

Lesson 38: Knowing Allah and His Wise Order

Man and His Relationship with Allah

This section of the Noble Prophet's (S) advice is about man's relationship with Allah and attentiveness to Him during hardships and also asking for help from Him while having freedom from need of other human beings. In regard to the first issue, it must be mentioned that man has been created to attain proximity to Allah; therefore, all his activities have to be done with the purpose of safeguarding this relationship and if one uses his energies to preoccupy himself with other activities those energies will be wasted.

All inner and outward faculties, as well as all blessings, should be employed on the course of this relationship. Without doubt, this course is very expansive and has various forms every one of which is related to one of the aspects of the soul because Allah, the Exalted, has endowed our souls with many aspects, appearances and ranks and all these aspects have been disposed towards a different orientation—but all have to be focused on Allah. It is not plausible for one of our existential aspects to be oriented towards Allah and for other aspects to be directed elsewhere.

Divisions have been made for the existential aspects of man; for instance, it is said that one aspect of man's existence is for his relationship with Allah, another aspect is for his relationship with himself, another is for his relationship with other human beings and another aspect is for his relationship with other creatures.

From the viewpoint of the properties of man's being and the divine laws that have been enacted for man, this division can be true: that which is discussed in regard to the aspect of the relationship of man with himself, for example, are the things that are beneficial and harmful for his body—such and such a thing is prohibited while such and such a thing is permissible. Some of the divine laws such as prayer and fasting determine man's relationship with Allah. Some of the divine laws determine man's relationship with other human beings, such as how to behave towards parents, relatives, friends and enemies.

These divisions are acceptable, but it has to be borne in mind that these divisions of the aspects of man

do not mean that we have another goal besides traversing the course of Allah and moving in the direction of proximity to Him; on the contrary, we have to admit that all our existential aspects—despite wonderful and amazing differences in them—have all been directed at one point; that is to say, that very relationship which man has with other human beings and with other creatures has to be for Allah.

The form of our deeds differs: one form is prayer and another form is teaching or learning and performing daily duties, but all these are only beneficial to us when they are ultimately done for Allah. That is why all of man's deeds and even his thoughts have to be for Allah and he has to desire, seek and search for no other except Allah.

In addition to the attractions which man has to secure his material needs for this limited life, every person also has attractions towards an unlimited life, a limitless ultimate goal as well as infinite beauty, perfection and power. In reality, man's existential makeup has been built for an ultimate goal and his instincts have been designed to move in the direction towards the infinite world and that which is confined by the world has an introductory aspect and acts as an engine that propels man to continually move towards Allah.

We should bear in mind that that which makes a person truly human is his relationship with Allah for the reason that man's ultimate perfection lies in this connection with his Lord because this relationship is attained under the auspices of knowledge and sound deeds; in other than this case, man is in the category of other animals, perhaps even worse than animals:

... أُولَئِكَ كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ ...

“They are like cattle, rather they are more astray.”¹

Meanwhile, the existence of prophets (‘a) and the saints [awliya] of Allah (‘a) and the academic works, precedents, customs and power which they manifested are signs of their relationship with Allah. Of course, it is worth mentioning that from a rational analysis, the existence of every creature is a kind of relationship with the Creator and it is not possible for the created not to be related to its creator, but this relationship is existential and it manifests itself in the whole order of existence.

There is no running away from such a connection and every creature has an existential relationship with Allah. However, besides this existential relationship, man has another distinction. He can perceive this relationship under the auspices of the intellect, conception and awareness and his worth lies in his comprehending this relationship better and deeper.

Usually this knowledge and relationship with Allah is attained by way of acquired knowledge which comes to hand under the auspices of employing the intellect and rational as well as philosophical deduction; however, this cognition is nevertheless not the end of the way for human perfection and it does not take man to the ultimate destination nor does it raise strong belief and faith in him.

