

[Home](#) > [Provisions for the Journey \(Mishkat\), Volume 1](#) > [Lesson 10: The Leaders of Heaven and the Status of Some of the Duties and the Levels of Paradise](#) > The Differences of Believers in Their Enjoying the Different Levels of Paradise

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# Lesson 10: The Leaders of Heaven and the Status of Some of the Duties and the Levels of Paradise

## The Leaders of Paradise

With regard to the leaders of paradise, the Noble Prophet (S) says:

“O Abu Dharr! Happy are those who are the standard-bearers on the Day of Resurrection, who hold the flag in front of people and precede them towards heaven, those are the same people who take precedence over others in going to the Mosques early in the morning and at other times [of the day].”

All human beings belonging to every age desire to take precedence over others. Of course, this competing and contesting is blameworthy if it is in connection to the world, but competition and taking precedence over others with regard to the hereafter is not only free of blame, but also a sign of man’s growth and seeking prosperity. Because the prosperity of man depends on having intimacy with Allah and if the believers take precedence over the others in this regard, it is not out of ostentation but in order to attain bliss.

Emphasis has been laid on this issue in many instances in the Qur’an; in one of the instances Allah states:

وَسَارِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

***“And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord; and a garden, the extensiveness of which is as the heavens and the earth, it is prepared for those who guard against evil.”<sup>1</sup>***

In reality, this *ayat* makes known the call of man's natural disposition because his basic nature desires his perfection and wants him to be more perfect than the others.

## Natural Disposition and the Search for Perfection

Without doubt, man yearns for the ultimate perfection and that is in intimacy with Allah. It is for this reason that he makes use of every means and resources in order to attain it. But limited perfections are not man's ultimate object of desire because they lose their appeal to higher perfections, and secondly, man gets satiated after attaining his desires. It is for this reason that they have said that union [or attainment] is the grave of love, that is to say man cannot be a lover of limited beauty and goodness but he naturally is a lover of immaculate perfection and yearns for Allah.

Man's deepest desire is a divine want, and if the veils of error were removed from his eyes and he were able to perceive his Beloved, he would have intimate acts of devotion, like 'Ali ('a).

Allah states in the Qur'an:

أَلَّا يَذْكُرِ اللَّهُ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ ...

***"... surely by Allah's remembrance are hearts set at rest."***<sup>2</sup>

The term 'remembrance of Allah' [*bi-dhikr Allah*] is a monopoly; that is to say it is only by Allah's remembrance that hearts are set at rest and it removes anxiety and worry away and man is terribly wrong if he imagines that property, wealth, position and status set his heart at rest. Of course, the Qur'an does not forbid attaining them, but it states that they do not set man's heart at rest.<sup>3</sup>

It has been said that man yearns for ideal perfection and he makes use of every means and tools; one of the means of attaining spotless perfection is prayer as an intimate dialogue between an individual and his Lord and enlivening the mosques. The Prophet (S) states that happy are those who take precedence and leadership on the Day of Resurrection. They lead men towards the Garden of eternal bliss and the others fall behind them in order to find their way to paradise. They are people who used to go to the mosques before everyone early in the morning and at other times of the day.

In order to make this comprehensible to the mind, heed ought to be paid to this issue that one of the qualities of man's soul is that he gets motivated once he sees the others trudging the course of goodness and welfare. The axiom of yielding to patterns and looking up to role models has been accepted as an indisputable means of edification of personality. In truth, the model plays the most fundamental role in man's way of life.

If man takes precedence at performing good works, he attracts the attention of other people and as a result, the others too follow his lead. This matter (yielding to example) is an object of attention for youths.

The older the people grow, the more they desire to be role models for other human beings, and this feeling is manifested in their conduct and performance of responsibilities. As a result, the others too get inspired to do good works.

It is natural that when one man in a community begins to do something, the others easily follow his lead. For instance, in a religious school, the others get encouraged by the conduct of a number of people who take the lead at going to the noon [*zuhr*] prayers. But if some people do not take leadership, the others do not pay heed to the time of prayer and to being in the mosque and/or if they pay heed [at all], do not firmly decide to undertake fulfilling it. This is an expression of that same spiritual and psychological truth which has been called yielding to role models.

If man performs works secretly for the sake of not getting contaminated by sanctimony, his works are good and praiseworthy, but if a person openly performs a good work in order to encourage others, not only is his action free from blame, but very valuable and productive because he discharges his duties not with the intention of showing off but of motivating others.

In this regard, Allah states:

...وَأَنْفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ سِرًّا وَعَاطَانِيَةً...

