Merits of the Fourteen Infallibles

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Just as man is created from four elements, the basics of ethical values are also four, wisdom, chastity, justice and valour. As if these are the four walls of a perfect character. Even if one of these walls is absent or dilapidated the morals are unsafe and the ethical character stained. These four qualities can be said to be the roots of the tree of morals. All the moral qualities are related to these four basic values. They are thus the branches of this ethical tree. Actually a tree is a tree because of its branches, while a dried barren tree is but used as firewood. The usefulness and value of a tree is proportionate to its foliage and shade-giving capability. In fact, the magic formula of the establishment of the universe lies in these four words. It is the ladder to the ascension of spirituality. Success in life and the hereafter depends upon these four qualities. Innumerable weapons have been produced and are being produced for the establishment of kingdoms but their purpose is to defeat and conquer material things but they are not concerned with the reformation of hearts.

This kingdom is beyond the power of those material weapons. If anything can gain control over it, it is these four weapons. How powerful these weapons are is beyond description and the extent of their capability is beyond perception. We can briefly state that they have the ability to control anything from the earth to the heavens. Every particle of the universe can kiss the feet. Humanity is raised so high in status that angels consider it a privilege to serve them. Let us now see their practical prowess.

Amazing Appeal of Good Morals

The aim of sending the Holy Prophet (S) was to perfect the morals. That is, the mission that did not reach the peak of perfection even after the arrival of 124000 messengers, it was done in theory and practice to such a level of perfection that now there was no more any need of a new prophet or messenger. This required extraordinary capability. That too in the land of Arabs, which was the cradle of ill manners. As if, shameless traits had hammered the final nail in the coffin of humanity. This severe necessity could neither be fulfilled by wealth and money nor by a military system or by the edge of the sword. This needed another type of power. The verse: “Certainly you are upon the best morals,” has revealed this secret and announced to the world that the aspect of Prophet's behavior is such that it transformed the Arab society

completely. It displayed such a miracle of human intercourse that the world was spellbound. What actually happened may be understood in the words of Quran: People entered the fold of Islam in hordes.

The good moral behavior of the Prophet of Islam had the most important role in this magnificent victory. Though Khadija's wealth served a great deal in helping the poor and deprived ones among the Muslims and the awe of Abu Talib afforded some security but the thing that struck the hearts and minds of the polytheist and disbelieving Arabs was the good moral behavior of the Messenger of Islam. It was this that left an indelible mark on the hearts of ignorant Arabs and attracted the wild Arabs to the Prophet like a magnet pulls a needle.

At that time Prophethood was veiled due to hidden wisdom when the Prophet started secret propagation and obtained confessions of his truthfulness from those who were dead enemies of good morals, becoming well known as “The Truthful” and “The Trustworthy” among the Arabs. The blood of human perfections had started running in this body known as Muhammad from the day it breathed its first in the atmosphere of water and clay.

The teachings of Islamic morals to the people did not consist of mere oral admonitions, but it was accompanied by practical feats for every aspect. When those lacking any type of moral embellishments saw the flawless character of the Holy Prophet (S) they realized the degraded and shameful position of their own humanity.

And on every occasion their created nature was shook with a deep yearning. The moral teachings that the Prophet imparted were the nourishment of the face of Islam and the life of its body. When these teachings was recorded on the pages of history and reached the different corners of the earth, and when with the Muslim travelers those teachings reached the people of other nations they were awakened abruptly from their slumber like a slow horse is spurred by the crack of the whip. It was it was an opportunity for the religions to compare that they make Islamic morals the criterion of comparing their differences. Those who did this realized very soon what is the difference between genuine and artificial pearls.

Perfection of Morals at the Hands of the Holy Prophet (S)?

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said: I was sent to perfect the morals. This shows that the one hundred and twenty four thousand prophets that have arrived till now, one of whose duties was to perfect the morals have not been able to achieve this object. Why is it so? Were they careless of their job? But this is against the status of prophethood. Then what is the reason that these teachings could not reach perfection?

