

## **Ethics of Road Usage from Islamic Perspective**

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**Abstract:** The scenario of road accidents, now-a-days has reached an alarming level that leads towards fatalities and loss of lives. This situation haunts dreadful imageries for every road user. Among notified causes are the attitudes and actions of the drivers, such as reckless driving, impatience as well as self-centeredness along with disobedience to the road and traffic regulations. This negligence ultimately brings misery to the mass as it affects innocent lives and their families. This study suggests solutions for road users to apply the ethics of road usage as introduced by Islam. The teachings of Islam involve guidance and regulations that would lead towards beautification of characters and personalities in all walks of life. It also inculcates the atmosphere of love, affirmation and cooperation. Islamic ethics outlined clear ethics of road usage that need to be upheld by all mankind. This is due to the fact that the public, in particular road users have the rights to utilize the roads and highways. Islam is indeed against any actions leading towards any form of hazards for the road users. This study clarifies and outlines these ethics from the Islamic perspective.

**Key words:** Road usage, ethics, Islamic perspective, scenario, Malaysia

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Islam is a religion that emphasizes the values of ethics and morality in human life. It is paramount in its teachings that it became one of the main reasons why the Prophet sent to the earth as stated in one famous hadith:

I was sent to make perfect of man's characters and morals (reported by Ahmad)

As a comprehensive and complete way of life, Islam provides ethics and moral codes as one of the fundamental branches of life for every individual-in fact following them is mandatory for everyone (Afif, 1995). In addition, ethical or moral codes in Islam form the basis for the establishment of a community.

Ethics or morals in Islam (Afif, 1995) strives to develop and nurture man's spiritual faculty while directing the conduct and attitude of individuals towards the good in addition to reminding the dangers and disadvantages of each crime in order for them to try to stay away from being influenced by negative forces.

Among the issues in Islamic ethics is the right to use the road as it is the right of everyone. Unfortunately, some people took advantage on the road to show off their driving skills with reckless driving, beating traffic lights, cutting the lines without thinking of the rights of others and so forth. Such actions have contributed to increased

rates of road accidents and thus loss of lives and property. Those who behave in this way either do not know traffic rules or perhaps they just think of their own interests without considering others.

This study will discuss ethics of road usage from the Islamic perspective that should be upheld by everyone particularly those who regularly break traffic rules, so that they are not only aware that they had violated traffic rules in the world but it will be rewarded accordingly by Allah for what they have done. Islam perceives rewards and punishments in the hereafter encompassing every aspect of life including matters related to human behavior on the road.

### **ISLAMIC ETHICS**

Islamic ethics or better known as *akhlaq* or morality derives literally from the word character, in Arabic with the word *al-khuluq* which is the plural of the word *al-akhlaq* that could be defined as the habits, behaviors or temperaments and it can also be taken to represent the religion itself (Ibrahim, 1960). The word *al-khulq* in the Quran is found in two places:

And though (Muhammad) has a great morality (Al-Qalam: 4).

The word al-khalq meanwhile means events, inventions and also means the occurrence of the beautiful and good. When referred to the creation of man, it means the beautiful and balanced structure of the body. If referred to the universe, it also carries the meaning of beautiful, immaculate and neatly arranged creation. In the Qur'an, the word al-khalq is mentioned 52 times which refers to the creation of man, the universe and other events. One example is this verse:

Verily in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of day and night, the ships that sail the sea with that which profits men and what Allah sent down from the skies and with it He revives the earth after its death (dry) and he spreads in it all kinds of animals and the winds and the clouds of heaven and earth, so (there is) the signs (the greatness of Allah) for those who think

As for a more detailed definition of akhlaq, there are various interpretations put forward by Islamic scholars. Among them is Miskawayh (2007), the famous Muslim philosopher who defines akhlaq as the state of the soul that leads to the spontaneous act without thinking and consideration. Considering the field of Islamic values based on two sources of knowledge, akhlaq can be summarized as follows:

A branch of science that discusses the meaning of the knowledge of good and bad and to identify good attitudes to internalize and practice and identify bad attitudes to avoid misconduct and to explain the goals that must be addressed by people in their actions and show the way to do what is allowed based on divine revelation to achieve the pleasure of Allah

In other words, akhlaq is a system that assesses the outer and inner man acting as individuals, groups and communities living in the interaction between humans reacting as individuals, groups and communities living in the interaction between man and God, man among men, men with animals, with the angels, the jinn and the environment (Yaljin, 1973).

Therefore, all human actions and choices made by conscious self whether the relationship with God, human relations, relations with the environment, relationships with themselves and others, all have moral and ethical values. All human actions either in the form of personal and social, economic, political and cultural have moral values and ethics that are taken into account and be accountable to the people involved in it. Bad moral or ethical values will be met with Allah's punishment (Yaljin, 1973).

