

AL-IHSAN (GOODNESS)

Definition:

Ihsan in Arabic means to do good and improve. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) defined *Ihsan* as:

“Ihsan is to worship Allah as if you see Him; since you do not see Him then you worship Him realizing that He sees you.”

Narrated by Bokhari, Muslim, Termedhi, Abou Dawood, Nesa’ee and Ibn Majja

In this **Hadith**, the Prophet (PBUH) emphasized the true meaning of *Ihsan* as worshipping and obeying Allah by watching our behavior and doing good.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN IHSAN AND ADL

Adl or Justice is to take your rights and discharge your responsibilities, to treat everyone with justice not wronging them. *Ihsan* (Goodness) is to take less than your right and to give more than you must; therefore, *Ihsan* is a degree higher than *Adl*.

Allah ordered us to do both *Adl* and *Ihsan*.

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَايَ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴾ [النحل: ٩٠]

"Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that ye may receive admonition"

(An-Nahl 16 : 90)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained this concept further when he said to Ali Bin Abi Talib,

“Shall I tell you about the most noble character in this life as well as in the Hereafter? It is to get close to the one who severs your relationship; and to give the one who denies you. This is **Ihsan** (Goodness).”

Narrated by Tabarani

In this tradition of the Prophet (PBUH), we are called upon to a higher level of character and behavior, a step few are able to achieve, that is, to overcome the tendency to stay away from the person who does not want to associate with us or be near us. Rather than staying away, we are commanded to make every effort to come closer and be good to that person and not to give up easily. Another tendency that most people have is to retaliate against those who deny us our rights or refuse to give us what is rightfully ours. To forgive, going beyond the desire to retaliate, providing for them when we are in a position to help, rather than seeking revenge is a noble characteristic and behavior that few can achieve. To be able to rise above our human weaknesses and impulses and to be good to those who hurt our feelings is not easy. It requires strong belief and the acknowledgment of God’s blessings and our seeking reward only from our Creator. It is to feel sorry for other’s frailty and human weaknesses and to forgive their shortcomings.

DIFFERENT STAGES AND ASPECTS OF IHSAN

1. *To be good to ourselves:*

To be good to ourselves implies that we obey Allah and serve Him as best we can both in word and in deed with pure intentions. If we do this, we help ourselves by gaining Allah’s pleasure.

﴿إِنْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا﴾ [الإسراء: ٧]

"If ye did well, ye did well for yourselves; if ye did evil, (ye did it) against yourselves" (Al-Isra'a 17 : 7)

We should spend our money to help those who need our help, to be patient, controlling our anger and greed, and to forgive other people's mistakes and shortcomings. Such is the character of those who do good and who therefore deserve God's forgiveness and His great reward.

﴿ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَبِيمِ وَالْغَيْظِ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ مُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴾ [آل عمران: ١٣٤]

"Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men; for Allah loves those who do good" (Al-Imran 3 : 134)

2. To be good to our parents:

We are commanded by Allah to be kind to our parents and care for them, thus we gain their blessings and the pleasure of Allah and His Paradise.

﴿ وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَيَالِ الْوَالِدِينَ إِحْسَانًا ۚ إِنَّمَا يَبُلِّغُنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرُهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا ﴾ [الإسراء: ٢٣]

"Your Lord has decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor" (Al-Isra'a 17 : 23)

3. To be good to our neighbors:

Those who live with us or close to us have certain rights that we should fulfill. We should be good to them and treat them well. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

Abou Horaira (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

"O Abou Horaira! Be careful and avoid doubtful areas; you will become

the best of worshippers; and be content with what Allah has provided for you; you will become the most thankful and grateful person. Desire for others what you desire for yourself and you will become a believer. Be good to your neighbor, and you will become a Muslim. Avoid excessive laughter for excessive laughter (for no reason) makes the heart dead.”

Narrated by Termedhi, Ibn Majja and Ahmad

It should be noted how the Prophet (PBUH) in this tradition emphasized and defined belief and Islam as good deeds and proper behavior, not as rituals of worship. In other words, it is what we do and how we treat others that determines if we are true Muslims and true believers, and not just our prayers or fasting. If you love others and want everything good for them, then this character indicates that belief in Allah and appreciating His blessings has indeed settled in our hearts. If we understand that He is the Only One Who can provide and give, then we trust His judgment and wisdom and we accept His will. We hope that others will enjoy His blessings as we do. Similarly, it is how we treat our neighbors that determine if we are sincere Muslims. If we are good to them and they trust us and fear no harm from us, then we have fulfilled our obligation as Muslims, submitting our will to Allah and obeying His orders.

To accept what Allah has provided for us and to be content with our lot and fortune is not easy for most people. They look at what others have and long for material pleasures. Those who are happy and content have indeed understood what it means to appreciate Allah’s blessings and to be grateful to Him.

4. To be good to other members of the society:

Goodness implies that we are good and treat everyone well. We should say what is good because a good word has a positive effect and closes the door to Satan foiling his attempts to incite enmity and evil. The Qur’an orders the servants of Allah to say what is good and proper.

﴿ وَقُلْ لِعِبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَنْزِعُ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَارٍ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوًّا مُّبِينًا ﴾ [الإسراء: ٥٣]

"Say to My servants that they should (only) say those things that are best: for Satan does sow dissensions among them: for Satan is to man an avowed enemy" (Al-Isra'a 17 : 53)

A bad deed should be repelled and replaced with something better, for it will turn enmity into friendship. The Qur'an explains,

﴿ وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ ﴾ [فصلت: ٣٤]

"Nor can Goodness and Evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with what is better: then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate!" (Fusselat 41 : 34)

We are also ordered to spend in the cause of Allah and help others. The rich should not control the poor. The rich should liberate their souls of greed and do good.