Though apparently it is a difficult question, its answer requires a little explanation. The verse:

“We blessed all those prophets, some of them excel others,” shows that the status of all the prophets was not equal. There was a difference in their grades and positions, whether it be in their practical value or by the limited scope of their propagation, or by way of their divine recognition, but Allah knows best about all that. Any conjecture in this regard can deviate us. We believe in the prophethoods of all of them.

“We do not differentiate between any of them.” Though it can be said that the previous prophets did not get the opportunity to highlight each and every aspect of perfection of morals. Some prophets were such that they were sent only for a particular group; some were sent for a particular country, some were appointed on one area. Some were prophets only for their families. Followers of certain prophets did not heed their teachings. Some listened but did not follow the teachings. In any case, there were many situations when all the moral qualities and their types could not be taught to the people and all the Islamic morals could not be explained clearly to them. Or sometimes the teachings of a particular prophet lasted for limited period and there was no arrangement to take it further.

It was the reason that the followers of every prophet became deviated after the passing away of their prophet, and with the passage of time the actual teachings assumed a completely different shape. Since the real examples did not exist any more they took the wrong ones as models and continued to follow them. Till the time that need arose again for the arrival of a new prophet. There are some prophets in whose generation prophethood continued in a serial order, but this also came to an end at some time. Since there was no permanent and everlasting arrangement, there was no possibility for the perfection of morals.

The best perfection of man is to set an example. There are innumerable people who display perfection of morals in their own selves but there are very few who can make others like themselves. Rather most centuries pass away without they're being any such personality in them.

When people with perfect morals are not able to pass on their traits to others, perfect morals gradually disappear from the society. Setting an example is not an easy job; it requires a very effective personality. To make someone else like ourselves is not possible till the time the personality of the owner of perfection is not so powerful that it could pull others towards itself. There are many who can create partial similarity; there are none who can create total similarity. Continuation of perfection is impossible till all the partial things, all the habits and all good traits and morals, all the actions and deeds, all the spiritual perfections are not transferred to someone else.

The Prophet was on the position of the best of morals. Its perfection was possible only if there

was arrangement of its continuation. Otherwise it would have been temporary just like the teachings of other prophets, while creation of examples is impossible without continuity. Therefore the Prophet, first of all, paid attention to this, and in his lifetime made four persons (Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain, peace be upon them all) like himself in every aspect. There was no quality of good morals that was present in the Prophet but not found in them. Just as the Holy Prophet (S) showed each and every virtue practically, they also did so. This was an arrangement of the perfection of good morals from Providence; that it created twelve such personalities, who had the privilege of the successorship of the Holy Prophet (S) one after the other. They continued to present the examples of prophetic morals in every age and period. And they continued to display all the good morals possessed by the Prophet himself, without any increase or decrease. Just as the prophethood of the Holy Prophet (S) is to continue till the Day of Judgment, in the same way is to continue the examples of his good moral qualities.

Explanation of the Four Merits

All the four meritorious qualities mentioned by us above (wisdom, chastity, justice and valour) are such that each of them is a very difficult path, thinner than hair and sharper than a sword. The scholars of moral science have called this “Siratul Mustaqeem”, the right path. One who has achieved this path in the world and remained steadfast on it would easily pass over the Sirat Bridge in the Hereafter, because if he walks on this Siratul Mustaqeem there would be no defect in his deeds.

Consider this way to be a space between two written words. It is the smallest but the most upright one. All the writings besides it would be slanted and longer than it. All these writings would not be included in the merits; rather they would be called decline and the merit would be that middle writing alone. All the writings near to this middle one would be closer in merit and those further away would be further from merit also. The moral virtue would be only one and the declines numerous. Not a single word would be steadfast on this middle line.

It is this straight path in whose search remain the wayfarers and guides, day and night. They practice penance to achieve all this but first of all its achievement is very difficult. Even if they find it, it is very difficult to remain steadfast upon it. The feet waver in the slightest difficulty. What can be said of others, the prophets sometimes reached the juncture of “omitting the preferred option” (Tark-e-awla). The correct standard to distinguish this path is the morals of prophets and most of all the morals of the Holy Prophet (S).

