

Chapter 2: Importance of Patience in the Light of Traditions

According to a few traditions selected from a collection of traditions describing the importance of patience in Islam and other divine religions, it may be summarised that patience has been recommended by all the divine prophets and righteous leaders to their successors and followers.

Let us consider the example of a kind father or a compassionate teacher who has spent a life full of efforts and resistance, and suffered pains, tortures, and deprivations for the sake of his goals. At the last moments of his life, all the struggles which provided the purpose and direction to his life are now nearing an end, and his goals are still cherished. What will be his last advice for his successors, who in his opinion will follow his struggle and will keep the movement alive by taking other giant steps to carry this heavy load closer to the final destination?

It will be nothing other than the extraction and summary of all the theoretical and practical experiences and possessions acquired by him in his life span. All those things which must be said in his last moments, if he could manage to put them into one sentence, will be like a capsule consisting all the precious accomplishments and practical know-how acquired by him in the form of guidelines designed for a trainee. He will hand this over to his successor and follower, which in reality means transformation of the final designation of his life to the person after him. This mission being accomplished, he leaves this world after making due preparations.

The last parting recommendations of the prophets, the pious, the righteous, the martyrs and the strugglers in the way of Allah for their followers and the builders of the divine society, is to be patient. Their last advice is their recommendation regarding patience.

Now let us pay our attention to the following two traditions:

First Narration

Abu Hamza Thomali, one of the famous and sincere followers of the Prophet's Ahl-ul-Bait and a principal member of the righteous Shi'ite movement quotes from his leader and teacher, Imam Muhammad Al-Baqer (a.s.), as saying: "When the last moments of his life arrived, my father Ali ibn al-Husayn (a.s.) held me close to his chest and said: My son I, recommend to you what my father (Imam Husayn) recommended to me at the last Moments of his life. My son stand for truth even if it is bitter".¹

Imam Muhammad Baqer (a.s.) is the vicegerent and successor of his father Ali ibn Husayn Zayn al-Abedin and is the inheritor of the heavy burden of trust, and is responsible for the continuation of the struggle and movement of his father, exactly in the same manner that Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn (a.s.) was responsible for the continuation of the movement left by his father Imam Husayn ibn Ali (a.s.), the martyr of Karbala.

Each personality from the household of the holy Prophet was responsible for the continuation of the divine mission of his predecessor, and all of them collectively were upholders of the divine mission of the last Prophet of Allah. All of them are created from a single source of energy (light) and are the seekers of one direction and one aim.

"My son I recommend to you what my father recommended me at the last moment of his life..."

We all know how and where the last moments of the life of Imam Husayn ibn Ali (a.s.) were spent. He was in the midst of turmoil on the day of 'Ashura' (10th of Moharram 61 Hijri -- 680 AD.). Pains, torture and tragedy dominated the bloody state of affairs in the plain of Karbala. In spite of the fact that he was completely encircled by his bloodthirsty enemies, Imam Husayn ibn Ali (a.s.) took advantage of a short opportunity to go back to his camp before starting his final attack. After having a brief meeting with the members of his household who in their own ways were carriers of his mission, he held a short but sufficient, effective and very important discussion with his vicegerent and successor Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn (a.s.).

These kinds of discussions in simple language may be called farewell meetings. But it must be understood that a pious leader (Imam) is far above sentimental passions, and that during the last opportunity of his life, he would only open his lips for personal, private, and sentimental affairs, instead of discussing the most important issues of his mission. Whatever reports which remains regarding the other great pious leaders (Imams) that has reached us, certifies the same thing.²

He knew at that sensitive moment that the heavy burden of the trust for which he had struggled for since the beginning of his leadership had also been endured by the founder of the revolution, the holy Prophet (S), the Commander of Faithful Imam Ali (a.s.), and Imam Hassan (a.s.). All of them had suffered all kinds of pains and were subjected to severe hardships for following that path. The trust would now be handed over to the next person. The powerful arms and steadfast steps of his vice-regent would be

assigned the responsibility to carry that burden of trust forward. Therefore he had come to advise him about the most important issues of his mission. What was this important and cherished advice?

