said, “The best among you are those whose behaviour is more pleasant, those whom people surround them and approach them; they associate with people and people associate with them.”

A developed society

A society can only develop and progress through forgiveness, collective work, sacrifice, and good manners.

Increased longevity

Vices such as greed, jealousy, and holding grudges can reduce a person's energy due to its mental pressures, resulting in exhausting the body, eventually having a direct impact on longevity. On the other hand, eliminating these vices results in a healthier and longer life. Imam Sadiq said, "Indeed, good manners develop lands and increase longevity." 37

Increased sustenance

It is natural to want a larger share of blessings in this world and in the hereafter. Given the trustworthiness of good-natured people, in business people tend to commerce more with them. Even in daily shopping, people prefer to buy from an approachable and welcoming shopkeeper.

In most big and small companies, employees are trained to treat clients well and to gain their trust and loyalty through gentleness. Imam Ali said, "The treasures of sustenance are kept within good manners." 38

Better social status

There have always been people who, without wealth, good looks, or status found their place in society through their good conduct and charm.

Imam Ali said, "How many humble people there were whose kind behaviour elevated them." 39

Eased problems

Good nature means that you do not become angry easily and you do not accuse people in your mind. Naturally, this means that no grudge and enmity will be formed and therefore, fewer problems will arise. On the other hand, if anger, grudge, and jealousy become part of one's mind-set, life will become miserable and intolerable for him.

Imam Ali said, "He whose behaviour is pleasant will reach his goals easier." 40

Effects in the hereafter

On the Day of Judgment, God will judge lightly those who have good nature. Imam Ali said, "Improve your manners and God will be lenient on you with regards to evaluating your actions." 41

Forgiveness is another reward for good nature. Imam Sadiq said, "Indeed, good-naturedness melts sins as the sun melts ice." 42 Those who are good-natured not only will his sins be forgiven, but he will also be given, as Imam Sadiq said, "...the reward of a warrior who has fought for the sake of God." 43

Because of this good nature, he will eventually be sent to heaven. The Prophet said, "The qualities that make people go to heaven the most are God-wariness (taqwa) and good nature (Husn al-Khulq)." 44

Conclusion

God loves virtues and the virtuous. A person who is good-natured is loved by God and has its place in heaven. His good nature also benefits him in this world as well. Having good nature is one of the virtues that apart from the role it has in building one's character, it has many practical outcomes in one's social and personal life.

It will make life easier on an individual basis free from anxiety or enmity caused by jealousy, greed, or anger. On a social level, it brings people who otherwise may not have been friendly even closer consequently bringing people together easily and ultimately improving the society by establishing peace, safety, and security.

1. Lisan ul-Arab, 1414, vol. 13, p. 114.

2. Raqib Isfahani, 1412, p. 297.

3. Naraqī, 1431, vol. 1, p. 231.

4. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 68, p. 389: تلین جانبك و تطیب كلامك و تلقى أخاك ببشر حسن

5. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 321.

6. Tabarsi, 1994, vol. 10, p. 500

7. Makarem Shirazi, 2009, vol. 3, p. 139.

8. The Qur'an, 50:18.

9. Javadi Amuli, 2008, vol. 5, p. 364.

10. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 100: أكثر ما تلج أمتي الجنة تقوى الله و حسن الخلق

11. Bihar ul-Anwar, vol. 68, p. 392: عنوان صحيفة المؤمن حسن خلقه

12. Ibid. p. 387: اكملكم إيماناً أحسنكم خلقاً

13. Ibid. p. 385: أول ما يوضع في ميزان العبد يوم القيامة حسن خلقه

Ibid. p. 374: ما يوضع في ميزان امرئ يوم القيامة شيء أفضل من حسن الخلق

14. Irshad ul-Qulub ilal-Savab, vol. 1, p. 133: سئل النبي أي المؤمنين أفضلهم إيماناً فقال أحسنهم خلقاً

15. Ibid.: أكمل المؤمنين إيماناً أحسنهم خلقاً

16. Nahj al-Balaqah, p. 533: المؤمن بشره في قلبي و حزنه في قلبه

17. Misbah al-Shariah, p 159:

قال النبي حاكياً عن ربه يأمره بهذه الخصال قال صل من قطعك واعف عمّن ظلمك و أعط من حرمك و أحسن إلى من أساء إليك

18. The Quran, 16: 125

19. Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p. 46: إذا مدح الفاجر اهتزّ العرش و غضب الربّ

20. Makarem ul-Akhlaq, p. 21: أن رسول الله كان يقول إني لأمزح و لا أقول إلا حقاً

21. Elhaminiya, 2012, p. 106-109

22. Tuhaf al-Uqul, p. 302:

يا ابن جندب لا تغل في المذنبين من أهل دعوتكم إلا خيراً و استكثروا إلى الله في توفيقهم و سلوا التوبة لهم

23. Faydh-e kashani, 1994, vol:3, p. 384
24. Ibid. vol. 5, p. 133
25. Al-Khisal, vol. 1, p. 96
26. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, p. 54
27. Extracted from: Ghazzali, bi ta, vol. 3, p. 123
28. Extracted from: Ghazzali, 1380, vol. 2, p. 13
29. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 70, p. 298: من ساء خلقه عَذَّب نفسه
30. Esmayily Yazdy, 1386, p. 640
31. Makarem Shirazi, 1388, vol. 3, p. 150-151
32. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 68, p. 394:
الأخلاق منائح من الله عزَّ وجلَّ فإذا أحبَّ عبداً منحه خلقاً حسناً وإذا أبغض عبداً منحه خلقاً سبَّساً
33. Majmuat Wurram (Tanbih ul-Khawatir), vol. 1, p. 90:
حسن الخلق في ثلاث اجتناب المحارم و طلب الحلال و التوسُّع على العيال
34. Irshad al-Qulub ilal-Thawab, vol. 1, p. 133: حسن الخلق يثبت المودة
35. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, p. 169:
يا بني عبد المطلب إنكم لن تسعوا الناس بأموالكم فالقوهم بطلاقة الوجه و حسن البشر
36. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 102:
أفاضلكم أحسنكم أخلاقاً الموطئون أكتافاً الذين يألفون و يؤلفون و توطأ رحالهم
37. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 100: حسن الخلق يعمران الديار و يزيدان في الاعمار
38. Ibid. vol. 8, p. 23:
في سعة الاخلاق كنور الارزاق
39. Tasnif Gurar ul-Hikam wa Durar ul-Kalim, p. 255:
كم من وضع رفعه حسن خلقه
40. Tasnif Gurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim, p. 255:
من حسن خلقه سهلت له طريقه
41. Al-Kafi, vol. 4, p. 286:
حسن خلقك يخفف الله حسابك
42. Ibid. vol. 2, p. 100:
انَّ الخلق الحسن يميث الخطيئة كما تميث الشمس الجليد
43. Ibid.:
انَّ الله تبارك و تعالى ليعطي العبد من الثواب على حسن الخلق كما يعطي المجاهد في سبيل الله
44. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 100:
اكثر ما تلج به امتي الجنة تقوى الله و حسن الخلق

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