

Prophetic Ethics and Moral Resilience: An Innovative Framework for Navigating Contemporary Tribulations

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.903SEDU0752>

Received: 18 November 2025; Accepted: 26 November 2025; Published: 23 December 2025

ABSTRACT

This study develops an innovative ethical framework for navigating contemporary tribulations by drawing upon Prophetic traditions. It begins with an exploration of the concept of tribulation (**fitan**) through linguistic, terminological, Qur'anic, and Prophetic perspectives, situating it within both classical Islamic thought and modern challenges. The research then examines the role of ethics in shaping moral resilience, stability, and clarity during times of crisis. Using inductive and analytical methodologies, the study systematically investigates relevant Prophetic hadiths, the practices of the Companions in confronting tribulations, and insights from classical and contemporary commentaries. By synthesizing these sources, the paper proposes a forward-looking ethical paradigm rooted in Prophetic guidance that offers practical principles for managing crises, addressing social and moral disorientation, and fostering resilience in Muslim societies today. This contribution enriches the field of Islamic ethics and provides an innovative model for contemporary scholarship on religion, ethics, and crisis management.

Keywords: Prophetic traditions, Islamic ethics, Tribulations (*fitan*), Moral resilience, Crisis management, Contemporary challenges.

INTRODUCTION

In Islam, Muslims are commanded to uphold good character in all circumstances, as moral integrity is the foundation of a stable and just society. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized this when he said: *"And behave with people with good character"* (At-Tirmidhi, 1975). The importance of ethical conduct becomes even more pronounced during times of tribulation (*fitan*), when confusion spreads, justice is often lost, and people are vulnerable to injustice and discord. In such times, the Prophetic tradition provides a moral compass that guides Muslims towards patience, forbearance, fairness, and the avoidance of haste.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) stated: *"A Muslim is one from whom other Muslims are safe from his tongue and hand"* (Al-Bukhari, 2001), underscoring the sanctity of life and the necessity of protecting others from harm. The Qur'an affirms this value: *"Whoever kills a soul not in retaliation for another soul or for corruption in the land—it is as if he had slain mankind entirely"* (Qur'an 5:32). Similarly, the Prophet (peace be upon him) warned against aggression, saying: *"Whoever carries weapons against us is not one of us"* (Al-Bukhari, 2001). These teachings highlight Islam's insistence on safeguarding life, dignity, and security during crises.

Moreover, the Prophetic tradition stresses the ethical use of speech, warning that careless words can become a source of destruction. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: *"Will anything but the harvests of their tongues overthrow men in Hell on their faces?"* (At-Tirmidhi, 1975). Thus, safeguarding one's speech is part of the ethical resilience that preserves society in turbulent times.

By integrating these Prophetic principles into a broader ethical framework, this study seeks to demonstrate how Islamic ethics can nurture **moral resilience** and provide practical guidance for navigating contemporary tribulations.

The Linguistic Meaning of Fitnah

The term *fitnah* (tribulation) is the singular of *fitan*, derived from the root letters *f-t-n*, which denote affliction, testing, or examination. Al-Azharī (2004) stated that the essence of *fitnah* is affliction and trial, while Ibn Fāris (1979) explained that the root indicates a process of testing, as in the expression “I tested the gold with fire,” meaning to examine and distinguish between pure and impure elements. Collectively, the linguistic usage suggests that *fitnah* embodies trial, affliction, and divergence of opinions, often leading to confusion, loss of wisdom, and social or material disruption.

The Conceptual Meaning of Fitnah

Classical scholars extended the meaning of *fitnah* beyond mere affliction. Az-Zamakhsharī (1986) described it as tribulation through severe obligations and hardships—such as displacement, poverty, calamities, or the schemes of adversaries—while Al-Jurjānī (1983) defined it as that which exposes the reality of a person’s goodness or evil. These perspectives highlight that *fitnah* not only tests individuals externally but also reveals their inner moral states.

Fitnah in the Prophetic Tradition

Within the Prophetic tradition, *fitnah* is presented as a recurring reality of communal life. Ibn Rajab (1996) noted that general tribulations surge like ocean waves, such as the killing of Caliph ‘Uthmān (may Allah be pleased with him), which marked the onset of division, conflict, and bloodshed among Muslims. Ibn Hajar (1959) observed that the term expanded from its original meaning of trial to encompass disbelief, fighting, deviation from truth, or moral inclinations toward falsehood. From this perspective, *fitnah* in hadith refers to tribulations that blur the distinction between truth and falsehood, leading to discord, division, and violence, thereby threatening both faith and social unity.

