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## Lesson 19: The Greatness of Allah's Status in the Viewpoint of the Angels

“O Abu Dharr! Allah has angels who as a result of fear of Him have their heads permanently bowed [in submission] while standing on their feet up to the Day of Resurrection. Then they all say, ‘Purity and praise are for you, we did not worship you as you deserved to be adored.’”

We have previously discussed invocation and remembrance of Allah. It has been said that invocation of Allah ought to be done as a result of humility, modesty and with the presence of heart; not as a result of habit and futile utterances of the tongue. Now, the discourse regards what things play a role in bringing about attention and presence of heart at the time of invocation of the divine name of Allah. It is for this reason that the Noble Prophet (S) embarks upon explicating the point which has excellent effects in bringing about attention to Allah and perceiving his divine presence at the time of invocation of the name of Allah.

### [The Role of Arousing Hope and Fear](#)

In a natural way, man's motivation in regard to volitional works is hope for reward and fear of harm; of course the realm of reward and harm is very wide: for some people the reward lies in these same worldly benefits and material facilities and for some people reward and benefit belong to the hereafter. In the same way, some material and worldly losses are taken into consideration and for some people losses and divine punishment of the hereafter are taken into consideration. Higher than these two types, for the saints [*awliya*] of Allah, reward lies in perceiving the presence of Allah and deriving benefit and the pleasure of Allah and their loss lies in being deprived of that prosperity and perfection.

Their fear is in respect to being deprived of the beatific presence of Allah and without the least doubt this fear is more than the fear of other people in regard to the losses of the world and the hereafter is higher. Of course, the reality of this issue is not known to us and is far from our comprehension; we briefly

deduce from the *ayats* [verses of the Qur'an] and *hadiths* there is such fear as well. (We hope Allah, the Exalted, will grant us the grace and aptitude to perceive this meaning by means of deriving benefit from the enlightening words of the *Ahl al-bayt* ('a).)

For every reason fear of Allah and/or fear of harm which appears by means of man himself and can be repelled by Allah causes man to attain deeper attention and in the same way eagerness for reward and profit and that which Allah grants to His slave, or eagerness for being in the beatific divine presence also gives rise to more attention and presence of heart.

Even if for a lot of people fear plays a greater role in arousing and compelling them to action and freeing them from negligence and making them perceive the danger and harm. Every person can test himself as to whether they become more impelled to take action by listening to fearful news which foretells extra danger and harm for them or hope and reward.

For us endeavor to repel harm is more important than attracting reward. Perhaps, this very point has become the cause that the Glorious Qur'an pays more heed to warning and premonition than it does to giving good news and tidings and the prophets (S) have been introduced as warners. In some *ayats* the prophets ('a) have been introduced as both warners and givers of glad tidings, like the *ayat*:

...فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ...

***"...So Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners..."<sup>1</sup>***

And very few instances are found where the Prophets ('a) have been introduced as bearers of good tidings [*bashir* or *mubashshir*] but the title of warners [*nadhira*] has been employed alone in a lot of instances, like the verse:

تَكَادُ تَمَيِّزُ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ كُلَّمَا أُلْقِيَ فِيهَا فُجْجَ سَأَلَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ نَذِيرٌ

***"Almost bursting for fury; whenever a group is cast into it, its keeper shall ask them: did there not come to you a warner?"<sup>2</sup>***

(Emphasis on the prophets ('a) being warners is because their warnings leave more effect in the hearts of the people than their glad tidings.)

Fear of Allah is one of the states having a lot of benefits for man, especially if it becomes a stable habit and as has been mentioned, one of its benefits and effects is remembrance and deep attention to Allah. Even if there is no room for delving in this discourse deeper, but still we will hint at certain issues in order to bring about more comprehension of the *hadiths* which have been narrated in regard to fear of Allah and also bringing about a deeper effect of fear of Allah in the heart and soul.

