

Taqwā, Humility and Honour in the Sight of Allah

A Qur'anic Reflection on the Believer's Journey

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

"...O mankind! Worship your Lord Who created you and those before you, so that you may attain Taqwā."

(Qur'an 2:21)

The Qur'an repeatedly calls mankind to worship Allah alone. Having reflected upon the certainty of the Last Day, the Qur'anic discourse repeatedly directs the believer towards principles that shape one's life before that inevitable meeting with Allah. Among these recurring principles are **Taqwā, Humility, and Honour in the sight of Allah.**

These are not presented as isolated virtues, nor merely as commendable qualities among many others. Rather, they appear throughout the Qur'an as enduring realities that shape the relationship with Allah, refine the character, and establish the criterion by which honour is measured.

This reflection does not seek to formulate new definitions where the Qur'an has already spoken. Rather, it seeks to listen carefully to the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an establishes the principles. The classical mufasssīrūn illuminate the Qur'anic discourse within their respective contexts. The authentic Sunnah demonstrates these principles through the life of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and the lives of the Rightly Guided Khulafā' provide practical examples of believers striving to embody the same Qur'anic guidance.

With this methodology established, we begin where the Qur'an repeatedly begins:

Taqwā.

Taqwā

The Qur'an introduces itself as guidance for the muttaqīn in the opening verses of Sūrah al-Baqarah (2:2–5). From the very beginning of its discourse, the Qur'an repeatedly returns to Taqwā through Divine commands, descriptions of the muttaqīn, promises made to those who possess Taqwā, and reminders of its fruits in this life and the Hereafter.

The Qur'an calls:

اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ

"...be mindful of Allah as He should truly be feared..."

(3:102)

It commands:

اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ

“Be mindful of Allah and be with the truthful.”

(9:119)

It reminds:

وَلْتَنْتَظِرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ ۖ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ

"...let every soul consider what it has sent forward for tomorrow and be mindful of Allah."

(59:18)

The authentic Sunnah then allows us to witness these Qur'anic principles in the life of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

Ummul Mui'minun 'Ā'ishah (raḍiyallāhu 'anhā) narrated that the Prophet ﷺ stood in night prayer until his blessed feet became swollen. When asked why he exerted himself although Allah had forgiven his past and future shortcomings, he replied:

"Should I not then be a grateful servant?"

(Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 1130; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 2819)

The classical scholars consistently explain this narration as reflecting profound servitude, gratitude and continual devotion before Allah.

Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī explains that the Prophet's ﷺ abundant worship was not due to uncertainty regarding Allah's forgiveness but reflected the perfection of his servitude (*'ubūdiyyah*) and gratitude (*shukr*) before Allah.

Imām al-Nawawī similarly observes that increased blessings from Allah call for increased worship and gratitude.

Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī explains that genuine knowledge of Allah naturally increases devotion and worship.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ declared:

"By Allah, I know Allah better than all of you, and I fear Him more than all of you."

(Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

Imām al-Nawawī, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī and al-Qaṣṣālānī explain this narration as demonstrating that the Prophet's ﷺ unparalleled knowledge of Allah produced the greatest reverential fear (*khashyah*), gratitude, devotion and worship. His continual worship therefore reflected neither uncertainty

regarding Allah's forgiveness nor mere personal piety, but the perfection of his servitude before Allah.

These narrations do not redefine Taqwā.

Rather, they allow the believer to witness the Qur'anic principle embodied in the life of the Messenger ﷺ.

The Qur'an repeatedly presents Taqwā through Divine commands, descriptions of the muttaqīn, promises to those who possess it, and reminders of its fruits. The authentic Sunnah then transforms those Qur'anic principles into lived reality through the worship, gratitude and continual consciousness of Allah demonstrated by the Messenger ﷺ.

Having repeatedly called the believer to Taqwā, the Qur'an continues by illuminating qualities that distinguish the servants whom Allah praises.

Humility

The Qur'an presents humility through different contexts, encompassing worship, the condition of the heart, personal conduct and interaction with others.

In explaining the verses concerning humility, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī and al-Baghawī each interpret these passages within their immediate Qur'anic contexts, demonstrating that the Qur'an presents humility through worship, the condition of the heart, personal conduct and interaction with others rather than reducing it to a single outward characteristic.

The authentic Sunnah then illustrates these Qur'anic principles through the life of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Our mother ʿĀ'ishah (raḍiyallāhu ʿanhā) narrated:

"The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to serve his family, and when the time for prayer came, he would go out to the prayer."

(Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Hadith 676)

Commenting on this narration, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī explains that the Prophet's ﷺ service within his own household reflected the perfection of his noble character and humility, demonstrating that no ordinary task was beneath him despite being the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Al-Nawawī likewise cites such narrations among the practical manifestations of the Prophet's tawāḍuʿ (humility).

The Prophet ﷺ instructed his Ummah:

"Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians exaggerated concerning the son of Mary. I am only the servant of Allah and His Messenger."

(Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Hadith 3445)

Ibn Ḥajar explains that the Prophet ﷺ prohibited exaggerated praise in order to preserve the proper understanding of his station before Allah while affirming his identity as Allah's servant. Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ likewise explains that this narration preserves both Tawḥīd and the Prophet's perfect humility before his Lord.

The Qur'an presents humility through worship, the heart and personal conduct. The authentic Sunnah then demonstrates that humility is not weakness or self-denial, but the natural character of one whose relationship with Allah has been shaped by Taqwā.

Having established the believer's relationship with Allah through Taqwā, and the believer's character through humility, the Qur'an then redirects the criterion by which honour itself is measured.

Honour in the Sight of Allah

The Qur'an speaks of honour in more than one context.

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاكُمْ

"Indeed, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the one with the greatest taqwā."

(49:13)

Commenting on Qur'an 49:13, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, al-Rāzī, al-Baghawī, al-Bayḍāwī and Abū al-Su'ūd explain the verse within its Qur'anic context, affirming that Allah Himself establishes Taqwā as the criterion of honour in His sight. In doing so, the Qur'an overturns the standards by which people ordinarily distinguish themselves through lineage, race, wealth, authority or worldly status, directing the believer instead to the criterion established by Allah alone.

The Qur'an further reminds:

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعِزَّةَ فَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ جَمِيعًا

"Whoever desires honour—then to Allah belongs all honour."

(35:10)

And in correcting the false claims of the hypocrites, Allah declares:

وَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

"To Allah belongs all honour, and to His Messenger, and to the believers."

(63:8)

Commenting on Qur'an 35:10, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr and al-Qurṭubī explain that all honour belongs exclusively to Allah and that whoever seeks true honour must seek it through obedience to Him rather than through worldly distinction. In explaining Qur'an 63:8, al-Rāzī, al-Baghawī, Abū al-Su'ūd and al-Bayḍāwī each emphasise that the hypocrites erred by measuring honour according to worldly power, whereas the Qur'an affirms that honour belongs to Allah and is bestowed by Him upon His Messenger ﷺ and the believers according to His wisdom and decree.

The Qur'an also declares:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

"Indeed, We have honoured the children of Adam..."

(17:70)

Commenting on Qur'an 17:70, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, al-Baghawī, al-Rāzī and al-Bayḍāwī explain that Allah honoured the children of Adam through creation itself and through the many blessings He bestowed upon humanity. Among these honours they mention mankind's upright form, the faculties of intellect, speech and discernment, the knowledge taught to Adam, the subjection of much of creation to humanity's service, the provision of sustenance, travel by land and sea, and Allah's preference of mankind over much of His creation. Collectively, they explain that this honour is a universal Divine favour (*karāmah*), bestowed upon the children of Adam through Allah's creative grace, generosity and providence rather than as a distinction earned through human merit.

The Qur'an establishes that honour in Allah's sight is measured according to His criterion rather than human standards. At the same time, it distinguishes this honour from the dignity bestowed upon all of humanity through creation. The believer is therefore called to measure honour according to the scales established by Allah Himself.

The Qur'an establishes these principles. The authentic Sunnah allows them to be witnessed in the life of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

The Rightly Guided Khulafā' then exemplify these same Qur'anic principles through their conduct.

The Living Embodiment of Qur'anic Principles

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

"Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for whoever hopes in Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah often."

(33:21)

Throughout this reflection, the Qur'an has established the principles of **taqwā**, **humility**, and **honour in the sight of Allah**. The authentic Sunnah then allows these principles to be witnessed in the life of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, whose worship, gratitude, humility and servitude represent their most perfect embodiment.

After him, the lives of the Rightly Guided Khulafā' do not introduce new principles, nor do they stand as independent models alongside the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Rather, they demonstrate how the Qur'anic principles already embodied by the Prophet ﷺ continued to be lived under differing circumstances, responsibilities and trials. Their conduct therefore serves not as a second source of guidance, but as practical illustrations of the Qur'anic path already established through the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ.

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (radīyallāhu 'anhu)

Ibn Sa'd preserves reports that, even after assuming the Caliphate, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (RA) continued to milk the sheep of neighbouring households as he had done previously. When a girl from the neighbourhood assumed that his new responsibility would end this service, he replied that he would continue and expressed the hope that his appointment would not change the character by which he had lived. The report was subsequently preserved under discussions of Abū Bakr's humility, presenting his continued service as an illustration that public responsibility did not estrange him from ordinary acts of care.