Complete understanding is direct knowledge which means that a person reaches a stage where he not only comprehends the connection with Allah with his entire being but also becomes one with that relationship. The goal of religion is to make man attain such a position. It has been narrated that Imam ‘Ali (‘a) said:

“I never saw a thing save that I witnessed Allah before it, after it and with it.”

If this knowledge is not attained in a complete form in this world for a person who is striving to attain perfection, he has to prepare the ground to attain this in a complete manner in the other world. It is for this reason that in the language of religion and in the traditions of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a), the relationship with Allah has been interpreted as vision and it has been said that the highest blessing for the people of paradise is that they witness the divine brilliance according to the measure of their personal perfection. It is always feasible for those who have attained the highest stations of perfection to witness these lights and these divine manifestations are lesser for people who are at lower levels of perfection.

It has been narrated that there once was a religious scholar who was on the verge of death. One of his relatives saw him in a dream and asked him, “In that world, do you visit the Pure Imams (‘a) and especially Imam al-Husayn (‘a)?” The scholar responded, “What are you saying? In this world there is a distance of thirty years between us and the Doyen of Martyrs (‘a). For this reason, one has to wait for thirty years in order to be permitted to visit Imam al-Husayn (‘a).”

Truly, we have to realize where our hearts lie because the degree of a person’s worth is equal to what he entrusts his heart to—one whose heart is attached to his orchard and house is worthy to that same measure, but if he entrusts his heart to Allah and becomes attached to Him, his worth becomes infinite and he no longer becomes confined to the transitive limitations of the world and he becomes detached from all things and all people except Allah.

Therefore, man’s real value is dependent on his relationship with Allah and gaining proximity to Him, not to material pleasures and possessions. Man’s humanity lies in his conception and inner attention to Allah. We should observe where our hearts are attached because to whatever extent our connection with Allah is deeper and our relationship with Him is stronger, when we pass away from this perishable world the divine lights will manifest more strongly and we will derive more benefit from the graces and blessings of Allah. The Noble Prophet (S) has said:

“O Abu Dharr! Should I not teach you words by means of which Allah will grant you benefit?” I said, “Yes, O Prophet of Allah!” He said, “Safeguard your relationship with Allah so that He may preserve His relationship with you.”

All the advice that has been mentioned up to now was beneficial, but the reason the Noble Prophet (S) draws Abu Dharr’s attention to this point by saying that he will tell him something by means of which Allah will grant him benefit is indicative of the fact these words are a summation of the previous sayings and have special importance. The Noble Prophet (S) draws Abu Dharr’s attention to the fact that Allah

has existentially created a relationship between Himself and His servant. He has initiated a link of relationship between the great position of Divinity and His servant as insignificant human being; therefore, we must safeguard this connection and never let it come to an end. If we safeguard this relationship, Allah too will protect us.

What prosperity and grace is greater than that an insignificant human being should be in connection and relationship with the Lord of the worlds? For this reason, man must endeavor to preserve this association and other graces will always come to him under the auspices of this relationship. If he does not endeavor to protect it and fails to discharge the duties of servitude, he ought not to expect to receive the graces and blessings of Allah, the Exalted.

Perhaps there are ambiguities for some people in regard to how there can be a relationship worthy of safeguarding between Allah and me [a human being]; what relationship can exist between me—a lowly person who lives on this earth—and Allah, the Exalted, and the divine Throne? In order to remove this ambiguity, the Noble Prophet (S) says:

“Safeguard this relationship so as to perceive Him in your presence.”

That is to say there is no distance between you and Allah and He is always in your presence and never separated from you:

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ...

“And He is with you wherever you may be. And Allah sees what you do.”²

Therefore, if a human being wants to be eligible to receive the blessings of Allah, the Exalted, so as to be protected from afflictions, whisperings of the devil as well as temptations of the soul [safeguarding in the words of the Noble Prophet (S) includes protecting man from every danger, whether material or spiritual], he has to guard his relationship with Allah and never let it become weak.

