CHAPTER FIVE:

Gandhi On Fundamental Ethics Of Islam

Islam is a religion of strict monotheism and rigorous ethical discipline. Gandhi regards Islam as one of the inspired religions, just as he regard Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism as inspired religions, and therefore the Holy Koran as an inspired book, and Muhammad as one of the prophets. Gandhi had a very high esteem for this religion and regarded it as a religion of peace, love, kindness, and brotherhood of all men. Gandhi regarded Islam to be a religion of peace in the same sense as Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are. No doubt there are differences amongst the path of each religion, but the object of these religions is peace. The Koran says: "Whoever killed a human being, except as a punishment for murder or other wicked crimes, should be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind; and that whoever saved a human life should be regarded as though he had saved all mankind" (The Koran, the Table 5.32). It tells us — "If you punish, let your punishment be proportionate to the

1 M.K Gandhi, In search of the supreme-vol-III., compiled &ed.by V.B kher,Navajivan publishing house,1961,pp-347
wrong that has been done you. But it shall be best for you to endure your wrongs with patience” (The Koran, The Bee16.127).

Islam’s distinctive contribution to India’s national culture is its unadulterated belief in the oneness of God and a practical application of the truth of the brotherhood of man for those who are within its fold.²

Gandhi was also impressed by the personal and social codes of behavior that Islam prescribes. In Koran there are rules and regulations for virtues like obedience to Parents, refraining from cheating, and lying, theft, murder etc. The five pillars of Islam, which prescribes prayers, fasting, alms giving and hospitality and pilgrimage (haji), are the duties every Muslims has to perform. Koran also speaks of Ahimsa and the need for living in peace. All these aspects of Islam influenced Gandhi a great deal.

Therefore, after a reverant study, Gandhi have come to the conclusion that the teaching of the Koran is essentially in favour of non-violence. It is said in the Koran that Non-violence is better than violence. Non-violence is enjoined as a duty, violence is permitted as a necessity. In his opinion, the followers of Islam are too free with the sword. But according to him, that is not due to the teachings of the Koran. This is due to the environment in which Islam was born. Just as Christianity

² M K. Gandhi, Truth is God. Navajivan publishing house, 1955, pp-75
has a bloody record against it not because Jesus was found wanting. But because the environment in which it spread was not responsive to his lofty teachings. Thus Gandhi opines that, after his study of other religions he has come to the conclusion that to discover an underlying unity among all religions, a master key is needed. That master key is that of Truth and non-violence. Unless and until we realize this fundamental unity, wars in the name of religion will not cease. These are not confined to Hindus and Musalmans alone. Religion can be defended only by the purity of its adherents and their good deeds, never by their quarrels with those of other faiths.

Muslims are taught to regard the following as the five ‘PILLARS’, or basic foundations of Islam:

(a) the testimony that there is no deity other than God and that Muhammad is God's messenger;

(b) the five daily prayers, with their set rites;

(c) the daytime fast during the holy month of Ramadan; (d) the annual payment of a proportion of one’s wealth for charitable and communal use; and

(e) the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca during the last month of the Hijra year, made at least once in a lifetime, if possible.

3 M.k Gandhi, My Religion, pp-27, see also In search of the supreme vol-III, pp-349
4 M.k Gandhi, compiled & ed by V.B kher, In search of the supreme vol-III pp-348
Islamic Moral Code - Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil

Islam requires Muslims to be righteous, truthful, fulfill their promises, be courteous, gentle in disagreements, have humility, keep the trust and keep all other well known virtues. Naturally, Islam condemns the immoral and criminal acts of lying, cheating, back-biting, slandering, breaking promises, breaching the trust, arrogance, haughtiness, and all other well known vices. It is not enough to stay away from vices and adopt all virtues but he has a duty to promote the same good in the society and do everything possible to stop evil and vices.