## **AN OVERVIEW ON THE PHENOMENON OF ROAD USAGE IN THE WORLD**

The problem of deaths and injury as a result of road accidents today is regarded as a global phenomenon. In recent years, there have been two major studies of causes of death worldwide which have been published in the Global Burden of Disease (1996, World Health Organisation, World Bank and Harvard University) and in the World Health Report-Making a Difference (WHO, 1996).

These publications show that in 1990 road accidents as a cause of death or disability were places at number 9th out of a total of over 100 identified causes. More dramatically by the year, 2020 forecasts suggest that road accidents will move up to sixth place as a cause of death. In daily news, we are exposed to news about road accidents and disasters that hit other road users. This causes many people suffering lifelong disabilities and damage to the vehicles. It not only happens to people who violate traffic rules but it also involves people who are not guilty of the offense.

Results from a number of countries show alarming statistics. According to UN ESCAP Report in 2004, the road accidents are a growing worldwide problem with >1 million deaths and over 23 million injuries per year and 85% of these deaths are occurred in developing countries. The problem is particularly urgent in developing countries as the Asia Pacific region contributes 44% of global road deaths, although it currently only has around 16% of the worlds motorized vehicle fleet (United Nations, 2004).

The number of deaths from road accidents in the developing countries continues to increase each year, even though the authorities have held a variety of road safety campaigns to remind motorists to be cautious when driving. The efforts to create awareness among road users are considered a failure because ultimately they do not adopt a prudent attitude, does not comply with traffic rules and does not show ethical behavior while on the road.

From the overall statistics, road accidents were caused by three main factors:

- Human factors (road users) with a statistics of 92% of road accident has been caused by road users infringing various traffic laws for instance driving over speed limit, careless driving and drunk driving
- Road defect, either one part of road accident has been caused by road and other infrastructure which is inappropriate to standard safety level for examples potholes along the way and uneven roads

- Vehicle defect, involving improperly maintenance and irregular inspections of the vehicles that could lead towards brake failure, inflated burst of tires, power steering failure and other mishaps (WHO, 1996)

Further results show that the highest fatality rates (deaths per 10,000 motor vehicles) worldwide occur in African countries, particularly Ethiopia, Uganda and Malawi whilst fatality risk (deaths/100,000 population) is found highest in a disparate group of countries including Thailand, Malaysia, South Africa and Saudi Arabia and as could be expected, males in the most economically active age group make up the largest proportion of reported victims of road crashes (WHO, 1996).

All in all, the statistics are really alarming and lead to many important questions. Among them, have we lost our sense of humanity once we are on our wheels? And are we lost our mind and attention that while we are on the road we are all be accounted for by the God Almighty? Indeed once we are on the road, it is not about our rights to be pondered but also our responsibilities towards fulfilling others rights which we are often neglected.

### ETHICAL USE OF ROADS IN ISLAM

Islam comes with a holistic view approach towards life that ultimately leading towards fear of God and following His commands. This will finally lead towards happiness and blessings in life. Islam as a religion that concerns itself with preservation of life has set certain rules and ethics that should be done by humans in terms of road usage for benefit of all. Ethics on the roads usage as outlined by Islam are based on evidences from the Quran and the Prophet (SAW)'s traditions. Among them are as follows:

**Beginning every journey with a prayer:** One of the first things a Muslim (Al-Haddad, 1997) should do before starting travel is to read prayers. This is because prayer is a demand for people to Allah to provide protection from all disasters in the travel or transport.

There are a lot of the Prophet (SAW)'s hadith that teach people about the prayers during travel and while getting in a transport. Prayers can even be adapted to specific conditions during the journey or transport (Zakariyya and Syarf, 1989). Among them are those who intend to start the trip are encouraged to bid farewell to his brothers because by doing so, the prayer that they will be asked to give advantages to those who intend to make the trip.

While boarding a vehicle, Islam teaches for road users to read certain prayers. Among them are (Zakariyya and Syarf, 1989) quoted in the prayer in the Holy Qur'an (Surah al-Zukhruf 43:13-14) which means:

Glory to Him who has subjected these to us when we were not capable of it and we will get back to our Lord!

The advantages of praying before travelling are so great that Islam categorizes it in the list of prayers answered by God Almighty. This has been mentioned in a hadith:

There are three prayers which will definitely be answered by God: The prayers of the oppressed, the prayer before a journey and the prayer of a father to his son

When one faces a misfortune in his travel such as losing a vehicle or there is situation beyond his control, Islam taught Muslims to read certain prayers. The following is the prayer that is taught by the Prophet (SAW) when the vehicle is lost or stolen: When a vehicle is out of control, one is encouraged to read the prayer taught by the Prophet (Zakariyya and Syarf, 1989):

The prayers recommended by the Prophet (SAW) is to provide peace and comfort to road users and those who take their vehicles to be protected by Allah from all accidents and disasters that befall them on the trip.

