

# Good News

...And give good news to those who do good (to others) - HQ22:37

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## Man's Evolutionary Journey

**His Physical, Moral and  
Spiritual Conditions**

**From the 'Teachings of Islam'**

**By Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad**

*[This article contains excerpts from the Preliminary Notes of the book "Teachings of Islam" by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. This highly acclaimed book actually comprises a lecture presented at an interfaith conference held in Lahore in December 1896. The lecture discusses five subjects that presenters were to discuss from their respective faith traditions: 1) the physical, moral and spiritual conditions of man, 2) the state of*

*man in the life after death, 3) the real object of the existence of man and the means of its attainment, 4) the results produced by actions in the present life and the life to come, and 5) the sources of Divine knowledge. In these excerpts from the Preliminary Notes, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad introduces the first subject by describing the stages of spiritual conditions of man as revealed in the Holy Quran]*

Some preliminary notes have been made at the outset which may appear as not bearing upon the questions. However, as they are necessary for the full comprehension of the subject, I have been obliged to resort to them. The first question relates to the **physical, moral and spiritual**

**conditions** of man. The Quran observes this division by fixing three respective sources for this threefold condition of man, that is, three springs out of which these three conditions flow. The first of these in which the **physical** conditions of man take their birth is termed the *nafs al-ammara*, which signifies the “uncontrollable spirit”, or the “spirit prone to evil”. Thus, the word of God says:

“Surely (man’s) self is wont to command (him to do) evil”  
(12:53)

It is characteristic of the *nafs al-ammara* that it inclines man to evil, tends to lead him into iniquitous and immoral paths, and stands in the way of his attainment of perfection and moral excellence. Man’s nature is prone to evil and transgression at a certain stage in his development, and so long as he is devoid of high moral qualities, this evil nature is predominant in him. He is subject to this state so long as he does not walk in the light of true wisdom and knowledge, but acts in obedience to

the natural inclinations of eating, drinking, sleeping, becoming angry or excited, just like the lower animals. As soon, however, as he frees himself from the control of animal passions and, guided by reason and knowledge, he holds the reins of his natural desires and governs them instead of being governed by them – when a transformation is worked in his soul from grossness to virtue – he then passes out of the physical state and is a moral being in the strict sense of the word. The source of the moral conditions of man is called, in the terminology of the Quran, the *nafs al-lawwama*, or the “self-accusing soul”:

“Nay, I swear by the self-accusing spirit!” (75:2)

This is the spring from which flows a highly **moral** life and, on reaching this stage, man is freed from bestiality. The swearing by the self-accusing soul indicates the regard in which it is held. For, the change from the disobedient to the self-accusing soul being a sure sign of its

improvement and purification makes it deserving of approbation in the sight of the Almighty. *Lawwama* literally means “one who reproves severely”, and the *nafs al-lawwama* (self-accusing soul) has been so called because it upbraids a man for the doing of evil deeds and strongly hates unbridled passions and bestial appetites. Its tendency, on the other hand, is to generate noble qualities and a virtuous disposition, to transform life so as to bring the whole course and conduct of it to moderation, and to restrain the carnal passions and sensual desires so as to keep them within due bound. Although, as stated above, the “self-accusing soul” upbraids itself for its faults and frailties, yet it is not the master of its passions, nor is it powerful enough to practice virtue exclusively. The weakness of the flesh has the upper hand sometimes, and then it stumbles and falls down. Its weakness then resembles that of a child who does not wish to fall but whose legs are sometimes unable to support him. It

does not, however, persist in its fault, every failure bringing a fresh reproach. At this stage, the soul is anxious to attain moral excellence and revolts against disobedience which is the characteristic of the first, or the animal stage, but does, notwithstanding its yearning for virtue, sometimes deviate from the line of duty. The third or the last stage in the onward movement of the soul is reached on attaining to the source of all **spiritual** qualities. The soul at this stage is, in the words of the Quran, the *nafs al-mutma’inna*, or the “soul at rest”:

“O soul that art at rest, return to thy Lord, wellpleased, wellpleasing, so enter among My servants, and enter My Garden!” (89:27–30)