Attentiveness to Allah in Difficulty and Ease

Thereafter, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Acquaint yourself with Allah when you are in a state of affluence so that He may know you when you are in a state of poverty.”

Because Allah has infinite power and everything that takes place in the world is a result of His will and nothing is outside of the realm of His will, man must pay attention to Allah in every state. When a person is in hardships and difficulties, he should only look to Allah for help and ask Him to alleviate his problems and conversely when he is in a situation of prosperity, he should pay heed to Allah because He has put

the blessing of affluence and ease at his disposal.

It is natural that man pays attention to Allah when he finds himself entangled in hardships and unpleasant events; in regard to the polytheists, Allah states:

فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفُلِكِ دَعَوْا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ

“When they board the ships, they invoke Allah putting exclusive faith in Him, but when He delivers them to land, behold, they ascribe partners [to Him].”³

It is really no big deal when a person seeks out Allah in times of hardships when waves of calamities besiege him from every side [even the most committed atheists call out to Allah when they feel death near]. Of course, there are some people who have been so driven away from the proximity of Allah that they do not pursue Him even when overwhelmed by hardships, but a person in whose heart there is even a bit of faith at least seeks out Allah in times of hardships and tribulations.

The Noble Prophet (S) states that if you want Allah to respond to your calls when you call upon Him, you must safeguard your relationship with Him in times of affluence and be acquainted with Him because if you become remote from him during your days of ease, you should not expect His response to your calls during your days of tribulation. Remember Allah during your days of ease and affluence in order for Him to remember you when you are in hardships.

All of us, to a greater or lesser extent, have been afflicted in our lives by hardships as well as tribulations from which we have been liberated after some time, but we easily forgot the blessing of liberation and the ease which followed after those hardships despite the fact that afflictions and tribulations are meant to awaken us and bring about attentiveness to Allah and understanding of the value of the blessings that we possess.

If we are confronted by dangerous circumstances and all the doors are shut before us except the danger that is threatening us and all of a sudden help comes our way and we are delivered, we ought to learn a lesson from the experience. Do we assume the occurrence was accidental? No, nothing is accidental in life—all events are blessings of Allah and His grace and blessings save us from danger.

In the system of creation whatever takes place is a result of the divine will and nothing occurs without having been willed by Allah. If blessings are granted to man or affliction is repelled from him, all these things take place as a result of the will of Allah. He makes the means and conditions available, whether those conditions are common or uncommon and whether we realize them or not. It is Allah who is continually granting us sustenance, whether by common means such as work and trade, or unnatural means such as manna (a special food delivered) from heaven. Alleviation of man's problems is also performed by Allah, whether by natural or unnatural means.

In one method of division people can be categorized in three groups in regard to their attention to Allah:

The first group is those who pay attention to Allah whether in hardships and tribulations or in affluence and ease. In the expression of the Qur'an, they remember Allah morning and evening—at all times, not only in times of hardships:

وَاذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ فِي نَفْسِكَ تَضَرُّعًا وَخِيفَةً وَدُونَ الْجَهْرِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ وَلَا تَكُنْ مِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ

“And remember your Lord within your heart beseechingly and reverentially, without being loud morning and evening, and do not be among the heedless.”⁴

فِي بُيُوتٍ أَذِنَ اللَّهُ أَنْ تُرْفَعَ وَيُذْكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ فِيهَا بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ

“In houses Allah has allowed to be raised and wherein His name is celebrated.”⁵

The secret behind the fact that this group remembers Allah all the time is that they are not heedless of Him despite all the blessings He has granted and that they perceive themselves as being in need of Allah at least for the continuance of their blessings. Also, because they understand their need towards Allah, as per their various levels, blessings and afflictions make no difference for them. These are worthy servants who constantly remember Allah and they are reciprocally objects of Allah's attention.

