

Lesson 36: Forbearance, Moderateness and Trust in Allah as Stated by the Prophet (S)

Sentences which were examined in the previous session centered on piety and self-restraint. In this section of the Noble Prophet's (S) *hadith*, in addition to self-restraint and abstinence, forbearance and the station of trust in Allah have also been mentioned. The Noble Prophet (S) stated:

“O Abu Dharr! Whoever on the Day of Resurrection is devoid of three things is a loser.” Abu Dharr asked, “May my father and mother be sacrificed for you. What are those three things?” In response, the Noble Prophet (S) stated, “Self-restraint [*wara'*] with which he abstains from forbidden things, forbearance [*hilm*] with which he encounters fools, and good morals with which he coexists harmoniously with people.”

Self-restraint [*wara'*] is the first quality that will cause loss for a person on the Day of Resurrection if not obtained. In the previous section, we said that usually self-restraint is applied to a habit of piety and merely abstaining from one sin cannot be considered to be self-restraint. The Noble Prophet's (S) expression in this section confirms that interpretation and clearly explains that self-restraint is applied to a spiritual nature or habit which inhibits man from committing sin; for this reason, the characteristic of self-restraint is that it prevents man from committing forbidden acts and it is natural that a man that is not endowed with this attribute becomes tainted by sin and consequently meets with defeat and failure and ends up in hell.

The Lofty Status of Forbearance

The second attribute that is necessary to be endowed with and protects man from loss and failure on the Day of Resurrection is forbearance [*hilm*]. It has been asserted that forbearance means controlling the self and not allowing incitement of the faculty of anger. Without the least doubt, patience and forbearance are commendable and invaluable attributes and can be considered to be soldiers of intellect, and anger [*ghadab*]¹—which is in opposition to forbearance [*hilm*]²—can be considered to be a

soldier of ignorance.

It is well known that man has been advised not to make decisions, discipline someone nor take action on something while in a state of anger because he will likely later regret his deeds. That is so because man's intellect does not function well when he is in a state of wrath. It has been recorded in a *hadith* that Qanbar was insulted by an ignorant man and he wanted to respond when Imam 'Ali (‘a) stated:

“O Qanbar! Ignore your defamer so that you may please Allah, the Merciful, and so that you may anger the devil and thus punish your enemy because retribution for him is not worse than ignoring and turning a blind eye to him. I swear upon the Allah who split the seed and created human beings that a believer does not please his Lord more than by having patience and forbearance and he does not annoy the devil more than by repressing anger and he does not punish a fool more than with silence.”[1](#)

Elsewhere, Imam 'Ali (‘a) states:

“No honor is like knowledge, no power is like forbearance.”[2](#)

With regard to the loftiness of the quality of forbearance and its invaluable role in preserving proper social relations and reciprocal respect, it is necessary for every individual in the society to be endowed with it and to strive to attain it, especially religious scholars who occupy the role of reforming and training people. When a religious scholar, who is a reformer and a guide of the people, retaliates vis-à-vis the unbecoming conduct of the ignorant, he renders his work ineffective.

Therefore, we must accompany our knowledge with forbearance in order to have a desirable outcome and be patient and enthusiastic when explaining religious truths. In regard to the fact that the viability of knowledge is not feasible without forbearance, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“I swear upon Allah in whose hands my life lies, no two things have joined and supplemented one another better than forbearance and knowledge.”[3](#)

Truly, forbearance is in the highest category of personal perfection after knowledge and, as we have already stated, knowledge without forbearance is not beneficial. It is for this reason that in some instances when knowledge is praised, forbearance too is praised and in reality forbearance and knowledge are mentioned as two invaluable elements which are conjoined and supplementary. The Noble Prophet (S) states:

“O my Lord! Free me from want on account of knowledge and beautify me with forbearance.”[4](#)

Without the least doubt a person who beautifies himself with patience and forbearance has adopted the most merciful and compassionate method in critical circumstances when enmity and hatred become inflamed in people's hearts. Forbearance helps one to extinguish the fire of hatred and enmity and does not allow the carnal self to gain control. Instead, it compels the self to extinguish the fire of hatred.

In history we observe that despite the different kinds of torture and torment which the polytheists inflicted on the Noble Prophet (S) and his companions, after the conquest of Mecca the Noble Prophet (S) displayed utmost forbearance by forgiving the defeated polytheists.

At that time, the enemies expected the Noble Prophet (S) to slaughter them and even some of the standard-bearers of Islam who were seeking revenge addressed Abu Sufiyan saying, "Today is the day of bitter fighting and revenge." However, the Noble Prophet (S) forbade this vengeful slogan and substituted it with the motto:

"Today is the day of mercy and good relations. Today, Allah has granted honor to the Quraysh." [5](#)

Without any doubt, man is forced by necessity to have relations with other people in his life. Allah, the Exalted, has created him in such a way that he is left with no option but to accept social life and if he wants to live alone and far from other people, he will be deprived of a great deal of the blessings of this world, he cannot progress towards perfection and perhaps he cannot even continue living his life.

For this reason, he is compelled by necessity to accept social life and have relations with other people in order to continue his life and also to seek perfection and ascendancy. On the other hand, every person is different with regard to mentality, personality, morals, understanding and knowledge and therefore people encounter others who are unwise and foolish in conduct. Sometimes, a person comes in contact with foolish individuals whose improper behavior is insulting and demeaning.