The soul is now freed from all weaknesses and frailties and is braced with spiritual strength. It is perfectly united with God and cannot live without Him. As water flows with great force down a slope and, on account of its great mass and the total absence of all obstacles,

dashes down with irresistible force, so does the soul at this stage, casting off all trammels, flow unrestrained towards its Maker. It is further clear from the words “O soul that art at rest with thy Lord, return to Him” that it is in this life, and not after death, that this great transformation is worked and that it is in this world, and not elsewhere, that access to paradise is granted to it. Again, as the soul has been commanded to return to its Master, it is clear that such a soul finds its support only in its Supporter. The love of God is its food, and it drinks deep at this fountain of life and is, therefore, delivered from death. The same idea is expressed elsewhere:

“He is indeed successful who causes it to grow, and he indeed fails who buries it”  
(91:9–10)

In short, these three states of the soul may be called **the physical**, **the moral** and **the spiritual** states of man. Of these, the physical state – that in which man seeks to satisfy the passions of the flesh — is most

dangerous when the passions run riot, for it is then that they deal a death blow to the moral and spiritual qualities of man, and hence this state has been termed the “disobedient spirit” in the Holy Word of God. Attention must also be called to another very important point. The Quran does not inculcate doctrines which are contrary to reason and which, therefore, a person can follow only against his better judgement. The whole purpose of the Book, and the pith of its teachings, is the threefold reformation of man, and all other directions are simply means to this end. As is seen in the treatment of bodily diseases, the physician recognizes the necessity of dissecting or performing surgical operations or applying ointments to wounds, etc. The Quran also employs these means on fit occasions to serve the purpose when necessary and advisable. All its moral teachings, precepts and doctrines have an all-pervading purpose beneath them which

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consists in transforming men from the physical state, which is imbued with a tinge of savageness, into the moral state, and from the moral into the spiritual state, which is boundless.

It has already been observed that physical conditions of man do not differ in quality from his moral state. The fact is that physical conditions, when subjected to regulation and used within proper limits according to the directions of reason and good judgement, are transformed into moral conditions. Before a man is guided in his actions by the dictates of reason and conscience, his acts do not at all fall under the heading of moral conditions however much they may resemble them; they are but natural and instinctive impulses. For instance, the affection and docility which a dog or a cat or any other domestic animal shows towards its master cannot be designated as courtesy or refined manners, nor can the fierceness of a lion or a wolf be classed as rudeness or misbehaviour. What we call good

or ill manners or morals are the results of the exercise of reason that comes into play on appropriate occasions. A man who is not guided by the dictates of reason in his actions may be compared either to a child whose reasoning powers are not yet matured or to an insane person who has lost all reason. The only line of distinction that can be drawn between the movements of a mad man or a child, on the one hand, and the actions of a man of reason, on the other, is that the former are only natural impulses while the latter are the result of an exercise of the reasoning faculty. For instance, the child will, as soon as it is born, seek the breast of its mother, while a chicken will, after it is hatched, begin to pick up food with its beak. Similarly, a leech inherits instinctively the habits of that worm and a serpent or a lion the habits of its own kind. The child begins, soon after its birth, to show human peculiarities. As it advances in years, these become more conspicuous. It cries louder and its

smile develops into laughter. It expresses its pleasure or displeasure in its movements, but these movements are still more the result of impulse than of an exercise of the intellect. Such is also man in his savage state when his intellectual faculties are yet in an embryonic state. He is subject to the impulses of his nature and whatever he does, he does in obedience to them. His deeds are not the result of due deliberation. The impulses of his nature, subject to external conditions, take an outward shape.