It is this balance of deeds in which the actions of people shall be weighed. The Almighty Allah says, Certainly We sent Our apostles with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book

and the balance that men may conduct themselves with equity. (Surah Hadid, 57:25).

It is evident that none of the prophets were born with a book or a balance, then what does it denote? The fact is that 'book' denotes the book of the existence of the prophet. Amir'ul-Mu'minin (a.s) says: “O man! You are that magnificent book of Allah, each letter of which reveals the secrets of providence.”

When the existence of man is the magnificent book of Allah, what can be said of the existence of the prophets? The special miracle of divine power is found in each of their organs and powers. Their senses of hearing, speech and sight are more powerful than those of ordinary people. Their physical organs are superior to those of ordinary people in their special qualities. Even the seeds in the loins or wombs heard the voice of Ibrahim (a.s) when he recited the Call (Azan) for Hajj. His eyes saw the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. Prophet Sulaiman (a.s) heard the conversation of the ant. In this way other prophets were endowed with special powers and qualities. Each verse of the book of their existence is incomparable in its position.

As for the descent of balance, it denotes their good moral behavior. The morals of all people would be judged in relation to them. The criterion of each thing is different. Material objects are weighed in a different kind of balance, and non-perceptible things are weighed differently. The balance of poetic meter is not an ordinary one, or the one used to weigh gold or silver; their weights are also completely different. These weights are also not used in measuring temperature; a thermometer is required for this. In moral science also this criterion is useless. You will find a completely different standard there.

In common parlance it is said: The habit of so and so is similar to the habit of so and so. He is like his father in moral qualities. Thus we come to know that the morals of the prophets is that balance on which the morals of all the nations would be weighed on the Day of Judgment, and the morals of the people would be judged in accordance with the “best of morals” (of the Holy Prophet). Thus as far removed one is from the right path; the less would be the weight of his deeds.

One who is nearer to this true measure would be rewarded most. Allah says, “This weighing would be very accurate.” So that no one gets an opportunity to complain. “One who has done an iota of good or one who has done a little bit of evil” all would be accounted for. Actually this examination would be in relation to this “medium letter”. One who is nearest to it would have the heaviest pan of deeds, and the further away one is from the criterion, the lighter his deeds would become. Now consider how difficult this path is.

If it had been an easy way the divine saints would not have subjected themselves to severe penance and would not have forgone ease and comforts. Even those who are considered the

patron saints of mysticism are found helpless and defeated at one time or the other. We can say without any doubt or fear that except for Muhammad and the Progeny of Muhammad no one else succeeded in achieving these positions. If this had not been so, the mystics would not have considered Ali (a.s) as the first guide. These pathways are so elevated that eyes snared by the enchantment of materialism cannot even see properly, then how can they be expected to .recognize anything

Explanation of Every Virtue in the Four Merits

We have already mentioned that every superior quality is rooted in the four merits. The first is wisdom, secondly chastity, third is valour and lastly justice. All the remaining moral virtues like patience, thankfulness, contentment, reliance, generosity, humility, satisfaction, piety etc; that are around forty-eight qualities, are branches of the four main qualities. Let us now briefly .study each of these four moral qualities

Wisdom

It is of two types, theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom. The first is related to the thinking and opinions of man. When one has this type of wisdom one is free from mistakes of judgment and by arranging the preliminaries he is able to draw a correct conclusion. That is why it is said: Those who are given wisdom are given a great good.

It is under the heading of this wisdom that all religious sciences come. The philosophies of the world and the divine sciences are also included in it. Divine recognition, certainty of belief and realization is related to this. By its help man is able to save himself from sins; and he can distinguish between right and wrong. The second kind is practical wisdom, towards which one is led after theoretical wisdom.

If one deviates an inch from this medium line one loses the merit of wisdom and it is replaced by some decline or degradation. If he reaches towards the top he learns to fool people with cunning and deceptive knowledge. He becomes deviated and is not anymore connected to wisdom. In the same way if he slides below the medium line, it would be ignorance, and this also has a lot of variations.

