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Chapter 4: The Fields of Patience

As explained in the earlier chapters of this book, one may define patience as resistance offered by man on the road towards perfection against the forces of mischief, corruption and degradation. Now let us recognise the fields of patience, where its practice is most crucial. Of course, we would like to examine the domain of patience, in accordance with the texts of Islamic narrations and the Holy Qur'an, where, practicing patience has been promised with plenty of rewards in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

There is no doubt, that an ignorant soldier or a mercenary fighting in the battlefield against the bearers of glad tidings of truth and justice (soldiers of Islam), and even losing his life for the sake of the orders issued by his master; or a tyrant, hoarder of wealth, and holder of an important position, standing against truth for the sake of power, wealth, and position; or various sections or special groups offering resistance for the sake of their vested interests or other reasons, are in fact not practising patience for the sake of human ideals but opposing the truth.

On the surface all these cases show practising of patience. But this is quite opposite than patience practised by pious individuals on the road of perfection for the pleasure of Allah. Of course, as far as the lexical meaning of the term "patience" is concerned both share it equally.

But in all such situations, patience has not been practised for accomplishing human perfection and ideals, rather for their suppression. Here the resistance was not offered against the forces of mischief, corruption and degradation, but instead it was offered to destroy the shining manifestations of human perfection. Therefore, this domain of patience is not the domain as defined in the traditions and the Holy Qur'an.

It could therefore be concluded that patience may be defined as a means of achieving perfection, excellence, and exaltedness, where man endeavours and makes sincere efforts for the ultimate goal of creation, to become a real servant of Allah. His personality ultimately becomes manifestation of all the hidden Potential of human talents and characteristics. In other words achieving the status of a perfect human being (Insan-e-Kamil).

At this stage all the internal and external obstacles (explained in detail earlier), which complement each other, and in any case are the manifestations of Satanic tactics, are resisted by him, on his forward journey. On this road, all kinds of dangers, headaches and obstacles await the traveller. The opposition provided by them varies in proportion to the traveller's location, movement, and duties. Sometimes for discharging a duty one is confronted with a direct obstacle, while at other times one is confronted with an indirect barrier in his path.

For a mountain climber, trying to scale the highest peaks, confrontation with rocks, thorns, thieves and wolves, all are tantamount to a negative force interfering with his ascent. But sometimes a beautiful scene, a comfortable soft bed, and a shaky companion are also negative forces of another sort, which force the climber to terminate his ascent. Still, at other times it could be his own sickness, or he has to take care of some sick companions, or might be confronted with some other mishap, which ultimately forces him to terminate his expedition. This last case may be regarded as an indirect obstacle in his path.

The above analogy of mountain climbing is also true for the journey of man on the road of perfection. He is confronted with three kinds of obstacles in this journey. If the compulsory duties and obligations of religion may be considered as the instruments and steps required for forward march on the road of perfection, the forbidden acts of religion may be regarded as diversion from the straight path. And if the unforeseen bitter happenings of life at the time of restlessness and instability are considered responsible for slowing down and ultimately cutting short his journey, then the obstacles and opposing motives could also divided into the following three categories:

- (I) Desires and passions which are responsible for negligence of compulsory religious obligations.
- (II) Desires and tendencies which encourage man to indulge in forbidden sinful acts.
- (III) Unforeseen, unhappy happenings which result in breaking his courage and steadfastness.

Patience means resistance against all three types of barriers, and providing moral courage and necessary momentum for the traveller to continue his forward journey on the road of perfection. It offers resistance against those desires and tendencies which discourage man from performing compulsory obligations, resists the desires for indulging in sinful forbidden acts, and provides zeal and strength to be able to tolerate the unforeseen and unhappy occurrences, which threaten to break his determination.

With the above explanation one may appreciate the context of this important narration from the holy Prophet (S) as related by the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (a.s.), as follows:

"The Prophet of Allah had said: Patience is of three kinds — Patience in tragedies and unpleasant events, patience in performance of compulsory obligations, and patience against sin".

On all the above mentioned occasions, like occurrence of a tragic unfortunate happening resulting in

loss of life or wealth or both, a situation requiring performance of compulsory obligations, and an alluring sinful pleasure tempting him to indulge in a forbidden act; a type of patience is required where the human being could manifest or display the most superior heroic potential of his hidden exalted qualities. In order that the complete understanding of these Islamic specialities related to the three types of patience could be made explicitly clear, we will discuss all of them in detail.