Fulfill the Duty to Others

There are mutual rights and duties. However, Allah will not ask on the Day of Judgment if you have received all your rights but He will ask if you have done all your duties. Human duties fall under four categories:

Duty to Allah

The first and foremost duty is to Allah. The main duties to Allah are: not to worship anyone but Allah, not to depend upon anyone for help but Allah, and to fulfil his orders by worshiping Him as He want us to do.
**Duty to Other Human Beings**

Whenever there is interaction with another person there are mutual rights and duties. One person's rights are other person's duties. There are duties to parents, spouse, children, relatives, neighbors, buyers, sellers, ruler, ruled, boss, subordinates and so on.

**Community Duty**

There is a duty to defend the family, the country and the community as a whole. In addition there are people who cannot provide for themselves, such as, the poor, orphans, widows, handicapped, refugees and others whom a single person cannot support fully but the community as a whole can. Every Muslim should be a part of such a support system. Every human being has five basic rights, namely, food, clothing, shelter, education and health maintenance; every Muslim should be part of the system providing basic rights to all those who cannot provide for themselves.

**Duty to Manage the Earth**

Allah has appointed man Khalifah on the earth, meaning that man is a trustee or manager of the earth for the owner, Allah. Humankind, in general, and Muslims, in particular, have the duty to see that the resources of the earth are not abused: air and water are not polluted, animals are not killed for fun or for greedy people, trees are not cut down unnecessarily and so on. Use resources of the earth but do not abuse them.
Food and Drink

There are a number of things which have been forbidden as food and drink, such as all intoxicants including alcoholic liquor and drugs of abuse and anything poisonous to humans.

Sources of Income

Any business involving production, distribution or sale of unlawful food or drinks is unlawful. In addition, all trades of exploitation or taking others rights away are unlawful, such as, prostitution, gambling, usury and interest, stealing, robbery, embezzlement, monopolizing and hoarding to raise prices and others.

Sexual Relations

A simple principle is no sex without marriage. One is asked to maintain a dignified relations with others. Controlling of sensual pleasures outside marriage is strictly prohibited just as we have seen in the ethics of other religions.

Thus, these are the essential components of beliefs and the essentials of good works required of every sane adult Muslim, male and female. The Qur'an and Hadith are essentially explanations of beliefs (Iman) and good works ('Amal-us-Salihat) and learning them in detail could be a life long pursuit.
The law of Islam called the SHARIA derives basically from: (a) the teachings of the Koran; (b) the authenticated sayings of the Prophet Muhammad and the precedents he set, collectively called the Sunna, or ‘Tradition’; (c) the consensus of learned opinion, explicit or implicit (called ijma’); and (d) reasoning by analogy (called qiyas), to help Muslims decide how to deal with new situations that arise in new places or with the passage of time. In general, if any action is not prohibited by the Sharia, it is permissible to Muslims; however, some permissible actions are less socially acceptable than others.

The Ethical Code of Islam emphasizes (a) the equality of all believers; (b) communal solidarity; (c) truth, honesty and justice in dealings with Muslims and non-Muslims alike; (d) modesty, humility and clemency; (e) honouring parents and caring for the family; (f) caring for the poor and the stranger; (g) kindliness, especially toward neighbours; and (h) patience in the face of adversity. The code also commands believers to encourage virtue and discourage wrongdoing, and warns against aggression, corruption, pride, avarice, greed, envy and waste.

Islam has laid down some universal fundamental rights for humanity as a whole, which are to be observed and respected under all circumstances. To achieve these rights, Islam provides not only legal safeguards but also a very effective moral system. Thus whatever leads to the welfare of the individual or the society is morally good in Islam, and whatever is injurious is morally bad. Islam attaches so much importance to the love of God and love of man that it warns against too much of formalism. We read in the Quran:

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in God and the Last Day and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans"
for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask; and for the freeing of captives; to be steadfast in prayers, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you made; and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-conscious." (2:177)

We are given a beautiful description of the righteous and God-conscious man in these verses. He should obey salutary regulations, but he should fix his gaze on the love of God and the love of his fellow men.