Ignorance is not a single kind but has a thousand varieties and due to this, man commits innumerable mistakes in the sphere of actions. Thus in the terminology of ethics, a wise one is that who walks straight on the middle line and is not even slightly deviated. You will see many people who apparently are knowledgeable and wise but their actions are found above or below

the line of the straight path. In mutual dealings they reach wrong conclusions, while making judgments they are unable to discover the correct causes and they solve their problems using .their cunning

Chastity

This is also the middle line. If one goes above it, it would amount to jealousy and create extraordinary desires. If one goes below it, one would even destroy the permissible desires. They broke the ties of relationships, society and culture and took themselves to the caves of seclusion and thus gave up their life before time. In other words we can say that both types of extremisms are dangerous. Both are considered deviations. A chaste person would only be one who is not afflicted with jealousy and neither should he be the one who sacrifices natural .inclinations

Valour

This is also the middle line. Anything above this is called ferocity or cruelty and if one falls .below the line it is cowardice

Justice

The upper portion of this is referred to as injustice and the lower one is remaining under oppression.

To find out these medium lines is beyond the capacity of people. Then to walk upon them with firm steps, the whole life is much more difficult. Even our Holy Prophet (S) who was having the highest morals said on the difficult path that: Surah Hud has made me aged. People asked what the Prophet meant by this? He replied, “It is commanded therein: Be upright!” That is, do not deviate even a little bit from the path of morals. This was such a difficult task that even a personality like the Holy Prophet (S) aged prematurely. What can be said of other people?

It is our claim that none of the companions of the Holy Prophet (S) can say that he/she had all the four qualities with all their variations. It is possible that their followers may have attributed these qualities to them because false beliefs can make clay into gold, but till the time it is proved it cannot be considered true. This superiority was owned only by the Ahl ul-Bayt of the Holy Prophet (S). The chief of Ahl ul-Bayt, Ali (a.s) obtained these qualities directly from the .Holy Prophet

1. Wisdom

The Holy Prophet (S) said, “I am the abode of knowledge and Ali is its gate,” and Allah said: And no one knows its interpretation except Allah and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge. And also said: Say Allah is sufficient witness between me and you and one who has the knowledge of the book.

2. Valour

The Almighty Allah said: …they shall strive hard in Allah's way and shall not fear the censure of any censurer…(Surah Maidah 5:54) And He said, …those who fight in His way in ranks as if they were a firm and compact wall. (Surah Saff 61:4) The Holy Prophet (S) said, “One stroke of Ali on the day of the battle of Trench (Khandaq) was superior to the worship of all men and jinns. And on the day of the battle of Khyber he said,
“Tomorrow I will give the standard to a man, who is victorious and who does not flee; who loves Allah and the Prophet and whom Allah and the Prophet love.” And seeing the courage of Ali the unseen caller called: “There is no brave youth except Ali and there is no sword except Zulfiqar”.

3. Chastity

The Almighty Allah says, “Allah certainly intends to remove all impurities from you O, people of the house and to purify you a thorough purification.” The Holy Prophet (S) said, “O Ali! You are to me as Aaron was to Moses.” That is you are infallible just as he was and like he was the successor of Moses, you are my successor.

4. Justice

The Almighty Allah says in Surah Araaf: And of those whom We have created are a people who guide with the truth and thereby they do justice. (Surah Araaf 7:181). The Holy Prophet (S) also said, “Ali is the most just among you.” Others could also have been included with Ahl ul-Bayt in these specialties. But they did not have any peers. Also no one else proved to be steadfast on the straight path all ones life, except the Ahl ul-Bayt.
Who could have been a better examiner than the Holy Prophet (S) whether Ali (a.s) had these merits or not. Even if there had been a slight deficiency the truthful tongue of the Prophet would not have uttered Ali's praise. Thus when it is proved that Ahl ul-Bayt had all these basic

four merits then their derivations are automatically proved in their perfections because the sum total of all perfections are these four basic qualities. Now we shall briefly discuss some of the qualities that Ahl ul-Bayt possessed. The most important of these is knowledge because no virtue is possible without it. However we would like to mention a few points as introduction to .our discussion