

17

عَنْ أَبِي يَعْلَى شَدَّادِ بْنِ أَوْسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ عَنْ
رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَتَبَ
الْإِحْسَانَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ، فَإِذَا قَتَلْتُمْ فَأَحْسِنُوا الْقِتْلَةَ،
وَإِذَا ذَبَحْتُمْ فَأَحْسِنُوا الذَّبْحَةَ، وَلْيُجِدَّ أَحَدُكُمْ شَفْرَتَهُ
وَلْيُرِحْ ذَبِيحَتَهُ - رَوَاهُ مُسْلِمٌ.

Abu Ya'la Shaddad ibn Aus, (رضي الله عنه), reported that the Messenger of Allah, (ﷺ), said: "Verily, Allah has enjoined excellence (ihsan) with regard to everything. So, when you kill, kill in a good way; when you slaughter, slaughter in a good way; so everyone of you should sharpen his knife, and let the slaughtered animal die comfortably." [Muslim]

Background

Ihsan is a comprehensive concept. It denotes doing things completely, nicely and in a tasteful manner. It comprises four components:

1. Sincerity (Ikhlas)
2. Completeness
3. Tastefulness (doing things in a nice manner), and
4. Correctness (doing things in the right way).

This concept is translated by commentators and interpreters as Excellence. Being a comprehensive concept, the term Ihsan cannot be translated word for word because there is no word in the English language that gives its exact meaning. Therefore, it is better to use it as it is.

Islam commands Muslims to practice and apply Ihsan in all that they do - hence it is an obligation (wajib).

It has been mentioned in the Qur'an as well. Allah the Almighty says:

"Verily, Allah enjoins Justice, and Ihsan and giving help to kith and kin,..." [Surah Al-Nahl (16): ayat 90]

In Surah Al-Mulk (67), ayat 2 this concept is mentioned as one of two main purposes of human creation, Allah the Almighty says: "The One Who created death and life so that He may test you which of you is best of conduct."

Lessons

The hadith contains a principle and provides an example of applying that principle. This is a Prophetic method, as mentioned previously, to enable Muslims to apply the same principle to other similar situations. It can also be said that providing the example is a way of explaining the principle so it is easily understood. Most of the forty hadiths collected by Imam Nawawi are of this nature. It was also previously mentioned that Muslims have a tendency of taking the example and forgetting about the principle. This may explain why Muslims are reminded of this hadith only once a year, during Eid ul-Adha.

The concept of Ihsan means that a Muslim is a responsible person and a person of quality where he does things in a very good manner, in a complete sense, in a nice and tasteful way and is never satisfied with anything other than a quality job in all that he/she does, motivated by realizing that Allah prescribed Ihsan to everything and to all deeds.

The term 'amalan in its selected form as mentioned in Surat Al-Mulk ayat 2 implies any kind of deeds. It is not just the religious deeds (ibadah), but also all that we do which is lawful. It should be done according to the concept of Ihsan and we should exert our efforts to live up according to its implications. The way we look and dress, the way we eat, the way we sleep, our work, our profession, our da'wah, teaching and learning, our relationship with our family, relatives, neighbours, and with others in general - Ihsan should be observed and practiced in all these actions. These actions and good deeds can be considered as ibadah thereof.

The superlative form of the verb used in the same verse (ahsan) implies that all good deeds and actions that we do should be done in a competitive way. However, competition in Islam is not for achieving personal interest but rather for seeking the pleasure of Allah.

The hadith mentions one way of dealing nicely or being merciful with animals and that is in the case of slaughtering. In another hadith the Prophet, (ﷺ), said: "Whoever shows mercy even when slaughtering a bird, Allah will have mercy on him on the Day of Judgement." [Recorded by Al-Bukhari]

In another hadith, the Prophet, (ﷺ), related this story: "While a man was traveling, he felt very thirsty. He found a well and went down to have a drink. When he came out he found a thirsty dog. He said to himself, "This dog is as thirsty as I was." He then went back inside the well and used his shoe to bring out some water for the dog. Allah was pleased with him and forgave his sins because of he had done." [Recorded by Al-Bukhari]

In other hadiths the Prophet, (ﷺ), warns us not to frighten animals. While he was with his companions he found a bird making a greaving sound. The Prophet, (ﷺ), immediately said: "Who has frightened this bird by taking its offspring?" Then he commanded: "Return back her offspring." In another hadith the Prophet, (ﷺ), warned Muslims not to harm animals. He said: "A lady was put into the hellfire because of a cat. She tied up the cat and did not give her anything to eat nor did she allow it to look for food."

One more ruling concerning dealing nicely with animals is not to abuse the animals we use for achieving certain work (i.e. carrying things) and not to overburden them. In one hadith (which shows a prophetic miracle), the Prophet, (ﷺ), was passing by a farm in Maddinah when he came across a camel. The camel approached the Prophet, (ﷺ), as if it was telling him something. The Prophet, (ﷺ), asked about the owner of the camel and called upon him and told him, "Your camel is complaining that you overburden him with work, and gives him too little to eat." [Narrated by Abu Daud, Al-Hakim, Imam Ahmad, and others and it is an authentic hadith]

Shaykh Abdullah bin Jibrin, a contemporary scholar, is in the view that animals should not be used as a testing instrument in the lab (like what is being done in the West) based on a basic ruling derived from this Hadith 17, where it is prohibited to harm an animal. The testing is only allowed if it can be ensured that the animal will not be harmed. All this shows that Islam is the religion of Ihsan and mercy, which is totally contrary to the image of Islam being promoted in the West. Not only that, but this evidently proves that the West are the ones who abuse and harm animals.

Even in Jihad (fighting enemies), Muslims are to apply Ihsan. We are not allowed to kill the elders, children, women, and those who are not fighting. When killing the aggressive enemy who deserves to be killed, Ihsan has to be applied and observed. We have to make sure not to cause any harm or suffering to anyone we kill. The captives have to be treated with Ihsan as well. It is Islam who introduced a new way

of dealing with captives. We are to free them on the basis of them teaching some Muslims something beneficial.

Weapons that cause mass destruction have been initiated, introduced and used by the West. Using them contradicts with the concept of Ihsan. But how about if the enemies of Islam use them against us? Some cotemporary scholars say that Muslims are allowed to use them only in response and as a counter act.

Conclusion

By living according to the concept of Ihsan and by applying it to all that a Muslim does, he/she will be rewarded and showered with mercy and forgiveness from Allah the Almighty. Furthermore, by doing that, a Muslim will ensure that he/she will pass the test and be amongst those of the best conduct.