***“...and spend benevolently out of what we have given them secretly and openly...”<sup>4</sup>***

Some people have said that the purpose of spending secretly in the way of Allah is for man to keep afar from hypocrisy and the purpose of spending openly is for inspiring others, therefore there is goodness in every aspect. The work of both the one who prays secretly for the purpose of keeping afar from sanctimony and that of one who prays openly in the mosque in order to encourage others is good. In addition to that, a person who takes the lead in going to the mosque with a sincere intention and far from hypocrisy and [his action] results in inspiring them, his reward is twice as much and he will be the standard-bearer on the Day of Resurrection because his action has opened the way to the mosque.

The late Ayatullah Mar'ashi Najafi, may he reside in Allah's garden of eternal bliss, was bound to going to the Holy Shrine [of Qum] early in the morning before the call to prayer [*adhan*]. During the early days of our religious education, we sometimes used to succeed at going to the Shrine early in the morning. Sometimes, snow used to fall and with complete wonder we used to see the late Ayatullah Mar'ashi sitting behind the door with his cloak pulled over his head. This was one of his high and eminent qualities. How much does such conduct encourage others to do the same? When the religious students used to see a religious legal authority sitting behind the door of the mosque early in the morning, they used to get encouraged to be present in the Shrine early in the morning.

It is proper for us to cite two *hadiths* with regard to the importance of being present in the mosque because mention has been made about the importance of taking precedence when going to the mosque.

The Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Verily, there are attendants for the mosques who are companions of the angels. When they do not attend the mosques on some excuse, they comfort them and visit them when they get sick and help them whenever they have need.”<sup>5</sup>

In another *hadith*, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Sitting in the mosque to wait for the time of prayer to arrive is worship. Also, they said that Allah builds two houses in paradise for a person whose speech is the Qur’an and whose house is the mosque.”<sup>6</sup>

## **The Status and Rank of Some Duties**

In continuation of the *hadith* of Abu Dharr, the Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! Prayer is the mainstay of religion and that which flows on the tongue in remembrance of Allah is more important. Charity erases sin and a word which is beneficial for the people is more significant than charity. Fasting extinguishes the fire and the fast of the tongue is more superb. And the *jihad* (spiritual struggle) is honor and dignity and the *jihad* of the tongue is more eminent.”

### **a) The Status and Rank of Prayer**

The Noble Prophet (S) states that prayer is the cornerstone of religion and that without it religion crumbles, but its invocations and words are more important and greater than the rest of the works because entreaties are a manifestation of the devotion and humility of a believing slave before Allah and also with those implorations the immensity of His mercy is demonstrated.

It is because of its delicate role in reforming the spiritual and religious personality of man that prayer has been set forth as the foundation and linchpin of religion. In reality, prayer embodies man’s faith and grants perfection to his spiritual identity. It is for this reason that the verses of the Qur’an and the *hadiths* of the Infallibles have been granted praiseworthy importance.

The Noble Prophet (S) states in a *hadith*:

“Prayer is the greatest obligatory duty after knowledge of Allah and is the first thing which will be asked of a slave on the Day of Resurrection. If it gets accepted, the rest of the works also get approved and if it does not get consented to, the rest of the works are disapproved.”<sup>7</sup>

In connection with the status of *sajdah* (the prostration), Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“If the person performing prayers could perceive the mercy of Allah that encompasses him, he would never raise his head from prostration.”<sup>8</sup>

In connection with the role of prayer in the purification of the soul, edification of character and cleansing the psyche of impurities and corruption, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“If there were in the house of anyone of you a stream and you washed yourselves five times in it, would any dirt remain on your bodies? One of the companions said, ‘No’. The Noble Prophet (S) stated, ‘The similitude of prayer to a flowing river is that whenever a person prays, his sins are forgiven in the intermittence of two prayers’.”<sup>9</sup>

## **b) The Status and Rank of Fasting**

The Prophet (S) has set forth fasting as a shield against the fire because it is a means of ascending through the spiritual stations, of man’s growth, and it is a barrier against the Devil.

Mankind possesses a carnal soul which is always pulling him towards spiritual decadence and losing his divine personality. It is for this reason that Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“I am afraid of two things for you, one is obeying the carnal soul and the other is protracted hopes; because following the carnal soul is an impediment to right and prolonged hopes cause forgetting the hereafter.”<sup>10</sup>

Because Allah has love and affection for His slaves, He has provided them with the means of making up for the oppression that they have committed against themselves and has caused them to be driven away from Allah’s divine presence.

One of those means is fasting which cleanses the soul of the effects of its ugly works and brings about patience and endurance against hardships and sins.

Regardless of the importance of fasting and its role in self–edification, special reward has been designated for fasting on some of the days and months; amongst them fasting in the month of Sha‘ban and Rajab discharging of which was resolutely done by the saints [*awliya*] of religion and the great scholars.