The Meaning of Ethics

Ethics (*khuluq*) in Islamic thought denotes a deep-rooted disposition of the soul that enables actions to be performed naturally. If this disposition produces actions deemed good by reason and the Sharī‘ah, it is called good character; if it results in blameworthy actions, it is termed bad character (Al-Jurjānī, 1983).

The Impact and Importance of Ethics in Muslim Life

Ethics were central to the Prophetic mission, as expressed in the hadith: “*I was sent to perfect good character*” (Al-Hākim, 1990). The Qur’an affirms this by declaring: “*And indeed, you are on an excellent standard of character*” (Qur’an 68:4). During tribulations, when confusion, rumors, and falsehood spread rapidly, the ethical framework becomes crucial. Words can wound like arrows, and unchecked actions can destabilize communities. Hence, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized restraint, teaching that: “*A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands other Muslims are safe*” (Al-Bukhārī, 2002). This Prophetic principle underscores the role of ethics in cultivating **moral resilience**, enabling Muslims to preserve unity, safeguard dignity, and maintain clarity in the face of tribulations.

The Prophetic Ethical Approach During Times of Tribulations

The prophetic ethical approach encompasses a set of moral guidelines and practical measures that Muslims are required to adopt during times of tribulations. These measures serve to preserve faith, unity, and social stability, while preventing injustice, aggression, and chaos.

First: Treating People as One Wishes to Be Treated

Among the key prophetic directives during tribulations is the instruction: “*Let him treat people as he wishes to be treated*” (An-Naysaburi, n.d). This principle establishes the golden rule of ethical interaction—placing oneself in the position of others and applying justice, empathy, and fairness in all dealings. Al-Lasheen (2002)

explained that the path to salvation in times of turmoil lies in holding firmly to faith and moral virtues, and in treating people as one would wish to be treated.

In this hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) refers to the intensification of tribulations in the end times, where each tribulation appears overwhelming until it passes, only to be followed by another. His guidance directs Muslims to uphold faith, virtuous conduct, and mutual compassion as a safeguard against moral collapse. Al-Sa'di (2002) elaborates: *"Kindness to people involves giving them, from your speech, actions, wealth, and dealings, what you wish for yourself. This is the true measure of kindness and advice. If you love something, you should love it for others as you love it for yourself."* Thus, prophetic ethics in times of trial emphasize empathy, justice, and self-restraint as the foundation for social harmony.

Contemporary Relevance: This principle is a critical countermeasure to the dehumanization and polarization often seen in modern conflicts and online discourse. It demands that we extend courtesy and justice, even to opponents, fostering a basis for reconciliation instead of perpetual enmity.

Second: Adhering to the Imam and Avoiding Division.

A central prophetic instruction during tribulations is to remain united under the legitimate leader (imam) and avoid any form of rebellion or division. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: *"Whoever pledges allegiance to an imam, giving him the pledge of his hand and the loyalty of his heart, let him obey him if he can. If another comes to dispute with him, strike the neck of the latter"* (An-Naysaburi, n.d). This narration underscores the impermissibility of rebelling against the legitimate leader and highlights the necessity of resisting anyone who seeks to undermine unity. An-Nawawi (1972) explains that if repelling such opposition requires armed resistance, it becomes obligatory; and if it results in the death of the transgressor, then such a killing does not require reparation, as he is deemed an aggressor.

Similarly, in the hadith of 'Arfajah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: *"Whoever comes to you while your affairs are united under one leader and seeks to split your unity or divide your group, kill him"* (An-Naysaburi, n.d). Furthermore, Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman reported that the Prophet said: *"Adhere to the group of Muslims and their imam."* When Hudhayfah asked what to do if no imam or unified group existed, the Prophet replied: *"Then avoid all those factions, even if you have to bite the root of a tree until death finds you in that state"* (Al-Bukhari, 2001).

These narrations demonstrate the prophetic emphasis on safeguarding communal unity and resisting division, except in cases where obedience to a leader entails disobedience to Allah. As Al-Mashhur (2005, 2010) explains, the correct approach during such times is to align with the imam in fostering peace and stability while avoiding entanglement in political conflicts that exacerbate tribulations.