Not all people have reached the peak of human perfection and knowledge nor do they possess the intelligence to compel themselves to behave in a suitable and courteous manner. It is for this reason that sometimes a person must interact with others that are not self-built who, due to lack of knowledge or existence of family problems and pressures, behave improperly and neither observe proper rules of conduct nor respect others.

It is natural that if a person retaliates in tit for tat manner and becomes angry quickly when faced with such people, differences increase and negative consequences arise from those differences. In addition, time is wasted, the person loses his peace of mind and he cannot attain his goals in life. Therefore, in order for man to derive great benefit from the world and remain safe from its blights, he has to develop the spirit of forbearance in order to control himself when faced with such people.

In addition to the fact that human beings ought to practice self-restraint in order to avoid committing sin, they also have to be forbearing in order to derive benefit from social life and not create losses because if man gains distance from the society, he becomes deprived of the benefits of social life. If man wants to derive benefit from the society for the sake of securing the life of the hereafter, in order to remain sound when confronted by unwise people, he must have self-restraint and forbearance.

He has to practice forbearance so that when he is confronted by demeaning and insulting circumstances, he pays a deaf ear and turns a blind eye to them so that he can carry out his duties and

derive benefit from the society and unbecoming conduct does not become a hurdle on the road to perfection. In the words of hadith: “Have forbearance in order to repel the ignorant.”

In contrast to the common impression that ignorance is only applied to a lack of acquired knowledge, ignorance is also absence of wisdom, foolishness and stupidity. For this reason, ignorance includes behaving in an unwise, foolish or senseless manner and this sense has been employed in many verses of the Qur'an. For example:

وَالْأَ تَصْرِفُ عَنِّي كَيْدَهُنَّ أَصْبُ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكُنْ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ ...

“If You do not turn away their schemes from me, I will incline towards them and become one of the ignorant.”⁶

Yusuf (Joseph) is saying, if Allah does not turn away the deceptive schemes of the women around him, he might commit an unwise deed. In such verses interpreting ignorance [*jahl*] as the lack of knowledge is incorrect and furthermore in most cases lack of knowledge is an excuse. Whereas this word is mostly used for reproach and in inexcusable instances such as when Allah reproaches the brothers of Joseph:

هَلْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ بِيُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ جَاهِلُونَ

“Did you realize what you did to Joseph and his brother when you were ignorant?”⁷

It is doubtless that the brothers of Joseph were not ignorant of their deeds and actions. They knew who Joseph was and they were aware that their deeds were not good but still behaved in a senseless manner and their deeds were foolish; that is to say, their deeds were not consistent with sound reason and intellect.

In addition, when Prophet Moses (‘a) told his people that Allah has given you orders to slaughter a cow, they asked him if he was deriding them.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا بَقَرَةً قَالُوا أَنْتَخَذْنَا هُزُؤًا قَالَ أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ

“And when Moses said to his people, ‘Indeed Allah commands you to slaughter a cow,’ they said, ‘Do you take us in derision?’ He said, ‘I seek refuge in Allah lest I should be one of the ignorant!’”⁸

In this verse also ignorance means foolishness, not lack of knowledge. Prophet Moses (‘a) did not seek refuge in Allah from lack of knowledge but from deficiency of wisdom, imprudence, and behavior in opposition to wisdom and truth. In the book “*Usul al-Kafi*” one section is dedicated to ‘knowledge’ and another to ‘reason and ignorance’ and this was done because in that section ignorance is opposed to

reason not knowledge, and as we have said, often ignorance is used to mean foolish and unwise conduct and is used as the opposite of reason not knowledge.

Forbearance, Befitting of the Saints [Awliya'] of Allah

In his advice the Noble Prophet (S) warns that sometimes in personal life man is confronted by unwise people whose behavior is foolish, and he recommends that the best method of interaction with those who lack manners is forbearance so that one may both derive good benefits from the society as well as free himself from becoming entangled in quarrels and adopt a sound path despite enmity and thus become beloved by Allah:

“Allah loves a person who is forbearing, modest, chaste and high-minded.”⁹

The Gracious Qur'an explains the way of fighting a foolish enemy in the following way:

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ * وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا ذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ * وَإِمَّا يَنْزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزْغٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

“And not alike are good and evil. Repel [evil] with what is best. [If you do so,] behold, he between whom and you was enmity, will be as though he were a sympathetic friend. But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except the greatly endowed. Should a temptation from Satan disturb you, seek the protection of Allah. Indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing.”¹⁰

This is the method which the Qur'an introduces in regard to encountering stubborn and foolish people and is one of finest and best ways of instruction for the reason that every person who behaves badly expects the injured person to retaliate, but when he sees the offended person encounters him in a good and constructive manner which is contrary to his expectations, he becomes transformed and as a result of the pressure of his conscience feels inferior and consequently changes his unacceptable ways of conduct.

It is for this reason that we see that a great deal of people used to surround the Noble Prophet (S) seeking to be in his presence. On the basis of the words of Allah, the reason for this was the attributes of mercy and forbearance which the Noble Prophet (S) possessed:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ...

“It is by Allah's mercy that you are gentle to them; and had you been harsh and hardhearted,

surely they would have scattered from around you. So excuse them and plead for forgiveness from them, and consult them in their affairs... [11](#)

And also in regard to the logic of the conduct of the righteous servants of Allah, the Qur'an states:

وَعِبَادُ الرَّحْمَنِ الَّذِينَ يَمْشُونَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ هَوْنًا وَإِذَا خَاطَبَهُمُ الْجَاهِلُونَ قَالُوا سَلَامًا

“The servants of the All-Beneficent are those who walk humbly on the earth, and when the ignorant address them, say ‘Peace.’” [12](#)

A story has been narrated that there once lived a wise man who invited his friend to his house. The wise man brought some food for his friend, but the badly behaved wife of the wise man came forward and took the food from the wise man's visitor, insulting the wise man. The visitor got very angry and left the wise man's house in protest.

