

The Concept of Islamic Work Ethic: An Analysis of Some Salient Points in the Prophetic Tradition

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Abstract

The issue of work ethics and value systems associated with work has captured the attention of scholars for the past seven decades. Most discussions about these topics have been concerned with Judeo-Christian contributions and, to a large extent, have been carried out in Western societies. Despite the fact that many other religions and ethnic groups have achieved prosperity and tremendous economic advancement during part of their history, their contributions have been almost totally ignored in management literature and in the discourse on work ethics. The Islamic view of work and ethical considerations have either been misunderstood or not widely studied in the field of organization studies. Thus, bearing the above in mind, this paper analyzes the concept of work ethics from the prophetic tradition. Although admitting that Hadith should be part of understanding the Qur'an, nonetheless, this research focuses primarily on the Hadith by deliberately separating the treatment of the concept of work ethics in Hadith literature from the Qur'an. To fulfill its aim, it examines some characteristics and attitudes which are central to Islamic work ethics, such as attitudes to wealth, attitudes to livelihood, attitudes to time and attitudes to leisure. Through this, it came to the conclusion that the concept of work ethics is part and parcel of the Islamic tradition when properly analyzed, especially through the Hadith traditions, and it can serve its purpose in the work place as is the case in the Judeo-Christian traditions.

Keywords: Work, Ethics, Islam, Hadith, Prophet,

Introduction

Along with the growth of industrial productivity, many countries, either from the west or the east, have experienced ethical chaos, such as the growth of corruption, exploitation of the weak, unabated materialism, pollution and widespread immorality and the destruction of the social fabric of the family. However, Islam as a comprehensive religion and a complete way of life can proffer some solutions to this chaotic situation especially to the Muslims. In fact, had the Islamic work ethics being adhered to, the Muslims could have become the dominant power long ago. This is because, with abundance of natural resources and a comprehensive religion like Islam, Muslims ought to be the economic and political power of the world. Unfortunately, they are still left far behind compared to other nations. The Muslim world has been in a state of pervasive decadence for several centuries. This negative state permeates the activities and the actions not only of the general masses but also of the reform movements. In order to move ahead, Muslims have to admit their malaise and start doing something to overcome it. The Qur'an and *Sunnah* contained much guidance which could form the Muslim's key to success. Through the concept of work ethics which is contained in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, Muslims should now move ahead to achieve higher levels ethically and economically in order to overcome the non-Muslim dominance in all aspect of human lives.

In the light of the above, this paper attempt an analysis of the Islamic work ethics from the point of view of the prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) by examining some characteristics and attitudes which are central to Islamic work ethics, such as attitudes to wealth, attitudes to livelihood, attitudes to time and attitudes to leisure, through the prism of the prophetic *Hadith*. However, in order to carry out this research, this paper is divided into three parts. The first part is concern with the definition of terms and understanding of concepts in the discourse. The second part focuses on the relationship between Islam and work ethics and in this context looks at the different shades of what Islam says about work, attitudes to wealth, attitudes to livelihood, attitudes to time and attitudes to leisure as well as Islam and the concept of motivation. The third and final part of the paper contains the conclusion reached at the end of the research on Islam and work ethics.

Definition of Concepts

Ethics

The term Ethics can be defined as “the activity of applying moral precept to concrete problems” (Wines, 1992: 883). Johnson (1984: 1) defines ethics as “the science of conduct”. Ethics is a science in a sense that its study represents an intellectual enterprise, a rational enquiry into its subject matter in the hope of gaining “acquired knowledge”. As such, ethics can be contrasted with art, religion or technology. Besides that, philosophers also speak of ethics as a normative science because it concerns itself with norms or standards of behavior.

