

Taqwa: Consciousness of Allah

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It has been narrated by Anas b. Malik that he said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) say, 'O' People! Have Taqwa of Allah as is worthy of Him; strive in gaining His pleasure; have certainty that the world is temporal and that the Next Life is everlasting; strive for the life after death such that it could be said about you that it is as if you were never in this world and so that it could be said about you that it is as if you have been in the next life for time memorial.

O' people! Surely everyone in the world are guests (of this world); all that they possess are simply trusts (given to them) and these guests shall (one day) leave and the trusts that were with them shall return back to their owners. You must know that this world is a merchandise which both the righteous and wicked person make use of, while the next life is the true promise (of Allah) which is ruled by the Just, Powerful One.

So then may the mercy of Allah be upon the person who looks at his soul and prepares his grave before death comes to him during this time that his halters are loosened from around him and before he arrives at his appointed time of death, as then (at that time), the ability to perform (good) actions will be removed from him."

This is a tradition in which there is both a summarized and detailed explanation given within the tradition itself. In the beginning, we see that we have been commanded to observe Taqwa and give it its due right, while later on we see that this issue has been explained in greater detail.

Much has been said in regards to the definition of Taqwa, however we can explain this comprehensive trait by saying: 'Taqwa is the inner protection and internal lock which prevents a person from committing sins.'

Of course, Taqwa has various levels to it - sometimes we see that it is at the level of 'Adalah or 'justice' (with others); sometimes Taqwa goes even higher than mere 'justice' such that we reach to the level of 'Ismah or 'infallibility' as 'Ismah is nothing more than the highest level of Taqwa.

Thus, the sense of responsibility (to Allah (SwT)) which is inside the spirit of a person and the state of Wiqayah (inner protection), is nothing other than Taqwa!

The right which is owed to Taqwa is that it is nurtured to its highest level and that one does not become satisfied with merely the lower forms.

This is best understood by the following example that when a flood is approaching, the person

would rush to shut all the doors and windows of his house - whether they are small and weak or powerful and large. Therefore, the more powerful and larger the doors of Taqwa become, the less damage will come about!

The lower desires, passions and following of the lower soul are just like a flood of water, while Taqwa is like the door or gate (which acts as protection) from the tumultuous waves and if one is able to control the flood waters, then he would be able to convert the power and force of the water into electricity (for positive usage)!

In continuation, the Noble Prophet (S) has stated that we must obey the following commandments.

First and foremost, we must struggle to earn the pleasure of Allah (SwT) and as we know, there are three forms of pleasure which are attainable (in this world):

1. The pleasure of Allah (SwT).
2. The pleasure of the people.
3. The pleasure of our own soul.

The person who possesses Taqwa would always place the pleasure of Allah (SwT) above the pleasure of others and while acting in this way, the people around him must be pleased and content with what the person of Taqwa decides.

If others become pleased with that person then what could be better; however if they are not pleased, then at least that person knows that he has done the right thing (and earned Allah's (SwT) pleasure).

If we can reach to this station, then we would have reached to the highest level of Taqwa and when this occurs, anytime anything comes up in our life, we would first seek to gain the pleasure of Allah (SwT) which would result in the creations of Allah (SwT) being pleased with us. This would culminate in our own personal pleasure - and this is the order we must follow in life.

If we want to see how this plays out in the real world, then anytime an issue comes up, we should see if that which we wish to follow would be in our own personal benefit or not and what it is that Allah (SwT) would like for us to do.

However, if we see what Allah (SwT) wants (us to do) and at the same time we see if this is also what the people want from us and what we want for ourselves, then this would be classified as Shirk (polytheism) in our actions as the pure form of Tawhid (monotheism) is something other than this!

Thus, in order to reach to pure Tawhid, anytime anything comes up in our lives, we must first see what it is that Allah (SwT) would want of us and then after this, we must see what the

people and our own soul desires.

It has been mentioned in the tradition that: "The one who corrects the relationship between himself and Allah, Allah will correct the relations between that person and the people." Therefore, if we are looking to earn the pleasure of Allah (SwT), then we must be ready to supplicate just as the Du'a of Prophet Ibrahim (as) in relation to his wife Hajar I and son, : (Isma'il (as

فَاجْعَلْ أَفْئِدَةً مِّنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِّنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ

therefore make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with... " blessings..."

Through this, Allah (SwT) would also make the hearts of the people gravitate towards us! :With complete clarity, the Noble Qur'an states

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا

Surely (as for) those who possess true faith and perform righteous deeds, the Most Merciful" (Allah) will bring about love for them (in the hearts of others)."

