

## Good

### With Special Reference to *Nahjul Balagha*

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### Abstract

Good is the basic and absolute value of human life while evil is relative. When we start our discussion about ethics and ethical values these questions arise in our mind: What is meant by ethics? Why ethical life is necessary for us? How the welfare and betterment of an individual and society is possible? In this age of discoveries and inventions, is there any need of ethics and ethical life for a being? A man of this age, which is in struggle to overcome and capture the space and new galaxies, has any need of ethics. If so then which kind of ethics and ethical life will be suitable for him? This article is an effort to bring out the answers of these questions in the perspective of *Nahjul Balagha* (The peak of eloquence)-the book of Hazrat Ali (A.S.).

Key Words: Nahjul Balgha, Good, Ethical life, Crises of the being of this age, Morality

### Introduction

Man is a rational being. Reason discriminates human beings from all other creature. When a being thinks about his beginning, life, end, responsibilities, role in this universe, and relations with other beings then following questions, arise in his mind. What is his origin? Why has he come in this universe? Why does he meet to death? What is good and what is evil? Which behaviour and conduct is suitable for a being? What is right and what is wrong? What is pleasure and what is pain? How can we gain the real pleasure? The answers of all these questions depend upon the faith to which a person adopts. Ethics and ethical values of a person emerge from the faith of a person. What is the importance of faith for a being and specifically for the man of this age, Allma Muhammad Iqbal elaborates in these words:

“Surely the present moment is one of great crises in the history of modern culture. The modern world stands in need of biological renewal. And religion, which in its higher manifestations neither dogma, nor priesthood, nor ritual, can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement of modern science necessarily involves and restore to him that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning a personality here and retaining it hereafter.”(Iqbal: 149)

## Different Kinds of Faith

Values and their system emerge from the faith of a person or a society.

We may divide to all faiths into two kinds:

1-Revealed

2-Non-revealed

In this article, our concern is only with the faith which out flows from the fountain of revelation. Islam is a revealed religion. It encircles to all dimensions of life and universe. What is the 'concept of good' in Islam? We will present in the perspective of *Nahjul Balagha*. Let us start our discussion from the meanings of Ethics, need of ethical life and definition of 'Good'.

## What is meant by Ethics?

According to Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

"The systems of value and custom instantiated in the lives of particular groups of human beings are described as the ethics of these groups." (Encyclopedia, 2000:256)

## Is Ethical life necessary?

If we observe the history of humankind, we will see that man has learnt to fly in the air like birds. He has skilled himself in swimming in the water like fish. However, he has forgotten to walk on earth as a human being. He has forgotten the will of God for which He had created him. We have missed the objectives of our lives. Technological civilization has created the robots but lost the human beings. We have captured the moon but lost our control on ourselves. A being has become alien from him. He has forgotten his all relations with other beings i.e. as a father, mother, husband, wife, brother, sister, neighbor, citizen, and human being. This is the most painful tragedy of the being of this age. The only solution of this human and social disaster is the revival of this ethical approach. Religion and Philosophy both provide their ethical systems to resolve this fundamental issue. (Qadir, 1982: Foreword)

## What is good?

This word has different connotations in different contexts. Generally, in the context of ethics, we define it as:

"Good is the most general term of positive evaluation, used to recommend or express approval in a wide range of contexts. It indicates that a thing is desirable or worthy of choice, so that normally, if you have reason to want a certain kind of thing, you also have reason to prefer a good thing of that kind."(Encyclopedia, 2000:321)

## *Nahjul Balagha* (Peak of Eloquence) and its Author

Allah Almighty has chosen Islam as a religion for His beings. All prophets brought this divine religion under different names for the welfare of humankind according to the demands and needs of time. Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W.W.) is the last representative of this chain. He is the last prophet of Allah's chosen religion Islam. Allah revealed His message to Him in the form of Quran. Quran is the last revealed book, and the constitution of Islam for all the times. The Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W.) is a real representative of Islam and an authentic interpreter of Allah's message i.e. Quran. He preached, interpreted, and explained Islam by His words and sayings (*Hadith*) and by His deeds and conduct (*Seerat*). After Prophet (S.A.W.W.) of Islam, His message was progressed and promoted by His family members, companions, and followers. Hazrat Ali (A.S.) is the only person among all His relatives, family members, and companions whose thought is available in the form of a complete book under the name *Nahjul Balagha*.