Akhlaq

Akhlaq is the appropriate term in Arabic that stands for the translation of the word ethics. The root from which it derives its meaning means “to create, to shape, to give form, to mould or to produce (Ba’labaki, 1990: 521). While the term Akhlaq is a plural of khuluq, referring to collections of distinct traits of character, the knowledge of morality (ilm al-Akhlaq) is translated as ethics, moral sciences or moral philosophy (Ba’labaki, 1990: 521). Akhlaq from Islamic point of view is different from western perspectives. Ethics, according to western sociologists is relatively dependent on individual perspective in order to determine good or bad. However, in Islam, the source of ethics is its religious institution, transmitting a divine revelation to mankind. In other word, the Quran and Sunnah automatically become the source of akhlaq in Islam. Thus, all modes of behavior and character traits derived their goodness or badness from the sanction or otherwise of the holy book and the sayings and practices of the prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) who himself has been described as the best model of behavior for all believers.

Islam and Work Ethics: An Analysis of Some Salient Points in the Prophetic Tradition

1. Islam and work

Islam lays great emphasis on work. In many places in the Quran and *Hadith*, it has been made clear that time should not be wasted. In the Qur’an, Allah draws attention to all the magnificent creations as an indication of the proper planning that leads to wonderful results—for Muslims believe that He creates nothing haphazardly. God relates in the Qur’an how the heavens and the earth were created in seven days and describes that as a sign for humankind. Then the Qur’an directs a message to humanity that they should contribute positively to the earth, that is, they should work to make use of what is created for their benefit:

That man can have nothing but what he strives for; That (the fruit of) his striving will soon come in sight: Then will he be rewarded with a reward complete. (An-Najm 53:39-41)

In Islam, work is given special importance to the extent that it is considered as an act of worship itself. Although some people believe that they are not obliged to work because they dedicate themselves to worshipping God, this is actually a wrong perception of the concept of worship. The Muslim scholar Imam Al-Ghazali mentioned in his book *Ihya’ `Ulum Ad-Deen* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) that Jesus (peace and blessings be upon him) once saw a man who had completely devoted himself to worship. When he asked him how he got his daily bread, the man replied that his brother, who worked, provided him with food. Jesus then told him, “That brother of yours is more religious than you are” (al-Ghazali, 1988). Al-Ghazali also mentions the Prophet’s Companion `Umar ibn Al-Khattab, who used to stress this point further by telling people, “Never should anyone of you think that *du`aa*’ (supplication) for sustenance without work will avail him, for heaven never rains gold nor silver” (al-Ghazali, 1988). Therefore, Islam lays a lot of emphasis on work and the need for man to work in earning his livelihood so as to be independent, self-sufficient and in order to uphold his dignity among his peers and in his community/society.

2. Islamic Work Ethics

Scholars have endeavored to define work ethics relating to the value system of people. Parnes and Andrian define work ethics as "... beliefs about the moral superiority of hard work over leisure or idleness, craft pride over carelessness, sacrifice over profligacy, earned over unearned income and positive over negatives towards work" (Parnes and Andriasani, 1983, 102). Barbash defines work ethics as "a commitment to work hard which is stronger than just providing a living" (Barbash, (1983, 4-5). Islamic work ethics is much more than that, being multi-dimensional and related to various aspects of life such as social, political and economic. Islamic work ethics could be defined as a set of values or system of beliefs derived from the Qur'an and *Sunnah* concerning work and hard work. Kamal Hassan has listed five attributes of the Islamic work ethics. These are as follows:

1. Employees have to fulfill their job for the societal obligation with purpose to seek pleasure of Allah.
2. Trustworthiness as a vicegerent of Allah which comprehends all aspects of living as a human.
3. Muslim must perform his duty as a religious obligation as well as implements all ritual obligations. Motivational reward is not only linked with earthly reward but also awarded in the hereafter.
4. Employees must adhere to diligence and efficiency as well as fairness in preserving public interest.
5. Employer-employee relationships are based on human value which is beyond race, color, language and inheritance.

Thus, from all the above, it is clear that Islamic work ethics goes beyond hard work as it includes the concept of worship which is geared towards pleasing one's Lord and Creator. Work ethics in Islam in as much as it brings material gains also has its own spiritual dimension and connection to the Divine whose pleasure Muslims seek to earn in everything that they do.

