



Bilol KHALMATOV^a 

^a*Master of Theology, Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International*

Kazakh-Turkish University

E-mail: ahliislam1010@mail.com

ETIQUETTE (ADAB) NORMS IN SURAH AL-HUJURAT

An analysis of the moral and ethical principles governing a Muslim's conduct before Allah,
His Messenger and society, based on the 49th chapter of the Qur'an

Abstract. *The article examines the norms of etiquette (adab) set out in Surah al-Hujurat, the 49th chapter of the Qur'an, and analyses them as a unified system of moral and ethical principles. Drawing on the classical exegetical tradition – the commentaries of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi and as-Sa'di – and on the chapters devoted to manners in the collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim, the author first sets out the general characteristics of the surah, its name and the circumstances of its revelation (asbab an-nuzul), and then distinguishes two principal groups of norms: the moral duties of a Muslim before Allah and His Messenger (submission, respect, piety and forgiveness), and the norms governing relations among the members of society (avoiding ill assumptions, refraining from mockery and offensive nicknames, abstaining from spying and backbiting, and upholding brotherhood). The study shows that piety (taqwa) functions as the connecting thread between the personal and the social norms of the surah, and concludes that the principles it establishes are not confined to their historical setting but retain their significance as a source of a culture of mutual trust and respect in contemporary society.*

Keywords: *Surah al-Hujurat, adab, Islamic ethics, akhlaq, asbab an-nuzul, submission, respect, taqwa, forgiveness, ill assumption, backbiting (ghibah), spying (tajassus), brotherhood, culture of human relations.*

INTRODUCTION

The culture of interpersonal relations, and the respect and courtesy shown towards others, is one of the key measures of the spiritual health of any society. Islam places special emphasis on this issue, and the Noble Qur'an contains numerous verses that

shape the moral character of a Muslim. From this perspective, the 49th chapter of the Qur'an – Surah al-Hujurat – occupies a distinctive place. Although short in length, this surah is a valuable source that encompasses the core principles of a Muslim's conduct towards Allah, towards the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and towards the people around him.

This article systematically examines the general characteristics of Surah al-Hujurat and the circumstances of its revelation, followed by the two major groups of etiquette it sets out: the moral duties of a Muslim before Allah and His Messenger, and the norms governing relationships with members of society. The purpose of the article is to analyse the content of the surah's verses in order to reveal the Islamic foundations of a culture of human relations that remains relevant for society today. The study is based on the text of the Qur'an and on the classical exegetical tradition, and employs descriptive, analytical and systematising methods.

MAIN PART

About Surah al-Hujurat: its name

The word "hujurat" is the plural of the Arabic word "hujra", meaning "chamber", "private room" or "dwelling". The surah takes its name from a passage in verse 4, which describes desert Arabs who called out to the Prophet (peace be upon him) loudly from outside his private chambers (Qur'an, 49:4). In some sources the surah is also referred to as "Surat al-Akhlaq" (the Chapter of Morals) or "at-Tathbit", reflecting the essence of its main theme – moral and ethical principles (al-Qurtubi, 1964).

Surah al-Hujurat is a Medinan surah, meaning that it was revealed after the Prophet's migration (hijra) to Medina. It is the 49th chapter of the Qur'an, consists of 18 verses and is located in the 26th juz'. Its Medinan character corresponds to its content: while the Meccan surahs primarily address matters of faith (iman) and the oneness of God (tawhid), the Medinan surahs give greater attention to social relations, law and codes of conduct (as-Sa'di, 2000).

The occasion of revelation (asbab an-nuzul)

Exegetical works (tafsir) describe the circumstances behind the revelation of the different verses of the surah individually. According to the reports, the first five verses were revealed in connection with certain Companions or delegations of desert Arabs who raised their voices in the Prophet's presence or called out to him loudly from

outside his home, thereby teaching Muslims the proper way of showing respect towards the Prophet (Ibn Kathir, 1999).

The occasion for verse 6 is reported to involve the Companion al-Walid ibn ‘Uqba, who was sent to a tribe to collect zakat but, out of fear, delivered a false report before reaching them, nearly triggering a conflict. This incident taught Muslims the necessity of verifying any piece of news before acting upon it (Ibn Kathir, 1999; Qur’an, 49:6).

The reports concerning verse 11 describe certain Companions mocking one another over past shortcomings or physical appearance. Verse 12 is linked to an account involving Salman al-Farisi, who was the subject of backbiting after falling asleep (al-Qurtubi, 1964). These concrete episodes from real life gave rise to the verses of the surah dealing with social conduct.

A Muslim’s moral etiquette before Allah and His Messenger

The opening section of the surah (verses 1–5) is devoted entirely to the fundamental principles governing a Muslim’s relationship with Allah and His Messenger. Four core norms of etiquette stand out in this section.

Submission (obedience). In the first verse believers are commanded not to “advance ahead” of Allah and His Messenger – that is, not to place their own opinion or decision above the ruling of Allah and the Prophet in any matter (Qur’an, 49:1). This represents the most fundamental expression of faith: in every area of life a Muslim must first turn to the command of Allah and to the practice (sunnah) of the Prophet, adding his own judgement only afterwards. Such submission is understood not as coerced obedience, but as a conscious choice arising from faith (as-Sa‘di, 2000).

