

The Believer's Trials And Tribulations

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An Exposition of Hadith by Imam Khomeini

*Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni (R) from 'Ali ibn Ibrahim, from his father, from Ibn Mahbub, from Abu 'Abd Allah (A) that he (A) said: "Verily, it is mentioned in the Book of 'Ali that of all mankind the prophets undergo the severest of trials, and after them the awsiya', and after them the elect to the extent of their nobility. Indeed, the believer undergoes trial in proportion to his good deeds. So one whose faith is sound and whose deeds are good, his trials are also more severe. That is indeed because God Almighty did not make this world a place for rewarding the believer and punishing the unbeliever. And one whose faith is feeble and whose (good) deeds are few faces fewer tribulations. Verily, tribulations hasten towards the believer with greater [speed than rainwater towards the earth's depths.]"*¹

Exposition

Some have said by nas (people, mankind) in this noble tradition and its like are meant perfect human beings (kamilun) such as the prophets and the awsiya', and that in reality it is they who are the nas, whereas other people are lil-nas (for the people), as mentioned in some traditions. However, that interpretation does not apply here and it seems proper that mankind and people in general should have been meant in this place. This is evident from the other traditions of this chapter of al-Kafi, and if it has been said in some traditions that by nas are meant the kamilun, it does not mean that the word has this meaning in every place that it occurs. Also, bala' means trial, test and examination, and it applies to the good as well as the bad among people, and the lexicographers have stated this expressly. Al-Jawhari in al-Sihah says in this regard:

And God Almighty' says: And that He may try the believers with a fair trial. (8:17)

All that with which God, to Whom belongs Glory and Majesty, tries His servants is bala' and ibtila', whether it is one of the diseases and ailments, or adversities like poverty, humiliation and loss of worldly fortunes, or a thing of an opposite kind such as acquisition of power and glory, wealth, riches, high status, honor, and the like. However, whenever bala', baliyyah or ibtila' and the like are mentioned, it is the former kind of things that are meant. Amthal means 'nobler and means that one who is better and nobler after the (ثُمَّ الْأَمْثَلُ فَالْأَمْثَلُ) better': Hence, the phrase prophets and the awsiya' has to face a severer kind of bala' than the others, and those who are

better and nobler than others after them have to face a severer degree of trial. The degree of the severity of bala' is in accordance with the decree of merit. This kind of expression (i.e., like **تَمُّ الْأَمْتَلِ فَالْأَمْتَلِ**) does not exist in Persian. 'Sukhf' means 'feebleness of the rational faculty' or 'foolishness', as mentioned by al-Sihah, and other lexicographical works. Qarar means 'resting place,' as mentioned in the dictionaries: The apology means that in the same way as the earth is the resting place where rainwater comes to rest and abide, the believer is the resting place of sufferings and tribulations, which rush toward him, come to rest in him, and do not depart from him. God willing, we will mention .that which is needed for the exposition of this noble tradition in the course of a few sections

The Meaning Of Trial

Let it be known to you that the human souls exist at a level of potentiality from the beginning of their origin, their attachment to the bodies, and their descent to the realm of corporeal existence (mulk), in respect of all things, including knowledge, good and evil traits, and all kinds of perceptive and behavioral faculties. Gradually they move from potentiality to actuality with the grace of God, the Almighty and the Sublime. At first, weak impressions related to particulars (as opposed to universals) emerge in the soul, such as impressions of touch and other outward senses, moving from the lower to the higher. Following that, the inward perceptions also arise in it. However, all its faculties exist only at a level of potentiality, and they do not grow without proper stimulation. For instance, if the base kind of faculties come to dominate it, it becomes disposed to ugliness and evil, for its inner powers, such as shahwah (lust), ghadhab (anger), etc., impel it towards sin, licentiousness, aggression and tyranny. After following them for some time it grows into a strange monster and a highly grotesque devil.