Patience in Performance of Obligations (Obedience)

All duties and compulsory obligations are accompanied with some headaches and inconveniences, or in other words, they demand some amount of efforts and involvements (positive or negative), which are at odd with the easy going and comfort loving nature of human beings. Starting from the personal compulsory religious obligations such as prayers and fasting till the financial obligations such as "Khums" and "Zakat" and collective social obligations such as Hajj, the separation from family and loved ones, sacrificing all the comforts and pleasures of life, and sometimes self–sacrifice itself becomes necessary. Of course, all this does not match with the easy going and comfort loving nature of man. This holds true for all the laws of the world whether heavenly or man–made, be they right or wrong.

Although in principle the law itself has been a necessity and for the same reason it is accepted by mankind, but generally nowhere, it has ever been accepted as something convenient, desirable and sweet by man. The same holds true for the most common international laws and regulations, whose benefits and advantages are explicitly clear for everybody, and their violation will result in serious consequences such as is the case with traffic laws.

Passing through a red light results in most horrible accidents sometimes leading to loss of lives. Although everyone is clearly aware about the consequences of traffic law violations, but in spite of the above it is very common that while awaiting behind a red light, the inner human nature is not comfortable and feels inconvenient. Similar is the case for not being able to drive through a short cut route because of a traffic sign, again one feels uncomfortable.

Although the compulsory religious obligations are based upon the inherent human nature, and without exception to meet its genuine demands, are in reality means and instruments to lead human beings towards perfection and exaltation, but in spite of that it must be said that in practice it requires efforts and difficulties of some sort. For example, in order to perform the compulsory daily prayers one has to spend some time, must clean his hands and face before prayers, and has to meet other preliminary requirements regarding the dress and place in accordance with the religious guidelines. It is obvious that all of the above are in conflict with the easy going human nature.

During performance of daily prayers, to control thoughts and to achieve the peace of heart and mind strictly for prayers, instead of getting preoccupied in worldly affairs other than Allah, is very important. In order for the prayers to be meaningful, and to be accepted by Allah, it is very important that the gates which allow all external ideas should be thoroughly closed during prayers.3

Of course achieving the above state of mind and heart requires lots of energy and efforts and is a difficult task.

Or fasting, which requires toleration of hunger and thirst for long periods. To resist and struggle against the appetite for eating and drinking, to restrain the eyes from looking at forbidden things of beauty and to resist sexual passions are difficult tasks requiring tremendous amount of resistance. In spite of possessing appetising food and drinks, to be able to impose voluntary self–restrictions, to spend a long hot summer day with empty stomach and dry lips of course, requires a lot of will power and strong determination.

Or Hajj for instance, which requires tolerating the inconvenience and hardships of a long distance journey, separation from home and relatives, and joining groups of unknown companions, and spending money and precious time. If Hajj is done only for the sake of pleasure of Allah, without any motives of leisure and profit—making, it will also require patience and self–sacrifice.

The obligations regarding encouraging whatever is good (Amr bil Ma'roof) and prohibiting whatever is forbidden (Nahi anil Munkar), as well as Jihad (Striving for truth), requires a lot of hardship, sacrifice, tolerant and patience.

Proclamation of truth in front of the forces of falsehood and Corruption is the most dangerous, unpleasant and bitter act, which is like standing against a tyrant whose unsheathed sword is ready to fall on the proclaimer's head. Or facing the enemies, who are like savage beasts, the glint of whose electrifying eyes and swords stun the heart and soul of superficial observers. Or, to be able to offer resistance against the waves of corruption and diversion of a nation, a class, or mankind as a whole, is the hardest, dangerous and menacing task.

Similar is the case with other Islamic obligations, which are accompanied with headaches, hardships and inconveniences, but at the same time without exception, all of them are the most beneficial, and essential means and guarantees of salvation and prosperity for mankind. Of course, for those who have recognised the straight path and have tasted the sweetness of walking on the difficult road for the pleasure of Allah, and the sacred and exalted aims of humanity, all the above difficulties are desirable and tolerable.

The same prayer for men of Allah, who have tasted the sweetness of fervent prayer and remembrance of Allah is something sweeter than honey. The Prophet of Islam (S) at the time of prayers was so eager and restless that he used to tell "Bilal"4

"Oh! Bilal please recite the call for prayer (Adhan) and make my heart and soul peaceful".