We are given four heads:

1. Our faith should be true and sincere,

2. We must be prepared to show it in deeds of charity to our fellow-men,

3. We must be good citizens, supporting social organizations, and

4. Our own individual soul must be firm and unshaken in all circumstances.

This is the standard by which a particular mode of conduct is judged and classified as good or bad. This standard of judgment provides the nucleus around which the whole moral conduct should revolve. Before laying down any moral injunctions, Islam seeks to firmly implant in man's heart the conviction that his dealings are with God who sees him at all times and in all places; that he may hide himself from the whole world but not from Him; that he may deceive everyone but cannot deceive God; that he can flee from the clutches of anyone else but not from God.
Thus, by setting God's pleasure as the objective of man's life, Islam has furnished the highest possible standard of morality. This is bound to provide limitless avenues for the moral evolution of humanity. By making Divine revelations as the primary source of knowledge it gives permanence and stability to the moral standards which afford reasonable scope for genuine adjustments, adaptations and innovations, though not for perversions, wild variation, atomistic relativism or moral fluidity. It provides a sanction to morality in the love and fear of God, which will impel man to obey the moral law even without any external pressure. Through belief in God and the Day of Judgment it furnishes a force which enables a person to adopt the moral conduct with earnestness and sincerity, with all the devotion of heart and soul.

It does not, through a false sense of originality and innovation, provide any novel moral virtues, nor does it seek to minimize the importance of the well-known moral norms, nor does it give exaggerated importance to some and neglect others without cause. It takes up all the commonly known moral virtues and with a sense of balance and proportion it assigns a suitable place and function to each one of them in the total scheme of life. It widens the scope of man's individual and
collective life - his domestic associations, his civic conduct, and his activities in the political, economic, legal, educational, and social realms. It covers his life from home to society, from the dining-table to the battlefield and peace conferences, literally from the cradle to the grave. In short, no sphere of life is exempt from the universal and comprehensive application of the moral principles of Islam. It makes morality reign supreme and ensures that the affairs of life, instead of dominated by selfish desires and petty interests, should be regulated by norms of morality.

It stipulates for man a system of life which is based on all good and is free from all evil. It invokes the people, not only to practice virtue, but also to establish virtue and eradicate vice, to bid good and to forbid wrong. It wants that the verdict of conscience should prevail and virtue must not be subdued to play second fiddle to evil. It makes an organized effort to establish and enforce goodness and suppress and eradicate evil.

According to Islam, human moral standards are universal and have been well-known to mankind throughout the ages. Good and evil are not myths, but realities well understood by all. A sense of good and evil is inherent in the very nature of man. Hence in the terminology of the Qur’an, good is called Ma’rif (a well-known thing) and evil munkar (an unknown thing); that is to say, good is known to be desirable and evil is known not to commend itself in any way. As the Qur’an says: *Allah has revealed to human nature the consciousness and cognition of good and evil.* (al-Shams 91: 8)
The Islamic Concept of Life and Morality

The viewpoint of Islam is that the universe is the creation of Allah who is One. He alone is its Master, Sovereign and Sustainer, and it is functioning under His command. He is All-powerful and Omniscient, he is subbā h and Quddā s (that is, free from all defects, mistakes, weaknesses and faults and is holy in every respect). His godhood is free from partiality and injustice.

Man is His creature, subject and servant and is born to serve and obey Him. These correct course of life for man is to live in complete obedience to Him. And it is for Allah, not man, to determine the mode of that worship and obey Him. It is the duty of man to live his life according to the dictates of Allah and to follow the Divine guidance.