The wise man followed his friend and when he got close to him, said, “Do you remember one day when we were busy eating some food and a chicken came forward and spoilt the whole food and neither of us became angry? Imagine that this badly behaved wife of mine is like a chicken!” After hearing this, that man swallowed his anger and said, “The wise man is right. Patience and forbearance are a cure for every pain.”

They have also narrated that one day Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (‘a) was confronted in an alley in Medina by a man from Syria who was heavily under the influence of the inimical propaganda of Bani Umayyah and began insulting Imam al-Hasan (‘a). After patiently and quietly bearing his words Imam al-Hasan (‘a) said, “I think you are a stranger in this town and you are under the wrong impression. If you have nowhere to sleep, you are welcome in my house. If you are indebted, I will repay your debts. If you are hungry, I will give you food to satiate you.”

The conduct of Imam al-Hasan (‘a) was very surprising to that man and a dramatic change overtook his heart. He was so impressed by Imam al-Hasan (‘a) that he said, “O son of the Prophet! If before this meeting they had asked me who the worst men under the sky were, I would have answered that you and your father are the worst people on earth, but now I believe that you and your father are the best people on earth.”

A perfect man who has attained the loftiest levels of spiritual service and devotion to Allah is not expected to behave otherwise and if they did not handle ignorant and foolish people with patience and forbearance, they would not have been fit to be the representatives of Allah on earth.

It has been narrated in regard to Khwajah Nasir al-Din Tusi that a man brought a letter to him in which he was insulted by the enemy. In that letter, Khwajah had been called “Dog son of Dog”.

In response to such insults, Khwajah kindly and wisely said, “It is not true that I am a dog, because a dog has four legs, fur and it barks while I neither have four legs nor have I fur nor do I bark. A dog has long nails and I have short nails, a dog is short and bent while I am tall and straight. I laugh but a dog does not. I think but a dog does not. In short, none of the characteristics of the dog are found in me. So, none of the claims of the writer of this letter are true.”

Explaining the social benefits of patience and forbearance, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“The first reward the exerciser of forbearance acquires is that others become his helpers against the ignorant.” [13](#)

Moderateness and the Difference between It and Lenience and Compromise

The third quality which, if attained, protects man from loss and failure on the Day of Resurrection is moderateness in his dealings with others. Moderateness [*mudara*] includes soft-heartedness, gentle behavior, sociability, friendliness and tolerance of the bothersome behavior of others. There are a lot of *hadiths* praising moderateness and its benefits in the hereafter. One of those *hadiths* is the Noble Prophet’s (S) saying:

“Moderateness with the people is half of faith.”

He also stated:

“There are three things which if they are lacking in man, his deeds do not become complete: self-restraint [*wara’*] which discourages one from sin, good ethics with which one coexists with others in moderation, and forbearance [*hilm*] which repels the unwise and foolish.” [14](#)

Elsewhere, he considers tolerance to be on par with discharging obligatory and incumbent duties:

“We the prophets have been charged to practice moderateness with the people in the same way that we have been charged to perform obligatory duties.” [15](#)

Man is always confronted by individuals who for various personal motives behave improperly. Sometimes, jealousy or other unbecoming traits impel one to behave in such a manner that he hurts other human beings. What is under discussion is how must one behave and when confronted by such people? If a person retaliates and conducts himself in a tit for tat manner when faced with the unwise and foolish, he usually complicates the situation.

In such circumstances, he should abstain from retaliation and adopt moderateness. He has to try to overlook the inappropriate behavior of the antagonists and practice tolerance and not react very fast. In some instances, a person has to turn a blind eye to the unsuitable behavior of other people and not

confront them with enmity despite their malice. In addition to that, one may have to help them and be at their service. If during his life a person is such that he is moderate and patient with malicious antagonists, he can reap very desirable results and succeed in life.

However, if he desires to retaliate for every hostile act perpetrated against him or for every one of his rights that is abused, he will be wasting his energies and time in addition to torturing his own heart and losing his own peace of mind. In addition to all this, he would only be increasing enmity and grudges. For this reason, the best way to deal with inimical human beings is to be moderate because moderation when dealing with other people is the way of the intelligent and wise as well as being a key to righteousness and salvation.

“Be moderate with others because that is the key to righteousness and it is the method of the wise.”[16](#)

What is worth discussing is that sometimes moderateness is mistakenly interpreted to mean lenience and compromise. Compromise is making concessions with those who have deviated and with the opponents of the truth and denotes that a person is negligent when propagating the truths of the religion of Allah or not protesting when he witnesses deviations. In this regard, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“By my life there will be no regard for anyone or slackening from me in fighting against one who opposes right or gropes in misguidance...”[17](#)

Elsewhere, while complaining about those of weak determination of his time who refrained from the truth and chose the way of compromise and ease, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“Know that—may Allah have mercy upon you—you are living at a time when those who speak about truth are few, when tongues are loath to utter the truth and those who stick to the right are considered lowly. The people of this time are engaged in disobedience. Their youths are wicked, their old men are sinful, their learned men are hypocrites and their speakers are sycophants. Their young people do not respect their elders and their rich men do not support the destitute...”[18](#)

As we can observe Imam ‘Ali (‘a) has reproached compromise, weakness and sycophancy with the people who oppose the truth and he perceives flattery as a mean and reproachable quality and a cause of social corruption and collapse of the pillars of honor and glory.