The second group of people includes the majority of believers. These are people who, to a greater or lesser extent, become afflicted by negligence when they are in a state of welfare but awaken and show their need for Allah when problems and tribulations overcome them. This group also comprises relatively good servants, but Allah complains in regard to them as to why they are negligent when they are granted blessings and return when they are deprived of His graces.

وَإِذَا أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ أَعْرَضَ وَتَأَى بِجَانِبِهِ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ فَذُو دُعَاءٍ عَرِيضٍ

“When We bless man, he is disregarding and turns aside; but when an ill befalls him, he makes protracted supplications.”⁶

The third group of people is the group which does not seek Allah in any circumstance or state. Some people belonging to this group believe that afflictions are in fact sent by Allah. They perceive afflictions as either arising from unnatural causes or that they are a sign of the anger and wrath of Allah such as the people of Yunus (Jonah) who repented when divine retribution was decreed for them. They turned to Allah and repented because they knew that divine retribution was a sign of Allah's wrath.

Allah too delivered them from affliction on account of their repentance and belief. This group of people

does not turn to Allah when afflicted by problems which they do not perceive as coming from Allah. Allah has thus reproached this group of people:

فَلَوْلَا إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا تَضَرَّعُوا وَلَكِنْ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

“Why did they not humble themselves when Our punishment overtook them! But their hearts had hardened, and Satan had made to seem decorous to them what they had been doing.”⁷

Elsewhere, Allah has stated:

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً وَإِنَّ مِنَ الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشَقَّقُ فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَهْبِطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

“When your hearts hardened after that; so they were like stones, or even harder, for indeed there are some stones from which streams gush forth, and indeed there are some of them that split, and water issues from them, and indeed there are some of them that fall for fear of Allah. And Allah is not oblivious of what you do.”⁸

The Need to Seek Assistance from Allah

Thereafter, with regard to the fact that man must ask only from Allah and never turn to other than Him, the Holy Prophet (S) says:

“If you want to make a request from Allah, make it and whenever you want to seek help from someone, ask for Allah’s help because the pen has already written what will occur until the Day of Resurrection.”.

It is normal for man to have needs and not have the ability to solve all of them. In addition, he cannot secure all of his needs and whether he likes it or not, he must ask for help from others. The Noble Prophet (S) tells Abu Dharr that when it is necessary for you to ask for help from someone, instead ask from Allah. When you notice that you have needs which you are unable to meet and you are obliged to ask for help, ask for help from Allah because there is no one who is more aware about your needs than Him and there is no one more capable of solving your problems than Him.

The reason for this is because the whole of creation belongs to Him and His power encompasses everything and if He desires a thing to happen, He only wills and decrees it and it occurs. In addition to all this, Allah, the Exalted, loves His creatures more than anyone else and desires only what is good for them and it is for this reason that He has ordered His slaves to request only from Him.

It is natural that once Allah opens the door of supplication and invocation for human beings, He is ready to respond and accept those supplications and in addition, He always includes man in the fold of His

blessings. There is no doubt that one of His blessings is deliverance of man from afflictions and repulsion of hardships. When a person is entangled in problems, Allah delivers him from those hardships and sometimes Allah repels calamities even before they befall a person. Human beings are always indebted to the graces and love of Allah and must know that only Allah is able to help them and that nothing occurs in the cosmos except with His permission; therefore, it is only from Him that help should be sought.

Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) states:

“When any one of you desires to receive all that you ask of your Lord, he has to lose hope in the people and only put his hopes in that which is in the possession of Allah. When Allah, the Honored and Glorified, sees this in his heart, He grants him whatever he asks.”⁹

Every Muslim says, *“And to you alone do we turn for help”* at least ten times a day in daily prayers, but we do not behave this in deed and perhaps many of our actions are indicative that we do not seek help only from Allah but instead seek help from other human beings.

