

THE IMPORTANCE OF NOBLE CHARACTERS FOR KNOWLEDGE SEEKERS

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Abstract: *From the above outline, it can be concluded that the end-purpose of good characters for knowledge seeker is to give birth to civilized scholars, as was the idea of ta'dib of Prof. Al-Attas, namely civilized humans who apply manner in every aspect: having good characters towards God, oneself, the social environment, human relationship, language, nature, and knowledge. Having good characters towards knowledge will affect other objects. Intellectuals who have good characters towards knowledge will recognize and admit that people with knowledge have a higher and nobler position and the compulsory knowledge and law must be mastered first before other knowledge. Knowledge seekers with good characters can be expected to defend the law because there are so many deviations of knowledge that appear one after another, sometimes it is impossible to defend them except by the knowledge seekers. They are also generous in responding to the differences of opinion among scholars.*

Keywords: *Noble Characters, Knowledge, Knowledge Seekers*

Introduction

Good characters (*akhlaq*) are an important aspect of Islamic faith. A seeker of knowledge, apart from improving himself with knowledge, must also be a person who always calls the people towards Allah SWT with his knowledge. He calls the people at every possible opportunity anywhere. The knowledge he acquires will be a substantial good deed and the most noble of worship. It's because some of the principles of upholding Allah's religion are knowledge and commentary. Therefore, it is important for knowledge seekers to always possess good characters to educate others. The importance of good characters is expressed through the praise of Allah to His Prophet, "*And indeed you have noble characters.*" (Al-Qalam [68]: 4). And the Messenger of Allah PBUH himself admitted that, "*I was sent to perfect noble characters.*" Human characters are depicted physically and spiritually, either good or bad, or halfway between the two. Characters that are created on humans are mental images in the form of disposition and *kasab* (results of effort), namely characters that can be achieved through efforts and practice. As the Prophet said to al-Asyajj bin Qais, "Verily in you there are two characters that are loved by Allah, namely *al-hilm* (patience) and *al-anah* (cautious)." Then al-Asyajj asked, "*O Messenger of Allah, are these two characters the result of my efforts or has Allah created them both?*" He replied, "*Indeed Allah has created both of them.*" This paper explains the concept of good characters, how to acquire it and its importance to the seekers of knowledge.

Literature Review

The Concept of Good Characters

The word *akhlaq* is the plural of *khuluq* which means nature, disposition, habit, behavior. It means, characters are the qualities that Allah commands a Muslim to have in his daily behavior, both in performing worship and social relationship. Among the scholars, *khuluq* is understood as the inner essence of man in the form of mind, soul and special qualities and characteristics, meanwhile *khalq* is the outward nature of man and his special characteristics such as habits, traditions, and so on. This means that the word *akhlaq* is related to the word *khalq*, namely the inherent nature of the soul (*malakah*) in oneself according to the origin of the creation (*ahsanu taqwim*) that is *fitrah*. If the human soul was created by God with His *fitrah* (*fitratallah alliti fatarannas alaiha*), then having an *akhlaq* is to think, to will and to behave in accordance with the *fitrah* (conscience). The figure of the Islamic moral philosophy, Miskawaih (1966), formulated that characters are a condition for the self or the soul (*al-nafs*) which encourages the self or the soul to do all actions or acts with pleasure without being preceded by the power of thought, because it has become a trait or habit.

Al-Ghazali stated characters mean an ability of the soul, which results in actions or experiences easily, without having to be contemplated and deliberate. Good habits will result in commendable deeds according to reason and law. There are good (*mahmudah*) and bad (*madzmumah*) characters. He also emphasized that there are four moral principles, namely *hikmah*, *sajaah*, *iffah* and *'adil*. *Hikmah* is the state of a person's soul by which he can distinguish between right and wrong in every action. *Sajaah* means obeying the intellect by the power of emotion (anger, *ghadab*), either in his actions or in his reluctance to act. Meanwhile, *iffah* is the educated power of will (*syahwat*, desire) through the upbringing of reason and law. Whereas *'adil* is the mental state of a person that is able to limit the movements of both emotional and desire forces, and control them in their activity and inactivity, so that they are in line with the *hikmah* values.

More specifically in day to day life, the phenomenon of characters in the form of daily life behavior is also referred to as *adab*. *Adab* in Islam also refers to good behavior for something that is accepted by Islam based on its teachings. Sometimes the meaning of character is also contained in the term *akhlaq*.