Contemporary Relevance: This principle directly addresses the destructive nature of **sectarian violence and civil unrest**. It provides a religious justification for prioritizing **national stability and legitimate governance** over factionalism, especially where the consequence of rebellion is mass bloodshed and chaos.

Third: Forbearance (al-ḥilm).

Forbearance is a cardinal virtue that Muslims are urged to embody, particularly during times of tribulations when emotions often run high and rash decisions can lead to greater harm. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"The Last Hour would come when the Romans would form a majority of people. Indeed, among them are four qualities: They are the most forbearing in times of tribulations, the quickest to recover after a calamity, the most likely to return after fleeing, and the best to the poor, orphans, and the weak. The fifth is a good, beautiful trait: They are the most restrained from oppressing kings" (An-Naysaburi, n.d).

This hadith highlights the value of forbearance in times of instability and presents it as a quality that sustains individuals and communities amidst turmoil. Forbearance entails the control of anger, restraint from vengeance, and maintaining composure in the face of provocation (Various Specialists, n.d). It is not only a human virtue but also a divine attribute, as Allah is described in the Qur'an: "*And Allah is Rich and Forbearing*" (Surah Al-Baqarah: 263). Likewise, it is a trait of the prophets, as Allah says about Ibrahim: "*Indeed, Ibrahim was forbearing, tender-hearted*" (Surah At-Tawbah: 114).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) commended Ashajj of the tribe of 'Abd al-Qais, saying: "*You have two qualities that Allah loves: forbearance and deliberation*" (An-Naysaburi, n.d). This indicates that forbearance is not merely passive endurance, but an active moral discipline that grants clarity and wisdom, enabling individuals to perceive realities accurately. In the midst of tribulations, such clarity is vital, as holding firmly to faith becomes as difficult as grasping burning coals. Thus, the prophetic tradition encourages Muslims to embrace forbearance, patience, and perseverance, preserving their faith while contributing to communal harmony (Al-Mashhur, 2015).

Contemporary Relevance: Forbearance is the antidote to the "**cancel culture**" and **instantaneous outrage** prevalent in the digital age. It compels individuals to pause, verify, and respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively, thereby lowering the temperature of heated public debates and preventing unnecessary conflict.

Fourth: Protecting the Sanctity of Muslim Life

In his Farewell Sermon, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declared: "*Indeed, your blood and your wealth are sacred to you, as sacred as this day of yours in this month of yours*" (An-Naysaburi, n.d.). This profound statement establishes the inviolability of Muslim life as a foundational principle in Islamic ethics and law. Al-Hasan reported:

"I went out with my weapon during the nights of the tribulations. Abu Bakrah met me and asked, 'Where are you going?' I said, 'I am seeking to support the cousin of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him).' He said, 'The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: If two Muslims face each other with their swords, both of them are people of the Fire.' It was asked, 'And what about the one who is killed?' He replied, 'He intended to kill his companion' (Al-Bukhari, 2001).

This narration highlights the severity of bloodshed among Muslims: both the aggressor and the victim share accountability due to their intention to kill. For this reason, the Companions of the Prophet deliberately distanced themselves from internal strife, recognizing the destructive consequences of such tribulations. Their approach reflects a deep awareness of the ethical imperatives in Islam, prioritizing peace, restraint, and self-preservation over partisanship.

When asked about the way to safety, the Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: "*Control your tongue, confine yourself to your home, and weep over your sins*" (At-Tirmidhi, 1975). Scholars such as Al-Barbahari emphasized that during periods of civil strife, one must avoid factionalism and refrain from endorsing any side, since "*whoever loves the actions of a people—whether good or bad—is like one who has done them*" (Al-Barbahari, 1997). Contemporary scholars echo this stance, arguing that understanding socio-political transformations during crises helps Muslims avoid bloodshed and provides a religiously sound framework for self-protection (Al-Mashhoor, 2005).

The Prophet also advised: "*If you encounter these tribulations, go to Mount Uhud, break the edge of your sword with it, and then sit in your house. If anyone enters your house, go to the inner chamber. If they enter the inner chamber, kneel and say: 'Here I am with my sin and your sin,' and you will be among the people of the Fire. That is the recompense for the wrongdoers*" (Ibn Hanbal, 2001). Such guidance underscores the necessity of de-escalation and the rejection of violence, even at the cost of personal vulnerability.

