

Lesson 37: Divine Providence and Divine Decree and the Role of True Faith

In the previous lessons, the focus of discussion was piety and it was explained that when a person is pious, he should not be worried about his sustenance for the reason that Allah, the Exalted, grants him ways of solving his problems and when he finds himself in difficulties and in a dead end situation, Allah shows him the way of deliverance and grants him livelihood from ways he cannot even imagine.

In reality, in the previous sections the Noble Prophet's (S) recommendations to Abu Dharr in regard to the connection between piety and sustenance have been discussed because man desires legitimate, pure and ample subsistence. If he conceives that piety results in the expansion and increase of his livelihood, his motivation to attain piety increases.

Submission to Truth, the Means of Averting Worries

So, to what extent should a believer be worried about his sustenance? To what extent should he think about improving his life and in what ways? In what way should he earn his sustenance? There is no doubt that man has needs which, if not provided, would bring his life to a halt. Sustenance is one of the things upon which the continuation of life depends, so naturally a person who loves life is also worried about sustenance.

As we have previously said, sustenance is not confined to food. The material and spiritual blessings that Allah grants to mankind are all subsistence including but not limited to a person's clothing, home, spouse, teachers and knowledge.

With this broad point of view that subsistence consists of all material and spiritual graces and also the certainty that every person has no option but to acquire subsistence, it is natural that every person is worried about their livelihood.

However, the degree of a person's apprehension is dependent on their various levels of knowledge and

certainty; that is to say, in the same way that people's faith and knowledge are not the same, their levels of apprehension too are not the same and their worry decreases to the same extent that their knowledge increases so much so that some of the saints [awliya] of Allah reach a level of knowledge where they do not even think about themselves. The station of submission which has been mentioned in the verses of the Qur'an denotes this station. Allah, the Exalted, states:

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

“But no, by Lord! They will not believe until they make you a judge in their disputes, then do not find within their hearts any dissent to your verdict and submit in full submission.”¹

In the station of submission man reaches a stage where he completely yields to Allah, does not want anything for himself, forgets his desires and only pays attention to what Allah wants. If a person attains this stage, he becomes liberated from anxieties and everything becomes easy for him:

“Allah, the Exalted, sent down inspiration to David, ‘O David! You desire and will something and I too desire and will something and that which I desire takes place. Therefore, you will attain what you desire if you submit to My will and I will cast you into distress and frustrate your desires if you do not yield to My will.’”²

Some people regard the station of submission to the will of Allah as higher than the station of contentment with His will because they believe that in the station of contentment man consents his will to what Allah does; for this reason, he is concerned with his own desire. However, in the station of submission, one relinquishes his desires to Allah.

They also consider it to be higher than the station of trust in Allah for the reason that reliance on Allah denotes putting one's hope in Allah in the affairs of life and choosing Allah to be one's trustee. For this reason, in the station of trust in Allah, man is still attached to himself but in the station of submission, he detaches himself from all affairs related to his self and surrenders everything to Allah.³

Inviting the believers to the station of submission, Allah, the Exalted, states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَافَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ

“O you who have faith! Enter into submission, all together, and do not follow in Satan's steps; he is indeed your manifest enemy.”⁴

The deceased 'Allamah Tabataba'i, may Allah be pleased with him, interprets this verse thus: the words 'salam' and 'islam' and 'taslim' all denote one meaning and the word 'kaffah' just like the word 'jami'an' is used for emphasis and because the verse addresses the believers, and they have been ordered to enter

into submission, the order in this verse is addressed to the people of the society altogether as a group and as individual persons.

Therefore, submission is incumbent on every individual of the society and on the community as a whole; that is to say, they ought not to ask questions in regard to the [orders of the] religion of Allah and they have to submit to the commands of Allah and His Noble Prophet (S). In addition, because the verse is especially addressed to the believers, the surrender which the believers have been invited to connotes yielding to Allah and His Noble Prophet (S).

Therefore, submission means surrender to Him after believing in Him. For this reason, it is obligatory for the believers to yield to Allah and not to choose a path which has not been enjoined by Allah and the Prophet (S) because every nation that has ever been destroyed fell into ruin for forsaking the way of Allah and for following their own carnal desires; a path for which they had no justification from Allah.⁵

Those who have attained the station of submission do not have any personal desires and their will is the will of Allah. They do not worry about how and by what means their sustenance will be provided. They are only pre-occupied with how to be devoted to Allah in order to please Him more. This group definitely attains deliverance and prosperity as Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) stated:

“A person who holds fast to the strong divine rope has attained deliverance.”⁶

When it was asked of him what ‘holding fast to the strong divine rope’ meant, he responded:

“It means submission to the will of Allah.”

There is no doubt conception of the station of submission is difficult for us. We are not able to comprehend how man can attain a level of knowledge and awareness to the extent that he forgets himself and only becomes pre-occupied with Allah, the Exalted, but we cannot deny the existence of this station and we know without the least doubt that the special servants of Allah have attained this station of submission and have handed over the management of their affairs to Allah.

A Brief Look at Predetermination and Divine Decree [Qada wa Qadar]

In addition to those who have attained the station of submission to the will of Allah, some have attained a position lower than that. Some of them are those who have attained the position of ‘certain knowledge’ [*‘ilm al-yaqin*] and they know that all events of the cosmos—whether small or large—have a well-established order which have been decreed by Allah, the Exalted, and besides this decree, they have also attained knowledge about definite predetermination. That is to say, besides decrees which are controlled by Allah and are changeable, all affairs have also reached a stage of certain predetermination which is not subject to change.

