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The Best of Creation By Shaykh Zulfiqar Ahmad (db)

Allah ﷻ says in the Holy Quran:

We have indeed created man in the best of moulds (95:4)

The Holy Quran thus bears witness that Allah ﷻ created man as the best of creation. Why has man been awarded such status? Is it because of form or character?

The Foundation

The Holy Quran uses four different phrases to describe how man's outer form came into being.

Man did We create from a quintessence [of clay] (23:12)

Clay is the foundation and base where man comes from. Now let us examine this verse. Clay, or soil, stays on the ground and is considered something lowly. It is therefore humble and does not rise; we walk on it with our shoes and complain if it gets on our clothes because it sullies them. We eat things and throw the leftovers on the ground.

We are from this soil and to it we have to return and from it we shall be raised again as the Holy Quran has informed us. This clay or soil spoils whatever it touches, such as clothes or shoes etc. This characteristic of rendering things dirty is known as *kasafat* (sing: *kasif*) and it is part of man's essence – to spoil everything he comes into contact with.

However, soil also has some redeeming qualities. One of these is that dry soil is pure: if one comes across dry soil that does not show any signs of ritual impurity then one can not only pray at that location but can also do *tayammum* with that dry soil. The Messenger ﷺ of Allah said in hadith that Allah ﷻ has made the whole world a place of prostration for us. Hence dry soil is not only pure but also renders one pure through *tayammum* if there is no water available. *Tayammum* is even sufficient when someone is in need of a bath before prayer and no water can be found.

Another redeeming quality is that although there is *kasafat* in soil, this *kasafat* is not permanent but can easily be removed. If clothes become dirty, washing in soap and water can clean them. The Holy Quran also uses synonymous words to describe wet clay although wetness increases *kasafat*: if dry soil gets onto one's clothes it can simply be brushed off, whereas the cleansing process takes more effort if it is wet.

The Next Stage

Allah ﷻ states further in the Holy Quran:

We Who created him from a filthy seed (36:77)

This verse refers to the next stage in the creation of man, from dry soil to wet soil to a thick fluid. The *kasafat* was only slight in the dry soil, and it increased when the soil became wet, and now when this soil becomes a thick fluid the *kasafat* becomes *najasat* (ritual filth). This becomes very different from *kasafat* in which the soiled article could merely be washed and it would be clean. *Najasat* (sing: *najus*) involves more stringent rules. A person who has had this filth exit from his private parts cannot enter the mosque if he does not wash his entire body thoroughly not can he touch the Holy Quran in this state. Why? This is because the whole body has now become ritually impure.

Soil is defined as *kasafat*, and when it is transformed into this thick fluid it becomes *najasat*. This is man's beginning and his foundation. Allah ﷻ says that man is rebellious and forgets his own despicable origins. The very essence of man is impurity.

Final Stage before Birth

As stated in the Holy Quran, this impure thick fluid becomes a clot of blood in the mother's womb. Whereas there is still some debate among the Hanafi scholars (*ulama*) as to the *najasat* of man's seed, there is no debate at all that blood is *najasat*. Hence we have progressed to yet another stage of man's creation, which is blood. Not only are the stages progressing, but the *najasat* is becoming more potent. At the beginning stages the dry soil was not only pure but could render other things pure also, and now it is not only impure but renders other things impure also, and in this there is no debate.

The embryo develops inside the womb surrounded by amniotic fluid, which in itself is also impure (*najus*). Whatever nourishment this embryo receives is through blood, which we have already established as *najus* as well. The mother's womb is a miraculous factory created by Allah ﷻ where the fetus is nurtured to full term until it is ready to be born into the world. If we reflect on our heedlessness and rebelliousness we will realize that we are truly at a loss if we forget our origins. Moreover, man is naked when he is born and so weak that he cannot even sit up by himself. If he wets or soils himself he is unable to clean himself, and will remain in this state unless someone else attends to him.

The Form

This is how Allah ﷻ fashions the human body, and now He turns to improving this form. Bones and muscles begin to strengthen, and height and weight increases to the point that now this same human being who could not even support himself is able to lift weights heavier than himself. The person whose legs were limp can now run so fast that he breaks world records. Characteristics change and improve but the origin remains the same.