However first off, we must set the record straight between ourselves and Allah (SwT) and then the record of deeds performed by us in relation to others will be cleared and set straight! The second commandment tells us that we must have certainty that this world will end while the next life is perpetual.

Before we can discuss this issue, we must first see what stage of certainty the tradition is speaking about. Is the meaning of certainty the level of actions or deep pondering and thinking?

From the point of view of our intelligence, we have certainty that this world will end. However, at the level of our actions, we act in the way of a person who believes that this world will last forever while the next life will come to an end!

If we have firm conviction that this world is temporal and will end, then why do we expend all of our efforts for the life of this world rather than the next world!?

We speak the words of one who is an ascetic in relation to this world, however our actions are :of the person who is actively seeking the life of this world

يَقُولُ فِي الدُّنْيَا يَقُولُ الرَّاهِدِينَ وَ يَعْمَلُ فِيهَا عَمَلَ الرَّاهِبِينَ

*He speaks about the life of this world as one who is an ascetic, however he acts in this world"
as if he is actively pursuing the material life!"*

The third point mentioned in the tradition is actually a look at the state of the transient world. Various phrases are used in the Islamic narrations in relation to the state of the world. In this section of the tradition, we see that humanity is addressed and has been told that in regards to the material world, both the believers and unbelievers are the same and that there is no difference between them!

We read, "O' people! Everyone in this world are merely guests and whatever they possess are things borrowed from others. When they die, these things will return back to their rightful owners!"

Point of Interest: This is a very expressive and eloquent analogy that has been used. If we imagine that we have been invited to a friend's house and when we enter we see his house is full of beautiful, expensive silk carpets and a table full of various types of foods served on dishes of jewels and other such things, however we then realize that all of these things have been lent to the person by someone else to use (and then give back), we would not have even the slightest attraction to them!

Therefore, if we were to have the same feeling for the life of this world (in all of its aspects), then without doubt, we would not have even the slightest attraction to the material world.

Problem: There are some self-proclaimed intellectuals and those who are outright opposed to the faith of Islam who state: "These sorts of teachings are actually a type of drug which lead the people to becoming lazy! Through these sorts of teachings, the Muslim society has been left behind and is a totally backward nation!"

Others state that, "These sorts of traditions have been made up by the rich class of people who would like to see the common people break off all attraction to the material pleasures so that they (the rich) would be able to hoard the luxuries for themselves!"

Answer: Islam has actually commanded all of us to struggle and has warned people about :being lazy and reliant upon the society for financial assistance

مَلْعُونٌ مَنْ أَلْقَى كَلَّهُ عَلَى النَّاسِ

Allah's mercy is removed from the person who becomes a burden upon others."

Once, a young man was with the Noble Prophet (S) and the Messenger asked some other

people, "What does this young man do for a living?" The people replied, "He (SwT)s :unemployed." To this, the Prophet (S) replied

سَقَطَ مِنْ عَيْنِي

He has fallen out of my sight (I have no regard for him)!"

In addition, Islam has brought with it such a set of teachings that even the great Prophet of Islam (S) used kiss the hand of people who would go out and work for a living! With this said, we see that the Prophet (S) and A`immah (as) spoke about the lowliness of the :material world since they wanted to bring a balance in life

إِنِّي لَا أُوصِيكُمْ بِدَارِ الدُّنْيَا فَإِنَّكُمْ بِهَا مُسْتَوْثِقُونَ...

I do not advise you towards the life of the material world since without doubt all of you have a "strong attraction to it. [Rather, I advise you to prepare yourselves for the life of the next world.]" Thus, we see that we have not been admonished towards the life of the material world. Rather, we are told to keep the next life in view so that through this, we can strike a balance between the two. Definitely, all of the tragedies that afflict the people of the material world come about due to the worship of this temporal life!

At the end of the tradition, the temporary world and the next life have been compared to one another and we are told that the life of this world is something which has been loaned to us. One of the other characteristics of the life of this world is that, although from one point of view, it is a place of trial and examination in which both the good and the bad doer profit, however conversely, the next life is that which has been promised to us - and that too a truthful promise. This material world is lowly and shall dissipate, whereas the next life is a trust - a truthful trust.

In that world (the next life), the ruler shall be an authority who is not only Just, but also All-:Powerful and there shall not be a single person who will be able to run away from His authority

وَلَا يُمَكِّنُ الْفِرَارُ مِنْ حُكُومَتِكَ...