﴿ وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴾ [البقرة: ١٩٥]

"And spend of your substance in the cause of Allah, and make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction; but do good; for Allah loveth those who do good" (Al-Baqara 2 : 195)

We are ordered to help particularly those who are weak and vulnerable such as the poor, the needy and the orphans.

﴿ وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا مَالَ الْيَتِيمِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ أَشُدَّهُ ﴾ [الأنعام: ١٥٢]

"And come not nigh to the orphan's property, except to improve it, until he attains the age of full strength" (Al-Ana'm 6 : 152)

5. To be good to those who differ with us:

Despite the difference in our belief with the Jews and Christians, the Qur'an commands that we argue with them in the best possible way. This way, we can narrow our differences and lessen any enmity.

﴿ وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴾

[العنكبوت: ٤٦]

"And dispute you not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury); but say, "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)" (Al-Ankabut 29 : 46)

6. To be good to everything in the environment:

We are told to be good to God's creatures including the animals. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) saw a man about to slaughter an animal. The animal was lying on its side looking at the man as he was sharpening his knife. He said,

"Should you not have done this before? Do you want to kill her twice?
Narrated by Muslim

The Qur'an orders us to do good, rather than to cause damage in the land if we are to receive God's mercy.

﴿ وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا وَادْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا ۚ إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴾ [الأعراف: ٥٦]

"Do no mischief on the earth, after it has been set in order, but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts): for the Mercy of Allah is (always) near to those who do good" (Al-Ara'f 7 : 56)

IHSAN (GOODNESS) IS A CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD AND HIS PROPHETS

Allah created human beings in the best of forms, as He created everything else in the universe in perfect order. He guided every creature to serve its purpose.

﴿ ذَٰلِكَ عِلْمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ الْعَزِيزِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴾ [السجدة: ٦]

"Such is He, the Knower of all things, hidden and open, the Exalted (in power), the Merciful," (As-Sajda 32 : 6)

﴿ الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ ۗ وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنسَانِ مِن طِينٍ ﴾ [السجدة: ٧]

*"He Who has made everything which He has created most Good:
He began the creation of man with (nothing more than) clay,"*
(As-Sajda 32 : 7)

Allah sent His messengers to their people to explain what He wanted them to do and how He wanted them to serve Him; therefore, we should follow the Way of Allah obeying His orders and those of His messengers.

﴿ أَفَحُكْمَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ يَبْغُونَ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ حُكْمًا لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ ﴾ [المائدة: ٥٠]

"Do they then seek after a judgment of (the Days of) Ignorance? But who, for a people whose faith is assured, can give better judgment than Allah?" (Al-Ma'eda 5 : 50)

Allah's prophets delivered His message; they explained it and applied it to themselves, in so doing they became examples to follow. The Qur'an praises Prophet Abraham as someone to follow because he was sincere and devoted to Allah and submitted his will to Allah.

﴿ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَاتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۗ وَاتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا ﴾ [النساء: ١٢٥]

"Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allah, does good, and follows the way of Abraham the true in faith? For Allah did take Abraham for a friend" (An-Nesa'a 4: 125)

REWARDS OF IHSAN

Ihsan or goodness has many rewards including Paradise and gaining the pleasure of Allah.

Those who do good will be rewarded with Allah's paradise:

﴿ وَقِيلَ لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا مَاذَا أَنْزَلَ رَبُّكُمْ قَالُوا خَيْرٌ ۗ لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةٌ ۗ وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَلَنِعْمَ دَارُ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴾ [النحل: ٣٠]

"To the righteous (when) it is said, "What is it that your Lord has revealed?" They say, "All that is good." To those who do good, there is good in this world, and the Home of the Hereafter is even better and excellent indeed is the Home of the righteous," (An-Nahl 16 : 30)

Abi Horaira (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Prophet (PBUH) said,

“Every one who enters Heaven is shown his place in Hell Fire should he had done wrong in order that he may be thankful; and every one who enters Hell is shown his place in Heaven should he have done good in order that he may regret and lament.”

Narrated by Bokhari

Allah loves those who do good:

Those who confirm their belief by their good deeds will be rewarded in both this life and the Hereafter, but the best reward is the love of Allah and His good pleasure.

﴿ فَفَاتَنَّهُمُ اللَّهُ ثَوَابَ الدُّنْيَا وَحُسْنَ ثَوَابِ الْآخِرَةِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَجِبُ الْحَسِنِينَ ﴾

[آل عمران: ١٤٨]

"And Allah gave them a reward in this world, and the excellent reward of the Hereafter. For Allah loves those who do good"

(Al-Imran 3 : 148)

The reward of those who do good has no measure:

The reward of those who do good and watch their behavior is from Allah. It has no measure as the Qur'an explains,

﴿ هَلْ جَزَاءُ الْإِحْسَانِ إِلَّا الْإِحْسَانُ ﴾ [الرحمن: ٦٠]

"Is there any Reward for Good other than Good?"

(Ar-Rahman 55 : 60)

BENEFITS OF IHSAN

A society whose members help one another, cooperate in virtue, and piety can only improve, and they are blessed by Allah.

We gain the pleasure of Allah and His Paradise.

To say good words and to do good spreads love and harmony, and avoids hatred and division in that community.