*Nahjul Balagha* is consisted of the sermons, letters, advices, and lectures of Hazrat Ali (A.S.) delivered by him after an apparent departure of Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W.). He had a

comprehensive and multidimensional personality. He brought up in the divine environment under the supervision of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W.) Hazrat Ali (A.S.) describes this relationship in these words.

“When I was only a child he took charge of me. He used to press me to his chest and lay me beside him in his bed, bring his body close to mine and make me his smell. He used to chew something and then feed me with it. He found no lie in my speaking, nor weakness in my act.” (438)

He was a masterpiece of the teachings of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W.). In His age, Muslim society was fallen in grave contradictions. Wealth and status became the prominent values of the society. From an ordinary being to gentry, majority was running behind wealth and status quo. All human values were in destruction. He was the real representative of Islam and a vice-gerent of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W.). He says:

“I used to follow him like a young camel following in the footprints of its mother. Every day he would show me in the form of a banner some of his high traits and commanded me to follow it. Every year he used to go in seclusion to the hill of ‘Hira’ where I saw him but no one else saw him. In those days, Islam did not exist in any house except that of the Prophet of Allah—peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his descendants—and Khadija, while I was the third after these two. I used to see and watch the effulgence of divine revelation and message, and breathed the scent of Prophethood.” (438)

He had to revive the real Islamic culture and human values in Muslim society. Therefore, he made great efforts to achieve this goal until His martyrdom. He addressed, delivered speeches, wrote letters, and issued commands and statements to all classes of the society and specifically to his governors, rulers of the neighbour states, and to soldiers and the generals of His army respectively. The collection of all those commands, sermons, advices, letters, statements and speeches is known as *Nahjul Balagha*. Although it belongs to a specific condition, situation, environment, and age but it also provides us the principles on which we may resolve the issues of our time because due to the abundance of wealth the destruction of values and the disintegration of the societies are the common issues of all ancient and modern societies. In this perspective, *Nahjul Balagha* provides a complete charter to lead all classes of society. This process starts from the education and training of an individual, and extends to the building of society. Now we try to evaluate the ethical system and concept of ‘good’ of *Nahjul Balagha*.

### **The Basis of *Nahjul Balagha*’s Concept of Good**

An ideology deprived of from practice is vague. On the other hand, an action with out any ideology is meaningless. We find a balanced approach in *Nahjul Blagha* in this regard. According to *Nahjul Blagha*, both an idea and action are not only necessary for each other but they are the complements of each other. Faith and action are two basic pillars and essential components of *Nahjul Balagha*’s concept of ‘good’. We find a beautiful harmony in faith and action in *Nahjul Balagha*. Unity of faith and action is it’s the most prominent feature. While according to *Nahjul Balagha*, the origin of all kinds of activities (thought and action or idea and deed) is ‘*Deen*’ (Religion-Islam).

### **Substance of *Nahjul Balagha***

*Nahjul Blagha* encircles all aspects of life and universe. A number of issues have been discussed in *Nahjul Balagha*. Some of them are of basic importance while some are secondary in this respect.

#### **A. Central Issues**

- Tauhid (One-ness) of Allah
- Risalt (Finality of the prophecy of Holy Prophet)

- Quran (Revelation of Allah to His prophet (S.A.W.W))
- Resurrection
- The Day of Judgment

### **B. Subjects, based on central issues for their connotation**

- Creation
- Beginning
- End
- Essence of human being
- Basic problem of this being
- Purpose of the creation
- Human being as a vicegerent
- Relationship between God, man and universe
- Correlation with other beings as an ordinary being and as a head of the state
- Attitude towards this universe
- Relationship between this world and the world hereafter
- Principles of friendship and war
- Foundations of social, economical, and political systems
- Desirable role
- Emergence of an ideal being
- Animal ethics

One can derive Nehjul Blagha's concept of 'good' from all these key points.