In the society, there are calm and imperturbable people who do not show any reaction to the events taking place around them and they pay no attention to the problems of others and the problems of religion and society.

This insensitive group of people has a lazy, weak and indulgent spirit and they desire to be in a place where they can recline and remain apathetic enjoying ease and joy. If sometimes war arises and they are called upon to go to the battle front, they pull themselves aside and take flight to secure places.

Naturally, this group has justifications for their deeds because no one is prepared to admit that he is a

bad person that does bad deeds; on the contrary, they even devise apparently good excuses for their actions. Usually, their justification is that they have to be moderate with the enemy and should not to be strict because harsh reactions are fruitless.

Sometimes, they refer to *hadiths* which assert that the cause of prosperity is moderateness with other people. If this way of thinking were allowed to spread in the society, fighting would never take place, no movement would occur and the way of *jihad* would be closed. As has been explained, this kind of negligence seeks to justify lenience and compromise and is created by self-indulgent people who seek to shirk social responsibility and avoid war and fighting under the auspices of religious law. This is an extremely undesirable pretext which brings about unfortunate results and the Glorious Qur'an explicitly reproaches it.

The Prophet's (S) Lack of Lenience in Regard to the Polytheists

In the early days of Islam, time and again the polytheists used to ask the Noble Prophet (S) to show leniency in regard to his religion so that they too could be flexible in their conduct. In reality, they wanted the Noble Prophet (S) to make concessions so that they might obtain privileges from him and the result would be the Noble Prophet (S) coming to terms and acceding to their demands. They wanted him, just like worldly leaders, to relinquish firmness in accomplishing his goals and to show compromise and pliability with his enemies. In regard to their demands, Allah states:

فَلَا تُطِعِ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ * وَدُوا لَوْ تَدْعُونَ فَيَذْهَبُونَ

“So do not yield to the rejecters, who are eager that you should be pliant, so that they (too) may be pliant.”¹⁹

Definitely moderateness and tractability vis-à-vis the enemy and making concessions in regard to enforcing the laws of Allah, propagating divine values and waging war against corruption is not desirable. This is in fact compromise with the enemy, and it is for this reason that Allah strongly prohibits this action and asks the Noble Prophet (S) to strictly enforce His laws on this matter:

وَأَنْ أَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَاحْذَرْهُمْ أَنْ يَفْتِنُوكَ عَنْ بَعْضِ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرْيَدُ أَنْ يَصِيبَهُمْ بَعْضُ ذُنُوبِهِمْ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنَ النَّاسِ لَفَاسِقُونَ

“Judge between them by what Allah has sent down, and do not follow their low desires. Beware of them lest they should beguile you from part of what Allah has sent down to you. But if they turn their backs [on you], then know that Allah desires to punish them for some of their sins, and indeed many of the people are transgressors.”²⁰

Every kind of compromise and pliability is not to be considered to be moderateness. Moderateness is applicable to circumstances where rational and correct goals are conceived as well as achieved in the sense that man patiently bears some of the problems which some people cause for him in order to attain higher aims, not that man should not react to every person and every kind of behavior out of nonchalance and compromise with the enemies in the name of tolerance.

We must differentiate between moderateness and compromise and understand that, with regard to Islamic goals and religious issues, overlooking transgressions, make concessions, or display flexibility with regard to theoretical and practical principles is quite unacceptable. When divine duty is incumbent upon man, he must discharge it with utmost firmness, be resolute and unwavering in executing it and refrain from every kind of negligence and carelessness.

It is not advisable for man to always show compromise and make concessions with every person and be pliable in enforcing divine goals. A person has to resist, stand firm on his feet and fight to the last breath to carry out divine duties and not show any lenience. When we listen to the whispers of the propaganda machine of the enemy, we hear them calling us fundamentalists.

Of course, their aim in using this term is to weaken our nation and present our people as having a harsh and merciless character, but when we pay attention to this label we see that it is a very proper and dignified name and we should warmly welcome it.

Indeed, we are fundamentalists—we always protect our fundamentals, we believe that we must not give up our fundamental ideals and aims, and we must not bargain them for anything. Yes, sometimes it is necessary to make temporary and tactical compromises and yield in regard to issues that are not fateful and ideal, but we must never make concessions in regard to fundamental ideals and goals.

During the difficult days in Mecca when the Noble Prophet (S) was under intense pressure from the Quraysh and he and his followers were being tortured and persecuted by the polytheists to the extent that serious limitations were placed in the way of Islamic propagation and fulfillment of the role of the prophetic mission, every once in a while one of the Prophet's followers was slaughtered for the sake of love for the Divine as well as due to their goals and ideals and naturally in this turmoil the greatest need of the oppressed and tortured Muslims was liberation from these persecutions and winning the support of people who would harm them against the Quraysh and hence prepare the means of their redemption.

Historians have said that during that sensitive time the people of Ta'if proposed to help as well as support the Noble Prophet (S) and stand by the Muslims in wars and conflicts together with protecting the Muslims with their money and lives on the condition that they would not be obliged to perform the daily prayers because they did not perceive it befitting of their status to prostrate on the ground and place their foreheads on clay; in fact, their culture did not allow them to do this.