The same struggle for the sake of Allah "Jihad fi sabil lillah" for the self-indulgent people without any insight for ultimate consequences is extremely harsh and undesirable, but for someone with a good spiritual insight and power like Imam Ali (a.s.), is sweeter than honey. For him, all inconveniences and

hardships in this struggle result in strengthening his power of resistance and steadfastness. He himself describes about his astonishing state of morale in a sermon "Nahj-ul-Balagha" as follows:

"Together with the holy Prophet (S) we fought our own fathers, sons, brothers, and uncles, (but all these unpleasant events had the least influence upon us), except that these increased our faith to surrender ourselves completely to Allah and made the hard things tolerable for us."

But in general these difficulties and hardships exist for the common people with weaker spiritual insight, and for those who are not possessed with the required determination and will power, are bitter and undesirable.

Now, what should be done regarding these difficulties which exist in dischargement of religious obligations? Since offering of dally compulsory prayers is difficult, presence of heart during prayers and chaining the roaming and wondering thoughts are even harder. Since Fasting, Jihad, Hajj, charity, encouraging good and forbidding evil and other social obligations require pains and inconveniences, then all these should be declared as void. Therefore, we should be allowed to live according to the desires of our heart which is full of passions and a spirit which loves ease and comforts of life.

It is here that Islam tells us No! Instead patience must be practised. Patience in obedience must be practised against those passions which lure the heart away from the prayer carpet, mosque and altar, by getting it preoccupied with hundreds of kinds of amusements, and in turn make prayers spiritless and meaningless. Patience must be practised against these kinds of desires and prayers should be offered completely with presence, of heart and concentration, so that they are accepted by Allah and are fruitful for us. Patience must be offered against those extremist tendencies which tempt us to enjoy eating and drinking on a hot dry day instead of fasting.

Patience must be practised in confrontation with the enemies in battlefield, where the danger shows its real and serious face, and where red death with dynamic speed confronts the man. The pleasures and sweetness of life, memories of children and relatives, and the faces of the loved ones become incarnated in the eyes, and all profit–oriented business transactions in one way or the other attract his attention, and try to make his determination weak and shaky. Resistance should be offered against all these forces. All obstacles and barriers which interfere with the forward march must be removed from the road.

Patience must be offered against proud tyrant whose eyes burn with anger and whose transgression and corruption has pushed a nation to the brink of catastrophe. Such a tyrant must be opposed by each responsible individual. In this situation it is a compulsory obligation for everyone to try to overthrow such a despot.

Patience should be practiced against the whispers of Satan, who with thousands of colourful deceits will try to close charitable hands by reminding me of personal needs instead of helping others, by inciting desires for material profits and other worldly ambitions, and will ultimately prevent a person from

righteous deeds. He will try to emphasize that the light in the own home is more important than the candle of the mosque's niche (Mehrab). Here, patience comes into picture by offering the necessary resistance to the above desires, to enable one to discharge his financial and religious obligations. Yes! Patience should be practiced. Yes! One should be patient in obedience and fulfilment of these religious commands. Resistance should be offered against the Satanic whispers and passions encouraging transgression.

Each case where such resistance is offered assumes a special meaning and special importance in proportion to the greatness of that particular situation. At one place, resistance means to be steadfast in facing the enemy in the battlefield, or it may be confrontation with the self, and sometimes it may be the struggle to remain indifferent while facing the pangs of poverty and other difficulties.

Therefore, patience means to be able to offer resistance in all the above circumstances. Patience never allows us to surrender with folded hands, to be insulted, to give up the initiative, and become prisoner of the events.

Examples of Patience in Obedience in the Lives of the Infallible Imams

The key phrase which has been emphasised a lot in the pilgrimage book "Ziyarat-nama" of the Imams, is patience. i.e., "You! (Imams) remained patient, and this patience was practiced with pleasure for the sake of Allah. You! accepted the heavy load of carrying the trust, and in spite of all the difficulties and hardships, you delivered it to its final destination."

Truly, the responsibility of guiding mankind and explaining them the truth of religion, and resisting tyranny, corruption, and transgression during the days of the Imams, like any other time, was a difficult task requiring a lot of patience and strong determination.

If the patience practiced by the Imams would have been of such a type that although unhappy about the bad conditions of their times, with hearts bleeding for the worsening plight of Muslims and Islam, they had confined themselves to the safe boundaries of their homes without taking any concrete steps for destruction of evil and betterment of situation in favour of the community, then this type of patience would not have been of any special distinction, prestige and honour. There is nothing special in this kind of inert behaviour and anybody could do it easily. Of course, this type of conduct is practiced by weak and uncommitted persons.