### **An account of Islamic Faith in the Perspective of *Nahjul Balagha***

Faith in *Tauhid* (One-ness of Allah), *Risalt* (Finality of the Prophecy of the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.W.)), *Quran* (Revelation of Allah to His last Prophet), The holy '*Ka'bah*' the house of worship and pilgrimage, and the Life Hereafter are the fundamentals of religion. According to *Nahjul Balagha*, a firm belief on these doctrines provides a solid ground for a special type of ethical life. According to Hazrat Ali (A.S.),

“The foremost in religion is the acknowledgement of Him, the perfection of acknowledging Him is to testify Him, the perfection of testifying Him is to believe in His One-ness, the perfection of believing in His One-ness is to regard Him Pure, and the perfection of His purity is to deny Him attributes...”  
(43)

### ***Tauhid* (Oneness of Allah)**

Faith in *Tauhid* is the first pillar of Islam. *Tauhid* or One-ness of Allah is the central point of the teachings of all the prophets. Each prophet put his emphasis on this doctrine. According to Hazrat Ali (A.S.), all virtues generate from a clear and unambiguous concept of *Tauhid*. We find a special emphasis on *Tauhid* (One-ness) in *Nahjul Balagha* as:

“Praise to Allah whose worth cannot be described by speakers, whose bounties cannot be counted by calculators and whose claim (to obedience) cannot be satisfied by those who attempt to do so, whom the height of intellectual courage cannot appreciate, and the divings of understanding cannot reach.”  
(43)

According to *Nahjul Balagha*, God is one, omnipotent, omniscient, and absolute creator. Every thing of this universe is due to Him. Every thing is dependent but Allah is independent, self sufficient and self consistent. All phenomenons of nature and universe are His manifestation and due to His manifestation. He is beyond sense perception. He exists by Himself. He has no need of any proof for His existence. He is self-evident. He is with every

thing but not materially. He created every thing with out any previous sample, model, and design. Every thing existence by His grace and will return to Him surely.

“Praise to Allah who is proof of His existence through His creation, of His being external through the newness of His creation, and through their mutual similarities of the fact that nothing is similar to Him. He is One but not by the in counting, is creator but not through activity or labor, Hearer but not by means of any physical organs, is Looker but not by a stretching of eyelids, is Witness not by nearness, is Distinct but not by measurement of distance, is Manifest but not by seeing and is Hidden but not by subtlety (of body). (328-329)

### **Risalat (Finality of the Prophecy of the Prophet Hood)**

This is the second pillar of Islamic faith. Allah Almighty has sent one hundred and twenty five thousand prophets for the welfare and betterment of humankind. Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W.W.) is the last prophet of this chain. According to Quran He is the guide for humankind forever. He presented a complete and comprehensive system for the beings of all classis, colors, creeds, and nations. He addressed to all groups in His sermons. We find a beautiful description of this doctrine in *Nahjul Balagha* as,

“Thy choicest and growing favors on Muhammad Thy servant and Thy Prophet who is the last of those who preceded (him) and an opener for what is closed, proclaimer of truth with truth, repulser of the forces of wrong and crusher of the onslaughts of misguidance. (183)

### **Quran**

Allah Almighty revealed His message to His prophets through angels. Quran is the last revealed book of Allah. It has the guidance for all the humankind. Quran encircles to all dimensions of life. It deals with all issues related with this life and life here after. All spiritual, material, psychological, social, economical, and political issues of humankind are in its scope. Quran tries to establish a moral behavior and an ethical approach in all its fellow beings. It puts its emphasis on both individual and society. According to Quran, individuals are the basic units of a community. The survival of a society depends upon the education, training, and coaching of individuals. Its main objective is the development of an ideal being. *Nehjul Blagha* describes to these characteristics of Quran in these words.

“Then Allah sent to him the Book as a light whose flames cannot be extinguished, a lamp whose gleam does not die, a sea whose depth cannot be sounded, a way whose direction does not mislead, a ray whose light does not darken, a separator (of good from evil) whose arguments do not weaken, a clarifier whose foundations cannot be dismantled, a cure which leaves no apprehension for disease, an honor whose supporters are not defeated, and a truth whose helpers are not abandoned.” (459)

There is a comprehensive discussion about angels, death, the Day of Judgment, resurrection, and life hereafter in *Nahjul Balagha*. We will talk about about these issues partially rather than independent topics according to the need of discussion.

