

ON WARNING AGAINST BASE CHARACTER



THE WEAK SERVANT of Allāh [Imām Zafar ʿUthmānī (may Allāh have mercy on him)] says:

Refining character traits [*tazkiya*] is one of the central concerns of the Sufis, for they consider noble traits to be stations on the spiritual path. They were distinguished from others by their good character, and through it they were known. Whoever examines the Qurʾān and Sunna with deliberation will know that good character is as central to religion as a foundation is to a building.

Improving character traits is not possible except through spiritual struggle at the hands of a perfected spiritual guide [*shaykh*]²² who has struggled with his own self, opposed his caprice, abandoned base character traits, and adorned himself with praiseworthy ones. Whoever thinks they can achieve this through mere knowledge and the study of books has erred and gone far astray. Just as (outward) knowledge is only acquired through study with scholars, good character is acquired by struggling to attain it at the hands of the knowers of Allāh.

Good character is an attribute of the Master of the Messengers ﷺ,²³ and the best of the works of the veracious [*ṣiddīqīn*], and is in

reality half of religion. It is from the fruits of the spiritual struggles of the god-fearing, and the efforts of the worshippers. Base character is a lethal poison, a fatal destroyer, and a humiliating debaser—manifest vileness, and filth that distances one from the sanctuary of the Lord of the worlds. It makes the one characterized by it of the devils, and it is the open door to the burning fire of Allāh, that “Leaps up over the hearts (of men),” (Qur’ān 104:7). Good character, on the other hand, is the open door to the bounties of the Gardens and proximity to the Merciful. Base character is a sickness of the heart and a disease of the lower self. It is a sickness that endangers the ever-lasting life. Therefore, it is necessary to pay utmost attention to it, even more than outward sickness.

Character traits are attributes of the self by which it leans to either beauty or ugliness. Complete outward beauty is not possible through the beauty of the eyes alone, without the nose, mouth, and cheeks. Rather, it is necessary that all these be beautiful. Similarly, inward beauty requires four essential elements. And good character is completed through an appropriate balance and temperance of these elements. These elements are: knowledge, anger, passion, and justice between the other three elements.

As for the attribute of knowledge, its good and uprightness lies in its ability to comprehend the difference between truthfulness and treachery in speech, between truth and falsehood in belief, between good and evil in actions. If this attribute of knowledge is made upright, then its fruits are wisdom, which is at the root of good character. Allāh said of wisdom: “And he unto whom wisdom is given, he has truly received abundant good” (Qur’ān 2:269). And it is what the Prophet ﷺ meant by profound understanding [*fiqh*] when he said, “Whoever Allāh wishes good for, He gives profound understanding [*fiqh*] of religion” (*Bukhārī* and *Muslim*).

As for the attribute of anger, its good lies in its suppression, and its expression in accordance with the dictates of wisdom. Likewise, the good and uprightness of passion lies in its being under the guidance