## The Essence of Fear and Dread of Allah

One of the questions which are treated is what the reality of fear is and what causes play a role in giving rise to it and what effects does it leaves behind? Do fear and awe differ from one another? These discussions largely involve lexical aspects; in order to comprehend fear and awe of Allah and the difference between these two, a lot of *ayats* and *hadiths* will be discussed. With regard to the application of fear and awe in the *ayats* and *hadiths*, there is no considerable difference to be noticed and in some instances these two have been used interchangeably.

Once man has perceived and felt the greatness of Allah, a feeling of self-abasement, servility, humility and modesty appears in him. This state and psychological reaction has been embedded in the nature of man. (Of course, this state and reaction is not confined to man, the other living creatures also have this feeling vis-à-vis those that are stronger than them.) Usually, this state is also called awe and in reality fear is employed in place of awe. When man perceives the greatness of another one, even if he poses no danger and harm to him, he feels in himself the feeling of humility and lowliness, as if he has lost his being.

Sometimes, fear denotes fear of harm which is directed at man—usually fear has been used in this sense—naturally the application of fear in regard to Allah implies dread of the divine retribution and requital which are likely to be earned as a result of man's bad works.

With regard to the saints [*awliya'*] of Allah and people who have attained higher levels of servitude and obedience of Allah, their fear sometimes arises as a result of paying heed to the majesty of Allah and sometimes due to the possibility of being deprived of the beatific vision of Allah [*liqa' Allah*] because the beatific vision of Allah and presence in his divine realm is not a definite and certain matter and is likely to either disappear or never occur at all.

Therefore, attention to this meaning causes the appearance of fear of Allah in the saints [*awliya'*] of Allah because the honor of being in the beatific presence of Allah and being accepted in His divine presence is the greatest perfection and prosperity and man's hope is to attain divine knowledge and the greatest gratification for him is feeling that he is in the presence of Allah. A bit further than that level, we perceive how much the happiness of Allah brings pleasure to faith. A friend who feels that his beloved is happy and pleased with him fears lest he becomes deprived of that happiness, pleasure and love of his beloved.

This is the highest kind of fear and dread for a person who has attained love. Lower than that is fear as a result of divine retribution and requital of the hereafter which is the meaning intended in most of the *ayats* and *hadiths*.

This stage plays an intermediary role for attaining higher levels because for us who up to now have not attained higher levels of awareness, this medium level of fear of Allah becomes the cause of our being

heedless to the world and its pleasures and is itself a cause for abstaining from sins and keeping aloof from worldly contaminations; of course, this is not a small thing that in man exists an inward cause for abstaining and fleeing from obsession with the world and sins.

For people who have low objectives, fear of Allah denotes dread of worldly problems and encumbrances. Fear lest Allah inflicts them with disease, or lest they lose their dignity and become lowly, and lose the respect of people and/or fear lest they lose their beloved one. (For people who have faith in Allah, dread of becoming entangled in problems and afflictions and dejections is a kind of fear of Allah and in short is desirable and most of the prophets' (‘a) warnings intend this type of fear of Allah.)

## The Benefit and Status of Fear of Allah

This discussion concerns the desirability and benefits of fear of Allah. What value and benefit has fear of Allah got so as to be so much recommended that man ought to endeavor to attain the station of fear and know its course? The reality is that a lot of people have not comprehended the good qualities and benefits of fear. Even if they know that a lot of verses of the Qur’an have been revealed in regard to fear of Allah and that people who are fearful of Allah have been praised but still they do not know what benefit and gain there is in fear of Allah. Once mention of the states of fear of the prophets (‘a) and the saints [awliya’] of Allah and the front-men of religion is made, they surprisingly ask as to why ought man to be so fearful and cry so much that his eyes get damaged and his face injured!?

It has been narrated in regard to John the Baptist, in whom the station of fear of Allah had appeared and manifested more than the other prophets (‘a), that he used to cry so much that his eyes and face used to get injured, to the extent that his mother used to bandage the sores on his face so as to reduce the pain caused by flowing tears. When man hears these incidents, he gets amazed that why ought a Prophet of Allah (‘a) to fear so much!? If amongst us a person was in such a state and fears this much, if we do not say that he is mad, then at least we affirm that his state is not normal and not natural!