It is not possible to flee from Your authority." (Du'a Kumayl)"

Therefore, we see that we are placed in the presence of three things:

1. The temporal environment (the life of this world);

2. A truthful promise (the life of the Next world);
3. An authority to which there is no way to escape. His is an authority which the Qur`an describes as being

...وَإِنْ كَانَ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ أَتَيْنَا بِهَا وَكَفَى بِنَا حَاسِبِينَ

and though there be the weight of a grain of mustard seed (any deed - good or bad), (yet) We... will bring it forth, and sufficient are We to take account."

:In another verse of the Qur`an, we are told

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

Whoever has done an atom's weight of good shall see it; and whoever has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it."

Thus, there is not a single thing which is hidden from the sight of Allah (SwT), and all things will be taken account of!

:However, in relation to the next life, the Noble Qur`an states

وَامْتَأْزُوا الْيَوْمَ أَيُّهَا الْمُجْرِمُونَ

To the group of sinners, it shall be said): Get aside today, O' guilty ones!")"

At this time, the masses of people will be divided, and Allah (SwT) will shower His mercy upon those who had prepared themselves for the next life.

has been used which refers to the grave as 'رمس' In the tradition under discussion, the word when a person's grave was made smooth and flat, the 'Arabs would use this word. Thus, when a person has been given the time and his hands are free (just as an animal whose ropes are taken off, permitting it to freely graze in the pasture), he must make use of the opportunity to perform righteous deeds before death comes to him!

There is an important issue that must be mentioned in regards to this tradition which is that this world, with all of its problems and difficulties is actually a great thing, while the next life with all of the good things promised therein has one problem with it. The good thing about the life of this world is that while we are here, our deed of records is open and thus, a person is able to wipe out all of the bad deeds he performs. However with the coming of death (and the next life), the person's deed of records is sealed.

In speech number 230 in Nahj al-Balagha, the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as)
:has stated

لَا عَنْ قَبِيحٍ يَسْتَطِيعُونَ انْتِقَالَاً وَلَا فِي حَسَنٍ يَسْتَطِيعُونَ إِزْدِيَاداً

*In the next life) neither shall you be able to remove the bad deeds and sins, nor shall you have)"
able to add to the good and righteous deeds (on your record)."*

Sometimes while in this world, a person would shed one tear or let out a single cry and repent from deep within his soul and through this, would extinguish an entire ocean of fire which he
had ignited through his sins!

The belief in Ma'ad - the next life, is an issue which the Noble Qur'an has placed a great deal of emphasis on and we see that there are actually two things which form the fundamentals of
the training of a person:

1. Keeping our origin in perspective.

2. The accountability for our actions and the resurrection (our eventual outcome).

If a person was to keep both of these two issues in mind, then without doubt, they would stay on the right course. However, the weaker our faith becomes in these two issues, the more we
see our actions becoming corrupt and impure.

Thus, we pray to Allah (SwT) that we are able to keep these two issues in our mind day and
night.

:In addition, we see that in our daily Salat, we repeat the following line a minimum of ten times

مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

Master of the Day of Judgment."

As is it commonly known, half of Suratul hamd is reserved for praise and extolling the characteristics of Allah (SwT) while the other half is a description of the Resurrection Day. Therefore, it is with this Surah that a person can spiritually build himself. It is a Surah in which
:the second half contains the prayer

إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

Keep us upon the straight path."

Thus, after attesting to true faith in our beginning (creation) and eventual end (death), we request guidance onto the Straight Path.

The more we pay attention to the contents of this Surah, the better we understand why this Surah has been chosen for the daily prayers and why it must be read in each of the daily prayers. In some traditions we are told that one of the main reasons why it must be read in every prayer is due to the secrets related to the beginnings of humanity, our eventual end and the nurturing of humanity.

We must make sure that especially while in the state of Salat, we do not drift towards thinking about the material world as any form of worship in which there is no deep thought and presence of heart is like the outer shell of a fruit with no fruit inside it!

At this point, a question may arise that how we can develop presence of heart in our Salat? The discussion on presence of heart in the Salat is extensive, however in brief we state: A person gives the most importance to that thing which occupies his thoughts the most. Therefore, if the material world is important to him, then during the Salat, he will constantly be thinking about it. However, if the next life is what is most important to him, then even when he is not in a state of Salat, he will be thinking about the next life - let alone while he is in prayer!

In summary, we state that presence of heart follows and is under the direct influence of those things which we are attracted to.

It is for this reason that we must seriously think about those things which we are attracted to .(and work such that our heart is always being pulled towards Allah (SWT