Man is answerable to Allah for all his actions and will be called on to render an account of them in the Hereafter. Man’s short life on earth is really an opportunity to prepare for that great test. He will be impartially assessed on his conduct in life by a Being who keeps a complete record not merely of his movements and actions and their influence on all that is in the world from the tiniest speck of dust to the highest mountains, but also of his innermost thoughts and feelings and intentions.
The Goal of Moral Effort

This concept of the universe and of man’s place in it indicates the real and ultimate good which should be the object of all mankind’s endeavours seeking the pleasure of Allah. This is the standard by which Islam judges all conduct. It means that man is not left like a ship without moorings at the mercy of winds and tides; instead, we have a set of unchangeable norms for all moral actions. Moreover, by making the ‘pleasure of Allah’ the object of man’s life, unlimited possibilities are opened for man’s moral evolution, untainted by narrow selfishness or racism or chauvinism.

Islam also furnishes us with the means to determine good and evil conduct. It does not base our knowledge of evil and virtue on mere intellect, desire, intuition or experience derived through the senses, which constantly undergo changes and modifications and thus fail to provide definite and unchanging standards of morality. Instead, it provides us with an objective source, the Divine revelation, as embodied in the Book of Allah and the Sunnah (way of life) of the Prophet. This source prescribes a standard of moral conduct that is permanent and universal and holds good in every age and under all circumstances. It does not mean that reason is not given its due place in Islam. In matters of ethics it is not a dogmatic religion. The Koran says, “Call men to the path of your Lord with
wisdom and kindly exhortation. Reason with them in most courteous manner. Your Lord best knows those who stray from His Path and those who are rightly guided.” If you punish, let your punishment be proportionate to the wrong that has been done you. But it shall be best for you to endure your wrongs with patience”.(16:123).

The moral code of Islam ranges from smallest details of domestic life to the field of national and international behaviour. It guides us at every stage in life and makes us free from exclusive dependence on other sources of knowledge, although we may, of course, use these as an aid to this primary source.

Here we furnish some basic moral teachings of Islam for various aspects of a Muslim's life. They cover the broad spectrum of personal moral conduct of a Muslim as well as his social responsibilities.

GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS

The Quran mentions it as the highest quality of a Muslim:

"The most honorable among you in the sight of God is the one who is most God-conscious." (49:13)
Humility, modesty, control of passions and desires, truthfulness, integrity, patience, steadfastness, and fulfilling one's promises are moral values which are emphasized again and again in the Quran. We read in the Quran:

"And God loves those who are firm and steadfast." (3:146)

"And vie with one another to attain to your Sustainer's forgiveness and to a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which awaits the God-conscious, who spend for charity in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and restrain their anger, and pardon their fellow men, for God loves those who do good." (3:133-134)

"Establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong; and bear patiently whatever may befall you; for this is true constancy. And do not swell your cheek (with pride) at men, nor walk in insolence on the earth, for God does not love any man proud and boastful. And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; for the harshest of sounds, indeed, is the braying of the ass." (31:18-19)
In a way which summarizes the moral behaviour of a Muslim, the Prophet said:

"My Sustainer has given me nine commands: to remain conscious of God, whether in private or in public; to speak justly, whether angry or pleased; to show moderation both when poor and when rich, to reunite friendship with those who have broken off with me; to give to him who refuses me; that my silence should be occupied with thought; that my looking should be an admonition; and that I should command what is right."

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The teachings of Islam concerning social responsibilities are based on kindness and consideration of others. Since a broad injunction to be kind is likely to be ignored in specific situations, Islam lays emphasis on specific acts of kindness and defines the responsibilities and rights of various relationships. In a widening circle of relationship, then, our first obligation is to our immediate family - parents, husband or wife and children, then to other relatives, neighbors, friends and acquaintances, orphans and widows, the needy of the community, our fellow Muslims, all our fellow human beings and animals.

PARENTS
Respect and care for parents is very much stressed in the Islamic teaching and is a very important part of a Muslim's expression of faith.