This proposal was offered to the Noble Prophet (S) at a time when he was in the worst of hardships and difficulties in addition to being under constant pressure of the enemies who had surrounded him on

every side. Had the Noble Prophet (S) been like other social leaders, he might have accepted these proposals, taken advantage of the situation, entered into an agreement and derived benefit from his allies while waiting for a suitable moment to gradually make these people acquainted with prayer and other acts of worship and servitude while teaching them cultural activities. Some interpreters of the Qur'an say that the following verse was revealed in this regard:

وَلَوْلَا أَنْ تُبَيِّنَاكَ لَقَدْ كِدْتَ تَرْكَنُ إِلَيْهِمْ شَيْئًا قَلِيلًا

“And had it not been that We had established you, you would certainly have been near to incline to them a little.”²¹

Allah warns the Muslims against being inclined to the polytheists and making concessions in regard to religion. All the programs, wars and struggles were in the cause of religion and for the sake of making people worship Allah and have connection with Him; therefore, how can one make concessions or bargain with them before they become Muslims and worshipers of Allah? The Noble Prophet (S) thus responded to the proposals of the people of Ta'if:

“There is no benefit in a religion devoid of genuflection and prostration.”²²

They would have loved to see the Noble Prophet (S) compromise with them and give up his ideals in order to win their support and assistance, but never would Allah grant such permission nor the Noble Prophet (S) engage in such bargaining, so he told them that he would not compromise for a religion that is devoid of prostration and he did not need their support. He explained that his religion was dependent on prayer and connection with Allah and the original aim of religion and the prophetic mission was establishing the sovereignty of Allah and divine worship.

The necessity of guarding the fundamentals and basic ideals in all situations has been proven, including such cases as leadership and the management of society. The leader has to be firm in the cause of protecting fundamentals and basic ideals and never compromise. However, he can compromise and make concessions in subsidiary matters if he deems it expedient to protect the fundamentals.

Therefore, social leaders must sometimes show firmness and decisiveness and at other times flexibility and forgiveness. Again, that which must be persistently and firmly safeguarded are the religious fundamentals and the high divine ideals. These cannot be overlooked nor compromised at whatever cost, but in subordinate issues it is possible for man to make concessions and bargains and for a leader to overlook certain things on the basis of expediency.

The preceding explanation has been to emphasize caution in not mistaking moderateness for compromise and to distinguish the limits of the two. Of course, it is very difficult to discern the bounds between acceptable moderation and reproachable compromise.

A person has to be very careful to be able to detect in what circumstances to use moderateness and when not to be moderate as well as discern when overlooking something is tantamount to compromise. One of the ways to distinguish compromise from moderateness is to observe whether overlooking or turning a blind eye to something will result in trampling the basic and important religious issues underfoot or not.

If it tramples fundamental religious ideals underfoot, then one ought to know that he is engaging in reproachable compromise. However, when one puts his own personal interests aside and sacrifices in order to acquire greater goals, he has interacted with moderateness with his adversary. Of course, one must be aware that there are dubious and complicated instances which call for much accuracy.

“O Abu Dharr! If you desire to be the strongest of men, completely trust in Allah. If you want to be the most esteemed of men, have piety and if you want to be the wealthiest of men, have more certainty in that which is with Allah than that which is in your hands.”

In this section of the *hadith* once again discussion about piety has arisen and as can be observed, there is no definite relationship between this subject and the previous discussions, although other issues which are in conformity with piety have been mentioned. In the above quotation the Noble Prophet (S) reminds us about three points. The first point is that if you want to have strength and find the capacity to better attain your goals and aims and not experience weakness and easy defeat in pursuing your objectives, you must have complete trust in Allah. The second point is that if you want to be beloved and honorable, you must have piety. Allah, the Exalted, states:

...إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ...

“...Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most pious among you...”²³

The third point is that if you want to be free from want, you must have more confidence in that which is in the hands of Allah than that which is in your hands. Every person derives benefit from the graces of Allah to some extent and has some kind of capital at his disposal. Sometimes, he has enough money and wealth which make him free from need of other people and he does not have turn to anyone in order to earn money. Or, he has enough food and bread and hence he does not need to borrow food from other human beings. This in itself is freedom from want.

However, we should realize to what extent we can put faith in our wealth. Money is likely to be lost or stolen by a thief just as any other blessing is likely to disappear such that man finds no chance to continue to derive benefit from it. It is possible that a person finds he cannot continue to have access to his wealth and use it when he needs it, but that which is in the hands of Allah can never be lost at all and there is nothing beyond His reach in the universe.

Therefore, with regard to the all-encompassing nature of Allah and His power and to the fact that His

ownership of all things and existents and whatever He wills is never breached, even if something were on the planet of Mars and Allah wills that it should reach a person, it will not violate His command.

If we attain such awareness that the whole of existence and inner as well as outward powers are under the control of Allah, truly believe that there is nothing outside His authority, and know that His ownership and encompassment is over all things, our belief in Allah will increase and we will have more confidence in that which is in His hands than that which is in our hands. It is natural that a person who has faith in the power of Allah will be the richest man because Divine will is never breached and there is nothing outside His power.

The Station of Trust in Allah

As has been observed, the Noble Prophet (S) regards trust in Allah [*tawakkul*] as the essence of power and strength. Taking into consideration the importance of trust in Allah and its significant role in life especially at times of difficulty as well as wrong interpretations which occur in regard to it, it is necessary to have a short discussion about this topic.