If we look at the verses of the Qur’an with the intention of taking lesson and admonition, we gather that fear of Allah has been introduced as a condition for deriving benefit from the admonitions of the prophets (S) and attaining prosperity.

إِنَّمَا تَنْذِرُ مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الذِّكْرَ وَخَشِيَ الرَّحْمَنَ بِالْغَيْبِ فَبَشِّرْهُ بِمَغْفِرَةٍ وَأَجْرٍ كَرِيمٍ

***“You can only warn him who follows the reminder and fears the Beneficent God in secret; so announce to him forgiveness and an honorable reward.”<sup>3</sup>***

In this *ayat*, Allah advises the Noble Prophet (S) to direct his calling and guidance at people who fear Allah in the hearts and whose natural dispositions have not yet been completely contaminated by sin, wrong doing and obscurities. This type of people benefits from the calling and directives of the prophets,

not that person who has no fear and dread of Allah perpetrates sin audaciously and without any guilty feelings at all. Without the least doubt, his heart is dark and is harder than the rock and there is no aperture in his inner soul for the penetration of light and brightness.

In another verse, Allah states:

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ \* فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ

***“And as for him who fears to stand in the presence of his Lord and forbids the soul from low desires, then surely the Garden—that is the abode.”<sup>4</sup>***

Definitely fear is contrasted with hope and optimism, and Allah states, “And as for him who fears to stand in the presence of his Lord”, He does not state that “as for him who hopes to stand in the presence of his Lord”; this show that fear of Allah results in preventing the disobedience of the carnal soul and setting foot on the course of guidance and hope in the mercy of Allah has no effect in this regard.

In another verse, Allah states that after the high station and status of the people of faith and good works, paradise and its blessings are especially reserved for those who fear Allah:

جَزَاؤُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ

***“...Their reward with their Lord is gardens of perpetuity beneath which rivers flow, abiding therein forever; Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him, that is for him who fears his Lord.”<sup>5</sup>***

In another verse, fear, dread, humility, submissiveness and self-abasement in the presence of Allah has been mentioned as one of the most delicate qualities of the scholars of religion:

...إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ ...

***“...those of His servants who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah...”<sup>6</sup>***

In another instance, Allah warns the Muslims against fear of the oppressors and orders them to fear Him:

فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِي وَلَئِمَّ نِعْمَتِي عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ...

**“...so do not fear them, and fear Me; that I may complete my favor on you and that you may walk on the right course.”<sup>7</sup>**

In another place, he states:

إِنَّمَا ذَلِكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ يُخَوِّفُ أَوْلِيَاءَهُ فَلَا تَخَافُوهُمْ وَخَافُوا اللَّهَ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

**“It is only the Satan that causes you to fear from his friends, but do not fear them, and fear Me if you are believers.”<sup>8</sup>**

## **The Status of the Fear of the Leaders and Saints [Awliya’] of Allah**

A brief look at the invaluable role of fear of Allah and the praise that has been made in regard to it makes us comprehend why the saints [awliya’] of Allah used to preserve the highest level of this state in themselves, by studying the states of the Noble Prophet (S) and the Pure Imams (‘a) we come across amazing states which if one or two *hadiths* had been narrated about them, there was room for man to doubt the existence of those states but they have not been narrated once or twice, on the contrary a lot of *hadiths* have been narrated in a successive way or with unbroken chains of transmission in regard to these states, to the extent that whenever we remember the personality of Imam ‘Ali (‘a), our minds are associated with his weeping and wailing and implorations and it is not possible at all to imagine Imam ‘Ali (‘a) without having an image of fear of Allah and also it is not possible at all to remember Imam al-Sajjad (‘a) without the state of fear and dread of Allah. The *Du‘a’ Abu Hamzah al-Thumali* and the rest of his supplications are delicate cases in point and are indicative of the existence of his extraordinary fear of Allah which is unimaginable for us.