3. Islamic Work Ethics in the Sunnah

It is clear that in Islam, work is not only important, but necessary. This article will try to discuss some attitudes which are central to Islamic work ethics from the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad. These attitudes are: attitude to wealth, attitude to livelihood, attitude to time and attitude to leisure.

A. Attitude to wealth

Bellamy, (1956:50) in his dissertation infers that there are many contradictions in the *Hadith* about praise and condemnation of wealth and poverty. First, he mentions that some *Hadith* seems to condemn wealth. He quotes a *Hadith* which he narrated from al-Baihaqi as follows: "It is reported in the Hadith that the patient poor man will enter heaven before the grateful rich man by forty years" (al-Baihaqi).

Similarly, Bellamy quotes the Prophet as saying "Love of the world is the beginning of all sin" (Bellamy, *ibid*: 54). Then, Bellamy sums up that the implication of these *Hadiths* is that there is something essentially evil in wealth which leads to it's owner being penalized even if he has no wrong doings (Bellamy, *Ibid*: 51). In order to support his view point about such contradictions, he mentions two other *Hadiths* in which, he says, the Prophet praises wealth. Al-Raghib al-Isbahani narrates: "The Prophet used to take refuge against disbelief and poverty, and a man asked him, 'are they the same? He replied: Yes, poverty is almost disbelief". In another place, the Prophet mentions "O God, I ask you for guidance, piety, modesty, and wealth. He also said: good and aid to fear of God is wealth" (Bellamy: *Ibid*: 59). Bellamy concludes by suggesting that the sets of *Hadith* which blames wealth are the older elements in Islamic religious literature. While the other sets of *Hadith* which praises wealth are the latest elements. He claims the latest to be an aid to the salvation of the Muslims. Wealth, claims Bellamy, at that time was really needed to buy weapons. Therefore, he concludes, the two sets of such conflicting *Hadiths*, praising and blaming wealth, could not have sprung from a single source (Bellamy, *Ibid*: 60).

Our point of view strongly disagrees with Bellamy's assumptions based on the following reasons. Firstly, Bellamy seems to think that the Prophet blamed wealth at the period of Makkah, but changed his utterance by praising it at the time of Madinah period. This view contradicts historical statements; whereby there are many narrations that state that the Prophet blamed wealth after the war of Uhud. This statement was narrated by Bukhary who mentioned that the Prophet seems to disregard wealth after Uhud's war (Kandahlawi, 1987: 259). Secondly, many companions strived hard to work in order to gain wealth. The Prophet never stopped them from gaining wealth whether during the Makkah period or Madinah period.

There is no doubt that the Prophet does not like the amassing of wealth or using it solely for one's enjoyment or for leading a luxurious life. Indeed, all Islamic legislations in matters of finance are geared towards a fair distribution of wealth. There is nothing in the *Hadith* which can be construed as forbidding the ownership of much money, or, more plainly, being rich. Some of the Prophet's companions were rich and we do not find any *Hadith* which tells them to get rid of their wealth. Indeed, the Prophet received donations from such people and thanked them for their generosity. The clearest example is Uthman who was one of the wealthiest people in Arabia at the time of the prophet. When the Prophet called on his companions to donate generously for the mobilization of an army to fight Byzantine Empire, Uthman came up with a donation which pleased the Prophet immensely. The Prophet was speaking on the pulpit when Uthman offered one hundred horses with all the equipment necessary for a horseman to have on such a campaign. The Prophet accepted and prayed for Uthman. As the Prophet went one step down, Uthman told him that he was donating another one hundred equipped horses. The Prophet again prayed for him and went another step down. At this point, Uthman increased his donation to three hundred horses.