Now Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn (a.s.) who found himself more or less under conditions similar to his father's time, explained the key issues to his son and vice-regent, and offered recommendations accordingly. He also emphasised that earlier, his father Imam Husayn ibn Ali (a.s.) had been similarly instructed by his father Imam Ali (a.s.):

"What his father recommended..."

This advice has continuously been emphasised since it was first given by the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (a.s.) to the next Imam-designate and onward through all the successive Imams by their proceeding Imams. What was that recommendation?

The outcome and summation of that advice was „patience“.

"My son stand for truth even if it is bitter."

My son! Stand for the truth and be patient, even if it is bitter and inconvenient. Or in other words, on the road of truth one should never give up, and should never be frustrated by obstacles. Once you know and recognise the path of truth, you must support it all the way. All hardships, bitterness, failures, and inconveniences should be borne patiently to continue the journey forward. It is obvious that the confrontation of truth and falsehood is full of hardship, bitterness, and inconvenience and one should not expect this path to be like a bed of roses. All these inconveniences and hardships should be resisted with patience for the sake of truth.

This was the last will of the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (a.s.) given to Imam Hassan (a.s.), and subsequently it was given to all the successive Imams by their predecessors. Also, we have witnessed that the Commander of the Faithful himself, and all of the righteous Imams after him, had actually followed that will. All of them, till the last moment of their lives defended truth accepting all the consequences, even at the cost of their lives (martyrdom). Their lives in practising patience for the pleasure of Allah, were indeed manifestations of the following Arabic couplet:

"I practised "patience" in my life to the highest level, whereby even "patience" itself bears witness that in tolerating things even more bitter than "patience", I remained steadfast and patient."

Therefore, for the importance of patience it is found, that all the infallible Imams from the Prophet's Ahl-Bait (a.s.) have enjoined this priceless jewel and noble inheritance in their wills for their successors, at the very last moment of their lives.

Second Narration

"From Fiqh al-Ridha' (a.s.) We narrate of the wills of the prophets, peace be upon them. Be patient for truth, even if it is bitter."³

Fiqh al-Ridha' is a famous book of jurisprudence attributed to the eighth Imam Ali ibn Musa al-Ridha' (a.s.), a portion of which deals with the legal affairs in Islam. In other words these issues may be termed as jurisprudence. This term partly deals with the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, and traditions but the major portion of the book covers the ways and means and overall issues related to Islamic learning. It is this second part which constitutes the complete and comprehensive portion of the term of jurisprudence. The above mentioned book contains the following meaningful narration⁴ which could be interpreted and expounded as follows:

We narrate this important narration, which is the inheritance and memory of our noble family left by our fathers and their ancestors, who left this last will for us, and in turn we willed it to our successors:

The will of all the divine prophets for their vice-regents, inheritors, trustees, flag carriers of divine movements, and students of the divine school of thought was:

"Stand for the truth and be patient, even if it is bitter and inconvenient."

This is exactly the same sentence spoken by the Commander of Faithful, without the least Variation. Perhaps, this short, but meaningful sentence left by the prophets and their vicegerents, could be the best example for showing the importance of patience. Therefore, on the basis of the above two narrations, we may define patience, as the will enjoined by the divine prophets and Imams on their inheritors and disciples. It is quite explicit that this Islamic characteristic has so much weight, importance, and influence, in the complex structure of the divine religion of Islam that all the prophets had included it in their Testaments.

¹. al-Kafi vol. 2

². Among the books of traditions, we may observe the wills of the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (a.s.), Imam Hassan (a.s.), Imam Sadiq (a.s.), and other leaders, which proves the seine point

³. Bihar al-Anwar

⁴. Late Muhaddis Nouri, who was a most exalted and learned scholar of his time in his book "Mustadrek al-Wasail" had presented numerous logical convincing arguments, testifying the authenticity of the above issues. Nouri's work is very interesting for the learned scholars in the field of traditions

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