The prominence and glory which distinguish the lives of the holy Imams, and the special characteristics which may be repeated while reciting salutations as mentioned in the "Ziyarat-nama", was their being patient in obedience to Allah. This is an area, in which many ordinary people found themselves helpless, and could not tolerate the hardships and therefore failed to achieve that honour and distinction.

Review of the Holy Qur'an

It would not be out of context to remind here that among tens of verses regarding the patience of those who have been patient, there are many verses about patience in obedience, such as follows:

"If there are twenty patient (steadfast) ones among you, they will overcome two hundred (of the infidels) and if there are a hundred (such ones), they will overcome a thousands" (The Holy Qur'an, 8:65)

The above verse emphasises the importance of offering resistance and being steadfast while confronting the interior motives within the self, which act as obstacles in the path of a soldier facing an enemy in the battlefield. The patient people who have been mentioned in the above verse are those that neither the flashing swords, nor the burning eyes of the enemies, neither the angry face of red death nor the memories of friends and children, and pleasures and charms of life, stop them in discharging their obligation to engage in bloody hostilities in the battlefield. And none of the above make a slight dent in their iron will for obeying Allah.

Another verse from the Holy Qur'an regarding the importance of patience in obedience is as follows:

"Our Lord! Bestow on us endurance, make our foothold sure, and give us help against the disbelieving folk." (The Holy Qur'an, 2:250)

The above verse refers to a group of believers who in order to discharge a compulsory obligation have readied themselves to confront an enemy in the battlefield. They are asking Allah to bless them with the spirit of endurance and steadfastness in facing the obstacles in their path, and with the result bestow upon them the fruit of their endurance, that is achieving victory over the enemies (unbelievers). This verse very explicitly explains the meanings of patience in obedience. There are many such verses in the Holy Qur'an, and the detailed discussions about them is beyond the scope of our present discussion.

Patience Against Sin

Naturally, human beings are possessed with desires and passions, which encourage as well as discourage them in doing certain acts. In reality these are instruments for performing all actions, efforts and endeavours by men in their live span. These are called instincts such as, love for self, love for children, love for wealth, love for power, sexual desires, and scores of other such attractions and desires.

What are the instructions of Islam regarding the above natural human instincts? And how the human beings are supposed to behave while confronting their natural instincts? Do they have to surrender themselves to these instincts without any limit or condition? Should these passions be suppressed? Or should they be made completely disabled by means of superimposing rigorous self-discipline?

According to the Islamic view none of the above methods are the correct treatment.

On the contrary under no circumstances, Islam ignores the human instincts, rather it considers them useful and something real to be reckoned with. Islam closes the paths of transgression and Aggression, but on the other hand by utilising realistic preventive measures. It dissipates the pervasive energy associated with them. In reality, as the basic existence of instinct among human beings is a means for continuation of life, as well as for providing the essential necessities of life, similarly mutiny, aggression and transgression of instinctive passions result in catastrophe and misfortune to human life.

If the instinct of love for the self did not exist, continuation of human life would have not been possible. But at the same time excessiveness and transgression of the above instinct makes the affairs of life difficult, and sometimes may make it impossible. Similar is the case with other instincts. Among the three types of patience mentioned earlier, patience against sin means offering resistance against the fire of rage or diversion of instinctive passions, because basically sin or transgression against Allah's law is nothing but the above acts of diversion, transgression and aggression of instincts.

Human beings are naturally inclined to endeavour for arranging the necessities of life and other essential requirements. Since this could not be accomplished without having wealth and money, therefore the motive to earn money and wealth constitutes a natural instinct.

Also, Islam being a school of mankind and way of life, encourages the above instinct and certifies it by putting its own signature. Of course, it does it for the right administration of the society and accordingly establishes the methods, procedures and limitations, but never stops human beings form making endeavours for earning a livelihood.

In spite of all that, in many instances, this instinct of love for money and hoarding of wealth takes its roots in the human soul like a chronic disease and with the result, the money no longer remains as a means for providing the requirement. Rather it turns into an intense desire for executing the inhuman goals or tools of self-glorification, which is condemned from the Islamic point of view. It is here that Islam decrees its followers to be patient by offering resistance against the transgression and diversion of instinctive forces.

The other example of human instinct could be love for power. By nature human beings crave for power. Certainly those who have accepted weakness, and humility as essential elements of their existence must believe that they have deviated from the assigned human nature. Islam, in this regards too, utilises the same approach as it does for dealing with all other instinctive desires.