Meanwhile, the external phenomenon of characters is called *suluk* (behavior) or *mi'amalah* (attitude in social relation) which is a sign of a moral state that manifests in a person's soul. Thus, good and modest behavior or attitude indicates good characters and vice versa bad and excessive behavior indicates bad characters that exist in a person's soul. This action is also known as *adab*. *Adab* in Islam refers to good behavior for a matter that is accepted by Islam as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad PBUH who followed the reference/model of the Koran and Sunnah.

Good characters (*akhlaqul karimah*) are when human behavior follows Islamic rules in every aspect of life, as meant by the hadith narrated by 'Aisyah ra, "*The Prophet's characters are the Koran.*" (Narrated by Muslim)

Method

This study is a literature review described descriptively in a qualitative research, with the focus of the study is analyzing about how knowledge seekers regarding the benefits of human capability into a higher and better understandings.

Result and Discussion

The steps to acquire good characters.

There are three popular schools that influence characters. *First*, the school of Nativism, *second*, the school of Empiricism, and the *third*, the school of Convergence.

The school of Nativism believes that all the factors that exist in an individual come from innate traits, in the form of talents, intellect and other tendencies. A person who is gifted naturally becomes a good individual. The school of Empiricism believes that the influence of externalities such as the environment, society and relationships, including education and guidance, is acquired so that this group needs education and self-development. The school of Convergence is a combination of the factors of the first and the second schools and this combination is considered to be the most suitable to Islamic teachings. This can be understood from the meaning of the Qur'anic verse from surah al-Nahl: 78, namely, "*And Allah brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and He gave you hearing, sight and heart, so that you may be grateful.*" (An-Nahl: 78). This verse gives an indication that humans have the potential to be educated.

Good characters are a reflection of a clean heart, the fruit of the balance of rational power, the perfection of *hikmah*, as well as the power of anger and the power of passion which is subject to reason and law. The verses of the Koran also contain miracles that can calm the soul when the heart is upset or sick.

According to al-Ghazali, the balance in acquiring good characters can be achieved in two ways: *First*, the perfection of innate nature, that is, someone who is born with good characters. Such people become smart without learning, and educated without educators, such as Prophet Isa, Maryam as, Yahya as, Zakaria as and other prophets.

For knowledge seekers, there are many benefits in accompanying their teachers, by imitating the goodness of their teachers orally or in deeds. In a hadith, Prophet Muhammad PBUH explained about the role and impact of a friend, namely, "*An example of a good friend and a bad friend is like a seller of perfume and a blacksmith. The perfume seller might give you perfumed oil or you can buy perfume from him, and even if you don't, you will still get a good smell from him. As for the blacksmith, he could (spark the fire) on your clothes, and even if he don't you still get the bad smell from his smoke.*" (Narrated by Bukhari 5534 and Muslim 2628). The hadith shows the virtue of associating with friends that may influence the bad or good on somebody's characters, "*A person's religious state matches that of his close friends. You should see who your close friends are.*"

In general, the signs of a good friend are sensible, of good character, not wicked, and not greedy with the world.

Second, through the struggle against lust (*mujahadah*) and mental trainings (*riyadhah al-nafs*) by getting used to doing actions that are in line with the morals that you aspire to. For example: someone who has a generous nature must train himself to be generous, that is, to donate his wealth and continue to carry out this wise effort seriously so that generosity is truly becomes his character.

According to al-Ghazali, the effort to acquire good characters is not by restricting or eliminating *ghadab* (anger) and *lust*, instead by placing it proportionally that is in the middle, not excessive and not deficient, because both have certain benefits and must exist in every being.

Human abilities vary in responding to change, some are fast and some are slow. Al-Ghazali revealed two reasons, *first*, the power of instinct (*gharizah*) which lies at the root of the temperament and grows with the age of a person. It's because the power of lust, anger and pride already exist in humans, but the most difficult thing to change is lust because it is the earliest to appear.

To go through all obstacles, disturbances, self deficiencies and all kinds of life tests in order to achieve the desire to have good characters, al-Ghazali provided the guidelines to reach that

perfection: reveal of *hijab (mukasyafah)* between humans and Allah through knowledge, wisdom and *ma'rifah* to Allah. The barrier to reaching that level is the absence of a struggle to undergo a spiritual journey (*suluk*). So a knowledge seeker must be able to find the main cause of the sickness of the heart, know its symptoms, recognize his shortcomings, treat the sickness of his heart, and educate his characters. This includes ways of guarding the heart like *musyaratah* (setting the conditions), *muraqabah* (supervision), *muhasabah* after doing good deeds, *mu'aqabah* (punish oneself for any shortcomings), *mujahadah* (struggle) and *mu'atabah* (self-deprecation).