In another narration, the Prophet stopped and signed with his finger to the right and left and prayed for Uthman and said his famous statement: "Nothing that Uthman may do in future will harm him." This means that Uthman would be forgiven any slip or mistake that he might do subsequent to such a great donation which amounted to the equipment of a full army by the standards of the time. There were other companions of the Prophet who were also rich, notably, Abdul Rahman Ibn Auf, who was one of the ten companions of the Prophet given the happiest news of all: the surety of admission to paradise in the hereafter. There is nothing wrong from the Islamic point of view in being rich, provided that one makes the right use of one's riches. Furthermore, to be rich is not synonymous with hoarding up of money, whether it is the modern currency type or silver and gold. The two are not different. What does, then, constitute hoarding? According to eminent scholars and commentators of the Qur'an, the payment of zakah makes all the difference. If one pays the zakah of his wealth on time, this payment serves as purification of the money and ensures that he is not included among those threatened by the verses of punishment due to hoarding.

O you who believe! Verily, there are many of the (Jewish) rabbis and the (Christian) monks who devour the wealth of mankind in falsehood, and hinder (them) from the Way of Allah (i.e. Allah's religion of Islamic Monotheism). And those who hoard up gold and silver [Al-Kanz: the money, the Zakat of which has not been paid] and spend them not in the Way of Allah, announce unto them a painful torment. (At-Taubah, Chapter 9, Verse 34)

On the Day when that (Al-Kanz: money, gold and silver the Zakat of which has not been paid) will be heated in the Fire of Hell and with it will be branded their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs, (and it will be said unto them): "This is the treasure which you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard." (At-Taubah, Chapter 9, Verse 35)

Al-Bukhari relates on the authority of Abdullah Ibn Umar that "this warning was applicable before legislation of zakah. When zakah was made a duty, Allah made it serve as purification of money." Abdullah Ibn Umar is further reported to have said that: "The wealth from which zakah is paid is not hoarded, even if it is stored under seven layers of earth. What is in a person's hands is hoarded if he does not pay zakah for it." It is certainly the case that zakah is spent to serve the cause of Allah. This is true when zakah is paid to the poor and the needy, or to any other class of beneficiaries, not merely when it is paid to finance a campaign of jihad.

B. Attitude to Livelihood

There are plenty of *Hadith* from early collections which praise work. Many narrations established that the Prophet had asked Muslims to work. Miqdam ibn Ma'adi narrates the tradition that says that the Prophet says: "if someone goes out to seek nourishment for his small children, he is in the way of Allah. And if he works for his old father and mother he is in the way of Allah. And if he works for himself for modesty, it is in the way of Allah, but if he works for the purpose of pride and boasting, he is in the way of Satan." (Tabarani). Similarly, in another narration the Prophet says:

“Hadrat Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said that when a man of the Ansar came to Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him) and begged from him, he asked him whether he had nothing in his house. When he said that he had a piece of cloth, which he used for wearing as well as for spreading on the ground, and a wooden bowl from which he drank water, he told him to bring them to him, and when he did so he took them in his hand and asked, "Who will buy these?" When a man offered a dirham he asked twice or thrice. "Who will offer more than a dirham?" and he gave them to a man who offered two dirhams. He then took the two dirhams and giving them to the Ansari he said, "Buy food with one of them and hand it to your family, and buy an axe with the other and bring it to me." When he bought it, Allah's Prophetic Messenger fixed a handle on it with his own hand and said, "Go gather firewood and sell it, and don't let me see you for a fortnight." The man went away and gathered firewood and sold it. When he had earned ten dirhams he came to him and bought a garment with some of them and food with others. Then Allah's Prophetic Messenger said, "This is better for you than that begging should come as a spot on your face on the Day of Resurrection. Begging is right for only three people: one who is in grinding poverty, one who is seriously in debt, or one who is responsible for blood-wit he finds it difficult to pay." (Abu Dawud)

The Prophet Muhammad himself, who is considered a paragon of virtues in Islam, used to pray seeking God's refuge from laziness or idleness. Even before he was chosen as a messenger of God, he was a hardworking person. This earned him the respect of his employer, Khadijah, who later proposed marriage to him because of all the merits and virtues she saw in him.