It has been narrated in a *hadith* that at the time of performing the ritual ablution, the state of Imam ‘Ali used to undergo change and his entire being used to shake. Likewise, it has been narrated in regard to Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (‘a) that whenever he came close to the mosque, the color of his cheeks used to change and his body used to tremble at the time of saying the inaugural phrase of prayer *Allahu Akbar*. Likewise, the rest of the Infallibles and Fatimah al-Zahra’ (‘a) were like this in the presence of Allah.

All this diligence in regard to keeping alive the quality of fear of Allah in the inner conscience and recommendation to it and manifestation and appearance of this state in the conduct of the leaders of religion is because of the invaluable role of fear of Allah in the formation, perfection and spiritual ascendance of man in his attainment of the course of direction and servitude. Without doubt, there are various effects and benefits depending on the levels of fear.

When we examine our psychological states, we gather that there is a certain limit of fear of Allah in us

and we perceive its special benefits, but when we examine the states of people who have attained higher awareness and have gone a step further than us in knowledge of Allah and have attained perfection, we gather that their fear and dread of Allah was different in form and so were the effects and benefits different.

Of course, explaining the station of fear of Allah and its nature and effects is problematic and in order for this topic to become clearer, mentioning this point that when man perceives a great thing vis-à-vis himself, it gives him a state under whose auspices he feels that he has lost his being and does not see his being any more. In other words, when man feels a greatness, he melts in it; like ice which melts under the rays of the sun. This melting and forgetting himself is an effect and special state which appears as a result of perceiving the greatness of Allah.

With regard to the previous discussions and issues about which books of ethics and mystics have been written, man attains perfection once he feels in himself utmost lowliness, self-abasement and humility in the face of Allah, the Exalted, and His endless majesty. The mystics have called this state the station of complete denial of the self or the station of annihilation; in this case man no longer perceives himself and once he sees himself no longer, he perceives Allah and His greatness. In technical terms, he comprehends that besides attachment nothing else exists.

Even if this talk is interesting and admirable but still the truth is that only a few people have ever attained this station and we have a long distance with that level. We ought not to think that our problem will be solved by learning a few terms; our problem will only be solved by perceiving realities and under the auspices of servitude and obedience of Allah and following the way of the Infallible and Pure *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a).

We ought to try to take steps along their course and give room to rays of their attentions, fear and dread of theirs in our hearts, so that as a result of the capability and aptitude that we have we may draw nearer to Allah. Attention to those high stations and acknowledgement of their existence is beneficial to us, on the condition that we ought not to become proud and not imagine that we have attained those stations.

## **The Perfection of Man and the Feeling of Humility and Lowliness in Regard to Allah**

Therefore, the perfection of man draws nearer when he melts in the face of Allah and does not see any autonomy for himself and perceives himself as dependent and in need of Allah; and the more man sees himself as dependent and low, the nearer he draws to Allah. The way of attaining this perfection is that once he perceives the greatness of Allah, a feeling of lowliness and inferiority appears in him, for people who are seeking perfection, knowledge and the high levels of servitude, this is the best way.

For us fear is an undesirable state, but it is interesting that we ought to know that the saints [*awliya*] of Allah derive pleasure from their fearful state and whenever they lose it once again try to recover it. This

state is so desirable and pleasurable to them that they never want to be separated from it! We do not have the correct perception of that state and cannot explain it well because we have not attained it. But what we have gathered from the stories of the saints [*awliya*] of Allah is that those who possessed intense love used to derive pleasure from suffering along the course of love. They derive pleasure from crying as a result of absence from Him.

Despite that the origin of crying is sadness and sorrow, but because it is for the Beloved, it is pleasure-giving to them. It is for this reason that we assert that fear of Allah is desirable and constructive for the saints [*awliya*] of Allah and they are not displeased with melting in the presence of Allah and having a state of fear and awe; at least they know that this itself is a prerequisite to attaining eternal gratification beyond which there is no other pleasure.