Tawakkul is derived from the word “*wikalah*” and in the culture of Islam, it means that man ought to take Allah as his sure support and entrust all his affairs to Him. It has been related that the Noble Prophet (S) asked the Archangel Gabriel about the purport of reliance on Allah. In response, the Archangel Gabriel said:

“Trust in Allah means that creations do not cause harm or benefit to man nor do they grant anything to him nor do they prevent him from anything. Also, trust in Allah is losing hope in created things. When a servant attains such knowledge, he does not do anything for other than Allah, does not put his trust in other than Allah, does not fear other than Him, and does not covet other than Him. This is the meaning of trust in Allah.”^{[24](#)}

In the Gracious Qur’an, there are many verses with regard to trust in Allah, amongst which is this verse:

وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ...

“And in Allah let all the faithful put their trust.”^{[25](#)}

(In this verse Allah, the Exalted, introduces total trust in Him as essentially inseparable from faith.)

In the same way that man usually chooses a lawyer for his worldly affairs and entrusts many of his activities to him in order to reap beneficial results, it is befitting for Allah’s servants to rely on Him alone in all worldly affairs and consider Him as their lawyer in order to secure their needs without stress and anxiety. In other words, a person who intends to solve his problems has three ways at his disposal: to rely on his own power, to trust in other people to help him, or to put his hopes in Allah and turn a blind

eye to all other than Him.

Meanwhile, total trust and complete reliance on Allah derives from man's knowledge about the Lordship of Allah because if man conceives Allah as the Owner and Possessor of jurisdiction as well as the One in whose hands all existence lies, he no longer sees any need to beg from anyone. In one of his supplications, Imam 'Ali ('a) says:

“O my Allah! Thou art the most attached to Thy lovers and the most ready to assist those who trust in Thee. You know their hidden secrets, are aware of whatever is in their consciences and know the extent of their intelligence. Consequently, their secrets are open to Thee and their hearts are eager to see Thee. If loneliness bores them, Thy remembrance gives them solace. If distresses befall them, they beseech Thy protection, because they know that the reigns of affairs are in Thy hands, and that their movements depend on Thy commands.”[26](#)

In regard to the benefits of complete reliance on Allah, Imam al-Baqir ('a) states:

“A person who trusts in Allah will not be dominated and whoever seeks refuge in Allah will not be defeated.”[27](#)

At the opening of the tablets of many prophets was engraved the message to believe in Allah and completely rely on Him because one of the signs of belief in Allah is total trust in Him. If man has faith in the Lordship of Allah and believes that the whole of the existing world is under His domination and lordship, and the only worthwhile object of worship is Allah, he will never permit himself to go after any other and seek their help; on the contrary, he will always put his hope in the Divine Essence of Allah and only ask for help from Him.

Trust in Allah and Making Use of Material and Spiritual Means

Trust in Allah is a matter of the heart and not an outward mode of conduct; for this reason, complete reliance does not mean that man has to seclude himself from the people or live as a recluse in the mosque and only busy himself with worship and invocation of Allah or quit work thinking he can earn a living with the hope that Allah will grant sustenance. Without the least doubt, this interpretation is wrong and a person who takes this approach has detoured and not attained the real meaning and purport of trust in Allah. It has been narrated in a *hadith*:

“The Noble Prophet (S) saw people who never engaged in farming and cultivation. He asked them, ‘Who are you.’ They replied, ‘We are those who rely on Allah.’ The Noble Prophet responded, ‘No, [you are not those people put their trust in Allah] but burdens [and parasites] on other human beings’.”[28](#)

People who do not have the right conception of divine knowledge vainly imagine that trust in Allah means that a person should not derive benefit from material means and facilities and that one who makes use of material conveniences and facilities does not have complete reliance on Allah. Not every

person who derives benefit from material means is devoid of reliance and not every human being who does not make use of material conveniences has trust in Allah. There are lazy and indolent people who wait for bread to be provided to them and they are pleased with just that and they do not have the vigor to work. When it is asked of them why they do not work, they say that they rely on Allah, sustenance is in His hands and only He can provide it! In reality, this so-called justification is an excuse and a cover for laziness and they do not really have reliance on Allah. Of course, some of these people truly have reliance but, in any case, this interpretation of not deriving benefit on the pretext of trust is incorrect.

As we have already said, reliance is a matter of the heart and it denotes dependence on Allah in such a way that man has to derive support from Allah. For this reason, it is possible for man to attain the highest levels of reliance on Allah and at the same time derive benefit from material means and conveniences in order to fulfill divine duties and responsibilities. It is possible for man to make more effort than other people and be more earnest at work and still rely only on Allah for Allah is disgusted with lazy and indolent people and he has enjoined work on man because divine wisdom necessitates that the affairs of this world have to traverse a natural course.

A person that has knowledge of Allah fundamentally knows that divine wisdom necessitates that affairs ought to take place by means of material mediums. Divine wisdom also necessitates that every phenomenon reaches fulfillment through its own mechanism. Therefore, because we know Allah has perfect wisdom, we can understand that which His wisdom necessitates, which is establishment of the system of causality. In the end, human perfection depends on this very system by means of which human beings are placed in the crucible of tests and trials without which humanity would not move towards perfection.

Man's perfection is dependent upon performance of duties of servitude towards Allah which is in turn dependent upon the system of human relations which is governed by the system of causality. Therefore, if man seeks the path of ease and secludes himself from other human beings in order to preoccupy himself with worship and he fails to work and make effort, and acts in opposition to divine wisdom, reliance on Allah will not make sense.

On this basis, divine wisdom necessitates that man must make use of means to attain his needs and desires. If it were such that only requesting sustenance from Allah were enough for bread to fall from heaven, then no one would ever work for a living and people would never be tried.