On one side the efforts and endeavours in the path of achieving power have been commended as something desirable and permissible, and in certain circumstances even considered as compulsory. Yes! Islam considers power necessary where it is required for establishing the truth, for dischargement of important social obligations, for reinstatement of lost rights of their rightful owners, and for execution of divine commands and decrees. In these cases Islam has made it mandatory for all Muslims to gain

power.

While on the other hand, in Islam, the path of this instinct towards aggression and ambitions has been closed. When the instinct of love for power results in tyranny, oppression, brute force and savage crimes, this has been condemned as an undesirable and forbidden act.

It is possible that association with a powerful tyrant or with a destructive organisation may bring ample power for an ambitious person, but Islam never sanctions such an association, because the act of associating with a tyrant is a direct support for strengthening tyranny. The balance of power which results from this kind of association is responsible for commitment of crimes.

Here the decrees of Islam and the Holy Qur'an are in direct confrontation with the outburst and diversion of human instincts and closes the path for them. The Muslims are ordered to struggle and offer resistance against the motives of this type of love for power, which result in mischief and corruption, and should never surrender to such ambitious tyrants, which means patience against sin.

There are other examples of instincts such as sexual desires, love for fame, love for life, and etc., which could also be likewise examined, resulting in a better understanding of important individual and social issues.

The Importance of Patience Against Sin

In the light of this brief discussion and in view of the traditions and Islamic learning which are generally full of social education, it may be concluded that patience against sins and transgressions has been assigned a special importance.

According to a few short traditions dealing with special circumstances and giving a constructive lesson for the endeavouring Muslims of the period of the infallible Imams, this branch of patience has been considered a crucial support and has been assigned special privilege. Perhaps it may be because offering patience in obedience is something accompanied with the natural desire (instinct) existing within human beings, the same natural instinct which is responsible for action and efforts.

While on the other hand to be able to resist the desires for diversions, and not to surrender to the appealing attractions of various obstacles, which are full of sweet and desirable natural attractions, is the field of patience against sin. In this case not only one is not supported by natural attractions and instinct, rather one is acting in the opposite direction.

Therefore, practicing patience in obedience although means struggling against the natural instinctives attractions such as human desires for ease and comfort, nevertheless it is accompanied and supported by another natural instinct, however weak. But patience against sin or transgression against laws of Allah, is in total and direct confrontation with all the natural instinctive attractions and pleasures, and accordingly this kind of struggle is more difficult and therefore has been assigned special privilege.

Also, patience against sins plays a determining role as far as the social affairs are concerned and since its effect is relatively more conspicuous, this could be another reason for assigning special privilege to this kind of patience.

- 1. One fifth levy; a yearly tax upon one's personal savings
- 2. Wealth tax to be paid on certain items
- 3. In his book "Sirr-us-Salat"the mysteries of prayers, Imam Khomeini, describes the presence of heart, as follows:

"During prayers one must try to completely cut off the heart's preoccupation with worldly affairs. If a person is submerged in love and desires of this world, naturally his heart is busy continuously from one involvement to another. The heart behaves like a bird jumping from one branch to another. So far we have this tree of worldly ambitions or desires ("Hubb-e-Duniya") in our heart, it will behave restless. If by struggle, practice, efforts, and thinking about the severe consequences and losses, if one could succeed in cutting this tree of worldly ambitions or desires, then the heart will become reposed and peaceful. It will achieve spiritual perfection.

At least the more one tries to free himself from worldly charms and temptations the more he succeeds in cutting the various branches of that tree in his heart, with the result, the presence of heart will be achieved in the same proportion."

Imam Khomeini further explains the term 'love of this world' "Hubb-e-Duniya". "There are people who do not possess anything at all of this mortal world, but still they could be the persons totally submerged in the love of this world. While on the contrary one may be like Prophet Sulaiman bin Dawood, (Solomon son of David) king of kings and possessing all the treasurers of this universe, but at the same time may not be a man of this world, completely detached from the lure of the world." (Tr.)

4. "He was born in Mecca, the son of an Abyssinian slave called Rabah; in a city of idol-worship, he was tortured for his belief in the One and Only Allah. He was made the first muezzin, the caller to prayer in Islam the Prophet (S).

After the Prophet's death Bilal's legs, in his grief, failed him. He could not climb up the steps to make the call to prayer again. He died in Syria, probably in 644, twelve years after the Prophet's death. The Black Muslims in America have renamed themselves the Bilali. Prophet (peace be upon him) called Bilal 'a man of Paradise'."

5. This instinct is a part of the real human structure, although its transgression and diversion is something unnatural and undesirable which should be resisted by human beings

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