For this reason the saints [*awliya*] of Allah and the leaders of religion used to accord great importance to fear of Allah, because they believed that it was the best factor for annihilating the rebellion of the carnal soul and restraining them from the feelings of needlessness and autonomy and self-sufficiency and egotism. Likewise, this state is the best method of attaining the stage of annihilation in Allah [*fana' fi Allah*].

In this regard, what ought to be made clear is that once some people learn terms such as 'the station of annihilation and absorption in Allah' [*maqam-i mahw wa fana' fi Allah*], they fantasize that they have become mystics and have attained high positions. It is good for this group to test themselves and see whether the feeling of fear of Allah exists in them or not; has there been a night in their lives when they did not sleep as a result of fear and awe of Allah? Have their eyes ever been swollen as a result of their crying as a result of fear of Allah?

It is very easy for man to claim that they have attained annihilation in Allah and no longer need these states and stations but we ought to carefully examine as to whether a little bit of the state that had been attained by John the Baptist ('a) exists in us or not. Has any effect appeared in us as a result of these states?

A person never becomes a mystic by making claims and learning a few mystical terms. This is a very long path filled with dangers; to quote that great man the deceased Ayatullah Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Amoli, may he reside in Allah's Garden of eternal bliss, traversing this course is harder than uprooting a mountain by means of eye lashes [as the tools].

If a person wants to trudge the course of divine awareness, he has to make himself ready to endure a lot of hardships, ascetic self-discipline and keeping vigil at night; the path has to be trudged in the way that travelers have traversed it [before]. We ought to observe how the saints [*awliya*] of Allah like Imam 'Ali ('a) and Imam al-Sajjad ('a) traveled this path.

## **Fear of Allah and Fleeing from Sin and Obsession with Popularity and Position**

According to what has previously been discussed, one of the effects of fear of Allah for people who have attained high spiritual stations is annihilation or absorption in Allah but for ordinary people, the greatest produce of fear of Allah is abstinence from sin and forsaking wrong-doing. When man perpetrates sin, he aspires to bring to hand some benefit or attain some pleasure and gratification, whether that pleasure is real or imaginary, whether that gratification is licentiousness or from the category of acquiring titles and popularity and position.

What can refrain man from such futile urges, which are a cause of sin and deviation, and free him from the trap of the Devil, is fear of Allah; attention to the fact that sin produces ominous effects and deprives him of the eternal and permanent blessings of the hereafter, makes him entangled in everlasting punishment (without the least doubt, the more the fear of Allah, the more its effects.)

It has been narrated in *hadith* that if there is fear of Allah in the heart of man, there will remain no room for love and obsession with power and position. That is to say a person who fears Allah is not obsessed with position, does not chase after being beloved by the people and having a good name and popularity. Ambition for position is the greatest calamity for man. It has been recorded in some *hadiths* that the greatest calamity for the believers is love of wealth and position. Obsession with status connotes seeking position and leadership. The thing which can remedy love of position, which is the last immodest quality to exit the hearts of the truthful, is fear of Allah:

Without the least doubt, the mania for fame, love of position and rank leaves the mind of a person who perceives the greatness of Allah and comprehends his own minuteness and smallness vis-à-vis Allah and knows what dangerous repercussions sin has for his world and hereafter. Therefore, the greatest effect of fear of Allah in us is flight from becoming tainted by sin. Of course, love of Allah has become stable in people whose knowledge has become complete and they yearn to reach the beatific presence of Allah.

It is this very love of Allah and yearning to attain the beatific presence of Allah that causes them to overlook [anything] other than the Beloved but this exclusively pertains to the worthy and we have not attained that position of love of Allah. The only thing which is attainable for us is strengthening fear of Allah in our hearts, so that as a result of that we may remain invulnerable to sin and bit by bit attain the aptitude to love Allah in our hearts and arrive at high levels of love and divine knowledge.