This prophetic wisdom has contemporary relevance in today's conflicts, where civil wars, sectarian violence, and political instability devastate Muslim societies. Arms trading—often fueled by external actors—exacerbates these crises, as weapons flow indiscriminately into Muslim lands, prolonging conflict and weakening unity. Modern scholars (As-Salqini, 2012) stress that prohibiting the sale of arms during tribulations remains a vital application of prophetic guidance to prevent exploitation by profiteers and adversaries. By adhering to the Prophetic model, Muslims can counter the destructive cycle of violence, protect communities, and preserve the sanctity of life.

Contemporary Relevance: This principle is a direct ethical response to the crises of **civil wars and sectarian violence** that plague many Muslim societies today. It mandates that Muslims **refrain from factionalism** and prohibits activities like arms trading during internal conflicts (As-Salqini, 2012), actively working to counter the cycle of violence and exploitation.

Fifth: Avoiding People and Steering Clear of Places of Tribulations

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) repeatedly emphasized withdrawal from tribulations as a means of spiritual and physical safety. Abu Musa reported that the Prophet said: *“Break your bows, cut your strings, stay in the interior of your homes, and be like the son of Adam”* (At-Tirmidhi, 1975). This instruction illustrates the importance of detachment from violent conflict. Commentators such as As-Sindi argued that *“patience in death during such times is better than movement, as movement increases the fitnah”* (As-Sindi, 1725), while Al-Qari stressed that disengagement becomes obligatory in periods of widespread and indiscriminate turmoil (Al-Qari, 2002).

Similarly, Ibn Mas‘ud narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: *“All the slain in those tribulations are in the Fire.”* When asked about the proper response during such times, the Prophet replied: *“Keep your tongue and hand from harm and be like a mat in your house”* (As-Sijistani, 2009). The metaphor of being like a “mat” underscores complete neutrality, passivity, and withdrawal from escalating hostilities.

In the contemporary context, this guidance carries significant weight. In times of political polarization, sectarian conflict, or civil unrest, aligning with factions often results in the loss of life, trust, and communal harmony. Modern scholars argue that detachment is not a sign of weakness but rather a moral stance that prevents individuals from being complicit in bloodshed and societal collapse (Al-Mashhur, 2015). In practical terms, Muslims are encouraged to prioritize self-preservation, focus on their families, safeguard their faith, and avoid falling into the cycle of retaliatory violence that often consumes communities in times of fitnah.

Contemporary Relevance: In times of intense **political polarization, civil unrest, or sectarian conflict**, this advice urges Muslims to prioritize **self-preservation, family security, and safeguarding their faith** over aligning with factions. Detachment is presented not as weakness, but as a moral position that prevents complicity in societal collapse (Al-Mashhur, 2015).

Sixth: Restraining the Tongue in Times of Tribulations

The tongue, though small, can cause destruction greater than weapons. During periods of unrest, rumours, inflammatory rhetoric, and misinformation can escalate violence faster than physical weapons. Ibn Mas‘ud advised: *“Control your tongue and your hand”* (As-Sijistani, 2009). Similarly, the Prophet (peace be upon him) warned: *“Beware of tribulations, for the tongue in them is like the impact of a sword”* (Ibn Majah, n.d.).

This prophetic teaching is remarkably relevant in the digital age. With the rise of social media, the spread of rumours and fake news during political crises has amplified divisions and fueled conflicts across the Muslim world. Words—whether spoken in public forums or shared online—have the potential to incite violence, delegitimize leaders, or destabilize communities. Hence, the Prophetic command to *“restrain the tongue”* extends beyond speech to include responsible use of digital communication.

Al-Mashhur (2015) observed that the path of safety lies in *“guarding the tongue from blame and the hand from bloodshed.”* This position mirrors the conduct of the Prophet's Companions, who often chose silence and

withdrawal over reckless speech during turbulent times. The ethical principle is clear: Muslims must verify information, avoid spreading unconfirmed reports, refrain from inflammatory rhetoric, and instead adopt language that fosters reconciliation and peace.

In essence, controlling the tongue is not only a personal virtue but also a societal safeguard. It protects individuals from sin and shields communities from chaos. In today's interconnected world, where a single statement can reach millions within seconds, this Prophetic wisdom offers a timeless strategy for conflict prevention and the preservation of unity.