It is very good to get used to thinking, because the brain needs to be sharpened so that it is always smart, adds experience, is easy to take *natijah* (conclusions) and understands the cause and effect of an action. The lazy brain will easily be confused and causes ignorance. Likewise, managing matters by weighing the benefits and harms first before committing an act is a good attitude because without reasonable consideration a lot of time and energy will be wasted.

The Importance of Good Characters for Knowledge Seekers

According to its term, knowledge is *ma'rifah* (knowledge) as opposed to *al-jahil* (ignorance), which was revealed by Allah SWT to His Messenger in the form of information and guidance, namely the revelation. The Holy Prophet PBUH said which means, “*When Allah wishes good for someone, then He will make him understand his religion.*” (Narrated by Bukhari). As the heir of the Holy Prophet PBUH, a knowledge seeker has superiority and is praised by Allah SWT for the obligation to convey knowledge to mankind. Therefore, it is important for knowledge seekers to adorn themselves with noble and commendable characters.

Good characters include two things, namely maintaining vertical relationship (with Allah) and horizontal relationship (with the people).

Good characters in the relation with God include three things, namely *first*, receive all the information from Allah SWT by believing it (justifying it); *second*, accept His laws by implementing and applying them; *third*, accept His predestination with patience and pleasure.

As a knowledge seeker, a solid foundation of *tauhid* is an important principle because the consequences of confirming the information from Allah require him to believe and defend and fight for it without the slightest doubt about the information that comes from Allah Almighty. With complete belief, he will surely reject all *syubhat* offered by people who are not happy with the information from His Messenger, both from among Muslims and from other than them. For example, in *Sahih al-Bukhari* from the hadith of Abu Hurairah ra that the Prophet PBUH said, “*If a fly falls into the drink of one of you, drown it then throw it away, because on one wing there is a disease while on the other there is a medicine.*” This is information from the Messenger of Allah PBUH, and in unseen matters he did not speak except in accordance with what is revealed to him, because he is a human being, and humans do not know the unseen.

As the enforcer of Islamic law, a knowledge seeker must accept, implement and practice His laws. Islamic virtues and Islamic behavior can be carried out by implementing the five pillars of Islam, and from there one can develop his personality and characters. A person with bad characters will surely not practice the knowledge he has acquired, and reject and deny Allah's laws, such as acting *takabbur* (arrogant). Likewise with the command to do prayer, especially the *Fajr* and *Isha'* prayers which are considered heavy for hypocrites. As the Prophet PBUH said, “*The heaviest prayers (to be performed) for hypocrites are the Isha' and the Fajr (Shubuh) prayers.*” *Whereas* prayer itself for believers is a source of peace and comfort of the soul. With good characters towards Allah Almighty, a knowledge seeker will gain inner strength by carrying out His obligations with a broad heart and feel longing to wait for the next prayer time. Being patient and pleased with His predestination is a reflection of good characters towards Allah SWT.

According to al-Hasan al-Basri, good characters are not harassing (hurting), being generous and friendly. That is, it is necessary for knowledge seekers to refrain from disturbing others, whether related to property, life or honor. The Holy Prophet PBUH announced to the large group of his people who were gathering around him, saying, “*Surely your blood, your wealth, and your honor are haram on you, just as it is haram today of yours, this month of yours, in this land of yours.*”

Generosity is not only about giving wealth, but it can also be in the form of sacrificing one’s life, position, and property. This needs to be understood by the knowledge seekers that being concerned about the needs of others is among good characters. So that there will be a desire to meet human needs and help them by paying attention to those who are unable to achieve their goals, spreading knowledge among humans, and giving their property to others. As Allah SWT says, “*Those who give in good times and in bad, suppress their rage and pardon other people. God loves those who do good.*” (Ali ‘Imran: 134)

Everyone who comes into contact with humans will definitely get harm (from other people), so responding to that harm is to forgive and be generous and hope that it can create love and friendship.

Being friendly by displaying a radiant face is a commendable character, especially for knowledge seekers who are preaching to the crowd. A radiant face will bring joy to those who around them and can create love and affection, as well as provide spaciousness of the heart, even broadness of the chest for those who seek knowledge and others. This is necessary when dealing with anyone according to the law. Thus, good relations with family, friends and relatives is part of good characters.

Conclusion

A knowledge seeker with good characters will feel responsible and keep the trust of his acquired knowledge, because he is very afraid of being interrogated in the afterlife for 4 matters: age, time, knowledge and wealth.

Included in good characters is *at-tatsabbut* and *ats-tsabat*. What is meant by *at-tatsabbut* is investigating and being careful in receiving information and when speaking. As for *ats-tsabat*, it is being patient and steadfast not to be bored and angry, so as not to take only bits and pieces of knowledge and then leave it, because this gives a negative impression and is considered wasting time without any benefit.

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