Of course, there are some people who are honest in regard to seeking help only from Allah and they are truthful when they say, *“You alone do we worship and to you alone do we turn for help”* and they are really sincere in their worship and devotion to Him and only seek help from Him; however, most of us are not sincere in our devotion to Allah and ask for help from other human beings. In hardships we expect our parents, brothers, sisters and friends to help us and sometimes we even publicly declare our hope and trust in them.

The Noble Prophet (S) advises us to only ask from Allah and only seek His help and after that he draws Abu Dharr’s attention to divine decree and providence. As has been previously explained, one of the benefits of belief in divine decree and providence is that when ease, wealth or any good comes man’s way, he does not become overjoyed and conversely if hardships and unpleasant events befall him, he does not become unusually upset because he knows that whatever takes place is in accordance with divine decree and there is no escaping from it not to mention that all occurrences are in man’s best interests:

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ * لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَى مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ ...

“No affliction visits the earth or yourselves but it is in a Book before we bring it about—that is indeed easy for Allah—so that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor exult for what comes your way.”¹⁰

One of the benefits of belief in divine decree is that man always places his hope in Allah because he knows that everything is preordained by Him and He can change His decrees and other human beings

are not capable of significant influence; hence, there is no benefit in putting faith in them. If an unpleasant event takes place and hardships befall a person, he knows that Allah, the Exalted, has decreed that event out of wisdom or, if something is taken from him, he knows that it has been written in the guarded tablet and on the basis of Allah's wise management, such events have to take place.

Therefore, a person does not become devastated and beseech Allah to ask Him to repel those hardships and problems. If a blessing has been allotted to us, we ought not to become overjoyed and proud and forget Allah counting it as our own accomplishment; on the contrary, we should become more aware of Allah, thank Him for freely granting us blessings and guard our state of humility in His presence. We must not be like Korah [Qarun] and conceive blessings as the fruit of our own efforts and endeavors:

...قَالَ إِنَّمَا أُوتِيتُهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ عِنْدِي أَوَلَمْ يَعْلَم أَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَهْلَكَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنَ الْقُرُونِ مَنْ هُوَ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُ قُوَّةً وَأَكْثَرُ جَمْعًا

“He said, ‘I have indeed been given [all] this because of the knowledge that I have.’ Did he not know that Allah had already destroyed before him some generations more powerful than him and greater in amassing [wealth]...”¹¹

Everyone must know that what he has been allotted is on the basis of divine decree and that Allah has also provided all means in the world; therefore, if it is necessary to ask for someone's help, one must ask for help from Him in whose hands lie all affairs, everything happens by His decree and He can change His decrees if He deems it expedient. A supplicant must open his hands in entreaty before Allah and trust only in Him.

When calamity and affliction come to pass, a believer must not become upset because affliction occurs on the basis of a wise and calculated course of events. For this reason, a person ought not to grieve and moan. Allah will not be dissuaded from His perfect system of management of affairs by our moaning and grieving.

If a blessing has been granted, one must not imagine that it has been attained on account of cleverness. Divine decree and the wise management of Allah brought about that grace and it is also a test to try the people as to how they use that blessing. Therefore, one of the benefits of belief in divine decree and providence is that man understands that whatever comes to pass is a result of wise management and if he sees some deficiencies and inadequacies, he ought not to be very sad for the reason that he knows that the One who has set this system up and manages this decree is more aware of His deeds than him and He knows what is good and expedient for His servants. Taking what has been mentioned into consideration, after advising Abu Dharr to ask for help from Allah, the Noble Prophet (S) brings his attention to divine decrees:

“Because the pen has already written what will occur until the Day of Resurrection.”.

Previously we mentioned, and now we emphasize, that we must not take advantage of the issue of divine decree, predetermination and divine knowledge. We must not imagine that what has been decreed to occur will come to pass and we cannot do anything about it, and therefore pull ourselves aside and shirk our responsibilities and duties.