An elderly man met a rich man who was walking very proudly. In two different worlds, this rich man was drowned in thoughts of his wealth while the other was drowned in

thoughts of Allah ﷻ. Seeing this rich man walking so arrogantly the elderly person recited a verse from the Holy Quran:

Nor walk on the earth with insolence: for you cannot rend the earth asunder nor reach the mountains in height (31:18)

This rich man said angrily, “Don’t you know me old man?” The old man replied;

Your beginning was an impure droplet, and your end will be an impure corpse. In between this birth and death you carry feces and other filth in your stomach (Saying)

The rich man was stunned by these words from this lover of Allah ﷻ and finally said, “May Allah reward you, for you have opened my eyes. I have now realized what I am.”

Illusions of this World

Man cannot claim a superior status than the angels on the merits of this body alone. Everything of this body is merely an illusion: beauty of youth fades, and if he fails to bathe his body starts to smell. Moreover, man is so weak that a little virus can incapacitate him and cause his youthful vigor to fade immediately from his face.

In fact, it is this very beauty that gets man into trouble. From a saying of the Prophet ﷺ we know that when Allah ﷻ created beauty He distributed half into the world and gave the other half to Hadrat Yusuf ؑ. People used to say of Hadrat Yusuf ؑ that one of such beauty could not be a man but an angel. However, on further examination we see that all his enormous troubles were the result of this beauty. His brothers envied him and threw him in a well because of his beauty; he was sold as a slave in Egypt because of his unparalleled beauty; Zulaikha desired him because of his beauty and this very beauty landed him in prison for nine years.

Superiority of Substance over Form

However, when Hadrat Yusuf ؑ was finally released he asked the ruler of Egypt to give him full control over the treasures of his lands because he was knowledgeable and trustworthy. He did not present his outward appearance as the reason to claim this position, but rather his character. He did not ask for control saying he was beautiful, but because he was knowledgeable and trustworthy and this is a very important point. Hadrat Yusuf ؑ was forced to endure hardship and suffering because of his *form*, but he was elevated in status and honor because of his *character*.

Man cannot claim superiority over the angels merely on the basis of form and body. A person has no value in front of Allah ﷻ if his body is beautiful but there is no faith (*iman*) in his heart. Youth is a shadow that fades like twilight; the best and strongest fighters of their day are reduced by age to bent old men. They might not have bent to Allah ﷻ in their youth and so Allah ﷻ caused them to bend low in old age.

Vain Attractions

Hadrat Maulana Ashrat Ali Thanvi (may the mercy of Allah ﷻ be upon him) has written a fascinating account. A young man used to eye a cleaning lady of a *khanqah* with desire because he was young and not in control of his desires. This cleaning lady immediately told the head teacher at the *khanqah* that this young man's gaze wanders towards her in an inappropriate manner.

Coincidentally, she contracted diarrhea the next day and became too ill to even move from her bed. She became very emaciated due to her sudden illness and in one day seemed as if she had aged ten years.

These were days before plumbing and so the waste would remain collected in a bucket in a corner until it could be thrown out. When she recovered the next day the head teacher told her to clean the outside before cleaning the washroom and to report to him if that particular young man would look at her now. When the young man spotted her this time he turned his face away immediately, and so she returned and told the teacher that he did not seem interested in her anymore. The head teacher instructed her to go about her duties and called for the young man. At the same time he instructed someone else to go into the washroom and collect all the waste and filth and bring it in an enclosed bag.

The young man was shocked when his teacher handed him the bag filled with waste and said, "What is this?" His teacher replied, "This is your beloved. Yesterday you could not take your eyes off a non-*mahram*, and today you cannot stand to look at her? Since this is the only thing that she has lost between yesterday and today, hence this must be your true love. So take your beloved with you."

