

The Power of Ihsan: The Heart of Islam

Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters!

Every society wants peace, justice, kindness, and strong relationships. Governments can establish laws, courts can enforce justice, and institutions can maintain order, but none of these alone can create a truly compassionate society. What transforms a community from merely functioning to genuinely flourishing is a quality that goes beyond obligation. Islam calls this quality Ihsan.

Many Muslims think Ihsan only refers to spiritual excellence in worship. While that is one of its meanings, the Qur'an uses the word in many different contexts. Sometimes it means giving generously, sometimes forgiving those who hurt us, sometimes overlooking the mistakes of others, sometimes working for peace in society, and at its highest level, worshipping Allah with complete sincerity and awareness. Thus, Ihsan is not confined to the mosque. It governs our homes, businesses, friendships, marriages, neighborhoods, and every human interaction.

The Qur'an repeatedly praises the Muḥsinīn (those who practice Ihsan). More than thirty times Allah speaks about them, promising them His love, mercy, guidance, and reward. This repetition shows that Ihsan is not an optional virtue but one of the foundations upon which Islam builds both individuals and civilizations. Today's khutbah explores the many dimensions of Ihsan and how it can transform our lives and our communities.

1. Ihsan: A Central Principle of Islam

One of the most beautiful and comprehensive concepts in Islam is Ihsan. It is a word that cannot be fully translated by a single English term. It includes kindness, excellence, generosity, mercy, compassion, and doing more than is merely required. Ihsan means striving to do every act in the best possible way, whether in worship, family life, business, or serving humanity. It is the spirit that brings beauty and sincerity to every command of Islam.

The Qur'an repeatedly commands believers to practice Ihsan:

وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

"Practice Ihsan (do good), for indeed Allah loves those who excel in goodness." (Al-Baqarah 2:195)

Notice that Allah does not simply promise a reward. He says, "Allah loves the Muḥsinīn." Every believer hopes to enter Paradise, but an even greater honor is to earn the love of Allah. Throughout the Qur'an, Allah repeatedly links Ihsan with His greatest blessings. He says:

Allah says:

لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا الْحُسْنَىٰ وَزِيَادَةٌ

"For those who practice Ihsan is the finest reward, and even more." (Yunus 10:26)

The scholars explain that "al-Husna" refers to Paradise, while "ziyadah" (something more) refers to the greatest blessing of all: the believers being granted the honor of seeing Allah in the Hereafter. Thus, Iḥsān is not merely a path to Jannah; it is a path to the highest reward that any believer can ever receive.

This repeated emphasis teaches us an important lesson. Islam is not satisfied with us doing the bare minimum. It does not simply ask us to avoid sin or fulfill obligations. Islam encourages us to rise above the minimum standard. Justice is obligatory, but Ihsan goes beyond justice. Charity is commendable, but Ihsan gives without expecting anything in return. Forgiveness is noble, but Ihsan forgives even when one can retaliate. Worship is required, but Ihsan is to worship Allah with complete sincerity and awareness of His presence.

For this reason, the Qur'an mentions the Muḥsinīn more than thirty times, attaching to them Allah's love, mercy, companionship, guidance, forgiveness, and the highest reward in the Hereafter. This shows that Ihsan is not a secondary virtue. It is one of the defining characteristics of a true believer and one of the highest objectives of Islam. A Muslim should therefore ask himself every day: *Am I merely fulfilling my duties, or am I striving to become among the Muḥsinīn whom Allah loves?*

2. The First Meaning of Ihsan: Giving and Helping Others

One of the most common meanings of Ihsan is to do good to others by helping them with whatever Allah has blessed us with. Not everyone can give money, but everyone can give something. A kind word, a helping hand, sincere advice, sharing knowledge, visiting the sick, supporting a struggling family, or simply giving your time to someone in need are all

forms of Ihsan. Islam encourages us to become people who benefit others, because the Prophet ﷺ said,

أَحَبُّ النَّاسِ إِلَى اللَّهِ أَنْفَعُهُمْ لِلنَّاسِ

"The most beloved people to Allah are those who are most beneficial to others." (al-Mu'jam al-Awsat)

However, Islam also teaches that the value of our good deeds depends on our sincerity. Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُبْطِلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَى

"O believers! Do not invalidate your charity with reminders of your generosity or hurtful words." (2:264)

Sadly, some people help others but later remind them of their favors whenever there is a disagreement. They may say, "Remember what I did for you," or make the other person feel indebted or humiliated. Allah tells us that such reminders can erase the reward of charity because they hurt the dignity of the person we helped.

The Prophet ﷺ gave a serious warning:

ثَلَاثَةٌ لَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ... الْمَنَانُ بِمَا أُعْطِيَ

"Among the three whom Allah will neither speak to nor purify on the Day of Resurrection is the one who reminds people of what he has given them." (Sahih Muslim)

A true believer helps only to please Allah, not to earn praise, control others, or make people feel obligated. When we give for Allah's sake, we should forget what we gave and never use it as a means of boasting or demanding gratitude. This is the true spirit of Ihsan. It preserves the honor of those in need and earns the pleasure and reward of Allah.

3. The Second Meaning of Ihsan: Forgiving Others

Another beautiful meaning of Ihsan is to forgive those who have wronged us. Justice allows us to demand our rights and hold others accountable. Islam recognizes that right. However, Ihsan calls us to a higher standard. Instead of insisting on revenge or repayment, it encourages us to forgive for the sake of Allah. This is why we say justice gives people what they deserve, but Ihsan gives them better than they deserve.