However, since the grace and mercy of God Almighty have been accompanying the Children of Adam since eternity, He bestowed upon them two educators and teachers which are like two wings with which they can fly from the depths of ignorance, defectiveness, ugliness and wretchedness to the heights of knowledge, perfection; beauty and felicity, and deliver themselves from the narrow valley of nature to reach the expansive and open horizons of the realms of the spirit (malakut). The first of these is the faculty of intellect and discernment, which is the inner teacher; and the second, the outward teacher, is represented by the prophets and the divine guides who shove the path of felicity as distinct from the ways of wretchedness. None of these two can singly achieve this end without the other. For the human intellect by itself can neither identify the paths of felicity and wretchedness nor find the way to the hidden

world and the realm of Hereafterly existence. Similarly, the guidance of the prophets cannot be effective without the exercise of the discerning faculties of the intellect. Thus God, the Beneficent and the Sublime, gave them these two educators so that through them all the potentialities and hidden faculties and capacities, latent in the human soul, should be realized and actualized. God Almighty blessed them with these two great bounties in order to try and test human beings, for it is through these bounties that individual human beings are separated into the felicitous and the wretched, the obedient and the rebellious, the perfect and the defective. And so the Great Wali of God said: And by Him Who sent him (the Prophet (S)) with the Truth, you shall indeed be mixed and intermingled and then separated in the sieve (of Divine trial and tribulation)?[2]

In the noble al-Kafi, in the chapter relating to Divine test and trial (bab al-tamhis wa al-'imtihan), Ibn Abi Ya'fur reports Imam al-Sadiq (A) as having said: It is inevitable that mankind should be purified, separated and sieved so that a great number is excluded by the sieve.[3] Also al-Kulayni reports with his isnad from Mansur the following tradition: Imam al-Sadiq (A) said, "O Mansur! Indeed this affair (i.e. the appearance of al-Mahdi (A)) will not come to you except after despair and not, by God, until you have been separated, and not, by God, until you have been purified, and not, by God, until the wretched attain wretchedness and the felicitous attain felicity."[4]

In another tradition, Abu al-Hasan (A) is reported to have said: You shall be purified in the way gold is purified.[5]

In al-Kafi, bab al-'ibtila' wa al-'ikhtibar, the following tradition is reported with isnad from Imam al-Sadiq (A): He said, "There is no qabd (extension) and bast (contraction) except that in it there is for God a purpose, a decree, and a trial."[6]

In another tradition he is (A) reported to have said: Indeed there is no qabd and bast in that which God has commanded or forbidden except that there is in it from God a trial and a decree?[7]

Qabd means imsak (withholding), man' (obstruction, prevention) and akhdh (seizure). Bast is nashr (unfolding, spreading, resurrection) and 'ata' (gift, bestowal). Hence every gift, expansion and obstruction, and every command, prohibition and duty is for the sake of trial. Thus we came to know that the sending of prophets and the revelation of heavenly scriptures is all for the sake of the separation of humanity, of the separation of the wretched from the happy and the felicitous, of the obedient from the sinful. And the meaning of Divine testing and examination is this very separation of men from one another, not the knowledge of their separateness, because the knowledge of God Almighty is pre-eternal; it encompasses all

things prior to their creation. The hukama' have elaborately discussed the reality of trial and ibtila' and it is beyond the scope of this exposition to mention their opinions. In any case, the result of this trial and examination is the separation of the felicitous from the wretched. In the course of it the proof (hujjah) of God is established against the creatures. Thereafter, their life, felicity and salvation, or their destruction and damnation occurs after the establishment of the proof and testimony (bayyinah), and there remains no room for objection for anyone. One who attains felicity and eternal life does so through Divine succor and guidance, for God has bestowed all the means of attaining them. Also, one who earns wretchedness and falls into destruction, following Satan and his carnal self, his wretchedness and damnation are also earned by him out of his own free will, because he does so despite the availability of all the means of guidance and felicity. The conclusive proof of God is established against him and there is no room for any pretext. Hence the Qur'an (says: For it (the soul) is what it has earned and against it is what it has merited. (2:286

The Prophets And Divine Trial

It was mentioned earlier that every act of the human being, or rather every event that occurs in the realm of the body and is related to the soul's perceptions, leaves a kind of impression in the self. This is true of both good and evil deeds (whose impression upon the soul is mentioned in traditions as the appearance of a 'white dot' or a 'black dot' respectively) as well as of pleasures and pains.