One has a full set of teeth in youth but starts losing them one by one as old age starts creeping up. All this is but a receding shadow. The eyesight starts to fail and we cannot see past a certain distance; if someone says anything we have to turn our whole head towards him to listen; if we ascend a long flight of steps we become short of breath. So these are not valid reasons for man to claim superiority over the angels and rest of creation. Hence this concludes that man is by no means the best of creation because of form and looks, therefore we have to look elsewhere.

Condition of the Heart

The word *seerat* in Urdu is used to describe a person's good character and habits. Now it would make more sense to say that man has superiority over the rest of creation because of his good character and manners. The Messenger ﷺ of Allah said:

Allah ﷻ does not look at your form, neither at your wealth, but at your heart and your deeds

The beauty of the form does not have value in front of Allah ﷻ, but rather the condition of the heart.

Hadrat Bilal ؓ was a black man from Africa with pronounced lips and an altogether alien appearance to the rest of the Arabs. However, he attained such honor that Hadrat Umar bin al-Khattab ؓ of the Quraish would stand up in respect whenever Hadrat Bilal ؓ

entered the room. Hadrat Bilal رضي الله عنه did not have the exceptional appearance to deserve such praise from the leader of the Muslims, but he indeed had such a character and status.

When the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم toured Paradise on the occasion of *Miraj* he heard footsteps and asked Hadrat Jibril عليه السلام what the sound was. Hadrat Jibril عليه السلام answered, “Your servant Bilal رضي الله عنه holds such a station in front of Allah تعالى that the echoes of his footsteps are heard up here in the heavens when he walks on the ground.”

We also learn from saying of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that Hadrat Bilal رضي الله عنه spoke with a lisp, so one day someone else asked if he could instead make the call to prayer (*adhan*) at the time of the morning prayer (*Fajr*) and the Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم of Allah granted permission for this. The *adhan* was called and the Noble Companions (*Sahabah*) awaited the first lights in the sky indicating the time for *Fajr*. However, the darkness persisted and the *Sahabah* became puzzled. Finally Hadrat Jibril عليه السلام descended and addressed the Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم of Allah, “What happened O Beloved of Allah تعالى? Bilal’s رضي الله عنه *adhan* has not reached the heavens yet.” Hadrat Bilal رضي الله عنه called the *adhan* and only then did the morning progress.

Hadrat Ataa bin Abi Rab’ah is a highly respected scholar who was one of the noble teachers of Hadrat Imam Abu Hanifa (may the mercy of Allah تعالى be upon them). Imam Abu Hanifa used to say that he had not met a more pious person than Hadrat Ataa bin Abi Rab’ah. It is known that Hadrat Ataa had a very disagreeable countenance, but earned such a high status in front of Allah تعالى that today one of his students who used to straighten his shoes is known throughout the world as the Greatest Imam (*Imam-e-Azam*). He earned this not because of his form but because of his *seerat*.

The Right Choice

There are seven famous styles of reading the Holy Quran, and among these is the style of a non-Arab man from Africa. He had a scary appearance with disproportionate features, but his recitation of the Holy Quran would leave people mesmerized and desirous of more. A very beautiful girl from a rich family fell in love with his recitation and without having seen him confided to her mother her desire of marrying him. Her parents then learnt that he was of an appearance that they considered distasteful, but the daughter remained adamant and insisted that she was in love with his voice and was willing to spend the rest of her life with him despite his unattractiveness. Even the *ulama* have written that the difference between husband and wife in terms of their appearance was that of night and day.

However, the girl chose to overlook his flaw and married him because of his character. It is said that once the wife was combing her hair in front of the mirror as the husband walked in and smiled upon seeing her. She also smiled and said, “Both of us are inhabitants of Paradise.” He asked, “Why?” and his wife replied, “You look at me and thank Allah تعالى for such a wife, and I look at you and exercise patience. The grateful and the patient are both promised Paradise.”

How did someone like him achieve his elevated status? It was simply because of the service he rendered to the Holy Quran that Allah تعالى elevated him so. Hence this is yet another example that man enjoys a high position in front of Allah تعالى because of his inner

strengths and character, not his form and looks. It is because of this excellence that man achieves success both in this world and the Hereafter.