'*Qada*' (predetermination) means prescription, certainty and decisiveness. '*Qadar*' (divine decree), on the other hand, signifies measuring an amount and determining an extent. Because the occurrence of events in the world is a result of divine knowledge and providence, they demand divine predestination and for the reason that limits and measures and circumstances of time and place have been determined, they have been pre-ordained by divine decree.

It is necessary to mention that sometimes predetermination and divine decree are not clearly and correctly interpreted and there are certain ambiguities in regard to these two and many people imagine that divine decree and pre-ordination are tantamount to determinism and fatalism. Briefly, we have to say that the issue of determinism or fatalism is not connected to divine decree and providence and belief in divine decree and providence does not mean that man has to quit his duties and fantasize that all things have been predetermined and that he has no duties.

We believe that the principle of causality—the principle of cause and effect—governs the world and all events and phenomena. All phenomena acquire their necessity and existence as well as their form and temporal and spatial attributes and the rest of their qualities from their related causes. One of these causes or agents is the will of man himself and divine decree and providence entail fatalism or determinism only if we deny the interference of man's will in his deeds and if we believe that divine decree and providence replace the power, potential and will of man.

In reality, divine decree and providence merely mean that the world's system of cause and effect derive from the divine knowledge and will; of course, man's free will or volition is one of the causes or factors of this system. For this reason, belief in divine decree and providence does not contradict man's responsibility.

It was asked of the Noble Prophet (S) if prayers [*hirz*] which are used to cure illnesses can also prevent divine decree; in response, he said:

"These prayers are themselves derived from divine decree."⁷

(That is to say, their effects in preventing illnesses are divine decree and providence).

Imam 'Ali ('a) was sitting in the shade of a leaning wall full of cracks that was about to fall. After some time, Imam 'Ali ('a) moved from beside that wall and went to sit in the shade of another wall. Some people asked him, "O the Commander of the Faithful! Are you running away from divine providence?"

He replied:

"I am taking refuge in divine decree from predetermination."⁸

That is to say, I am taking refuge in one kind of divine decree and predetermination from another kind of divine decree and predetermination. If I were to sit under a wall and it falls on my head, I am condemned to a kind of divine decree and predetermination for the reason that in the order of causes and factors if

man were to sit under a wall and it fell on his head thus harming him, this is itself a kind of divine decree and predetermination and if he were to move away from a falling wall to save his life from danger, this is also another kind of divine decree and predetermination.

It is worthy of note that causes and factors are not confined to material and ordinary causes and, besides those that we know, there are also spiritual and paranormal causes. One of the causes that greatly affects man's destiny in this world is supplication. In other words, supplication is one of the ringlets on the chain of divine decree and providence which can be effective in causing events or preventing divine decree and pre-ordination. It is for this reason that it has been said:

“Supplication prevents divine decree even if the decree is very strong.”⁹

Such *hadiths* take into consideration the whole system as well as the entire collection of causes and factors, both material and spiritual. They take into consideration instances where spiritual causes and factors overshadow material causes and factors. A person who only sees material and tangible causes imagines that causes and factors are confined in these very things and he does not know that it is possible for thousands of other causes and factors to be working under divine decree and predetermination and when those causes and effects come on the scene, they eclipse material causes and factors, hence making them ineffective:

وَإِذْ يُرِيكُمُوهُمْ إِذِ التَّفَقُّتُمْ فِي أَعْيُنِكُمْ قَلِيلًا وَيُقَلِّلُكُمْ فِي أَعْيُنِهِمْ لِيَقْضِيَ اللَّهُ أَمْرًا كَانَ مَفْعُولًا وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ

“And when he showed them to you—when you met them [on the battlefield]—as few in your eyes, and He made you appear few in their eyes, in order that Allah may carry through a matter that was bound to be fulfilled, and to Allah all matters are returned.”¹⁰

As we have said, there are some people who have reached the stage of knowledge and certitude, and they know that the cosmos is governed by Allah on an accurate and calculated system and the occurrence and appearance of every event is on the basis of divine decree and predetermination.

They know that all things, including sustenance, are ordained by Allah, that man is never deprived of whatever Allah has decreed, and that whatever has not been written and prescribed will not occur and is unattainable by man. Of course, as we have already said, belief in this accurate and wisely calculated system does not run contrary to belief in duty.

Man can believe in divine decree and predetermination and the unity of divine actions without being affected by fatalism and laziness, sitting at home saying, “Now that everything has been preordained by Allah, there is nothing we can do’.

On the contrary, based on divine knowledge, belief in divine decree and predestination and the unity of divine actions and issues of this nature are not incongruous with the need for making effort and

discharging personal and social duties in material and spiritual issues. Regardless, if man attains this level of knowledge and certitude, he will no longer have any anxieties.

The Station of Certitude [Yaqin] and Its Levels

Now that we have discussed this station of certitude, it is necessary to briefly define that station and its levels:

Certitude [*yaqin*] is a stable belief conforming to reality which is indestructible and a source of tranquility for man. There is no doubt that certitude is higher than knowledge and ordinary belief and is the noblest and loftiest human virtue which very few human beings have attained and is a great asset, the attainment of which is tantamount to achieving great prosperity.

