

# **Islamic moral theology: Communal ethics and the ethics of charity**

## **Selected readings from scripture and tradition**

### **Qur'anic passages**

#### **Qur'an 2:261-281**

The likeness of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain which grows seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. And God multiplies for whomsoever He will, and God is All-Encompassing, Knowing. Those who spend their wealth in the way of God and then follow not what they spent with preening or injury shall have their reward with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. An honorable word and forgiveness are better than an act of charity followed by injury. And God is Self-Sufficient, Clement. O you who believe! Do not annul your acts of charity through preening and injury, like he who spends his wealth to be seen by people and believes not in God and the Last Day. His likeness is that of a smooth rock with dust upon it: a downpour strikes it, and leaves it barren. They have no power over anything they have earned. And God guides not the disbelieving people.

And the likeness of those who spend their wealth seeking God's good-pleasure, and out of a confirmation in their souls, is that of a garden upon a hill: a downpour strikes it, and brings forth its fruit twofold. And if a downpour does not strike it, then a soft rain. And God sees whatever you do. Would any of you wish to have a garden of date palms and grape vines with rivers running below, partaking therein of every kind of fruit, and old age then befalling him while he had weak progeny, and a whirlwind with fire then befalling it, such that it is consumed? Thus does God make clear unto you the signs, that you may reflect. O you who believe! Spend of the good things you have earned and of that which We have brought forth for you from the earth, and seek not the bad, spending of it though you would not take it [yourselves] without shutting your eyes to it. And know that God is Self-Sufficient, Praised. Satan threatens you with poverty and commands you to indecency. And God promises you forgiveness from Him, and bounty....

If you disclose your acts of charity, that is well. But if you hide them and give to the poor, that is better for you, and will acquit you of some of your evil deeds. And God is Aware of whatsoever you do. You are not tasked with their guidance, but God guides whomever He wills. Whatever good you spend, it is for yourselves, when you spend only seeking the Face of God. And whatever good you spend shall be paid to you in full, and you shall not be wronged. [It is] for the poor who are constrained in the way of God, who are not able to travel the earth. The ignorant one supposes them to be wealthy because of their restraint. You know them by their mark: they do not ask of people importunately. And whatever good you spend, truly God knows it. Those who spend their wealth by night and by day, secretly and openly, shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.

Those who devour usury shall not rise except as he whom Satan has deranged by his touch rises. That is because they say, "Buying and selling are simply like usury," though God has permitted buying and selling and forbidden usury. One who, after receiving counsel from his Lord, desists, shall have what is past and his affair goes to God. And as for those who go back, they are the inhabitants of the Fire, abiding therein. God blights usury and causes acts of charity to grow. And God loves not any sinful ingrate. Truly those who believe and perform righteous deeds,

maintain the prayer, and give the alms shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. O you who believe! Reverence God, and leave what remains of usury if you are believers. And if you do not, then take notice of a war from God and His Messenger. If you repent, you shall have the principle of your wealth, and you shall neither wrong nor be wronged. And if one is in difficult circumstances, let there be a respite until there is ease, and it is better for you to give [it] as charity, if you but knew. And be mindful of a day when you shall be returned to God. Then every soul will be paid in full for what it earned, and they shall not be wronged.

### **Qur'an 3:92**

You will never attain piety until you spend from that which you love. And whatever you spend, truly God knows it.

### **Qur'an 4:36-38**

Worship God and do not ascribe partners unto Him. And be virtuous toward parents and kinsfolk, toward orphans and the poor, toward the neighbor who is of kin and the neighbor who is not of kin, toward the companion at your side and the traveler, and toward those whom your right hands possess. Truly God does not love the vainglorious boaster, those who are miserly and enjoin people to be miserly, concealing what God has given them from His Bounty. We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment. And those who spend their wealth to be seen by people, and who believe not in God or the Last Day. Whosoever has Satan for a companion has an evil companion indeed!

### **Qur'an 47:38**

Behold! You are those who are called upon to spend in the way of God; yet among you some are miserly. And whosoever is miserly is only miserly towards himself. God is the Rich, and you are the poor. And if you turn away, He will cause a people other than you to take your place, and they will not be the likes of you.