In his instructions to Muslims on this aspect, the Prophet Muhammad strikes a balance between worship and work. So, in as much as Muslims have to be constant in their acts of worship, they also have to work hard to earn a living, as it is recorded in one of the sayings of the scholars: “Work hard (for earning a living and survival) as if you are going to die”. Also, in exhorting Muslims on the importance of work, the Prophet Muhammad made it clear that getting one's sustenance from one's work is one of the praiseworthy acts of worship. It is recorded in his traditions how he turned a man who came to him begging into a productive member of the society by teaching him how to work and provide for himself.

The meaning of the Prophet's saying is obvious. Those *Hadiths* reveal that working hard and earning bread through honest means is equivalent to jihad. It is also an equal to the defense of an Islamic state and the word *shahadah*. Once a man promised himself that he would work hard, he not only ensures the fullest use of his conscious experience but also thanks Allah for the gift of brawn and mind and all that is in this world and hereafter. The matter of gaining a livelihood is closely associated with wealth and poverty. The following quotation impresses on one the rightness of working for oneself and avoiding dependence on the others, and emphasizes especially the relationship between an activity in this world and its result in the hereafter. The Messenger of God (s.a.w) said: “Allah loves the servant who has an occupation. He said: Allah hates healthy servant who is unoccupied: and he said: He who gains his nourishment and does not beg from people, Allah will not punish him on the day of resurrection... and there is no one more beloved of Allah” (Abu Dawud). This shows that Allah hates one who is not occupied with activities of this world and the Hereafter. In addition, the implication of the last Traditions seems to be that it is just as bad as to neglect worldly activities as failing to work for the hereafter. Another *Hadith* which introduces the ever present idea of ‘permitted thing’ which is of much concerned to a good Muslim, is the following; “the best gain is the gain of the hand of him who is sincere (Muhadarat, 1: 283). There is another version of Prophet Daud's saying, which emphasizes the value of working with one's hand and also describes the invention of an important skill. The Prophet says: “No one ate better food than the person who labored with his own hand. And verily the prophet, Daud, ate his victuals from his own earnings” (Bukhari) Similarly, it was narrated that the famous companion, Abu Masud al-Nasari, says ‘the prophet (s.a.w) exhorted us to spend in the way of Allah, and to spend in the market, and earned money. The money thus earned we spent in a goodly manner, and today many of us have thousand of dirham” (Bukhari).

The prophet also mentions about work which is associated with earthly matters even if someone sees his end near. The Messenger of God says: “if the hour of the end of the world comes, and in the hand of one of you is seeding, if he can get up to plant it, let him plant it” (Bukhari,Ahmad)

C. Attitude to Time

Many *Hadiths* ask Muslims to be aware of the value of time. Time is a commodity that should be rightly invested. The Prophet says that the feet of Adam’s son will not cross the path (to Paradise) until he has been questioned and he has answered satisfactorily, about his lifetime how he spent it, about his youth, how he invested it, and about his wealth, how he earned it and how he disposed of it. This statement from The Messenger of God mentioned the value of time and its close contact to human working activities. It means that the Prophet would like the Muslims to invest or use their time wisely and forbade them to waste any part of it. The Muslim worker shall conscientiously and judiciously utilize all the working hours in dispensing all their duties and responsibilities. The duties of Muslim workers must be as follows: “they should report to work promptly on time, diligent at work, never to play around or engage in vain conversation or in long telephone calls or doing one’s own business at the cost of another employer, or making excuses of leaving” (Abdul Rauf, 1991:136) The fact that ritual obligations are to be performed at their assigned time or during a prescribed period, teaches Muslim the habit of doing things promptly without delay. Habitual delay leads to confusion and causes losses and great harm. It is, after all, injustice to those involved. It is a violation of trust, a vice condemned by a mark of hypocrisy.

D. Attitude to Leisure

The attitude to work and leisure exist in four different ways and they can be grouped as follows:

- AB work hard/play hard – the idea that both work and leisure are desirable characteristics and that, when no doubt properly disguised, should be highly enjoyable.
- AD puritan – the idea that work (in all its form) is good and on the contrary leisure (whichever course that it takes) is bad
- CB Hedonist/idle rich – this position is largely against all forms of work (particularly if they are not immediately enjoyable or worthwhile) but they are in favor of leisure.
- CD Alienated – people who are against work and leisure seemed particularly alienated perhaps with concomitant feelings of powerlessness, and meaninglessness.