It should not, however, be assumed that all these movements are necessarily improper; some of them may resemble the deliberate acts of a reasonable person, but it cannot be denied that they are not preceded by any exercise of the reasoning faculties or by any deep consideration of their propriety or impropriety. Even if we assume the presence of a slight degree of reasoning in some acts of the savage, we cannot class them generally as good or bad actions, for

the more powerful factor in bringing them about is not the reasoning faculty but an instinctive impulse or a yielding to desire and passion. In short, we cannot class as “moral” the acts of a person whose life is akin to that of the savage and who is subject to his natural impulses like the lower animals, infants or madmen. The first stage of a moral being — of one whose acts can be classed as good or bad morally — is that in which he is capable of distinguishing between good and bad actions, or between two good or two bad actions of different degrees. This takes place when the reasoning faculty is sufficiently well developed to form general ideas and perceive the remoter consequences of actions. It is then that man regrets the omission of a good deed or feels repentance or remorse after doing a bad one. This is the second stage of man’s life which the Quran calls *nafs al-lawwama*, “selfaccusing soul” or, to take a more familiar term, “**conscience**”. But it should be remembered that, for the savage to

attain to this stage of the self-accusing soul, mere admonition is not sufficient. He must have so much knowledge of God that he should not look upon his own creation by the Almighty as an insignificant or meaningless act. This soul-ennobling perception of the Lord can alone lead to actions truly moral, and it is for this reason that the Quran inculcates a true knowledge of God along with its admonitions and warnings and assures man that every good or bad action bears fruit which may cause spiritual bliss or torture in this life, while a clearer and more palpable reward or punishment awaits him in the next. In other words, when man reaches this stage of advancement, called the “self-accusing soul”, his reason, knowledge and conscience reach the stage of development in which a feeling of remorse overtakes him in the doing of unrighteous deeds and he becomes eager to perform good ones. This is the stage in which the actions of man can be said to be moral. It seems necessary

here to define the word *khulq* (moral). There are two words alike in form except in the vowel point: *khalq* which signifies “external creation” and *khulq*, meaning “internal creation” (or inborn quality). As the perfection of internal creation is achieved through moral excellence and not through the innate passions of man, the former is the proper significance of the word *khalq*, and not the latter. We may take this opportunity of exposing the error of the popular view that forbearance, humility, meekness and the like are the only qualities which constitute good morals. The fact is that, corresponding to every external action, there is an inner quality which, when exercised in its proper place, is termed “moral”. For instance, in weeping the outward action is that of the eye from which tears flow, but corresponding to this there is in the heart a quality of melting which may be called “tenderness” which, when properly applied by a moral being, is one of

the excellent morals. Again, a man uses his hands in defending himself against, or opposing, an enemy, but corresponding to this power of the external organ, there is in the heart a quality which we call “courage” and this, when properly used, is also one of the high morals, the possession of which is necessary for man to attain perfection. Similarly, a man sometimes saves an oppressed person from the oppressor with his hands or feels impelled to give something to the helpless or the hungry or serve mankind in some other way. All such actions proceed from the inner quality, which is called “commiseration”. Or, sometimes, a person inflicts punishment upon a wrongdoer and the source of this outward action is the moral quality termed “vengeance”. Or, again, there are occasions upon which a man who receives an injury, refrains from injuring in return, and he passes over the action of the aggressor. This refraining results from the moral quality, called “forbearance”. In like

manner, man sometimes employs his hands or feet or brain or wealth in doing good to his fellow-beings. In such cases the corresponding moral quality is “charity”. The truth is, as already stated, that all these qualities are only ranked as moral qualities when they are used on the proper occasion. Thus, in the Holy Book, addressing Prophet Muhammad, the Supreme Being says:

“And surely thou hast sublime morals” (68:4)

In short, all the qualities with which man’s mind is naturally endowed, such as politeness, modesty, honesty, generosity, jealousy, perseverance, chastity, devoutness, moderation, compassion, sympathy, courage, charity, forgiveness, patience, kindness, truth, fidelity, etc., when they are called into action within their proper spheres and on proper occasions, fall under the definition of virtue. All these grow out of the natural inclinations and passions of man when the latter are controlled and regulated by reason. The desire for progress is an

essential characteristic of man and is not shared by the lower animals. Hence it is that true religion, good company and virtuous injunctions transform man's natural inclinations into morals. □



**We strongly condemn all forms of human right violations; all forms of injustices, and the wanton abuse of the environment. We condemn all forms of aggression especially the ruthless killings of all innocent parties in the name of Religion or State!**

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