We have to know that our movement and effort too is one of the divine decrees; for this reason, we ought to make more effort at discharging our duties and not imagine that we can shirk our responsibilities by depending on divine decree. This is one of the devil's temptations.

Belief in divine decree and providence ought to make a person pay even more attention to Allah and only seek Him and no one else. One must never evade his duties in order to attain goals nor be deceived by the devil imagining that everything has been preordained, and therefore there is nothing that can be done.

One cannot say, "Let's go and sit in seclusion in a corner." Or, if they are students, quit studying. One cannot say that he will become a scholar whether he studies or not. The truth is that, if it was decreed for one to become a scholar, he will become one, but by studying. Of course, it is not possible for knowledge to be granted to man without himself striving and making effort, which is itself Allah's grace and sometimes it is allotted to man, but in any case man has to make effort and strive.

In continuation, the Noble Prophet (S) emphasizes his previous words thus:

"If all human beings strive to benefit you with something which Allah has not written down (decreed) for you, they will not have the ability to do so and in the same way if all the people strive to harm you with something which has not been preordained for you, they will not have the ability to do so."

If the will of Allah, the Exalted, makes the occurrence of something incumbent, all the conceivable powers of the universe cannot prevent it:

وَاللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَى أَمْرِهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ...

"And Allah has full command of His affairs, but most people do not know."^{[12](#)}

In another verse, He sates:

وَإِنْ يَمْسَسْكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ وَإِنْ يَمْسَسْكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

"Should Allah visit you with some distress, there is nothing to remove it except Him, and should He bring you some good, then He has power over all things."^{[13](#)}

Therefore, the final decision and irrefutable will is Allah's, so if a person wants something they must ask

Him who has such will and power and never go after people who are in need of someone else's help like oneself and are unable to do anything. We must understand that no one can help us unless it is Allah's will that they do so.

Results of Knowledge and Certitude in Regard to the Wise

Management of Allah

The last point the Noble Prophet (S) advises Abu Dharr about is that if he were to possess the level of certitude it would be very beneficial for him. One must have certitude that what Allah has decreed will come to pass and what has not been decreed will not occur as well as having certitude that things that have been decreed are not futile and occur as the result of wise management.

With this knowledge and awareness, a believer is sure whatever takes place is for his good because Allah does not desire what is harmful for his servant, especially the slave who has entrusted his affairs to Allah. He strives with peace of mind to perform his duties and he knows that what takes place is in agreement with divine wisdom and is beneficial and expedient for him, whether it is apparently pleasing or not. He knows that whatever happens on the basis of divine decree is beneficial and there is nothing detrimental in divine decrees.

Naturally, if man were to attain this kind of certitude and spiritual knowledge and conceive all events and occurrences of the universe as beneficial and in conformity with the wise management of Allah, he will be pleased with what happens and sure that what has taken place is for his own good and man is happy with good and it is not possible for him to be displeased.

Of course, this certitude, awareness and lofty faith is not easily attained. Not every person can establish such faith in their hearts nor has every person the ability to attain this station. A person who wants to obtain such a position has to strive on the course of edification of character and embellishment of his inner self and attain a level where he is in complete control of his soul.

He must achieve lofty stations and positions by doing what Allah has enjoined and taking lessons from the precepts of the saints [*awliya*] of Allah and by always preferring the will and contentment of Allah over his own desire and contentment. It is obvious that earning this standard is not possible for every person and the Noble Prophet (S) advises that if a person cannot manage to gain such spiritual knowledge and certitude where he perceives that all that happens to be good and beneficial to him and not become despairing when confronted by adversities, at least he ought to be patient and persevering when faced with bitter and unpleasant events.

He has to know that there is no benefit in being impatient with that which is destined to take place and no matter how impatient he is, whatever Allah desires will come to pass and there is nothing that can be done to prevent it.