A person that has reached the stage of certitude is not attentive to other than Allah, only trusts Allah and does not perceive any source of influence save Him. In reality, certitude is attained after the stages of Islam (submission to the will of Allah), faith, and piety. In this regard Imam al-Rida (‘a) states:

“Faith [*iman*] is one level higher than submission [*islam*] and piety [*taqwa*] is one level higher than faith and certitude [*yaqin*] is one level higher than piety and there is nothing apportioned less among the servants of Allah than certitude.”¹¹

Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) states:

“The Noble Prophet (S) performed his morning prayer with the people in the mosque. Then, his eyes fell on a youth who was dozing and dropping his head drowsily. His color was pale and his body was very thin. His eyes had sunk deep into the eye sockets. The Noble Prophet (S) asked him, ‘O youth! How did you spend your night?’

“The youth responded, ‘O Prophet of Allah! I spent my night in certainty.’ The Noble Prophet (S) became amazed by the youth’s response and said, ‘There is a reality and truth for every certainty. What is the truth of your certainty?’ The youth replied, ‘O Prophet of Allah! The truth of my certainty has made me sorrowful, it keeps me awake (for worship) at nighttime and obliges me to fast during the day. I have become disinclined to the things of this life. It seems as though I am seeing the Throne of Allah and all human beings have been raised and gathered for judgment and I too am among them. It seems as if I am seeing the dwellers of paradise enjoying the pleasures therein, entertaining one another while leaning on soft cushions. It seems as though the people of hell are being tortured therein and they are weeping and requesting help. I feel as though right now I can hear their frightful voices echoing in my ears.’

“At this juncture the Noble Prophet (S) addressed his companions, ‘This is a servant who has enlightened his heart with the light of faith.’ Then, he addressed that youth, ‘Be firm on this state and never lose it.’ Then, the youth requested him, ‘O Prophet of Allah! Ask Allah to grant me martyrdom.’

The Noble Prophet prayed for him and it did not take long before he participated in a war with the Noble Prophet (S) he was martyred after nine people, he being the tenth martyr.”[12](#)

Certitude has three levels: 1) certain knowledge [*‘ilm al-yaqin*], 2) certain vision/eye of certitude [*‘ayn al-yaqin*], 3) certain truth [*haqq al-yaqin*]. All the three levels have been hinted at in the Qur’an:

كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ * لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ * ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ

“No indeed! Were you to know with certain knowledge, you would surely see hell. Again, you will surely see it with the eye of certitude.”[13](#)

إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ حَقُّ الْيَقِينِ

“Indeed this is certain truth.”[14](#)

1. Certain knowledge [*‘ilm al-yaqin*]

It denotes steadfast belief and certitude which corresponds with reality which is attained by inferring something from its effect, like certitude about the existence of fire after seeing smoke.[15](#) In the Qur’an, Allah states:

سُنُرِهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ أَوَّلَ مَا يَكْفُرُ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

“Soon we shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real. Is it not enough that your Lord is witness to all things?”[16](#)

In this verse the existence of Allah has been inferred from signs in the horizons.

2. Certain vision [*‘ayn al-yaqin*]

It consists of beliefs which are attained by seeing and witnessing which conforms to intuition and insightful perception. This seeing is stronger in clarity and brightness than outward [physical] eyes.[17](#)

Referring to this level of certitude, it has been recorded in Shaykh Saduq’s “*Tawhid*” that:

“One of the scholars of the People of the Book [*ahl al-kitab*][18](#) came to Amir al-Mu’minin (‘a)[19](#) and said, ‘O Amir al-Mu’minin! Have you seen your Lord at the time of worship?’ Imam ‘Ali (‘a) responded, ‘Woe unto you! I do not worship a Lord whom I have not seen.’ The questioner said, ‘How have you seen your Lord?’ Imam ‘Ali (‘a) responded, ‘Woe unto you! Physical eyes do not see Him, but the intuitive and insightful eyes as well as hearts possessing real and steadfast faith’.”[20](#)

3. Certain truth [haqq al-yaqin]

It denotes decisive belief which is attained by way of obtaining the thing itself and accomplishing real connection with it in such a way that the possessor of certitude witnesses by means of his intuitive and inner eyes the bounties of light from Him. The result of this level of certainty is annihilation in Allah [*fana' fi Allah*] and ecstatic absorption in love and affection for Him, so much so that he does not see any independence for himself—it is like getting into fire and burning within it.²¹

It has been related in a *hadith qudsi*²²:

“Man does not get near to Me by means of that which is more beloved than what I have made incumbent upon Him and he gets near to Me by means of optional prayers until I love him. When I love him, I become his ears with which he hears and his eyes with which he sees and his tongue with which he speaks and his hands with which he touches.”²³

In the Supplication of Abu Hamzah al-Thumali, Imam al-Sajjad (‘a) says:

“O my Lord! I ask from You inner and insightful faith, to keep me [on the course of] of steadfast and firm faith so that I may attain true certitude which I cannot attain unless you have written and recorded it for me, and make me content and happy with what you have granted me, O Most Merciful of the Merciful.”

Imam al-Sajjad (‘a) requests real, steadfast and firm faith which has reached the level of certitude and in reality he is asking for the utmost limit of faith because after that, he says, “true certitude’ [*yaqin-i sadiq*]. The certitude which the Imam is asking for from Allah is the most important divine grace and blessing under the auspices of true certitude and truth of certitude. Inner belief is attained by man when he conceives no power except the power of the Lord governing the cosmos and he perceives all matters as dependent on the Divine Essence of Allah, he always sees himself as being in the presence of Allah, he is cautious not to commit unbecoming deeds and not act contrary to His pleasure.