Work	A	C
Leisure	B	D

Clearly, Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) based on the Prophet tradition endorses position AB. No doubt that IWE would be against idle, self indulgent and leisure. Indeed, many leisure pursuits, such as do-it-yourself, visiting relatives and fitness body programs/exercises seem the very embodiment of IWE. The concept of balance between leisure and work is clearly mentioned by the prophet:

“The rational man, as long as his mind is healthy, should divide his time into four: time to link with their God, time to account of themselves, time to think about the creation of God, and time to fulfill their necessities such as eating and drinking” (Ibn Hibban in his Sahih)

In terms of hard work, the prophet said “Allah verily likes if one of you do his job thoroughly and proficiently” (Baihaqi and Abu Ya’la and Ibn Asakir from Aisha)

4. Islamic Work Ethic and Motivation

Motivation is part of work ethics. Steer M. and Porter W. define work motivation as “how behavior gets started, is energized, is sustained, is directed, is stopped, and what kind of subjective reaction is present in the organism while all this is going” (Steer M. and Porter W, 1991: 5). Motivation is essentially concerned with (1) what energize human behavior, (2) what directs or channels such a behavior, and (3) how this behavior is maintained or sustained. Each of these three components represents an important factor in our understanding of working ethics. Three major categories of individual differences in characteristics have been shown to affect the motivational process; interests, attitudes and needs. The Islamic motivational theory considered two dimensions of human behavior, first, the inner human body which is concern with the spirit or *iman*. Second, the outer human body which dealt with material needs such as physiological needs. The prophet says; “ Remember, in your body there is a lump of meat, if it is good all the body become good, but if it is bad, all of human body becomes bad, lo, it is heart” (Muslim)

This tradition refers to the inner spirit in determining the success or failure of certain men. Bayyumi (1970: 462) calls the motivational spirit of Islam which is perceived from the spirit of Islam as a core factor in determining success. Seyyed Huseein Nasr has laid down the concept of “*afu al-‘Uquud*” as motivational spirit of Islam. This concept brings out the nature of the relationship between man and God and nature, man and society and even man and his soul. (Nasr, 1989: 14) The concept of “*al-‘Uquud*” encompasses moral responsibilities and human relations. Human relation is considered the important factor of industrial success in Japan and Korea. According to Nasr, *Uquud* (covenant) referred to in the Quran Chapter 5 Verse 1 encompasses both moral and social responsibilities of a Muslim and as such serves as an impetus to the motivational attitude in him/her. By tying a Muslim’s spiritual obligations to his worldly or daily work, which he/she seeks to fulfill being mindful of it following the *Shariah* and seeking the pleasure of God, a Muslim adhere strictly to the contractual agreement made between him and the employer and thereby aspires to perfection in his work and the output of his work (Nasr, 1989: 35 – 45).

In Nasr’s view, the fact that the Muslim also knows that his/her reward does not end in this world alone as long as he/she is sincere in his/her work and seek for the perfection of that which is possible within the range that he/she has to work serves as a motivation in going about his/her daily work diligently and in fulfilling all the task related to the work. Likewise, the concept of *halal* and *haram* are duly observed in the kind of work undertaken by a Muslim and in the discharge of his/her duties in the work place (Nasr, *ibid.*). Finally, in as much as motivation is very important in the work of a Muslim, it must not lead to excessive work to the detriment of his/her religious and social obligations. Nasr points out that according to the Prophet, “the members of the [Muslim] community in general [must devote] a third of their day to work, a third to sleep and rest and a third to prayer, leisure and family and social activities” (Nasr, 1989: 39). Thus, as in everything else, balance and equilibrium is maintained in the work ethics of Muslims as the concept of workaholic to the detriment of other aspects of one’s life is seriously discouraged. In concluding this part, it is important to point out that the motivation behind a Muslim work lies in the fact that the reward for his work goes beyond his immediate gain to the future in the form of reward in the hereafter. Thus his/her work ethics’ motivation is both material and spiritual in nature.