## **The Role of Perceiving the Status of the Fear of the Lovers of**

## Allah and the Angels

Now that talk concerning fear of Allah and its importance and benefits has been brought up, the issue arises as to what we ought to do in order to give rise to fear of Allah in us? One of the best ways to arrive at this level is to look at the degree of the fear of people who are beloved by Allah. Without the least doubt, attending to their [spiritual] states and their boundless fear of Allah is the best way to motivate us to attain fear of Allah. This is the same method which the Noble Prophet (S) has pursued in this *hadith*.

Among the most beloved slaves of Allah are the angels. The Gracious Qur'an, describing these worthy servants of Allah who are pure from any contamination states:

...وَيُسَبِّحُ الرَّعْدُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ مِنْ خِيفَتِهِ

***“And the thunder declares His glory and praise, and the angels too for awe of Him...”<sup>9</sup>***

With regard to what has been mentioned that knowing the majesty of Allah and paying heed to it give rise to fear and dread of Allah, we find a fine example of this knowledge in the angels of Allah, as the Noble Prophet (S) has expressed in this report that a group of them who are in the divine presence of Allah perceive themselves as small and low and are humbly standing with lowered heads in fear and dread of Allah since the beginning of their creation to the Day of Resurrection. Perhaps, they lack the courage to raise their heads as a result of the intensity of fear of divine need and worry and anxiety and/or as a result of attending to the infiniteness and majesty of Allah.

When the angels of Allah who are pure from any contamination and sin are scared of divine need in this way, they drop their heads before His majesty and tremble and do not dare raise their heads as a result of feeling guilty of neglecting worship of Allah, is it not worthwhile that us who are stricken by sin and have been ensnared into the fetters of the carnal soul and the deadly trap of the Devil not to raise our heads as a result of excess shame and embarrassment?

A finer example of the state which the angels have in regard to Allah is when we find ourselves confronted by a great person; we lose ourselves, our tongues do not have the ability to speak and involuntarily drop our heads. Once people who had experienced the greatness of Imam Khomeini's personality and knew him completely were in his presence, it used to seem as though the personality of Imam Khomeini used to melt them like ice as a result of the excess greatness and awe of Imam Khomeini. They used to find themselves facing a majestic mountain of knowledge and power and used to feel they are completely nothing. This is one of the stages of the servants of Allah.

Allah has angels who even the great angels hardly perceive their greatness. It has been narrated in a report that the Angel Gabriel revealed his true image only a few times to the Noble Prophet (S). The

Noble Prophet (S) stated that at the time of his appearance and manifestation, the Noble Prophet used to witness his light encompassing the East and West.

Imam al-Baqir (‘a) states,

“One day the Noble Prophet (S) was seated and the Angel Gabriel was next to him. Suddenly, Gabriel looked at the sky and the light from him reflected in the sky and its intensity was continually increasing until it attained the color of saffron. Then, Gabriel drew himself close to the Noble Prophet (S) and the Noble Prophet looked at the sky. Then, he saw that the light of Gabriel had encompassed the West and East of the cosmos in entirety and was getting close to the earth.”<sup>10</sup>

Of course, the rank of the Noble Prophet (S) and his luminousness is further than that of the Angel Gabriel, but the Noble Prophet (S) perceived such greatness of Gabriel because his reality manifested itself on the human nature of the Noble Prophet (S).

- [1.](#) Surat al-Baqarah 2:213.
- [2.](#) Surat al-Mulk 67:8.
- [3.](#) Surat Ya Sin 36: 11.
- [4.](#) Surat al-Nazi‘at 79:40–41.
- [5.](#) Surat al-Bayyinah 98: 8.
- [6.](#) Surat Fatir 35:28.
- [7.](#) Surat al-Baqarah 2: 150.
- [8.](#) Surat Al ‘Imran 3:175.
- [9.](#) Surat al-Ra‘d 13:13.
- [10.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 16, p. 292.

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