In the hadiths, certitude has been mentioned as one of the greatest divine graces and blessings for man and, as has been previously mentioned, Imam al-Rida (‘a) has said, “... there is nothing apportioned less among the servants of Allah than certainty.” That is to say, there are very few people who have attained the level of certitude.

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) says:

“No servant has tasted faith until he knows that which has befallen him could not have passed him by and that which has passed him by could not have befallen him and that the only granter of loss and benefit is Allah, the Honored and Glorified.”²⁴

If a person were to attain this degree of certitude and superior understanding that every problem and every blessing that befalls him could not by any means have bypassed him, and whatever did not

happen for him, could not possibly have happened, he feels special peace and tranquility in his inner being and tastes the sweetness of faith.

A person who attains this measure of faith, although he seeks material and spiritual pleasures, knows that everything is measured and will come to him at a specific time and it is not true that everything he desires will come to him and whatever he does not like will be avoided. A lot of things which man does not like are decreed for him on the basis of divine expediency and conversely divine expediency often necessitates that what we desire does not come to us and we cannot attain it no matter how much we strive for it.

The Saints [Awliya'] of Allah and Contentment with Allah's Decree

When a person attains certitude, he relinquishes his own desires and sets his eyes on the wishes of Allah and from then on does not spend time on thinking about unattainable aspirations and cravings and makes effort only to perform duties and responsibilities. He preoccupies himself with discerning what Allah wants of him and is pleased with whatever has been decreed. In addition to knowing that which has been decreed will come to pass, the people of certitude [*ahl al-yaqin*] know that their good lies in divine decrees; that is to say, they are aware of the best of all possible systems.

They know that what Allah has decreed is the best and what has been preordained by divine decree is a part of this best system and that with regard to its special causes, conditions and requisites nothing better than that special phenomenon can occur. Yes, in addition to having conviction that whatever Allah desires will come to them, people who have attained this degree of knowledge are also happy and have no worries. If affliction befalls them, they are happy and welcome it with joy because they know that their good lies in that which has occurred—this is the station of contentment [with what Allah decrees and desires].

The station of contentment [*maqam-i rida'*] is attained by people who believe that all divine decrees are advantageous to man. In this regard, many *hadiths* have been related. Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) stated:

“I am surprised at the Muslim for whom Allah, the Honored and Glorified, does not determine a decree save that there is good for him in it; if his body is cut to pieces with a scissors, it is good for him, and if he is made the owner of the whole world from the East to the West, it is good for him.”²⁵

Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) says that all decrees which Allah preordains for a believer are good for him, whether they are apparently good or bad. An unpleasant event that occurs for him is for his good either in this world or in the hereafter. A person who attains such knowledge is pleased with what comes to pass and he is not worried for the reason that he has not behaved with negligence in regard to his position of servitude and he has discharged his duties. He is not perturbed about whether his sustenance will be increased or decreased or about what will befall him. He entrusts his work to Allah while pursuing his

servitude and obedience and he knows from the bottom of his heart that whatever occurs is good and he desires nothing but that.

Such a person perceives all events and occurrences with optimism and he is content with afflictions and problems. He has no grievances when thrown into prison, and according to the expression of the *hadiths*, he is content even if they were to cut his body to pieces with a scissors for the reason that he conceives his good in that. During the days of the Revolution and the Imposed War, we saw parents, brothers, sisters and wives whose beloved ones were either burnt or badly cut before attaining martyrdom but nevertheless welcomed the event with joy and thanked Allah for allotting them the favor of a martyr!

Contentment with divine decrees and being pleased with what occurs is easy to talk about, but its materialization is very hard. It is very hard to conceive how certain special servants of Allah attain the position of not agonizing over what comes to pass for them, it is not a matter of concern to them what tomorrow brings; they are not worried whether or not they will have sustenance for the morrow.

If their beloved one goes to the battlefield, they are not worried whether he will be killed or not and if he himself is spending his days at the battlefield with those devoted to the way of truth, he is not worried about his household and family because a person that has a hold on his life and is ready for martyrdom cannot be worried about anything. How good it is when these devoted people safely return home and preserve that special spirit and characteristic and teach others lessons about sacrifice, contentment with divine will and submission to Allah.

The deceased Mulla Mahdi Naraqı states: “Contentment with the divine will is the highest religious position and the noblest station for those nearest to Allah. A person who enters this door will enter paradise. The importance of the station of contentment reaches such a high degree that it has been related in a *hadith* that the Noble Prophet (S) said that on the Day of Resurrection, Allah will grant wings to a group from among my followers with which they will fly from their graves towards paradise and they will derive benefit from the pleasures of paradise according to their wishes.

The angels will ask them, ‘Have you been stopped for accounting?’ They will say, ‘There is no accounting for us.’ The angels will ask again, ‘Have you passed over the bridge over hell?’ They will respond, ‘We did not see the bridge over hell.’ The angels will further ask, ‘Have you seen hell?’ they will answer, ‘We did not see any hell.’ The angels will ask them, ‘Whose followers are you?’ They will answer, ‘We are followers of Muhammad (S).’