The report appears in Ibn Sa'd's discussion of Abū Bakr's character.

Likewise, Abū Bakr's inaugural address, preserved in the early historical tradition through **Ibn Ishāq**, **Ibn Hishām** and later historians, begins not with authority but with accountability:

"I have been appointed over you, though I am not the best among you... Obey me so long as I obey Allah and His Messenger."

Rather than asserting his rank, he reminded the Ummah that leadership remained subject to obedience to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. His public leadership and private conduct together illustrate that worldly authority did not diminish his humility before Allah.

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (raḍiyallāhu ‘anhū)

The historical literature preserves numerous reports describing ‘Umar's profound consciousness of accountability before Allah.

Among the best known are reports transmitted through the early historical tradition, discussed by scholars of hadith regarding their chains, in which ‘Umar expressed fear that Allah would question him even concerning neglected animals under his responsibility. Although individual wordings vary, the reports consistently portray his continual awareness that leadership was a trust for which he would answer before Allah.

Similarly, historians including **al-Ṭabarī**, **Ibn Kathīr** and **Ibn Khaldūn** preserve the account of ‘Umar's journey to Jerusalem, during which he alternated riding with his servant and entered the city in simple clothing despite being the leader of the Muslim world.

Several early sources—including Ibn Abī Shaybah, al-Khallāl, Abū Nu‘aym, Ibn Sa‘d, Musaddad and al-Ṭabarī—transmit differing reports in which ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (RA) expressed fear that Allah would question him if an animal perished neglected within the territory under his responsibility. Although the individual routes contain weaknesses, their combined transmission supports the meaning of the report. Its emphasis is not upon a celebrated claim of justice, but upon ‘Umar’s fear of accountability before Allah—an illustration of Taqwā within the responsibilities entrusted to him.

‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (raḍiyallāhu ‘anhū)

Unlike the previous examples, ‘Uthmān's distinguishing characteristic is established directly through the authentic Sunnah.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

"Should I not show modesty before a man before whom even the angels show modesty?"

(Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

Commenting upon this narration, **Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ**, **Imām al-Nawawī** and **Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī** explain that it establishes the exceptional **ḥayā** of ‘Uthmān (RA). While **ḥayā** and **tawāḍu‘** are distinct virtues, they recognised that his profound modesty reflected a heart deeply conscious of Allah.

The authentic Sunnah therefore presents ‘Uthmān not through public accomplishments alone, but through an inward quality recognised and praised by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself.

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (raḍiyallāhu ‘anhu)

Al-Bukhārī records in al-Adab al-Mufrad a report that ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (RA) purchased dates and carried them himself in his garment. When assistance was offered, he replied that the head of the household was more entitled to carry them. Versions of the report were also preserved by Ibn ‘Asākir and Abū al-Qāsim al-Baghawī. Transmitted within discussions of ‘Alī’s humility, it presents ordinary personal responsibility—not his knowledge, courage or public standing—as the context in which humility was manifested.

His example reminds the reader that humility is often manifested not through extraordinary acts, but through ordinary conduct performed with sincerity before Allah.

The lives of the Rightly Guided Khulafā’ demonstrate that the Qur’anic principles established by Allah and embodied most perfectly by His Messenger ﷺ were not confined to a single generation or circumstance. Whether in private service, public leadership, personal accountability, modesty or everyday conduct, each of the Khulafā’ reflected those same enduring principles according to the responsibilities Allah entrusted to them.

Their examples therefore do not stand beside the Sunnah as independent sources of guidance; rather, they testify to the transformative power of the Qur’an and the Prophetic example when sincerely lived.

The believer is thus invited not merely to admire these lives, but to recognise within them the living continuity of the Qur’anic guidance that began with revelation and found its most perfect embodiment in the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

Throughout this reflection, the Qur’an has repeatedly directed the believer towards **taqwā, humility, and honour in the sight of Allah**. These principles are not presented as isolated virtues, but as enduring realities that shape the believer’s relationship with Allah, refine the believer’s character, and establish the criterion by which honour is measured.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ embodied these Qur'anic principles most perfectly, and the Rightly Guided Khulafā' exemplified them through their words and conduct. Together, they demonstrate that the Qur'an is not merely recited or studied but lived.

The Qur'anic journey, however, does not end here. The believer continues to reflect upon Allah's guidance, allowing the Qur'an itself to illuminate each stage of that journey according to His wisdom and mercy.

By the permission of Allah, the Qur'anic journey now continues through another of its enduring realities.

And Allah knows best.