### **Qur'an 49:9-13**

If two parties among the believers fall to fighting, make peace between them. And if one of them aggresses against the other, fight those who aggress until they return to God's Command. And if they return, make peace between them with justice and act equitably. Truly God loves the just. The believers are brothers; so make peace between your brethren, and reverence God, that you may receive mercy. O you who believe! Let not one people deride another; it may be that they are better than them. Nor let women deride other women; it may be that they are better than them. And do not defame yourselves or insult one another with nicknames; how evil is the iniquitous name after having believed! And whosoever does not repent, they are the wrongdoers.

O you who believe! Shun much conjecture. Indeed, some conjecture is a sin. And do not spy upon one another, nor backbite one another. Would any of you desire to eat the dead flesh of his brother? You would despise it. And reverence God. Truly God is Relenting, Merciful. O humankind! Truly We created you from a male and a female, and We made you peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another. Surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you. Truly God is Knowing, Aware.

**Qur'an 76:8-9**

And [the pious] give food, despite loving it, to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, [saying]  
“We feed you only for the Face of God. We do not desire any recompense or thanks from you.”

**Qur'an 4:6-10**

And test the orphans until they reach the age of maturity; then if you perceive in them sound judgment, deliver unto them their property, and do not consume it wastefully and in haste before they come of age. Whoever is rich should abstain, but whoever is poor should partake of it in an honorable way. And when you deliver unto them their property, bring witnesses on their behalf, and God suffices as a Reckoner. Unto the men a share of what parents and kinsfolk leave, and unto the women a share of what parents and kinsfolk leave, be it little or much—a share ordained. And when kinsfolk, orphans, and the indigent are present at the division, make provision from it for them and speak unto them in an honorable way. Let those who would dread if they left behind their own helpless progeny have fear; let them reverence God and speak justly. Truly those who consume the property of orphans unjustly only consume fire in their bellies, and they will burn in a blazing flame.

**Qur'an 9:60**

The charitable offerings are only for the poor, and the indigent, and those working with them, and those whose hearts are [to be] reconciled, and for [ransoming] slaves and for debtors, and in the way of God, and for the traveler: a duty from God. And God is Knowing, Wise.

**Qur'an 90:6-19**

[The human being] says, “I have squandered vast wealth!”  
Does he suppose that no one sees him?  
Did We not make for him two eyes, a tongue, and two lips,  
and guide him upon the two highways?  
Yet he has not assailed the steep pass.  
And what will apprise you of the steep pass?  
[It is] the freeing of a slave,  
or giving food at a time of famine to an orphan near of kin,  
or an indigent person, clinging to the dust,  
while being one of those who believe and exhort one another to patience,  
and exhort one another to compassion.  
Those are the companions of the right.

**Qur'an 101**

Have you seen the one who denies religion?  
That is the one who drives away the orphan,  
and does not urge feeding the indigent.  
So woe unto performers of prayer  
who are heedless of their prayers—  
those who strive to be seen,  
yet refuse small kindnesses.

**Qur'an 9:71**

But the believing men and believing women are protectors of one another, enjoining right and forbidding wrong, performing the prayer, giving the alms, and obeying God and His Messenger. They are those to whom God will have mercy. Truly God is Mighty, Wise.

**Qur'an 17:23-29**

Thy Lord decrees that you worship none but Him and be virtuous to parents. Whether one or both of them reaches old age, do not say "Uff!" to them, nor chide them, but speak unto them a noble word. Lower unto them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, "My Lord! Have mercy upon them, as they raised me when I was small." Your Lord knows best that which is in your souls. If you are righteous, then truly He is Forgiving toward the penitent. Give unto the kinsman his right, and unto the indigent and the traveler, but do not squander wastefully. Truly the wasteful are the brethren of satans, and Satan is ungrateful to his Lord. But if you turn away from them, seeking a mercy from your Lord, for which you hope, then speak unto them a gentle word. And do not let your hand be shackled to your neck, nor let it be entirely open, lest you should sit condemned, full of regret.

**Qur'an 17:34-38**

And do not approach the orphan's property, except in the best manner, until he reaches maturity. And fulfill the pact, surely the pact is called to account. And give full measure when you measure, and weigh with the straight balance. That is better and more virtuous in the end. And do not pursue what you have no knowledge of. Truly hearing, and sight, and the heart—all of these will be called to account. And do not walk exultantly upon the earth; surely you shall not penetrate the earth, nor reach the mountains in height. The evil of all this is loathsome unto your Lord.

**Qur'an 4:135**

O you who believe! Be steadfast maintainers of justice, witnesses for God, though it be against yourselves, or your parents and kinsfolk, and whether it be someone rich or poor, for God is nearer unto both. So follow not your caprice, that you may act justly. If you distort or turn away, truly God is Aware of whatever you do.