“The angels will ask them what they did in the world. They will respond, ‘We had two attributes for which Allah granted us this position:

One is that we were ashamed to sin in solitude and the second is that we were contented with what Allah allotted to us’.[26](#)²⁷

In regard to a person who has attained the position of contentment [*maqam-i rida*], Allah, the Exalted, states:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ * إِرْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً * فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي * وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي

“O soul at peace! Return to your Lord, pleased, pleasing! Then enter among my servants! And enter my paradise!”²⁸

This blessed verse explains that the station of contentment and certainty cause anxiety, worry and distress to depart. One of the qualities of this station is that man is both pleased with and pleasing to Allah:

رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

“Allah is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him. This is the mighty achievement.”²⁹

In regard to the above verse, ‘Allamah Tabataba’i says, “If Allah has described the soul at peace as ‘pleased [with Him]’ [*radiyah*] and ‘pleasing [to Him]’ [*mardiyyah*], it is because being at peace and ease with the Lord demands that man has to be pleased with Allah and not complain for the least decree and preordainment that befalls him, whether that decree and preordainment is existential or recorded in His divine law [*shar*].”

For this reason, no annoying event annoys him and no sin swerves his heart and Allah is definitely pleased with a person once he becomes pleased with his Lord because nothing annoys Allah more than the exit of His servant from the fold of servitude and he will deserve the pleasure of Allah once he traverses the course of servitude. That is why Allah has used the terms ‘well pleased’ [*radiyah*] and ‘well pleasing’ [*mardiyyah*].”

Therefore, certitude and peace of mind is attained once a person is well pleased with Allah. Being well pleased with another means that one accepts the qualities and deeds of the other, and a monotheistic person does not become unhappy when he conceives that all the affairs of the world are under divine control and when he attains the position of contentment because he sees events as having been ordained by Allah and he perceives their connection with the divine Essence.

He knows that no event occurs without the permission of Allah and divine will and providence; in addition to not becoming upset, he becomes pleased because every event occurs on the basis of divine will and providence.

In reality, contentment [*rida*] is higher than the station of patience [*sabr*] because patience is also congruent with unhappiness: man patiently bears an event but that event is bitter for him; however, a

person that has attained the position of contentment does not even perceive hardships and problems so as to bear them patiently. On the contrary, all things are good for him, he is pleased with whatever befalls him and not worried about anything.

Earnestly imagining this position is difficult for us—even harder is attaining it! How difficult it is for man to be pleased when he is in good health and how much more when he is ill?! Is it possible to be completely satisfied with our possessions when we are wealthy and how can we be pleased with deprivation if we become poor?! Above and beyond this, those who have attained the position of contentment create rapport between the spiritual and psychological state of contentment and deeds that are apparently not compatible with contentment.

Without the least doubt, the Infallible Imams (‘a) and Imam al-Husayn (‘a) in particular had attained the loftiest degrees of contentment and we observe that on account of their being pleased with Allah, they took the sword and fought to the last breath of their lives because they were displeased with the government of Bani Umayyah. One might ask how it is possible for a person to be pleased and at the same time displeased with an event that is decreed by Allah.

Making a distinction between these two is very hard and man has to attain high levels of perfection in order to separate these levels and aspects one from the other. In explanation, a person should look at matters from different perspectives. On one level he should view these events in regard to their proximate agents becoming displeased with their conduct. A person should be displeased with his sins, oppression, transgressions and treachery and on another level his soul must be happy and pleased.

We will cite an example in order to make this point easier to understand: imagine that a person has a headache and a doctor prescribes bitter medicine for him. That man will take and drink the medicine because he wants to be in good health. He is pleased with taking the medicine but he is unhappy with its bitterness. If man has a cancer on his hand or leg, he will be pleased with cutting it off his body because if this is not done the cancer will spread to the other parts of his body, but at the same time he is displeased on account of losing a limb of his body and with the pain of the operation.

This very two sided quality and aspect in man is very surprising because in regard to one event, he is able to have two feelings; of course, these two feelings are the result of two different causes: when he conceives that his health will be preserved by taking medicine or cutting off his limb, he becomes happy and he also becomes unhappy on account of either the bitterness of the medicine or the pain which he has to bear.

With regard to the previous example, we say that a person whose knowledge has reached perfection knows that events in the world do not take place without the will of Allah. Therefore, he is upset on account of actions that are carried out by an oppressor which are signs of his lowliness, decadence and existential deficiency. He is upset about why man ought to be so ignorant and sinful that he commits such indecent acts. Therefore, it is possible for man to have two points of view in regard to one event

and react accordingly to the two perspectives.

Believers though have to be pleased with events and occurrences because they know that they take place on the basis of divine will and providence, they know that Allah does not do unwise deeds and He calls for good order in which events occur in their proper place under proper conditions.

When a person knows that Allah, the Wise, does not perform vain and futile deeds, he conceives that whatever happens in this world is part of an orderly and perfect system and for this reason it brings about the perfection of existents of the world and human beings become nearer to Allah under the auspices of various events and attain perfections which are incomparable to worldly pleasures; for this reason, he is optimistic in regard to the whole set of events. From this point of view, he is not even saddened by the martyrdom of the prophets (‘a) and Imams (‘a) because he knows that they attain higher perfection with their martyrdoms and in addition their martyrdoms are a cause of progress for the religion.

The Doyen of Martyrs, Imam al-Husayn (‘a) attained the loftiest position with his martyrdom. His martyrdom gave fruit to the survival and progress of Islam and also became a means for other human beings to attain spiritual perfection under the auspices of knowing and remembering him and distinguishing the proper course of life for prosperity in this world and the hereafter. If he had not become a martyr, neither would he have attained that high station nor would Islam have become prevalent.