Allah praises those who possess this noble quality:

وَالْكَاظِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

*"Those who restrain their anger and forgive people. Allah loves those who practice Ihsan."
(Al-Imran 3:134)*

No family is free from disagreements, no marriage is without misunderstandings, and no friendship is without disappointment. If every mistake is met with anger and every hurt with retaliation, relationships will eventually fall apart. Forgiveness keeps hearts united and allows relationships to heal.

Forgiveness is not a sign of weakness or surrender. It is a sign of inner strength and self-control. It means controlling your anger when you have the power to respond. The strongest people are not those who defeat others, but those who master their own emotions. A person who forgives for the sake of Allah earns not only peace in this world but also the love and reward of Allah in the Hereafter.

4. The Third Meaning of Ihsan: Overlooking People's Mistakes

Another beautiful dimension of Ihsan is not only forgiving others but also overlooking their mistakes. Sometimes forgiveness alone is not enough. A person may say, "I forgive you," yet continue to remind the other person of their past whenever a disagreement arises. Islam teaches us something even higher than forgiveness: to pardon and move on.

Allah instructed the Prophet ﷺ:

فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاصْفَحْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

"Pardon them and overlook their faults. Indeed, Allah loves those who practice Ihsan." (Al-Ma'idah 5:13)

The scholars explain that 'afw (العفو) means to forgive by removing blame, while ṣafḥ (الصفح) means to turn the page completely and not continue bringing up the mistake. It is like erasing a mark instead of simply covering it.

Many families, friendships, and communities remain divided because old mistakes are repeatedly mentioned. Every new argument becomes an opportunity to reopen old wounds. Such behavior prevents trust from being rebuilt and keeps relationships trapped in the past.

A person who practices Ihsan does not keep a record of every fault. He gives people the chance to improve and begin again. By overlooking mistakes for the sake of Allah, we protect our hearts from resentment, strengthen our relationships, and earn the love of Allah, who loves the Muḥsinīn.

5. The Fourth Meaning of Ihsan: Building Peace in Society

Another important meaning of Ihsan is working to build peace and harmony in society. Islam does not only ask us to avoid wrongdoing ourselves; it also encourages us to become people who bring goodness, solve problems, and strengthen relationships. A believer should leave every place better than he found it.

Allah says:

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا

"Do not spread corruption on the earth after it has been set right." (Al-A'raf 7:56)

Immediately after this command, Allah says:

إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

"Indeed, the mercy of Allah is near to those who practice Ihsan."

The connection is clear. Those who work for peace, reconciliation, and the well-being of others are among the people closest to Allah's mercy.

Corruption is not limited to violence or crime. It also includes spreading rumors, gossip, hatred, injustice, racism, dishonesty, and creating division within families or communities. Every word or action that destroys trust and harmony is a form of corruption.

A Muslim should never be the cause of conflict or division. Instead, he should become a source of reconciliation, unity, kindness, and mercy. Whether at home, in the mosque, at work, or in society, a believer should strive to calm tensions, settle disputes, and bring people together. This is the true spirit of Ihsan, and through it we become deserving of Allah's mercy and pleasure.

6. The Highest Meaning of Ihsan: Excellence in Worship

The highest and most complete meaning of Ihsan is excellence in our relationship with Allah. While Ihsan includes kindness to people, its greatest expression is to worship Allah with complete sincerity, devotion, and awareness of His presence. The Qur'an reminds us that there is a difference between outward submission and true faith. Allah says:

قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا قُلْ لَّمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا

"The Bedouins say, 'We have believed.' Say, 'You have not believed; rather say, we have submitted, for faith has not yet entered your hearts.'" (Al-Hujurat 49:14)

This verse teaches us that Islam is more than outward actions. True faith must enter the heart and transform our character and worship.

The famous Hadith of Jibril explains that our religion has three levels: Islam, Iman, and Ihsan. When Jibril asked the Prophet ﷺ about Ihsan, he replied:

أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ، فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ

"To worship Allah as though you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, then know that He certainly sees you."

This is the highest spiritual station. A person who lives with this awareness prays with humility, speaks truthfully, avoids sin even in private, and fulfills every duty with sincerity. Knowing that Allah is always watching fills the heart with sincerity, strengthens faith, and inspires excellence in every aspect of life. This is the ultimate meaning of Ihsan.

Conclusion

Dear brothers and sisters!

Ihsan is not an optional quality for a few pious people. It is the heart of Islam and the character of every true believer. Allah wants us to rise above the minimum. It is easy to take our rights, but Ihsan teaches us to give more than we take, forgive when we can retaliate, overlook faults, help others sincerely, and worship Allah with excellence.

Imagine what our homes, masājid, and communities would look like if every Muslim practiced Ihsan. Families would become stronger, friendships would be restored, communities would be united, and many conflicts would disappear. Every one of us has the opportunity to practice Ihsan every day through our words, our actions, and our dealings with others.

Let us strive to become among the Muḥsinīn, those whom Allah loves, whose deeds He accepts, whose hearts He fills with mercy, and whom He rewards with Paradise and the honor of seeing Him in the Hereafter. May Allah make us people of Ihsan in our worship, our character, and our service to humanity. Amīn.