For instance, every experience of pleasure, derived either from food, drink, sex or something else, leaves an impression upon the soul and creates or increases the love and attachment for that kind of, pleasure in the soul. The more that one plunges into such pleasures and lusts, the greater becomes the self's love and attachment for this world and its reliance upon it. Thus the self is nourished with the love of the world and trained in accordance with it.

The greater the sensual pleasures that it derives, the stronger become the roots of this love; and the more the available means of comfort and luxury, the sturdier becomes the tree of attachment to the world. And the more the soul's attention is directed towards the world, the greater is proportionately its negligence toward God and the world of the Hereafter. Thus when this reliance upon the world becomes complete, the soul assumes a worldly and materialistic form, and the absence of attention towards God Almighty and the 'realm of His munificence and bounty also becomes total and complete. It is about such a soul that, the Qur'an says: He inclined towards the earth and followed his lust. (7:176)

The inevitable result of this inner immersion in the sea of pleasure and lust is the love of the

world, and the love of the world creates antipathy towards that which is unlike it; attention towards the corporeal realm (mulk) brings negligence towards the spiritual world (malakut). On the contrary, if one has a bad and painful experience of something, the impression of that experience creates an antipathy in the soul. The stronger that impression is, the greater is that inward antipathy. For instance, if after moving to a city one has to face there numerous torments and ailments and undergo outer and inner adversities, he will inevitably abhor that place. The greater the number of adversities that he faces therein, the more will be his abhorrence for that place. If he knows a better place, he will migrate to it, and if he is unable to make the journey, his heart will migrate and go out to the city of his liking. Thus if a man faces adversities, pain and torments in this world and is overtaken therein by waves of calamities and tribulations, he will inevitably come to resent it. His attachment to it will diminish and he will come to distrust it. If he believed in another world, a vast world free of every kind of pain and grief, he will inevitably want to migrate to it, and if he were unable to make the journey physically, he will send his heart out to it. Moreover, it is evident that all the spiritual, moral and behavioral evils arise from the love of the world and negligence of God Almighty and the Hereafter. The love of the world is the source of all sins, in the same way as the love of God, the aspiration for the eternal abode of His bounty, the renunciation of the world and absence of reliance upon and trust in its adornments are the source of all spiritual cures and moral and behavioral reform. After these preliminaries we come to know that whenever God Almighty has a greater consideration and love for someone, and when someone is the object of the mercy of His Sacred Essence to a greater extent, He restrains him from this world and its charms with the waves of calamity and tribulation, so that his soul turns away in disgust from the world and its adornments and turns his face and his heart, to the extent of his faith, toward the world of the Hereafter. If there weren't any other reason except this one for endurance of severe calamities it would have been sufficient, and a noble tradition also points towards this matter. Imam al-Baqir (A) said "Verily, God Almighty treats the believer with tribulations in the same way as a man treats his family with gifts after an absence (upon a journey), and He restrains him from the world in the same way as the physician prescribes restraints for the sick man."^[8] The same thing is said in another hadith, and one should not imagine that God's love and the great care of His Sacred Essence for some people is - God be our refuge - extravagant and pointless. Rather, with every step that a faithful servant of God takes towards Him, God's grace turns towards him and the Almighty moves closer to him. The similitude of the degrees of faith and the availability of the means of Divine succor is that of a man moving with a lamp in

darkness; with every step that he takes forward, some more of the path in front of him is illuminated, which allows him to take another step forward. With every step that a man takes forward on the path of the Hereafter, that path appears clearer to him and God's grace upon him increases, preparing the means of attention towards the world of Divine proximity and of antipathy towards the world of separation and distance.

The pre-eternal grace of God Almighty upon the prophets and the awliya' is on account of His pre-eternal knowledge of their obedience during their terms of duty. For instance, if you have two children about whom you have prior knowledge in their childhood that one of them will bring you satisfaction while the other will grow up to cause you displeasure and resentment, your love for the obedient child would be greater from the very beginning

God's Remembrance

Another point relating to the severity of the tribulations of the elect among God's servants is that they are made to remember God on account of these adversities and tribulations and to pray and lament in front of His Sacred Essence. This makes them accustomed to remember Him and keep their thoughts busy with Him. It is natural for human beings to seek and learn upon what they think is a source of support in times of 'adversity. In times of comfort and welfare they forget and neglect it. And since the elect know no source of support other than God, their attention turns towards Him, they putting their sole reliance in His sacred station, and God Almighty, also, with the love that He has for them, prepares the means of that undivided attention and reliance.