We would neither have become believers in the Imams nor would we earn their intercession. It is for this reason that we have to be pleased with his martyrdom and believe that it was a divine decree and a component of the best of all possible systems. However, becoming sorrowful results from the emotional aspect of man’s soul because man is an emotional creature and his emotions necessitate that once a sad thing befalls his beloved one, he too becomes sad.

Weak-minded people cannot separate these aspects one from the other and place them side by side and sometimes their rational and emotional aspects collide with one another and for this reason they cannot strike a balance between them, but those whose souls have become perfect separate these aspects from one another and the separation of these aspects brings about different states in their souls, even with regard to one event that occurs at a specified time. Of course, this is dependent on different levels of the soul such that on one level they become happy and on another level they become sad.

Indeed, people who have attained the station of contentment bear pleasures and displeasures because they perceive them as divine decrees.

A Look at Patience [Sabr] and Its Significance

The stations of contentment, knowledge and certitude are great graces and it is a magnificent blessing

for man to be well pleased with all the decrees of Allah on account of knowing that Allah desires only what is good for him; however, not every person attains these stations and this understanding is not easily achieved.

Much self-edification and effort is required to arrive at these positions. If a person does not attain such high positions, he has to generally know that divine decrees are good and even if bearing hardships and afflictions is difficult for him, he still has to try to be patient and adorn himself with the gem of patience.

A believer who has not arrived at the station of contentment, but is patient in the face of hardships, discharges his duties and does not neglect his obligations even if he does not like those bitter events to take place. If it is time to go to war with the enemy, he goes to war because it is his religious duty even though he is not pleased with the bitter events. He bears the hardships of war although he is not content in the deepest recesses of his heart. Therefore, for a person who has not attained the position of contentment, the station of patience [*maqam-i sabr*] is desirable.

Patience is one of the ethical concepts that has been greatly emphasized in Islamic ethics. What is understood from this term is a spiritual state that occurs for particular people during hardships. Different conditions arise for people when faced with unpleasant events. Some immediately become anxious and grievous when confronted by problems and this sorrowful state affects their lives and becomes a hindrance in their activities—these are impatient and fragile people.

In contrast, some people are forbearing in the face of hardships and safeguard their peace of mind. Bitter events do not affect their spirits very much—these are patient people. Though these people are not pleased in their hearts with bitter and unpleasant events, they still bear them with patience and equanimity. They do not welcome unpleasant events, their hearts do not desire to go to the battlefield and be martyred. They do not want to walk over landmines, but they go to the battlefield and would never turn their backs on the enemy when duty calls because they patiently bear dangers.

Parents do not want their child to go to war, but when divine duty calls for that, they do not hinder their child and bear patiently the separation of their child knowing that man is built by bearing hardships and such an act is better for them and their child to secure the prosperity of the hereafter.

Sometimes, patience is wrongly interpreted and it is imagined that forbearance in the face of hardships denotes accepting humility and being indifferent in the face of negative events and oppression that is perpetrated against other human beings. This interpretation is incorrect and alien to the true meaning of patience. Patience in Islamic terminology denotes enduring hardships and resistance in the face of things which draw man towards deviations or towards things that do not bring about our perfection. That factor is sometimes internal and at other times external.

Sometimes, that factor incites man to move on a null and void course, and sometimes it makes him remain stagnant in a futile spot. For example, when hungry, man is inclined to eat, but perhaps food that is given to him is either illegitimate or doubtful. It is here when our instincts incite us to eat the illicit food

whereas resistance in the face of that instinct is a sign of patience.

On the battlefield, the enemy is firing from every side and the heart says run away from the war and save your life, but Allah says resist until Islam becomes triumphant. It is here that resistance in the face of the call to flee from the battlefield is termed patience.

Sometimes, an external factor invites a person to something that is not right and that external factor sometimes occurs through other human beings and at other times by means other than human beings which result in divine decree. For example, an earthquake might occur and the roof of the house becomes destroyed. If we safeguard our peace of mind in the face of this event and discharge our duties, we have displayed patience.

The importance of patience becomes clear when we observe the role it plays in life and in human perfection. We conceive that man's perfection is attained by means of his volitional actions; that is to say, when a person is faced with two opposing attractions and he chooses that which invites him towards perfection, his essence and perfection becomes manifest when he chooses that which is pleasing to Allah.

Therefore, perfection is accomplished on the scene where two opposing attractions come face to face. It is on these arenas that man has to put in all-out effort and choose that which is pleasing to Allah. If in this case the motivation of faith and innate disposition is so strong as to invite him to truth, he will have attained his worthy perfection. If, however, the satanic incentive and motivation of the carnal soul is stronger, the person makes errors in the war between these two attractions and goes in a direction that leads to his fall—and this is the reality of being tested.

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ الْمُلْكُ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ * الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ
الْغَفُورُ

“Blessed is He in whose hands is all sovereignty, and He has power over all things. He, who created death and life that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct. And He is the All-mighty, the All-forgiving.”³⁰

Indeed, on the course towards our perfection, we are faced with factors which invite us in different directions: rational, spiritual and divine factors invite us in one direction and agents of the carnal soul as well as animal and satanic influences tempt us in another direction. The correct choice is resistance in the face of agents which incite us towards vanity and futility. Therefore, if our life is to move in the direction of perfection, we must conjoin it with patience.

