



Hadith 17: Prescription of Ihsan (Perfection)

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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، وَلْيُحِدَّ أَحَدُكُمْ شَفْرَتَهُ
وَلْيُرِحْ ذَبِيحَتَهُ - رَوَاهُ مُسْلِمٌ.

On the authority of Abu Ya'laa Shaddad bin Aws (may Allah be pleased with him), that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) said:

"Verily Allah has prescribed Ihsan (proficiency, perfection) in all things. So if you kill then kill well; and if you slaughter, then slaughter well. Let each one of you sharpen his blade and let him spare suffering to the animal he slaughters."

Related by Muslim

Commentary Summary

Written commentary compiled by volunteers utilizing Sh. Jamaal Diwan's audio commentary above and English translation of Ibn Daqiq Al-Id's commentary on The Forty Hadith of Imam al-Nawawi.

Islam commands Muslims to practice and apply Ihsan, striving for excellence, in all that they do. Ihsan is so important that it was actually made obligatory, or wajib. It has been mentioned in the Quran, where Allah the Almighty says,

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَايِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ
 وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ
 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ﴾

Verily, Allah enjoins justice, and ihsan and giving help to relatives, and He forbids immoral sins, evil and tyranny. He admonishes you, so that perhaps you may take heed. (16:90)

The structure of this hadith is very similar to the first one of Imam Al-Nawawi's collection. The Prophet (sas) spoke in the first Hadith about intentions, then he gave an example to clarify what he meant by intentions. Likewise in this hadith, the Prophet (sas) speaks about ihsan and then gives an example of what ihsan means and how to apply it.

Components of Ihsan

When the Prophet (sas) used the terminology: "Allah has written ihsan upon everything," the scholars of Usul al-fiqh^[1] said that the word "written" implies obligation. Whenever the terminology "written" is used in the Quran or sunnah it implies a religious mandate. We are bound, then, to strive for excellence in everything we do.

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

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

A Muslim who practices ihsan throughout his life is a responsible person and a person of high quality. He does things in the best manner, in a pleasant and tasteful way, and is never satisfied with anything other than a top-notch quality job in all that he does. He or she is motivated to exercise this excellence because Allah prescribed ihsan for all deeds.

It is very important to apply ihsan to our deen and our relationship with Allah (swt). Sometimes we do the least possible thing to get by. Islam shouldn't be understood this way, but rather as a way of life that is based on continuous striving for excellence. It is based on the understanding that God is watching and that He knows what we do. That God-consciousness should lead us to ihsan.

Applying Ihsan

The meaning of "killing well" is to exert oneself the utmost in performing the action well, without causing unnecessary pain or torment through it. "Slaughtering well" implies that we show kindness to the animal being slaughtered, do not push it to the ground cruelly or harshly, nor drag it from one place

to another. It also includes facing it towards the Qibla, pronouncing the name of Allah upon it, cleanly and quickly cutting the throat and the two jugular veins, and finally leaving it until it has turned cold. This hadith also includes recognizing and acknowledging Allah's favors upon us, and thanking Him and being grateful to Him. Allah (swt) has subjected some of His creation to us, and made their meat permissible when He could have made it forbidden, if He had wished.

Example of Abu Bakr

Acquiring Ihsan requires a level of preparation. We can't practice ihsan without proper planning and readiness.

One of the best examples is the example of Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, who applied excellence in everything he did. When the Prophet (sas) gave permission to the companions to migrate to Madinah, Abu Bakr declined to migrate with the companions, secretly hoping that he could accompany the Prophet (sas) on his journey. While he was waiting, he readied two camels, fed them, and made sure they were ready to leave at a moments notice. This is true Ihsan; it is not only doing the action itself in the best way, but preparing for the action in the best way.

^[1] Usul al-Fiqh are the principles underlying fiqh (religious jurisprudence); in other words, legal theory.