However, this, as well as the foregoing point, is not true of the prophets and the perfect awliya', for their station is too high in sanctity and their heart too firm in faith for them to develop attachment for worldly things on account of such things (as comfort and welfare) or for them to waver in their sole reliance upon God. This may be so because the prophets and the perfect awliya' have, through their inward light and spiritual experience, ascertained that God Almighty has no regard for this world and its adornments and that everything therein is base and lowly in the eyes of His Sacred Essence, and for this reason they have preferred poverty to wealth, tribulation to comfort and ease, and adversity to that which is unlike it. Several noble traditions also support this view.

It is mentioned in the hadith that Gabriel brought the key of the earth's treasures to the Seal of the Prophets (S) and said to him (S) that should he (S) accept it, nothing would diminish from his (S) Hereafterly stations. But the Prophet (S) did not accept it for the sake of humility before God Almighty and chose poverty.

In the noble al-Kafi, al-Kulayni, with a chain of transmitters reaching up to Imam al-Sadiq (A), reports the Imam (A) as having said: Indeed God has so little regard for the unbeliever that should he ask of Him the world and that which is in it, He would give that to him.[9]

And this is due to the worthlessness of the world in the eyes of the Almighty. It is mentioned in the hadith that from the time that the Almighty created the corporeal world, He did not look at it with favor.

Another point related to the severity of the believer's tribulations that has been mentioned in traditions is that there are certain stations for the believers which they cannot attain without undergoing suffering, pain and affliction. It is possible that these afflictions are the corporeal forms of the degrees of renunciation of the world and devotion to God, and it is also possible that these sufferings have celestial forms (suwar-e malakuti) which cannot be realized without their occurrence in the corporeal world and afflictions therein. Imam al-Sadiq (A), in a noble tradition of al-Kafi with a continuous chain of transmission going up to him, states: Verily, the servant has certain stations near God that cannot be realized without one of these two attributes: either the loss of his wealth or affliction in his body.[10]

In a tradition relating to the martyrdom of the Doyen of the Martyrs (Imam al-Husayn) (A) it is mentioned that he (A) saw the Prophet (S) in a dream. The Prophet (S) said to that mazlum, "There is a station for you in the Paradise which you cannot attain except through martyrdom." The celestial form of martyrdom cannot be attained without its occurrence in the corporeal realm, as has been demonstrated in the higher sciences. It is mentioned in mutawatir traditions that for every action there is a corresponding form in the other world, and al Imam al-Sadiq (A) is reported to have said in al-Kafi that: The greatness of man's reward goes with the greatness of suffering, and God did not love a people but that He subjected them to suffering.[11]
.There are many traditions containing this theme

The Prophets' Suffering

The great muhaddith al-Majlisi (M) says: These traditions relating to the tribulations of the prophets, which have been narrated both through Sunni and Shi'i chains of transmission (turuq), clearly indicate that the prophets and the awliya' differ from others in respect of ailments and bodily afflictions. Rather, they have a greater right than others to suffer on account of their great reward which is responsible for the loftiness of their stations. And this suffering is not only not contrary to their station, it even causes the confirmation of their affair. Should they not undergo afflictions, despite the manifestation of miracles and extraordinary things at their hands, people might say such things about them as the Christians did about

their prophet. This explanation is also mentioned in traditions.

The subtle researcher and the great, sacred philosopher al-Tusi, may God fill his grave with aroma, states in al-Tajrid: "Of the things that the prophets should be free from is that which is regarded as abhorrent." And the Allamah of the ulama of Islam (al-Allamah al-Hilli) (R) adds in Sharh al-Tajrid that the prophets should be free from such abhorrent diseases as absence of urinary control, leprosy and leukoderma, for their abhorrent character is contrary to the aim of prophecy.