**Never be arrogant on roads:** In the Quran, God forbids people including road users from being arrogant and imperious as stated in Surah al-Isra verse 37:

Do not walk in a swank and arrogance in the face of the earth itself, surely you will not be able to dig the earth and will not be able to match the height of the mountains

In another verse, Allah says in Surah al-Furqan, verse 63:

Those who walk on earth, humble and not arrogant

The Messenger also provides a strong reminder of that attitude in saying:

Meaning: Whoever is proud ourselves in the soul or arrogant in the way the way he will meet God the wrath of God in him (Ahmad in his Musnad narrated from Ibn 'Umar with this pronouncement (Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Hanbal b. Hilal b. Asad al-Shaybani. tt)

Meaning: When a man from among the people before you walked proud and arrogant, God covered him with the earth. The man would be in that state until the day of judgment

In the context of road user, someone who has ethical values should not take the opportunity to show their prowess with reckless driving, speeding and overtaking recklessly, cutting the line of vehicles, racing on the road, driving to attract public attention, the use of excessive vehicle horn, turning the loudspeaker installed in a vehicle loudly without shame, disturbing the other users' peace and so on. Thus, for people who really have a high ethical values should not be cocky and arrogant on the road because it will bring danger to themselves and to others. Road users should be patient and tolerant because the road is a shared property and right.

**To be unharmed to oneself and others:** Among the ethics for road users is not to do anything that may be harmful either to themselves or others. According to Al-Din (1978), the public has the right to use vehicles on the road with the condition that safety of road users must be paramount to avoid dangers.

It is imperative for road users to always be careful when using it to avoid any harm to other users. The neglect of this duty will deprive the road user of the right to use the road. However, this kind of situation is subject to the ability of other road users or are in a state that can be controlled by the user (Al-Dini, 1978). This is consistent with the hadith of the Prophet (SAW):

No harm and no harm (to others) (narrated by Ibn Majah and al-Daraqutni)

This means that every road user should follow traffic rules, such as having a driving license, owning vehicle in perfect condition, complying with speed limits and so forth. Even within Islam itself, there are a number of penalties imposed on those who commit offenses on the road whether that involves life, the body or property (Ismail, 1999).

Some of the young motorists ride recklessly. They ride motorcycles with a display of dangerous actions such as riding recklessly and so forth. They seem not to care about the consequences and effects that will occur due to the actions undertaken by them. This shows that they do not love their own lives when protecting and preserving life is the obligation of Islam and were among the five fundamental needs that should be fulfilled by men.

Ismail (1999) says the authorities should provide appropriate facilities to road users, such as not letting the road in danger due to holes in the road, lack of signs, the road is too narrow, situated in the high-risk landslide occurrence and so forth. This is all to refrain from all forms of harm that would befall the road users.

**Avoidance of all forms of harassment:** Islam stresses on avoiding all forms of interference which may affect the use

of the road. This is because Islam recommends that all road users feel comfortable when using the road. This means that prevents all forms disturbance or discomfort to other road users can be avoided. These disturbances happen either in physical form, sound or sight.

God will reward those who do this. Abu Hurayra had asked Allah's Messenger on a wisdom that can be applied. Among the recommendations were introduced by the Prophet (SAW) told him to remove or avoid anything that may interfere with the use of the road. As the Prophet (SAW) says:

Keep away all the bother on the streets of a Muslim (narrated by Muslim (1930))

In the context of physical disorders, the Prophet (SAW) encouraged Muslims to discard any of the trees that block the use of the road. According to a hadith:

Indeed, I see someone enjoying his rewards in Paradise due to the piece of wood he banished from the roads which could interfere with the public (narrated by Muslim (1930))

Similarly, Islam forbids men and road users from littering on the road due to its disturbance of public interest. This is because it may cause some discomfort to motorists using the road as well as ugly, damaging the natural beauty around and invite a variety of diseases. Meanwhile according to Nazim, Islam encourages its followers give priority to sanitation in public places including roads, thereby making the Muslim countries the world's cleanest state. However, this is not the case. Such practices are more practiced in Western countries and among the European Muslims.

The act of throwing excrement and dirt roads are among the acts that invite the curse of Allah. This is stated in the Prophet (SAW)'s hadith which means:

Fear of three things that lead to the perpetrator to damnation: Throwing excrement in the street to the river, on the road and under a tree shelter

Among the things that can be linked and considered to have similarities with excrements is the nauseating exhaust fumes coming out of the vehicle which can also affect other road users because the authorities did not follow standards. When these conditions can be controlled, Nazim mentions that it is a sign of a gratefulness God and one of the branches of faith to Allah (swt). Similarly, motorists should not park vehicles in public places that can prevent traffic flow, especially on relatively narrow roads (Ismail, 1995).