### **Effects of this faith**

According to *Nahjul Balagha* in the result of having faith in above said doctrines these feelings develop in a being:

- A complete submission and an absolute servitude to Allah Almighty
- Welfare of the Humankind

One can achieve the first goal by a firm commitment in Islam. The second objective is an essential result of the first. The spirit of the religious faith is the well fare and betterment of humankind. All fundamentals of religion proceed, develop, and enhance this approach in a

follower. In other words, we may say that these two aspects are the complements of each other. As much as a person is close to his lord, so much he will be beneficial to His creature without any discrimination. The person (Holy prophet S.A.W.W) who is the most obedient to His Allah almighty that is held mercy for all the worlds.

“And we have not sent you but as a mercy to the worlds.” (Al-Quran, 21:107)

### Major problem of the human being

In this age of discoveries and inventions, science is going to discover every secret of the universe. However, it is the extreme misfortune of this being that he is alien from himself till now. The main problem of the being of this age is his unknowingness about himself. Dr. Ali Shariati pointed out to this disaster of the human being in these words:

“This is the same disastrous that, inspite of his enormous success in the realm of science, deprives the modern man of a correct understanding of the concept of life and his existence. According to Dewey, it makes him more ignorant and weaker on his self-governing than his ancestors.” (Shariati, 1987:7-8)

In Greek philosophy, the emphasis of all philosophers in pre-Socratic period instead of Sophists was on nature. They concentrated on the questions related nature and Absolute reality. Although, Sophists focused on human being but they mislead towards sophistry only. Socrates only put his concentration on human beings. He introduced new issues of grave importance to Greek thought. W.T. Stace analyzes to Socrates contribution in these words:

“He brushes aside all questions as the origin of this world, or the nature of the ultimate reality, of which we have heard so much in the philosophies of the earlier thinkers. Socrates openly deprecated such speculations, and considered all such knowledge worthless as against ethical knowledge, the knowledge of man. (Stace, 1962:142)

Main problem of a human being from ancient times to this age is the cognition of himself. Although this is the age of advancement but this mechanical civilization has lost the identity of a being. Instead of all the luxurious life, human being is facing relentless crises internally and spiritually. He is alien to himself and this is the biggest disaster of this civilization. Allama Dr. Muhammad Iqbal pointed out to this catastrophe in this way:

“Thus, wholly overshadowed by the results of his intellectual activity, the modern man has ceased to live soulfully, i.e. from within. In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself; and in the domain of economic and political life is living in open conflict with others.” (Iqbal, 148)

Hazrat Ali (A.S) in *Nahjul Balagha* starts the process of development of a being from his own self-awareness. For Him, self-cognition is necessary for the cognition of Absolute. He pronounces that for the comprehension of God, recognition of self is necessary. Again he narrates that,

“He who does not know his own worth is ruined.” (709)

According to *Nahjul Blagha* the process of the development of a being is consisted of three steps i.e. self-building, others building, and the building of a society. This course starts on the basis of faith by self-realization i.e. recognition of self, awareness about responsibilities, and consciousness of his status in this universe. This is the stage of self-building. In second stage, a being starts to help others in all their affairs. He becomes beneficial for all other beings. The third stage is the development of a society. All the units of society voluntarily and independently struggle to establish a welfare state advantageous for all. That state provides all the opportunities to all the components based on justice. According to *Nahjul Balagha*, there is an essential relationship between this world and the world hereafter. Society emerges from individuals and there is no concept of good for an individual with out a society. Ethical life and the achievement of a good are possible with in a society and by a society. *Nahjul*

*Balagha* is enriched with sermons, commands, sayings, quotations, and pieces of advices, which are helpful to develop a moral being and to establish a welfare state under the guidance of revelation. Hazrat Ali (A.S) set the foundations to revolutionize a society. He gave the guidance that for the transformation of will and understanding transformation in feelings is necessary. We find a continuity of this approach in Muslim mystics specifically. As Allma Muhammad Iqbal describes it as:

“Sufi holds that the mere transformation of will or understanding will not bring peace; we should bring about the transformation of both by a complete transformation of feeling, of which will and understanding are only specialized forms.” (82)

### **Conclusion**

According to *Nahjul Balagha*, a human being

- is Chosen of God
- is Virtuous by its very nature
- is a righteous being
- is self-determining
- is a cognizant creature
- is a self-conscious being
- is an innovative being
- is desirous
- is a moral being
- has an agreement with his God to live in this world according to His will.

We have derived the basic principles and a concise but precise concept of good from *Nahjul balagha*. These are the basic principles from which one can evaluate a comprehensive concept of good in the perspective of *Nahjul Balagha*.

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