If adversity such as illness, poverty, earthquakes, floods or any other events befall man and ravage his life and he bears them with patience and endurance, he becomes the object of Allah's blessings. Of course, if an event is foreseeable and can be prevented by strategic thinking, man has the duty to avert it, but all too often even the most advanced countries, with modern equipment at their disposal, are often confronted by unforeseen calamities and events that they lack the power to forestall.

As is well known, Japan is the most earthquake prone country in the world and the Japanese have built the strongest earthquake resistant buildings and acquired much equipment for relief for those hit by earthquakes because they have a lot of experience in this field. In spite of all this, we see that the most deplorable earthquakes in the world have hit Japan and have inflicted more damage on that country than the damage inflicted by earthquakes which have hit some backward countries.

Therefore, events are preordained and they happen while people are unaware of them and are controlled by the manager of this cosmos and it is He who knows when, how and where any event is going to take place; He knows where an earthquake or flood should occur. It is possible, God forbid, for a calamity to befall ourselves too, but if we have certitude and faith in the wise management of Allah, we will not become upset because we think well of divine decrees and conceive everything as beneficial and expedient.

When we see some weaknesses and deficiencies in an affair, we become angry but if we perceive things as always beneficial in some way, there is no way we can become saddened by them. It is possible for a person to be bothered by some pain or illness, but once he conceives that the pain or illness is good for him in some way, he welcomes it overall. For example, a person whose tooth has become decayed and he must remove it willingly welcomes the operation and pays money for it because he perceives this to be good for him and he does not become saddened because he understands it to be good generally because the removal of his tooth will improve his overall health.

Sometimes, a person has an illness that forces him to go abroad for treatment and as a result spends large sums of money or is forced to have a part of his body amputated in an operation and must even give his consent to such; however, this does not mean that he is pleased with those things or that he has no qualms about them. It is likely that he is in fact quite displeased and even complains about them to Allah, as many people of weak faith do who lose patience whenever a calamity befalls them. It is in regard to this issue that the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Therefore, if you manage to perform a duty for Allah with contentment and certitude, do it and if you do not manage to do what you dislike with contentment and certitude, there is much good in patience and forbearance. Success is accompanied by patience and deliverance is accompanied by sorrow and sadness and verily there is ease after every hardship.”

You are truly blessed if you manage to attain the greatest human station, contentment, because the best station and human attribute is that man should be pleased with divine decrees and happy from the

deepest recesses of his heart and never have complaints. Of course, contentment is attained under the auspices of certitude and these two [contentment and certitude] have a very close relationship with one another because one who has not attained certitude cannot become content with divine decrees.

Therefore, strive to conduct yourself on the basis of contentment and certitude, in which case bitter and sweet events will become equal for you and you will have neither sorrow nor complaint. However, if you do not attain this position and you do not manage to find any justification to feel pleased when unease and unpleasant occurrences come to pass, try to be patient, do not grumble or complain, and safeguard your peace of mind.

If you cannot manage to be pleased in regard to those unpleasant events in the recesses of your heart, understand that you have not managed to attain the position of contentment due to insufficient knowledge so do not be impatient because impatience has no benefit and improve your intellect and faith. Know that if you persevere when faced with hardships, Allah will grant you much good.

The Role of Hardships in the Process of Man's Perfection and Spiritual Ascendancy

In order to emphasize his saying, the Noble Prophet (S) states that success is guaranteed by patience and forbearance, every sorrow and problem is accompanied by deliverance and every hardship goes along with ease. In the Qur'an too Allah, the Exalted, states:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا * إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

"Indeed ease accompanies hardship. Indeed ease accompanies hardship."¹⁴

In the Gracious Qur'an very few issues have been repeated twice, what is more with the word 'indeed' [*inna*]. This is indicative of the regard and grace of Allah in regard to the issue. In the above-quoted verse Allah states that every hardship is accompanied by ease, not that after every hardship comes ease; it seems as if ease has been concealed in the very core of hardships.