Respect. Verses 2–3 instruct believers not to raise their voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor to speak to him as loudly and casually as they might speak to one another. The verses state that Allah has tested the hearts of those who lower their voices in the Prophet’s presence for piety (taqwa), and that forgiveness and a great reward await them (Qur’an, 49:2–3). This principle is understood not only as pertaining to the Prophet’s lifetime, but as a broader model for the culture of respect owed to elders, scholars and parents (Ibn Kathir, 1999).

Piety (taqwa). Throughout the surah the call to fear Allah, or to be mindful of Him, is repeated several times. Taqwa is regarded as the underlying foundation of all the norms of etiquette set out in the surah, for it is only when a person feels that Allah is watching at every moment that he observes proper conduct out of genuine inner conviction rather

than for outward show. In this way taqwa serves as the thread connecting both the personal moral qualities and the social norms described in the surah (al-Ghazali, n.d.).

Forgiveness. In the fifth verse, after stating that it would have been better for those who called out to the Prophet from outside had they waited patiently for him to come out, the surah emphasises that Allah is Oft-Forgiving and Most Merciful (Qur'an, 49:5). This teaches a principle of understanding and of leaving room for forgiveness rather than harsh punishment towards those who err. Muslims, too, are called to emulate this divine attribute by being patient and forgiving towards the faults of others (as-Sa'di, 2000).

Etiquette in relations with other people

The latter part of the surah (verses 6–13) is devoted to specific moral and legal norms governing relations among the members of society. This section is regarded as one of the principal sources of social ethics in Islam.

Avoiding ill assumptions. Verse 12 commands believers to avoid baseless suspicion of one another, stating that much suspicion is sin (Qur'an, 49:12). This principle aims to prevent the mistrust and the unfounded accusation that arise between people: forming a negative opinion of someone without clear evidence harms both the person who holds it and the social relationship itself (al-Qurtubi, 1964).

Mockery and offensive nicknames. Verse 11 commands that men should not mock other men, nor women mock other women, since the one mocked may well be better than the one who mocks. It further prohibits assigning others hurtful nicknames, warning that a name of disobedience after faith is an evil thing and that such behaviour is incompatible with true belief (Qur'an, 49:11; al-Bukhari, 2001).

Spying and seeking out the faults of others. The same verse, 12, directly prohibits spying (tajassus) and backbiting (ghiba). The verse compares one who backbites to a person who eats the flesh of his dead brother – a vivid image underscoring how repugnant backbiting is to human dignity (Qur'an, 49:12; Muslim, 1955). In this way the surah establishes the protection of a person's private life and reputation as an integral part of Islamic ethics.

Brotherhood. Verse 10 declares that the believers are but brothers, and that reconciling any two parties in dispute is the duty of the Muslim community (Qur'an, 49:10). The surah's concluding verse, 13, explains that humanity was created into different nations and tribes not so that one might conquer or dominate another, but so that people might come to know one another. The verse closes by affirming that the most

honoured in the sight of Allah is the one most mindful of Him, thereby establishing the true measure of equality and brotherhood among people (Qur'an, 49:13; Yasawi, 2018).

CONCLUSION

As this analysis has shown, although Surah al-Hujurat is short in length, it comprehensively addresses the principal dimensions of a Muslim's moral and ethical life. It sets out a system of etiquette that ranges from inward, spiritual conduct – submission, respect, piety and forgiveness towards Allah and the Prophet – to outward, social norms concerning relations with others: avoiding ill assumptions, refraining from backbiting and mockery, abstaining from spying, and upholding brotherhood.

A further conclusion of the analysis is that these two groups of norms are not separate from one another: piety (taqwa), repeatedly invoked throughout the surah, links the inward and the outward dimensions, since it is the inner awareness of being observed by Allah that makes the observance of social norms sincere rather than merely formal.

In this way Surah al-Hujurat stands as one of the primary sources of Islamic ethics (akhlaq). The principles it sets forth are not confined to their historical period; they remain timeless values capable of making a significant contribution to shaping a culture of mutual trust and respect among people in contemporary society as well.

REFERENCES

1. Al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Isma'il (2001). *Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Manners (Kitab al-adab)*. Beirut: Dar Tawq an-Najat. (in Arabic)
2. Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid (n.d.). *Ihya' 'ulum ad-din [The Revival of the Religious Sciences]*, chapter on Etiquette (Adab). Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa. (in Arabic)
3. Al-Qurtubi, Muhammad ibn Ahmad (1964). *Al-Jami' li ahkam al-Qur'an*. Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya. (in Arabic)
4. As-Sa'di, 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Nasir (2000). *Taysir al-Karim ar-Rahman fi tafsir kalam al-Mannan*. Beirut: Mu'assasat ar-Risala. (in Arabic)
5. Ibn Kathir, Isma'il (1999). *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim (commentary on Surah al-Hujurat)*. Riyadh: Dar Tayyiba. (in Arabic)
6. Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (1955). *Sahih Muslim, Book of Virtue, Enjoining Good Manners and Joining of the Ties of Kinship*. Beirut: Dar Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi. (in Arabic)
7. The Noble Qur'an. English translation of the meanings.
8. Yasawi, T. (2018). *Human Values in the Verses of the Qur'an*. Almaty: Center for the Study of Religious Affairs. (in Kazakh)