## **c) The Status and Rank of Jihad**

*Jihad* and striving in the way of Allah is a cause of honor and dignity and has a lively role in the protection and preservation of religion and the people. If it were not for the *jihad* and spiritual struggle, religion and its beliefs would have been exterminated because materialists and opportunists, in order to attain their worldly desires, do not relinquish their hostility and fight against religion.

The spiritual wars of the saints [*awliya*] of Allah have been the reason why religion has remained preserved from their danger and we are benefiting from the fruits of those wars today. It is for this reason that the ways of life of the holy soldiers and fighters shine and they have been the object of Allah’s mercy and grace.

With regard to them, Allah states:

لَا يَسْتَوِي الْقَاعِدُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ غَيْرُ أُولَى الضَّرَرِ وَالْمُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ  
...الْمُجَاهِدِينَ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ عَلَى الْقَاعِدِينَ دَرَجَةً

***“The holders back from among the believers, not having any injury [or valid excuse], and those who strive in Allah’s way with their property and their persons are not equal, Allah has made the strivers with their property and their persons to excel the holders back a high degree...”<sup>11</sup>***

The point which has been emphasized by the Noble Prophet (S) is that what comes out of the mouth cannot come out of the other limbs and organs of the body and what is built by the tongue is higher than what is built by prayer, fasting and the *jihad*, whether what is uttered by the tongue is in the form of enjoining the right and forbidding the evil as has been mentioned in the *hadiths* that forbidding the evil and enjoining the right is higher than the holy *jihad*, or is in the form of teaching and educating others; because guiding an ignorant man towards right is higher than any other spiritual striving [*jihad*].

Likewise, they make us understand that performing recommendable works not only discharging time-consuming and long acts of worship but light recommendable works can be fulfilled by the tongue too without expending a lot of capital, effort and time. Therefore, the value of the tongue ought to be known and protected from pollution and contamination so that man’s works are not performed in vain.

## **The Differences of Believers in Their Enjoying the Different Levels of Paradise**

With regard to the different levels of the Garden of eternal bliss, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! The distance between the different levels of paradise is like that between the earth and the sky. A dweller of paradise looks above himself and then his eyes meet with a ray of light so bright that it makes him blind, and he asks what light that is. It will be said to him that this is the light of your brother so and so. He will protest that we all used to perform worthy works with brother so and so, why has he been accorded superiority over me? It will be said to him that brother so and so had superiority over you in performing good works. Then, contentment will be placed in his heart and he will become pleased with his station.”

It is surprising that they do not tell that dweller of paradise that your brother’s works were more than yours, but tell him that his works were better; that is to say, the quality of his works was higher and he used to have an attentive heart during his acts of devotion and prayer and sincerity. It is natural that man ought to regret when he sees his friends taking precedence over him. If man lags behind the others in the world, he can manage to make up for his lagging behind, but there is no opportunity for compensation and discharging duties in the hereafter, that is why punishment and regret in the hereafter

is more regretful than anything else, but despite that there is a ground for regret in the dwellers of the Garden of eternal bliss, Allah does not let them get afflicted by remorse. This is a well-kept secret whose explanation is difficult for us.

Now the question which arises is how come the dwellers of paradise do not get afflicted by remorse despite seeing their friends taking precedence over them? In this regard, a metaphor has been narrated from the Prophet Jesus (S) in the Gospel of Barnabas that he stated, “In this world no short man desires to wear long clothes and no tall man desires to wear short clothes.”

It can be gathered from this simile that every one in the Garden of eternal bliss gets contented with what they have earned and do not expect more than their stations and in reality perceive the rank that they have attained as befitting to them. When he sees a number of people, like the prophets (S), residing in a higher station than his, he conceives their rank as befitting to them and perceives their station as a long wide dress for his stature.

The dwellers of paradise get freed from ugliness and filth before their death and in the limbo [*barzakh*], and attain the perfection that they rightfully deserve. It is for this reason that every person gets contented with what they have earned and Allah grants him peaceful contentment.

- [1.](#) Surat Al ‘Imran 3:133.
- [2.](#) Surat al-Ra’d 13:28.
- [3.](#) Shahid Mutahhari, *Insan-e Kamil (the Perfect Man)*, pp. 94–96.
- [4.](#) Surat al-Ra’d 13:22.
- [5.](#) *Mustadrik al-Wasa’il*, vol. 1, p. 358.
- [6.](#) *Ibid.*
- [7.](#) *Tafsir Abu al-Futuh*, vol. 1, p. 103.
- [8.](#) *Ghurar al-Hikam*, p. 605.
- [9.](#) *Wasa’il al-Shi’ah*, vol. 3, p. 7.
- [10.](#) *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 77, p. 419.
- [11.](#) Surat al-Nisa 4:95.

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