Conclusion

From all the discussions above, it is clear that work ethics is part and parcel of the Islamic faith and it has been emphasized by the Prophet himself in many of his sayings some of which have been quoted and explained in this paper. Although the west has taken the lead on this issue of work ethics, as earlier said, the fact that other traditions had witnessed success in their midst and developed civilizations which is based on hard work shows that this concept is not limited to the modern western tradition only. In other words, if other traditions are conscientiously studied and analyzed, it will become apparent that they contain work ethics which had worked for them hence their successes.

As for the Islamic work ethics, it is clear that it is one of the important factors in the success recorded by the Islamic civilization. Like everything Islamic, it is not directed towards this world only but also takes care of the spirituality of man. Hence, Islamic work ethics is both material and spiritual in its purpose and direction. In as much as Islam laid emphasis on work, it also emphasizes the importance of the work being in tandem with its principles, that is, the *Shariah*. In asking Muslims to work and be punctual in their work life, the Islamic work ethics takes care of the concept of *halal* and *haram* in the work that Muslims do and in their daily earnings which has to be sincere in order to meet these criteria. Likewise, the concept of workaholic which usually leads to the abandonment of social responsibilities is strongly discouraged since Islam, being a moderate religion, encourages moderation in everything that a Muslim does concerning his/her work. In the Islamic work ethics, work should be moderated to the extent that it does not disturbs one’s responsibilities to God, family and the society and does not also lead to personal depravity which could affect one’s health. Thus, the Islamic work ethics has many dimensions to it and it is both comprehensive and holistic in nature.

In other words, unlike some form of Protestantism in the Christian tradition which talks about the virtues of work as an end in itself, Islam does not see work as an end in itself but as a virtuous means to the necessity of establishing a natural equilibrium in one’s social and individual life so as to uphold one’s dignity and at the same time earn the pleasure of God by being punctual, sincere and striving for perfection in what one does to earn his daily bread.

In view of the above, it is clear that the concept of work ethics is very much alive in the Islamic tradition and it has acted and still acting as an impetus in successes of the Muslim ummah.

Finally, the Islamic Work Ethic which pervasively exists in the Sunnah could be briefly summarized as containing the following points:

1. Work is one of the highest forms of “worship”. Islam does not recognize any kind of unemployment. Therefore, does not accept any doctrine of “mutual reliance” (tawaakul) because the Prophet opposed this doctrine by holding jobs.
2. Work is sacred because it is seen as a “duty” to build a strong national economy. One’s work is not an end in itself, but a means to destroy the non-economic dependent control over the economy. Therefore, work constitutes the first pillar in the construction of a healthy economic system.
3. Work must be done seriously. One’s success in worldly affairs as well as in the hereafter relies upon how hard he works.
4. Work is “amanah”. The trust which no other creation is able to accept for fear of not being able to discharge it properly. The concept of trust covers all definitions of “worship” including one’s working life. In one’s work, one must possess a feeling of accountability for his work, because all these deeds will be reckoned in front of Allah in the Hereafter.
5. Justice in Islam is considered as the unity of spiritual and material values. The Islamic values should not be isolated in the realm of idealism far from the practical worldly life. Rather, these values will guide a Muslim’s life in its entirety both spiritually and materially, religiously and worldly.
6. Work must be done diligently and patiently. Without diligence it is hard to achieve success in life. Patience is considered very important in a Muslim’s life. These concepts require that man possesses both traits in order to be successful in his work.
7. The relationships between man and God, man and nature and society and even man and his soul seeks to bring all these into one path- the path which leads to worship of Allah. Based on that, all works must be done sincerely for the sake of Allah.
8. Time is important in a Muslim’s life. Therefore, it should be used properly because he will have to account for every seconds of his life in the hereafter.

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