The Student in the Mosque

Qari Muhammad Qayyam (may the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) related that a great deal of fighting and bloodshed had started prior to the Indo-Pakistan partition of 1947. He said that a very beautiful daughter of a very rich man in a certain community stepped out of her house to visit her aunt, who lived no more than a few streets away. Suddenly a riot erupted as she had gone halfway and she found herself trapped with apparently nowhere to go. She saw a mosque nearby and quickly went inside, sitting in the women's section. The rioting continued late into the night and this girl did not know what to do.

The custodian of the masjid was a very young student there and late at night when he walked through the masjid before locking up he noticed this beautiful young lady. He was a respectful young man who feared Allah ﷻ and so politely asked her to leave, saying that if she was found there then both would be dishonored and thrown out. She pleaded with him because of the extreme danger outside and so he agreed that she could spend the night, and sat down to study at the opposite end of the masjid.

The girl was unable to sleep with the events of the day in her mind and so watched the young man sitting studying by candle light at the opposite end of the masjid. She kept watching him and was very surprised at something she saw. From time to time this young man would extend his hand and keep it over the open flame, only withdrawing it when the flame obviously became unbearable. He then would resume his studies and continued this throughout the night until the dawn broke.

The young man called the *adhan* and asked the girl to leave before the congregation started coming to pray since now everything was calm outside. She agreed on the condition that he tell her why he was placing his hand on the candle flame throughout the night. The young man said that that was his own business and so the girl refused to leave until he told her what she wanted to know. The young man gave in and said, "I am at the age of youth and strong desire. We were alone and my desire was increasing, and although I was studying the Devil (Shaitan) would occasionally put temptation in my heart. Hence whenever I would feel any temptation I would put my hand on the flame and my fingers would burn. I would say to myself that this flame is nothing compared to the fire of Hell."

The girl left the masjid and reached home, calming her parents' fears as to what had happened to her. She also confided in her mother that she wanted to marry the custodian of the mosque near their house. She related the night's events to her parents and said that only such a man with true fear of Allah ﷻ in his heart can be true to his wife. Only such a man who truly fears Allah ﷻ can fulfill a wife's rights properly.

Hence the poor custodian of the mosque earned the daughter of a rich household in marriage. He received this honor not because of his looks but because of his character. Everything disintegrates and turns to dust but character remains strong. Honor is not bestowed because of handsome clothes or beautiful jewelry but because of what is in the

heart. Knowledge is only beneficial when it is captured within the heart, and not merely written in books.

Engraved upon the Heart

A scholar had preserved his two years' worth of learning in his notebooks, and was walking home with his lunch also tied to the same bag as the books. A dog snatched the bag because he smelled the food and ran off with it, and the scholar ran after him. People laughed when they saw the scholar chasing a dog for mere food. The scholar said, "It is not for the food, but he has taken my knowledge." A passerby laughed and said, "Son, knowledge that a dog can snatch away is not knowledge. Knowledge is what is engraved in the heart." In the same way honor and character are not bestowed because of family or wealth or beauty, but for the strength of character that is engraved upon the soul.

The King and the Beggar

A king's caravan came across a beggar sleeping along the caravan's path. The king was very angry that someone should lay sprawled in his way and so kicked him and then said disdainfully to the beggar, who was now awake, "Do you know who I am!?" The beggar looked up and said, "We have not been introduced, but you have kicked me the same way that a donkey kicks."

Fancy clothes and a big entourage of a king is no basis for status and honor, but character and deeds. It so happened that the king was so impressed with the man's fast wit and honesty that he decided to employ him as an advisor.

We should ask Allah ﷻ to put in our hearts the desire to ask Him for good character and habits. Moreover we should take account of ourselves and our actions every day to evaluate what we are doing and where our lives are going. Hadrat Umar رضي الله عنه used to say,

Take account of yourself before you are taken account of

We should therefore dedicate some time for isolation and reflection in which we remember Allah ﷻ, beg for His forgiveness and ask Him to guide us. May Allah ﷻ guide us and give us the character by which we can lead our lives as His chosen servants.

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