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Chapter1: Discourse on Patience

Patience is considered to be one of the best-known terms in Islam. In Islamic literature, this phrase occurs with frequency in proportion to different occasions and in various fields, with a tone of encouragement, discussion of rewards, and praise and explanation about its importance. It is therefore natural that Muslims become familiar with its meaning, understand this special phrase, and try to breed this quality within themselves to the best of their ability.

Unfortunately, alteration or tampering, which is a very common calamity especially for Islamic phrases, has not left this term untouched, and it could be said that up to a large extent its form, matter, and substance have been completely metamorphosed.

Common Understanding of Patience

Normally, patience is defined as tolerant of unpleasant circumstances. This definition, the way it is to a larger extent is intermingled with ambiguities, justifications, opposing statements, and conflicts. For an oppressed and vacuous society steeped in corruption and decadence, patience as defined above will become the biggest tool and pattern for oppressors and corrupters for maintaining the status quo, by keeping the society in a state of backwardness.

When poor and backward nations exposed to all kinds of problems and misery, or oppressed masses crushed under brute oppression, or societies faced with moral corruption, poverty and human suffering, or any individual or group trapped in a cesspool of misfortune and calamities are told to be patient, the first result will be the taking of that bitter and fatal dose, i.e. to suffer with, and not to overthrow the existing state of oppression.

Not only will they not mobilize themselves to overthrow the existing undesirable state of oppression, but on the contrary, keeping in mind the supposed rewards for remaining indifferent and naive they would feel happy and content to the extent that they would regard such behaviour as tantamount to accomplishment of a grand victory. It is obvious that the prevalence of such a mentality in that society, up to a large extent, will be to the advantage of the class of exploiters and oppressors, and to the further

detriment of the deprived and oppressed masses.

Unfortunately, this wrong interpretation together with its disastrous results presently constitutes the sorry state of affairs in Islamic societies. Any other interpretation for free and unprejudiced minds is quite logical and acceptable. But for those accustomed to its false interpretation, even serious endeavours and fruitful results. When detailed studies of verses of the Holy Qur'an and narrations (hadith) about patience are conducted, grief and surprise for this deviation becomes relatively intense.

Overall Views About Patience

If the meanings of patience are interpreted in the light of the clear, explicit, and definite verses of the Holy Qur'an as well as in accordance with the authentic traditions reported from the infallible Imams (may peace be upon them), then the result derived would be completely opposite to the current common understanding of the term.

The above interpretation transforms patience into a lever capable of removing with ease, the heaviest obstacles and solving the biggest problems with one hundred percent positive results. Thus, for an unfortunate society, patience is the key to prosperity and blessings, while on the other hand it will be a strong obstacle to be reckoned with for troublemakers and mischief mongers.

In order to appreciate exactly the true meanings of patience and its relevant fields, the best methodology is to resort to the Holy Qur'an and authentic traditions. A thorough investigation would enable us to reach a clear and decisive judgement. More than seventy verses of the Holy Qur'an, deal with patience, glorifying the term and praising those who possess this virtue. The Holy Qur'an describes in detail possess this virtue. The Holy Qur'an describes in detail the relevant results derived, and the circumstances where one could count on this characteristic.

For the present discussion, we will not resort to the verses of the Holy Qur'an regarding patience, rather it will suffice our discussion to review the authentic traditions, and accordingly, derive inferences and conclusions because of the following reasons.

Firstly, precise and detailed interpretation of the verses of the Holy Qur'an regarding patience would mean a wide discussion, which requires a lot of patience, energy and time.1

Secondly, to try to compensate for the negligence shown towards the traditions which were narrated by the infallible Imams (may peace be upon them), our discussion will be based on traditions. The absence of the use of traditions is clearly felt in current Islamic research and currently published Islamic literature.

Summary of the Meanings of Patience

On the basis of traditions, patience is defined as the resistance shown by man on the road towards perfection against mischief, corruption and degradation. Which can be compared to the example of a

mountaineer who, in order to reach the peak, has to face internal as well as external obstacles or barriers.

The internal obstacles are within his inner self, while the external ones are outside beyond his control. Each of them in their own ways interfere with his climbing efforts. Internal obstacles such as the love for comfort, as well as fear, despair, and different types of similar passions, try to stop him while the feeling of indecisiveness in many forms tries to kill his determination for climbing. On the other hand, external barriers such as stones, rocks, wolves, thieves, and thorns etc. retard his progress.

Someone who is faced with these kinds of barriers will have the options to either drop his journey on this road which is full of dangers and hardships, or to go ahead by offering resistance against them and overcoming each barrier with his power of determination. The second case is defined as patience.

During his limited span of life in this world, the human being between his birth and death is a traveller on the road towards the final destination. He has been fundamentally created to endeavour as much as possible to bring himself close to the final destination. All the duties and responsibilities which have been assigned to man's shoulders are the necessary means and ways to bring him closer to that target. The primary aim of the divine religions and the great prophets was to build an Islamic society providing a suitable field in which human beings could travel, ultimately reaching their desired goal.

In a nutshell, that aim could be defined as the striving for perfection and exaltation of human beings. In other words, it is the opening of the fountainheads of talents of his inner self. His acquiring of superior and noble characteristics overrides animalistic characteristics or lower qualities.

Of course, this path is a difficult one full of troubles and plenty of barriers. Each of these barriers alone is sufficient to deter the climber from continuing his journey towards the peak of perfection and exaltedness. The inner negative forces (inside the climber) of unweighed evil passions, coupled with the external forces such as the troublesome state of affairs of the real world, produce a series of obstacles of thorns, rocks, etc., in his path.

Patience means to be able to stand up against all those obstacles and to conquer them with determination and enthusiasm. Therefore, as was mentioned earlier, all Islamic duties whether individual or collective (social) are means and steps needed to approach that goal of perfection.

For a person on a journey towards a distant City travelling through the deserts, the passing of each habitation that lies in his path means that his journey is progressing or, he is getting closer to his final destination. Of course these intermediate aims or targets themselves are preliminaries of the path towards reaching the real and final destination. Therefore each step taken, although a means for accomplishing the ultimate aim, is nevertheless in itself a multidimensional accomplishment and may be regarded as something closer to the final objective.

The summary of this discussion is that to reach each of these goals and destinations, the basic condition

is the possession of patience and the ability to utilise this sharp and decisive weapon. Just as the road towards the accomplishment of the ultimate goal of perfection is full of obstacles, similarly the paths of Muslims fulfilling their Islamic duties and responsibilities are also full of these obstacles. These paths are a means for reaching the final destination.

There are infinite internal and external obstacles scattered on these roads. On one hand, the depressing internal feelings of laziness, indifference, selfishness, self-praise, pride, greed, and improper sexual desires, as well as other various harmful desires of comfort, wealth, fame, etc., haunt the traveller. While on the other hand, unfavourable conditions, interruptions, and situations forced or superimposed onto people because of the social set up of ruling regimes confront him.

Each one of the above in a way, discourages him from carrying out his constructive duties, which either could be individual duties such as offering prayers, or other social obligations like his efforts for the proclamation of truth. The thing which would enable and guarantee the dischargement of each duty, the undertaking of each step, the proceeding on each road, and the accomplishing of each result, is the resistance offered by man against obstacles. Thus the power which enables him to proceed through these barriers, is defined as patience.

1. A point in contrast to those who have totally disregarded the Holy Qur'an for understanding the principles and branches of Islam, and depend upon traditions, however weak, as the only source of religion

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