However, when it is said that we ought to derive benefit from means in order to attain our needs, it does not signify that our providers of sustenance are the earth and our work. These are from Allah and their management are in His hands, and therefore subsistence too is in His hands. Man has the duty to go after the means in order for divine goals to reach fulfillment in the universe and those goals are for the purpose of man's perfection.

Therefore, the one who relies on Allah has to work and not be negligent like those who do not trust in

Allah; of course, the difference between these two lies in their inner states and the conditions of their hearts. The one who relies on Allah is motivated by obedience to the will of Allah and he makes effort while depending on Allah.

However, a person that is not monotheistic and does not rely on Allah seeks his sustenance in his work and efforts and/or from other people. A believer is a person who puts his hope in none other than Allah and perceives all facilities as coming from Him and if even he were deprived of all his material things, he does not lose even the slightest hope in his Lord because he knows that whatever Allah does for his servant is out of wisdom, for the good of His servant and He never deprives his slave of that which is beneficial and good for him.

On the one hand, the cosmic order has been formed on the basis of causality and man has to attain his needs by making effort within that system; on the other hand, work, seeking a livelihood and interaction with others are for the sake of preparing the ground for tests and trials because if man is not tried, he cannot move towards perfection. There has to be employment, the relationship between worker and employer and observance of their mutual rights in order for the ground for man's perfection to be prepared under the auspices of work, effort and respect of mutual rights.

For this reason, man has the duty to work but at the same time he has to believe that his sustenance is provided by Allah and he has to rely on Him. True trust in Allah does not mean that one ought not to work but that his heart has to be with Allah. He has to believe that his sustenance is provided ultimately by Allah not by his work. It is in this case that he becomes successful and overcomes the problems and hardships of life because he has put his hope in the Eternal Divine Essence.

It has been narrated that on an occasion when Prophet Moses (‘a) became ill, the children of Israel came to visit him and told him that if he were to take a particular herbal medicine, he would feel better. Prophet Moses (‘a) responded, “I will not take any medicine until Allah cures me.” Some period elapsed and Prophet Moses (‘a) did not get well.

Then, inspiration was revealed to him, “I swear upon My honor and glory that I will not cure you unless you take that herbal medicine which the Children of Israel said would cure you.” After that Moses used that medicine and became well, but he was worried about what he had told the Children of Israel. Inspiration was once again sent to him, “O Moses! Did you want to invalidate My wisdom with your reliance on Me? Who besides Me placed that medicinal benefit and effect in the roots of the herbs?”

In addition, it has been narrated that an ascetics left the city to live in the mountains. He decided not to ask for anything from anyone until Allah directly provided sustenance for him. Seven days and nights elapsed and no food came for him. The ascetic was about to die when he supplicated to Allah, “O my Lord! I will die if you do not provide my sustenance!” Allah responded, “I swear upon My honor and glory! I will not grant you livelihood until you return to the people and live in society.” The ascetic left the hill and went into the city. When he arrived in the city, some people brought him water while others

brought him food and bread. At that moment, Allah said to him, “O ascetic! Did you want to invalidate my wisdom with your asceticism? Do you not know that it is more beloved to me to provide livelihood to my servants by means of other servants than to provide it directly without any intermediaries?”

Sustenance does not only comprise food, but also includes spiritual and material benefits such as knowledge. Therefore, one should not be lazy about acquisition of knowledge and fail to attend classes on the pretext that he relies on Allah to provide him with knowledge. According to a *hadith*:

“Knowledge is not attained by studying; knowledge is a light which Allah places in the heart of whomever He wishes.”^{[29](#)}

True, knowledge is provided by Allah and He grants it to whomever He wishes, but we are duty-bound to learn and be earnest in acquiring knowledge and make use of every opportunity in its attainment. It is not true that a person can become a scholar without hard work in the same way that a person cannot earn worldly wealth without making effort and undergoing hardships.

All the blessings which man desires to attain are at the disposal of Allah and the means are not the original determiners but are tools which Allah has assigned for acquiring blessings and, because Allah wants to grant His sustenance by these very means and facilities, we are duty-bound to derive benefit from them even though it is possible for Allah to grant us unimaginable blessings and favors without our having to make any effort and also when we lack necessary means and facilities.

In contrast, it is also possible for us to fail to attain our desired goals even after much effort and access to all the necessary means and this is indicative of the fact that we ought not to put our hopes in worldly agencies. In essence, people must rely only on Allah while making use of material facilities and conveniences.

As the Noble Prophet (S) states, if one wants to be the strongest person, he must put his hope in Allah. He must make his inner relationship with Him strong so that he may attain inner peace and under the auspices this relationship rely on His eternal power because He is able to do all things and is the best helper in hardships and problems.

Indeed, it is with regard to this trust and firm relationship with Allah that the Commander of the Faithful, Imam ‘Ali (‘a)—that perfect man who used to tremble when praying and supplicating Allah, faint and fall on the ground as a result of fear of Allah—would never bend to the enemy nor fear and the enemies used to flee from him like ants and locusts and they could not stand face to face with him because he had the help of Allah, the Exalted, and His eternal power and he had the Supporter who is never weak and powerless and everything is managed by His will. During the war of Jamal, he gave the standard to his son Muhammad Hanafiyyah and ordered him:

“Mountains may move from their position but you should not move from yours. Grit your teeth. Lend to Allah your head (in fighting for Allah, give yourself completely to Allah). Plant your feet firmly on the

ground; have your eye on the remotest foe and close your eyes (to their numerical majority). And keep sure that succor is but from Allah, the Glorified.”[30](#)

If man does not have trust in Allah, his conscience is always anxious that his life will be filled with distress and agitation because he believes he will not derive benefit. He is heedless of the genuine and sure support and he relies on false and shaky supports. Therefore, in order to have power, we have to have total trust and reliance on Allah.