Contemporary Relevance: This principle is profoundly relevant to the **digital age**, where social media allows the instantaneous spread of **fake news, hyper-partisan rhetoric, and incitement** that fuel divisions. The command to “**restrain the tongue**” extends to the **responsible use of digital communication**. Muslims are ethically bound to **verify information**, avoid spreading unconfirmed reports, and use language that fosters **reconciliation and peace**. Guarding the tongue is both a personal virtue and a **societal safeguard**.

Seventh: Taking What is Known and Leaving What is Denied

One of the most insightful Prophetic instructions concerning tribulations is found in the narration of Abdullah ibn Amr ibn Al-‘As. He reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) mentioned tribulations and said: “*When you see people break their promises, their trustworthiness becomes light, and they become like this*”—and he interlaced his fingers. Abdullah ibn Amr asked: “*What should I do in such a situation, may Allah make me your ransom?*” The Prophet replied: “*Stay in your house, control your tongue, take what you know to be true, and leave what you find reprehensible. Focus on your own private affairs and leave the public affairs aside*” (As-Sijistani, 2009).

This hadith outlines a clear framework for Muslims in times of turmoil and societal disorder. The Prophet (peace be upon him) emphasized four essential principles:

1. **Staying at home** – physical withdrawal from conflict zones to avoid harm.
2. **Controlling the tongue** – refraining from contributing to rumours, disputes, or provocative speech.
3. **Holding fast to what is known to be true** – clinging to religiously verified truths and established moral values.
4. **Avoiding what is reprehensible** – distancing oneself from doubtful or corrupt practices.

Al- ‘Azim Abadi (1994) noted that this guidance provides a temporary concession to avoid *enjoining good and forbidding evil* when corruption prevails, the righteous become weak, and the wicked dominate. In such contexts, attempting to correct the public may expose individuals to greater harm and deepen the fitnah rather than resolve it. Thus, self-preservation and focusing on one's private matters become an act of wisdom, not negligence.

The phrase “*Take what you know and leave what you deny*” is particularly profound. It instructs Muslims to prioritize certainty over doubt, aligning with the broader Islamic principle: “*Leave that which makes you doubt for that which does not make you doubt*” (Al-Tirmidhi). A Muslim should cling to what is clearly permitted and beneficial for their faith and well-being while avoiding what contradicts the Sharī‘ah. Al-Eid (n.d.) emphasized that when a believer witnesses widespread sins, they should thank Allah for protecting them and distance themselves from participating in or normalizing such wrongdoing.

From a contemporary perspective, this hadith offers timeless wisdom for dealing with the confusion of modern tribulations—whether political instability, sectarian strife, or the overwhelming influence of misinformation. In an era where public discourse is often dominated by polarized narratives, the Prophetic instruction to focus on verified truths, personal piety, and restraint provides a safeguard against being consumed by collective chaos.

Ultimately, this teaching is not a call to disengagement from society altogether, but rather a reminder that in times of moral inversion and social collapse, safeguarding one's faith, family, and private affairs may constitute the highest form of religious commitment and ethical responsibility.

Contemporary Relevance: This teaching offers a timeless strategy for navigating the **confusion of modern informational and political instability**. It instructs Muslims to reject polarized narratives, focus on **verified ethical and religious truths**, and make their family and private piety the immediate priority—a spiritual anchor in times of moral inversion and collective chaos.

CONCLUSION

Studying the topic of tribulations and the means of safety from them is a crucial subject in the life of the Muslim community, especially in the contemporary era. Tribulations are an exceptional phase that requires finding a safe way out. An objective and conscious study of the Prophetic hadiths provides us with the appropriate remedy for these dangerous stages. Additionally, the issue of tribulations requires significant attention from scholars and researchers to find the right solutions to safely navigate these dangers. The rise in claims by various sects, groups, and parties asserting that they alone possess the truth and the correct path to safety has led to mutual accusations and labelling others as misguided. This can even escalate to the point of declaring others as disbelievers, resulting in the justification of violence against them, ultimately leading to the shedding of blood. Thus, the importance of adhering to ethical conduct during times of tribulations becomes clear, as well as the need to avoid conflict and disputes, which often result in the violation of lives and dignity.

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