"Your Sustainer has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your lifetime, do not say to them a word of contempt nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility and say: My Sustainer! Bestow on them Your mercy, even as they cherished me in childhood."
(17:23-24)

OTHER RELATIVES

"And render to the relatives their due rights, as (also) to those in need, and to the traveler; and do not squander your wealth in the manner of a spendthrift."
(17:26)

NEIGHBORS

The Prophet (saw) has said:

"He is not a believer who eats his fill when his neighbor beside him is hungry"; and:

"He does not believe whose neighbors are not safe from his injurious conduct." and this includes non-Muslims as well.
According to the Qurān and Sunnah, a Muslim has to discharge his moral responsibility not only to his parents, relatives and neighbours, but to the entire mankind, animals and trees and plants. For example, hunting of birds and animals for the sake of game is not permitted. Similarly, cutting trees and plants which yield fruit is forbidden unless there is a very pressing need for it.

Thus, on the basic moral characteristics, Islam builds a higher system of morality by virtue of which mankind can realize its greatest potential. Islam purifies the soul from self-seeking egotism, tyranny, wantonness and indiscipline. It creates God-conscious men, devoted to their ideals, possessed of piety, abstinence and discipline and uncompromising with falsehood. It induces feelings of moral responsibility and fosters the capacity for self control. Islam generates kindness, generosity, mercy, sympathy, peace, disinterested goodwill, scrupulous fairness and truthfulness towards all creation in all situations. It nourishes noble qualities from which only good may be expected.

**The aim of Ethics in Islam: The Purification of the soul**

Moral virtues in man gain him eternal happiness, while moral corruption leads him to everlasting wretchedness. It is therefore necessary for man to purge and purify
himself of all evil traits of character and adorn his soul with all forms of ethical and moral virtues. Moreover, without having cleansed oneself of all evil habits, it would be impossible to nourish and develop moral virtues in oneself. The human soul can be compared to a mirror in this regard. If we wish to see something beautiful reflected in a mirror, we must first cleanse the mirror, so that dust entered do not disfigure the reflection. Any attempt to obey God’s commands would be fruitful and successful only when one has purified himself of evil habits and tendencies; otherwise, it would be like putting on jewels on a dirt and unwashed bodies. When self purification has been completed and one is completely rid of all evil habits of thought, speech and action, then the soul is ready to receive the unlimited grace of God. Such reception is the ultimate reason for which man was created.

In truth, God’s grace and the divine mysteries are always accessible to man, it is man that must purify his soul and develop within himself the necessary receptivity to benefit from the infinite grace of his creator. In order to attain the ultimate and final perfection, it is necessary to traverse the path of struggle against selfish lusts and immoral tendencies which may exist within the soul, and thus to prepare the soul to receive the grace of God. If man sets foot on the path of self purification, God shall come to his aid and guide him along the path:

*And (as for) those who struggle in our cause, surely we guide them in our ways.*

(29:69)
Islam, like other great religions, has emphasise on ethics for all situations of the man’s life. According to Islam, man has not come into existence on his own end and neither is he a product of natural forces that had somehow, by pure chance, combined to produce life. One of the most important ethical issues of Islamic thought that is called Taqwa, which we can call it as an internal Jihad or internal purification that prophet Mohammad had put great emphasizes on it. Taqwa as a word means; fear of God, it is the fear of earning his displeasure and being deprived of his all abounding mercy. Keeping the foregoing in mind, a person can attain Taqwa if he submits whole heartedly to every order of his Lord. The great stations of perfection in the spiritual life can also be seen in the light of the inner Jihad. To become separate from the impurities of the world inorder to repose in the purity of the divine presence requires an intense Jihad, for our soul as its roots sunk deeply into the transient world which the soul of fallen man mistakes the reality. The Islamic path towards perfection can be conceived in the light of the symbolism of the greater Jihad to which the prophet of Islam, who founded this path on earth, himself reffered.

**The spiritual significance of Jihad**

The Arabic term Jihad usually translated into European languages as holy war or holy defense, more on the bases of its juridical usage in Islam rather than on
its much more universal meaning in the Koran and Hadith, is derived from the root J-h-d whose primary meaning is to strive or to exert one. Its translation into holy war combined with the erroneous notion of Islam prevalent in the west as the ‘religion of the sword’ has help to eclipse its inner and spiritual significance and to distort its connotation.