**Qur'an 30:37-39**

Have they not considered that God outspreads and straitens provision for whomever He will? Truly in that are signs for a people who believe. So give unto the kinsman his right, and unto the indigent and the traveler. That is better for those who desire the Face of God. It is they who shall prosper. That which you give in usury that it might increase through other people's wealth does not increase with God. But that which you give in alms, desiring the Face of God—it is they who receive a manifold increase.

**Qur'an 89:15-20**

As for man, whenever his Lord tests him, then honors him and blesses him, he says, "My Lord has honored me." And whenever He tries him and straitens his provision, he says, "My Lord has abased me." Nay, but you honor not the orphan, nor urge you the feeding of the indigent. You devour inheritance with rapacious devouring, and love wealth with abounding love.

## Hadith traditions

The Messenger of God said: "The companion who is the best in the sight of God is the one who is best to his companion. And the neighbor that is the best in the sight of God is the one that is best to his neighbor."

Tirmidhi, Jami` at-Tirmidhi #1944

"Abd Allah b. Amr had a sheep slaughtered for his family, so when he came he said: 'Have you given some to our Jewish neighbor? Have you given some to our Jewish neighbor? I heard the Messenger of God saying: [The Archangel] Gabriel continually advised me about [treating] the neighbors [kindly], such that I thought he would order me to make them heirs."

Tirmidhi, Jami` at-Tirmidhi #1943

"The Messenger of God said: 'None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother" (or he said "for his neighbor) what he loves for himself."

Ibn Majah, Sunan Ibn Majah #66

Ibn 'Abbas informed Ibn al-Zubayr, "I heard the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, say, 'He is not a believer whose stomach is filled while his neighbor goes hungry."

Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad #112

My ears heard and my eyes saw the Prophet when he spoke, "Anybody who believes in God and the Last Day, should serve his neighbor generously, and anybody who believes in God and the Last Day should serve his guest generously by giving him his reward." It was asked. "What is his reward, O God's Messenger?" He said, "[To be hosted] for a day and a night with good food and the guest has the right to be entertained for three days, and if he stays longer than that, whatever he is given will be considered charity [for the host]. And anybody who believes in God and the Last Day should speak only what is good or keep quiet.

Bukhari, Sahih al-Bukhari #6019

A man expressed his intention to give charity, so he came out with charity and placed it in the hand of an adulteress. In the morning, the people were talking and saying: charity was given to an adulteress last night....He then again expressed his intention to give charity; so he went out with the charity and placed it in the hand of a rich person. In the morning the people were talking and saying: Charity was given to a rich person....He then expressed his intention to give charity, so he went out with charity and placed it in the hand of a thief. In the morning, the people were talking and saying: Charity was given to a thief....Then [an angel came to the charitable man] and he was told: Your charity has been accepted. As for the adulteress [your charity may be the means] by which she restrains herself from fornication. The rich man might perhaps learn a lesson and [be moved to] spend from what God has given him. And [because of your charity] the thief may refrain from committing theft.

Muslim, Sahih Muslim #1022

When the verses of charity were revealed, we used to work as porters. A man came and distributed objects of charity in abundance. And they (the people) said, "He is [just] showing off." And another man came and gave a very small measure of grain; they said, "God does not need such a small amount of charity." And then the Divine revelation came: *Those who criticize such of the believers who give in charity voluntarily and those who could not find to give in charity except what is available to them.* (Qur'an 9:79).

Sahih al-Bukhari #1415

The Prophet said: The most prevalent kind of usury is going to great lengths to speak unjustly against a fellow Muslim's honor.

Abu Dawud, Sunan Abi Dawud #4876

The Messenger of God cursed the one who accepted usury, the one who paid it, the witness to it, and the one who recorded it.

Abu Dawud, Sunan Abi Dawud #3333

Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "The person who strives on behalf of the widows and poor is like those who strive in the way of God and like those who fast in the day and pray at night."

Bukhari, [Al-Adab Al-Mufrad #131](#)

Al-Hasan said, "I remember a time among the Muslims when they would call out "O family! O family! (Look after) your orphan! [Don't forget] your orphan!" "O family! O family! [Look after] your orphan and the poor among you, [don't forget] the poor among you!" "O family! O family! [Look after] your neighbor! [Don't forget] your neighbor!" Time has been swift in taking the best of you while every day you become baser."

Bukhari, [Al-Adab Al-Mufrad #139](#)