Thus, Islam prohibits people from doing any form of disturbance and harm to other people either in physical or non physical way. Sometimes non-physical disorders are even more prevalent than physical disorders.

**Prioritizing the necessities of other users:** A part of road ethics that Islam emphasizes is road users should be pay attention to the needs of others while on the road, especially the urgent needs such as providing access to those in distress and so on.

This is a trait that gives priority to other road users and does not reflect the attitude of selfishness. This is because according to Suyuti and Abu Bakr (1990), prioritizing the needs of others is a commendable attitude and encouraged except in matters relating to special rituals such as purification, prayers and so forth. The nature of selfishness can be construed as putting self-interest alone without considering the needs of others. This is one of the vices that must be avoided by motorists.

The attitude of prioritizing the needs of others can create harmony and tolerance and ultimately may prevent further accidents and save lives. This is because road users are willing to give their way even if they have to compromise with their own situation on the road.

Selfishness on the road includes driving in drowsiness, driving without having necessary skills, not checking the condition of the vehicle, being hot-tempered, racing on the road and do not want to give in or compromise.

**Always on the helping hands:** Islam also outlines some of the things that need to be undertaken by other road users so that they help one another, especially to those in need such as leading the blind cross the street, looking for the missing items, carrying things, pointing the direction to the lost sheep, help the oppressed people and helping those afflicted by disasters and accidents (Hajar *et al.*, 1959).

The concept of mutual help is one of the approaches that are relevant in the context of the use of the road because it involves matters relating to human relations. Many examples are given by Allah to reflect this. This is based on several hadith of the Prophet (SAW) including when one of his companions asked him about the right of the road. Then, he said:

And giving the direction to those who are lost  
(Al-Bukhari, 1998)

According to Nazim, charity is not only in material form even the person who gave the directions to lost people and helping other people to carry items into the vehicle is a form of charity. This is because such acts can foster relationships, especially among motorists. The statement was based on the words of the Prophet (SAW):

And showing the way to the lost person is a charity (narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1998)

The Prophet (SAW) also says:

The lift on a vehicle is a charity

**Good command of communication:** Among the ethical use of roads according to Islam (Hajar *et al.*, 1959) are all road users need to communicate well, namely by removing the words that do not offend the feeling of other road users. It is common to observe road users breaking road regulations. However, nasty words and insults must be avoided so as not to create things that did cause unwanted quarrels and enmity among the people. This situation is compatible with the Prophet (SAW)'s which means:

The true Muslim is one who can give safety to the people of Islam from the point of his tongue (speech) and his hand (narrated by Bukhari hadith and Muslim (1930))

According to Nazim charity, not only in material form even good communication is encouraged in Islam and is considered as charity. This is based on the words of the Prophet (SAW) which means:

The good word or phrase is a charity  
(narrated by Al-Bukhari hadith)

**Refraining oneself from loitering by the roadside:** Road ethics in Islam are not only limited to those who use the roads even those who are at the roadside must also meet the rights of the road. Such phenomena did not only happened in the era of the Prophet (SAW) but it is still happening now. It should be noted that Islam has laid down some ethics accordingly observed by those who like to hang out on the roadside according to a hadith of the Prophet (SAW):

One day, Prophet (SAW) said his friend, who liked to loiter at the roadside. You should refrain from sitting or loitering on the edge-side of the road, they replied: We have been here since this became a gathering place and our conversation. His word: If you insist on staying and still want to use this as a gathering place, you must meet the rights of the road. Then they asked, what are the rights of the road? He (SAW) word, lowering your gaze, giving no interference to greet, serve the good and avoid evil (narrated by Bukhari hadith and Muslim (1930))

Based on the earlier mentioned hadith, the Prophet (SAW) clearly stated certain rights that must be fulfilled by those who are on the edge of the road. Such ethics are very important because these days, there is a loitering culture among teenagers which is worrying because it can be symptomatic of other problems such as social drugs, skipping school, drinking, rape, robbery and street

thugs. When the ethics are adhered to and practiced, it can prevent the occurrence of adverse incidents on the road users, especially women because they often become victims of sexual harassment and rape (Hisyam, 1985).

### CONCLUSION

Public interest on the road requires serious concern by all parties. The objective is very clear that is to maintain the safety of life and property as well as avoiding things that could interfere with one's comfort. For Muslims road users, they must consider that ethical use of the road is part of the Islamic faith and guidance. They must observe all traffic rules and regulations and any forms of non-compliance with them is considered guilty for violating the objectives of Islamic law itself and for the users who are driving carelessly and causing death and disabilities will be appropriately punished either in this world and the hereafter. Road users should always be aware of the fact that living together need for respect for the rights of others on the road.

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