The Relationship between Piety and Trust in Allah

In continuation, the Holy Prophet states:

“O Abu Dharr! If all people observe this verse it would suffice them: ‘And whoever practices piety, He shall make a way out for him from whence he shall not reckon. And whosoever puts his trust in Allah, He shall suffice him. Allah attains His purpose. Allah has set a measure for all things’.”

(In this holy verse both piety [*taqwa*] and trust [*tawakkul*] in Allah have been mentioned. This shows that there is a profound relationship between them and they cannot be separated. Maybe the reason piety was mentioned first is that attaining piety is the prelude to realization of trust in Allah. Thus, a person cannot reach the truth of trust in Allah without first being pious.)

There is no doubt that all heavenly and earthly affairs lie in the hands of Allah and there is no other power vis-à-vis the power of Allah and it is He who manages the created world with His will and everything happens according to His desire and resolution. For this reason, we must only put our hope in Him and ask only from Him and feel free from want from all others.

Because Allah has given us orders to respect other human beings and be thankful for their good deeds to us, we have to show due regard to others on the basis of divine duty, but we must refrain from flattery and improper tribute in the vain imagination that a thing will be provided to us by another human being. A person who trusts and believes in Allah conceives sustenance as coming from Allah; for this reason, he does not see the need to compliment other people and bow down to them in the hope that they will help him. Flattery and bowing down are not compatible with man’s self-esteem.

Allah, the Exalted, and the divine *awliya*’ of religion (‘a) have ordered us to be humble to some people such as our parents and mentors who have great rights upon us and likewise they have advised us to be modest and polite to the progeny and descendants of the Noble Prophet (S) because of their closeness to the Noble Prophet (S) and due to our desire to obey Allah and show respect to the Prophet of Allah, not on account of coveting the world or for material rewards.

Allah, the Exalted, mentions humility and respect towards parents after mentioning worship and servitude to Him:

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا إِمَّا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا * وَاخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا

“Your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship anyone except Him, and [He has enjoined] kindness to parents, should they reach old age at your side—one of them or both of them—do not say to them, ‘Fie!’ And do not chide them, but speak to them noble words. Lower the wing of humility to them out of mercy, and say, ‘My Lord! Have mercy on them, just as they reared me when I was [a] small [child]’.”^{[31](#)}

In regard to the rights of teachers and mentors, Imam al-Sajjad (‘a) states:

“The right of the one who educates you and nourishes your soul is that you must respect him, venerate his gatherings, listen to his words with honor, look at him and never speak loudly in his presence. If someone asks him a question, never respond to that question before he himself answers it nor talk in his class and never gossip about anyone in his presence.”^{[32](#)}

If a person humbles himself before someone and compliments another human being on account of coveting worldly and material benefit, the reality of his deeds is polytheism and the truth is that he conceives Allah, the Exalted, as incapable and so covets what other people have.

A person that knows Allah, whose awareness of Him is perfect and pays heed to His word: ***“Does not Allah suffice His servant?”***^{[33](#)} does not hope in any other save Him to solve his problems. He only trusts Allah, the Exalted, and at the same time discharges his duties. If his duty is to work, he works and if his duty is to study, he studies and if his duty is to fight in the way of Allah, he fights and puts the rest in Allah’s hands.

Imam Khomeini, may Allah be pleased with him, used to repeatedly say, “We are duty-bound to fight; however, with regard to whether we will win or not, that is up to Him. Whatever He desires and deems expedient will come to pass.”

¹. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, p. 424.

². Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 1139, wisdom [hikmat] 109, trans. Fayd al-Islam.

³. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 46.

⁴. Ibid., vol. 97, p. 368.

⁵. Ibid., vol. 21, p. 109.

⁶. Surat Yusuf 12:33.

⁷. Surat Yusuf 12:89.

⁸. Surat al-Baqarah 2:67.

⁹. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 174.

¹⁰. Surat Fussilat 41:34–36.

¹¹. Surat Al ‘Imran 3:159.

¹². Surat al-Furqan 25:63.

¹³. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 1179, wisdom [hikmat] 197, trans. Fayd al-Islam.

¹⁴. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 179.

- [15.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 53.
- [16.](#) Ghurar al-Hikam, p. 479, trans, Muhammad 'Ali Ansari.
- [17.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 87, sermon [khutbah] 24, trans. Fayd al-Islam.
- [18.](#) Ibid., p. 729, sermon [khutbah] 224, trans. Fayd al-Islam.
- [19.](#) Surat al-Qalam 68:8-9.
- [20.](#) Surat al-Ma'idah 5:49.
- [21.](#) Surat al-Isra' 17:74.
- [22.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 21, p. 153.
- [23.](#) Surat al-Hujurat 49:13.
- [24.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, p. 138.
- [25.](#) Surat Al 'Imran 3:122.
- [26.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 719, sermon [khutbah] 218, trans. Fayd al-Islam.
- [27.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, p. 151.
- [28.](#) Mustadrik al-Wasa'il, vol. 11, p. 217.
- [29.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 1, p. 225.
- [30.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 62, sermon [khutbah] 11, trans. Fayd al-Islam.
- [31.](#) Surat al-Isra' 17:23-24.
- [32.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 42.
- [33.](#) Surat al-Zumar 39:36.

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