To understand the spiritual significance of jihad and its wide application to nearly every aspect of human life as understood by Islam, it is necessary to remember that Islam bases itself upon the idea of establishing equilibrium within the being of man as well as in the human society where he functions and fulfils the goals of his earthly life. This equilibrium, which is the terrestrial reflection of Divine Justice and the necessary condition for peace in the human domain, is the basis upon which the soul takes its flight towards that peace which, to use Christian terms, ‘passeth understanding’. If Christian morality sees the aim of the spiritual life and its morality as based on the vertical flight towards that perfection and ideal which is embodied in Christ, Islam sees it in the establishment of equilibrium both outward and inward as the necessary basis for the vertical ascent. The very stability of Islamic society over the centuries, the immutability of Islamic norms embodied in the Shariah, and the timeless character of traditional Islamic civilization which is the consequence of its permanent and immutable prototype are all reflections of both the ideal of equilibrium and its realization as is so evident in the teachings of the Shariah (or
Divine Law) as well as works of Islamic art, that equilibrium which is inseparable from the very name of Islam as being related to salam or peace.

In its most outward sense, Jihad came to mean the defense of dar alislam, that is, the Islamic world, from invasion and intrusion by non-Islamic forces. The earliest wars of Islamic history which threatened the very existence of the young community came to be known as Jihad par excellence in this outward sense of 'holy war'. But it was upon returning from one of these early wars, which was of paramount importance in the survival of the newly established religious community and therefore of cosmic significance, that the prophet nevertheless said to his companions that they had returned from the lesser holy war to the greater holy war, the greater Jihad being the inner battle against all the forces which would prevent man from living according to the theomorphic norm which is his primordial and God given nature. Throughout Islamic history, the lesser holy war has echoed in the Islamic world when parts or the whole of that world have been threatened by forces from without or within. This call has been especially persistent since the nineteenth century with the advent of colonialism and the threat to the very existence of the Islamic world. To seek social justice in accordance with the tenets of the Quran is a way of re-establishing equilibrium in human society, that is, of performing Jihad, as are constructive economic enterprises provided the well-being of the whole person is kept in mind and
material welfare does not become an end in itself; provided one does not lose sight of the Quranic verse.

All of those external forms of Jihad would remain incomplete and in fact contribute to an excessive externalization of human being, if they were not complemented by the greater or inner Jihad which man must carry out continuously within himself for the nobility of the human state resides in the constant tension between what we appear to be and what we really are and the need to transcend ourselves throughout this journey of earthly life in order to become what we are. From the spiritual point of view, all the ‘pillars’ of Islam can be seen as being related to Jihad.

The great stations of perfection in the spiritual life can also be seen in the light of the inner Jihad. To become separate from the impurities of the world in order to repose in the purity of the Divine presence requires an intense Jihad for our soul has its roots sunk deeply into the transient world which the soul of fallen man mistakes for reality. To overcome the lethargy, passivity and indifference of the soul, qualities which have become second nature to man as a result of his forgetting who he is constitutes likewise a constant Jihad. To pull the reigns of the soul from dissipating itself outwardly as a result of its centrifugal tendencies and to bring it back to the centre wherein reside peace and all beauty which the soul seeks in vain in the domain
of multiplicity is again an inner Jihad. To melt the hardened heart into a flowing stream of love which would embrace the whole of creation in virtue of the love for God is to perform the process of inwardly through a work which is none other than an inner struggle and battle against what the soul has become in order to transform it into that which it 'is' and has never ceased to be if only it were to become aware of its own nature.

The inner Jihad or warfare seen spiritually and esoterically can be considered therefore as the key for the understanding of the whole spiritual process, and the path for the realisation of the One which lies at the heart of the Islamic message seen in its totality. The Islamic path towards perfection can be conceived in the light of the symbolism of the greater Jihad to which the Prophet of Islam, who confounded this path on earth, himself referred.