This writer says: The station of prophethood is subject to spiritual levels and excellences and has no relation to corporeality. Hence physical diseases and defects do no harm to the spiritual station of the prophets and affliction with abhorrent diseases diminishes nothing from the sublimity and greatness of their station, although they may not contribute in a way of confirmation to their (already established) excellences and degrees of sublimity. But that which these two researchers have said is also not devoid of validity. This is because the common people cannot make a distinction between the two stations (of spirituality and corporeality) and imagine that physical defectiveness is related or caused by spiritual defectiveness.

Hence they consider some defects as being contrary to the high and great station of the prophets. Hence Divine grace dictates that the prophets who are messengers and bringers of Divine Shari'ah should not be afflicted with such diseases as are considered disgusting and abominable by the people. Therefore, the absence of this kind of affliction is not because it is harmful to the station of prophethood, but for the sake of maximizing the effectiveness of the prophetic mission of communicating the Divine teachings (tabligh). Hence there is nothing wrong if some prophets without a Shari'ah, great awliya' and the faithful are afflicted with this kind of afflictions, as in the case of Hadrat Ayyub (Job) and Habib al-Najjar. There are many traditions concerning the affliction of Hadrat Ayyub (A), of which are the following two: 'Ali ibn Ibrahim in a long tradition narrates on the authority of Abu Basir that Imam al-Sadiq (A) said, "Then his whole body, excepting his intellect and his eyes, was subjected to the disease. Then Iblis blew upon it and it became a single wound extending from his head to feet. He (Job) remained for a period in that condition, praising and thanking God, until it became infested with worms. Whenever a worm fell off from his body, he would put it back, saying to it, "Return to your place, from where God created you." And it began to stench until his townsfolk expelled him from his town and his food came from the garbage thrown outside the town."

In al-Kafi, al-Kulayni reports from Abu Basir that he asked Imam al-Sadiq (A) about the verse, "When thou recitest the Qur'an, seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan, he has no authority over those who believe and trust in their Lord; (his authority is over those who take

him for their guardian and ascribe associates to God) (16:98-100)" The Imam said, "O Abu Muhammad, by God, He gives authority to him (Satan) over the believer's body but not over his faith (din). He gave him (Satan) authority over Ayyub and Satan disfigured him physically, but He did not give authority to him over his faith. And He does give him authority over the faithful's bodies but not over their faith."

Najiyah says, "I said to Abu Ja'far (A) that al-Mughirah says that a believer is never afflicted with leprosy, leukoderma and such other ailments (is that true?) The Imam replied, 'Didn't he know that the Sahib Ya Sin (Habib al-Najjar, the man mentioned in Surat Ya Sin) was mutilated (mukanna')?' He (A) closed his fingers and said, 'It is as if I see him go to his people in his mutilated state (takannu') to warn them and come back the next day, when they killed him.' Then he added, 'Verily, the believer suffers all kinds of afflictions and dies in all manners of dying except suicide.'"^[12]

Sahib Ya Sin is Habib al-Najjar and takannu' (the word is with nun in most of the manuscripts), according to al-Majlisi, means shortening and mutilation. He adds that it was probably leprosy which had resulted in the shortening of his fingers. However, this, as well as many other ahadith, indicate that the believers and prophets are sometimes afflicted with abominable diseases on account of some higher expediency, although there are some other traditions which negate the disfigurement of Hadrat Ayyub's body and its petrification, and not much benefit lies in discussing them further with a view to affecting a reconciliation. On the whole, these kind of diseases do no harm to the condition of believers and do not diminish anything from the station of the prophets (A) rather, they lead to the elevation of their station, and God .Almighty knows best the truth

The World Is Not A Place Of Reward Or Punishment

Let it be known to you that this world, due to its defective, feeble and weak nature, is neither the abode of the reward of God Almighty nor the place of His chastisement and punishment. This is so because the abode of Divine munificence is a realm whose bounties are pure, unadulterated with torment, and its comforts are not mixed with pain and grief. Such bounties are not possible in this world, which is an abode where contradictories throng together and each of whose bounties is mixed with numerous kinds of pains, hardships and torments. Rather, as the philosophers have said, pleasure in this world lies in avoiding pain. It may be said that even its pleasures cause pain and every one of its pleasures is followed by pain and hardship. Rather, the very material of this world lacks the capacity to accept absolute goodness and unadulterated bounty. In the same way, its pains and hardships, torments and