It has been narrated in a *hadith* that the Noble Prophet (S) said that the Archangel Gabriel was asked what patience meant. The Archangel responded:

“Patience means that you have to be uncomplainingly forbearing and resistant in distress in the same way that you persist in happiness. You have to be perseverant in destitution in the same way that you are composed in affluence, and you have to have endurance in illness in the same way that you are calm in health; therefore, a patient person should not complain about his state to human beings on account of what has befallen him.”[31](#)

It is befitting of those that have not attained the station of certitude, who can clearly discern that which has befallen them is good and welcome hardships with happiness, to be patient and ask Allah to provide their needs and be forbearing in deplorable circumstances that come to pass. As we have already said, a person that has attained the station of contentment does not become upset in hardships but he is instead happy and thankful to Allah. If his son is martyred, he says “Praise be to Allah, I wish I had another son to send to the battlefield so that he too would be martyred.” Not only does he not become sad, but he becomes proud and delighted and thanks Allah for what has happened, but there are many people who have not attained this position, as Allah, the Exalted, says:

وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرُونَ ...

“...And few of my servants are grateful.”[32](#)

If those who have not attained the position of contentment uncomplainingly endure deplorable events and thank Allah for whatever comes to pass, Allah grants them the reward of the patient, the firm and the steadfast. They have to be forbearing, not grumble and safeguard their peace of mind hoping that Allah will grant them a reward.

Although hardships are bitter for them, they have to bear that bitterness patiently in the same way that a person who takes bitter medicine does not derive pleasure from it, but knows that he will get better by taking it. It is hard for a person that is forced to lose a limb of his body in an operation to bear it, but because he has no option he submits to fate and becomes ready to have that limb cut so that he may save his life.

The Effects of Preferring the Will of Allah over One’s Own Will

With regard to what has been said, some of the verses of the Qur’an and the *hadiths*, with the intention to train and edify people who have desires in their hearts but have not attained the station of contentment and submission to the will of Allah, give the glad tidings that Allah will grant worldly needs and desires if one chooses piety [*taqwa*], and in this regard the Noble Prophet says:

“O Abu Dharr! Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, states, ‘I swear upon My glory and honor that no servant of Mine prefers My will over his save that I make him free from want and I make his thoughts and efforts devoted to the hereafter’...”

Allah swears in order to emphasize this issue because the purport of His words is not easy to comprehend for the majority of people. Therefore, He swears in order to make people believe this matter. Allah states that if His servant's will conflicts with His will and the servant prefers Allah's will over his own—if man's will is the same as Allah's will, both his desires and the desire of Allah are attained, but the discussion concerns circumstances where man's will is incompatible with Allah's will—Allah guarantees a number of things for his servant: the first thing is that He makes him feel free in his heart from want of other human beings. Of course, mankind is always in need of Allah and there is also a feeling of need for Him in man's heart and this feeling must be in man's heart. Utmost honor and pride for man lies in his conceiving that he is in extreme need of Allah and not perceiving himself as free from need of Allah.

Taking into consideration the fact that man's needs are usually outwardly brought to hand by means of other human beings, he perceives himself to be in need of other human beings. This feeling of needing other people demeans people to the extent that they feel in need of others and humble themselves to them—sometimes they feel they have to flatter them for favors and at other times plead to them.

If a person's relationship with Allah is strong and he prefers Allah's will and contentment over his own, Allah awakens the spirit of freedom from need of other human beings in him and provides enough means for him to help him attain his needs; of course, those means are intended to make him attain higher aims and goals and one has the duty to make use of those means and be grateful to Allah while deriving benefit from them and if other human beings were among the mediums and means of attaining one's worldly aims and goals, he has to be thankful to them, too. Although a person derives benefit from various means, he only conceives himself as being in need of Allah and he does see himself in need of any other than Him.

The feeling of affluence and freedom from need of other human beings is a great blessing which grants personality to man. Of course, we should not imagine from what has been mentioned that a person should not be modest and humble towards other human beings. A person has to be humble both towards Allah as well as to other people. Some who have little acquaintance with Islamic knowledge imagine that Allah does not want us to have a feeling of abjectness and humility even before Allah Himself! These people have not understood Islam and they have vain imaginations about it.

The root of Islam is servitude and the peak of man's pride lies in lowliness and humility before Allah and placing one's forehead on the earth and prostrating to Him. Man's utmost perfection lies in perceiving himself as low in the presence of the divine Essence and because Allah desires perfection and ascendancy for man, He has asked him to feel humble in His presence and present his needs to Him because man's perfection is guaranteed in devotion to Allah.

Conversely, man ought not to feel small and low in the face of other human beings nor perceive himself as being in need of them because when he conceives himself in need of them, whether he likes it or not he will feel belittled to the same extent that he feels in need of them.

Man conceives himself as low to the same measure that his affairs lie in the hands of other people. Although he does not admit it in words, he still feels belittled and demeaned in his heart. However, if a believer entrusts his affairs to Allah as a result of his faith and conceives himself only in need of Him, he does not feel any need for other people in his heart though it is possible for Allah to alleviate his needs by means of another one of His servants and want the helped man to be thankful to that other benevolent servant while still perceiving himself as being in need of Allah.

It has been narrated in regard to Prophet Abraham (‘a) that when Nimrod ordered that a great fire be set and Prophet Abraham (‘a) be thrown into the fire that the fire was so intensely hot that no one had the courage to come near it and they were forced to cast the Prophet into the fire from afar by means of a catapult. The Archangel Gabriel appeared while Abraham was in the fire and asked him:

“Are you in need of any help?”