In *Surat al-Sharh* (or *al-Inshirah*) Allah consoles the Noble Prophet (S), who it seems had been upset, with a kind tone and makes him feel at ease by reminding him about how Allah removed the heavy burden of hardships from his shoulders and changed the hardships into ease. Thereafter, he states that every hardship and pain is accompanied by ease. For this reason, if you find ease embark upon endeavor once more and restart your striving. In reality, Allah hints at this point that hardships and problems are a prerequisite for all of man's perfection and progress and grant him vigor and therefore afflictions and problems are necessary for perfection:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ

“Certainly, We created man in distress.”¹⁵

This verse is indicative of the important role of hardships and ordeals in building man and in his perfection and if this were not true, Allah who is the fountainhead of mercy and kindness and desires prosperity and good for His servants would not have created man in toil and difficulty.

In addition to what has been said, Allah always appraises His servants in order for the worthy to be distinguished and known and in this regard He has made two programs for training and edifying human beings: one is the legislation of acts of worship and the other is the institution of existential afflictions and problems. Ultimately, those who appropriately follow divine injunctions and endure hardships are guided to mercy and divine knowledge:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ * الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ
مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

“We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient—those who, when an affliction visits them, say, ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him indeed we return’.”¹⁶

Imam al-Baqir (‘a) states:

“Allah shows kindness to His servant and bestows him with afflictions in the same way that a man returning from a journey brings presents for his family.”¹⁷

The Noble Prophet (S) was invited to the house of one of the Muslims, when he entered his house, he saw a chicken that had laid an egg on top of a wall and that egg was bound to a nail and was not falling, the Noble Prophet (S) was surprised by this. The owner of the house said, “Are you surprised? I swear upon the Allah who appointed you to the Prophetic mission that no affliction has ever befallen me.” When the Noble Prophet (S) heard this sentence, he got up and left the house without partaking of any food and said, “A person that has never faced hardships is not the object of Allah’s grace.”

For this reason, if we correctly look at affliction, we realize that hardships and trials play an instructive and awakening role. Adversity awakens as well as puts on guard sleeping and immobile people and motivates them to be self-determined and strong-willed and in truth hardships make man resistant and unsusceptible. The quality of the life of this world is that it is accompanied by hardships and in this regard the more man’s resistance increases, the more is his perfection and bit by bit his intelligence and natural capabilities blossom more and this is indicative of divine grace and blessings.

“...Allah will bring about ease after hardship.”¹⁸

This verse is addressed to people of insufficient capabilities who lose hope when they are faced with problems and imagine that the world has come to an end. They forget to supplicate and seek the help of Allah and His saints [*awliya*'] and they perceive all doors as closed unto them.

A believer must not lose himself when faced with problems, and must safeguard his peace of mind and know that after every hardship is ease. Allah, the Exalted, has not decreed that His servant will be faced with hardships all the time. On the contrary, Allah has made ease and comfort accompany hardships.

- [1.](#) Surat al-A'raf 7: 179.
- [2.](#) Surat al-Hadid 57:4.
- [3.](#) Surat al-'Ankabut 29:65-66.
- [4.](#) Surat al-A'raf 7:205.
- [5.](#) Surat al-Nur 24:36.
- [6.](#) Surat Fussilat 41:51.
- [7.](#) Surat al-An'am 6:43.
- [8.](#) Surat al-Baqarah 2:74.
- [9.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 219.
- [10.](#) Surat al-Hadid 57:22-23.
- [11.](#) Surat al-Qasas 28:78.
- [12.](#) Surat Yusuf 12:21.
- [13.](#) Surat al-An'am 6: 17.
- [14.](#) Surat al-Sharh (or Inshirah) 94:5-6.
- [15.](#) Surat al-Balad 90:4.
- [16.](#) Surat al-Baqarah 2: 155-156.
- [17.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 354.
- [18.](#) Surat al-Talaq 65:7.

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