punishments are also mixed; each of its pains and hardships carries within itself some goodness and bounty, and none of its afflictions and adversities is unmixed. The very material of this world lacks the capacity to accept pure, absolute punishment, whereas the abode of Divine chastisement is a place where punishment is pure and absolute; its pains and afflictions are not like those of this world, which while they afflict one member of the body are absent from the other members. While the healthy members are in comfort and ease, the afflicted member suffers pain and agony. The noble tradition partly refers to what we have stated here when it says: That is, the reason that the believer is afflicted in this world with tribulation is that God Almighty has made it neither the place of His reward for the believer nor the place of chastisement for the infidel. This world is the abode of duty and the farm of the Hereafter. It is a place of trade and earning whereas the Hereafter is the abode of reward and punishment, of bounty and damnation.

Those who expect that God Almighty would immediately get hold of one who commits some sin or indecency in this world or perpetrates some injustice or aggression against someone, and cut his hand off and expunge him from the realm of existence, are unaware that their expectation is contrary to this world's order and opposed to God's wont and sunnah. Here is the place of trial and the zone of the separation of the wretched from the felicitous and the sinful from the obedient. Here is the realm of the manifestation of deeds, not the abode of the emergence of the results of personal deeds and qualities. If occasionally God Almighty does take hold of an oppressor, it may be said that it is due to the Almighty's mercy for that oppressor (for it stops him from sinning further). For, when God Almighty leaves the sinful and the tyrants to themselves, His wrath takes the form of *istidraj*, the gradual seizing. Hence, God Almighty declares: (And those who cry lies to Our signs), We will draw them on little by little whence they know not; and I respite them - assuredly My guile is firm. (7:182-183)

And He also says: And let not the unbelievers suppose that the respite We grant them is better for them; We grant them respite only that they may increase in sin; and there awaits them a humiliating chastisement. (3:178)

In *Majma' al-bayan*, this tradition is cited from Imam al-Sadiq (A): The Imam (A) said, "When a person commits a sin and the bounty (that he had received) is renewed for him, he leaves off asking for forgiveness (*istighfar*), and this is *al-'istidraj* (as mentioned in verse 7:182)." At the end of the noble tradition, the Imam (A) says: And one whose faith is feeble and his intellect is weak, his tribulation is also slight.

This shows that tribulations are both bodily and spiritual, for the persons of weak intellects and

feeble sensibility are secure from spiritual tribulations and intellectual suffering in proportion to their intellectual weakness and the feebleness of their sensibility. On the contrary, those with more complete intellects and acuter sensibility have to undergo spiritual tribulations more intensely in proportion to the perfectness and acuteness of their intellect and sensibility. Perhaps it was for this reason that the Holy Messenger (S) said: No prophet was tormented to the extent that I was. This complaint of the Prophet (S) refers to this point, for whoever perceives the greatness and glory of the Lord to a greater extent and knows the sacred station of God Almighty more than others, he suffers more and is tormented to a greater extent by the sins of the creatures and their offences against the Lord's sanctity. Also, one who has a greater love and compassion for the creatures of God is tormented to a greater extent by their crooked and wretched condition and ways. And, of course, the Seal of the Prophets (S) was more perfect in all these stations and higher than all of the prophets and the awliya' in respect of his degree of excellence and perfection. Hence his torment and suffering was greater than that of any one of them. There is also another explanation of the Holy Messenger's statement, whose mention is not appropriate for this place. .And God knows best and to Him belongs all the praise

Notes:

[1] Al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, vol. II, p.259, hadith No.29.

[2] Nahj al-balaghah, Khutbah No.16.

[3] Usul al-Kafi, vol II, p.370, hadith No.2.

[4] Usul al-Kafi, vol II, p.370, hadith No.2.

[5] Usul al-Kafi, hadith No.4:

[6] Usul al-Kafi, vol. I, p.152.

[7] Usul al-Kafi, vol. I, p.152.

[8] Usul al-Kafi, vol. II, p.255, hadith No.17.

[9] Usul al-Kafi, vol. II, p.255, hadith No.17.

[10] Usul al-Kafi, vol. II, p.255.

[11] Usul al-Kafi, vol. II, p.255.

[12] Usul al-Kafi, vol. II, p.255.