Abraham responded,

“Yes, but not from you.”³³

Abraham said that he needed help and assistance but not from other than Allah and Allah is also aware of my state of affairs and knows my needs and He will do whatever He deems best in my interests. After victory in this trial, Abraham was appointed to the rank of intimate and sincere friendship with Allah, the Exalted.

Of course, attaining the position of freedom from want of others is not an easy task and man only arrives at such a station with the grace and blessings of Allah, but Allah has placed the requisites for attaining this position at the disposal of man and one of those requirements is that man prefers the will of Allah in affairs concerning his will and the will of Allah and on the first level he must feel in his heart freedom from want of other human beings.

The second point is that he no longer feels worried in regard to his worldly affairs, entrusts the good and expediencies of his worldly affairs to Allah, only concerns himself with the hereafter and devotes himself to securing heaven. He is only preoccupied with what his destination will be and with whether he has discharged his divine duties or not. Hence, he is always worried about the last world.

“I make the sky and the earth guarantors of his sustenance and I safeguard his career and I do trade for him.”

The third point is that He secures the needs of a person who prefers Allah’s will over his own will and I make the sky and earth guarantors of his subsistence.

The fourth point is that I make him derive profit from his career and compensate for his losses and deficits. Every person chooses a career in his life and earns an income under its auspices and it is natural there is no guarantee for the continuation of a career and profits from it. Where is the guarantee

that an orchard will continue producing fruit? Where is the guarantee that cows and herds of sheep will remain alive? Where is the guarantee that a person will not be dismissed from his job? Where is the guarantee that a trader will not make losses? Allah is the Guarantor of profit for a person who prefers the will of Allah over his own will.

The fifth point is that in business and trade He helps him so as not to make losses. People who are always preoccupied with the world try to deal with people who will give them more profit. They choose dealings and businesses from which they will gain more profit. They are always worried about the possibility of making losses or gaining less. Allah states that He supports and helps a person who prefers His will to man's personal desires in every business and dealing. Instead of him thinking and managing and planning with whom and how to do trade so as to make enormous profit, Allah supports him and safeguards his interests.

Thereafter, in reference to the fact that a believer has to have so much certainty that under its auspices he must to be worried about his sustenance and he has to be certain that Allah, the Exalted, will grant him what has been decreed for him, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! If the son of Adam were to run away from his sustenance in the same way that he runs away from death, his subsistence will reach him in the same way that death will find him.”

Man does not like death and he takes flight from it but, in the end, death overtakes him and he finally dies. Likewise, if he runs away from his sustenance, it will reach him and there is no fleeing from what has been decreed for him. If man strives with all his might, it is not clear that his sustenance will be increased. All too often people strive a lot and still die of hunger!

There are a lot of stories in this regard, and some have narrated that some very rich people were confronted with incidents where they had to eat their shoes during the last moments of their lives in the vain effort to save themselves from extreme hunger and death. On the other hand, there were people who did not work so hard but attained the great wealth that was decreed for them by Allah.

Man must not be remiss in discharging his obligations and in striving to earn a living, and neither should he be lazy on the pretext of belief in divine providence because Allah hates the indolent. However, if a person has the option to choose between various careers, the low income of a particular field should not hinder him and he must believe that the sustenance which Allah has decreed for him will reach him and this must encourage him to seek knowledge with peace of mind because he is sure that subsistence will not be deprived of what has been decreed for him no matter what path he follows.

[1.](#) Surat al-Nisa' 4:65.

[2.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 82, p. 36.

[3.](#) Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol. 3, pp. 211-212.

[4.](#) Surat al-Baqarah 2:208.

[5.](#) Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 2, p. 103, Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah Publications.

[6.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 204.

- [7.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 5, p. 87.
- [8.](#) Tawhid Saduq, p. 369, Mu'assisah al-Nashr al-Islami Publications.
- [9.](#) Safinah al-Bihar, vol. 1, p. 446, section on supplication [maddah du'a], Dar al-Ta'arif li-Matbu'at Publications.
- [10.](#) Surat al-Anfal 8:44.
- [11.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 87.
- [12.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 89.
- [13.](#) Surat al-Takathur 102:5-7.
- [14.](#) Surat al-Waqi'ah 56:95.
- [15.](#) Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol. 1, p. 123.
- [16.](#) Surat Fussilat 41:53.
- [17.](#) Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol. 1, p. 124.
- [18.](#) Either a Christian or a Jew.
- [19.](#) Imam 'Ali ('a).
- [20.](#) Tawhid Saduq, p. 109, Mu'assisah al-Nashr al-Islami Publications.
- [21.](#) Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol. 1, p. 124.
- [22.](#) 'Hadith Qudsi' is a hadith that has been revealed by Allah to the Prophet apart from the Qur'an. Hadith qudsi (sacred hadith) are so named because, unlike the majority of hadiths which are Prophetic hadiths, their authority [sanad] is traced back not to the Prophet (S) but to the Almighty. [ed.]
- [23.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 54.
- [24.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 97.
- [25.](#) Ibid., p. 102.
- [26.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 103, p. 25
- [27.](#) Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol. 3, p. 202.
- [28.](#) Surat al-Fajr 89:27-30.
- [29.](#) Surat al-Ma'idah 5:119.
- [30.](#) Surat al-Mulk 67:1-2.
- [31.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p. 20.
- [32.](#) Surat Saba' 34:13.
- [33.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 12, p. 35.

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