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Lesson 6: The Magnificence and Magnitude of the Rights of Allah's Blessings and the Need for Attention to Obligations

[The Greatness Of The Rights Of Allah And The Infiniteness Of His Blessings](#)

“O Abu Dharr! Allah's rights are higher than people could manage to discharge and his gifts are more than can be counted by His slaves, but you ought to acknowledge your faults every morning and every evening when you offer repentance.”

In this section, the discussion pivots on bringing a sense of responsibility and performing duties. After man has understood that he ought to make use of his life, and knew that for the purpose of deriving optimum benefit from his life, time, and leisure, he ought to be knowledgeable; the turn comes for inducing a sense of motivation and activity in an individual and understanding how this motivation arises in man. In order to bring about ambition, it is necessary to pay attention to this point that Allah has rights upon His slaves and for this reason man finds himself obligated to Allah. Man conceives with his intellect and natural disposition that if someone had a right on him, he ought to honor that right and every intelligent man knows that Allah, the Exalted, has the highest right upon him.

Once man has realized that all the gifts which he enjoys, ranging from the origin of existence and life to the rest of the gifts, material and spiritual, are all from Allah, the Exalted, it is not possible for him to forget his devotional duties. He knows that he ought to be thankful and appreciative to the Provider of these graces and this in itself is an incentive which drives a believer to action. That is the reason why in the first sentence of this section of the *hadith* the Prophet (S) hints at the rights of Allah on mankind and states that man can never ever manage to thank Allah and discharge divine rights fully.

Once man has understood that by expending all his life, he still remains unsuccessful at performing divine rights and thanking Allah for His blessings, he always ought to perceive himself as indebted, even if he has not committed any sin, divine rights are incumbent upon him and he ought to fulfill them, lest the devil deceive him into imagining that he has a claim on Allah. If man, with the grace of Allah, were successful at fulfilling his obligations, he ought not pride himself and boastfully thank Allah that he does not commit sin! He gets afflicted by heedlessness and self-admiration. Therefore, it has to be known that man cannot manage to discharge Allah's rights and thank Him for His graces, as Allah states:

...وَأِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا

“And if you would count the blessings of Allah's favors, you will not be able to number them...”¹

Supposing that man were able to count Allah's favors, he would still not be able to discharge the right of any one of them. Even if he were to content himself with saying one 'Praise be to Allah', he still has not discharged the right of thanking Allah for it because just saying 'Praise be to Allah' is a grace and favor that Allah has granted unto him, and itself stands in need of thanksgiving. Therefore, for every thanksgiving, there is [yet] another incumbent thanksgiving. That is to say, if we were to [repeatedly] say 'Thanks be to Allah' up to the Day of Resurrection, we still would not have discharged the right of one 'Praise be to Allah', therefore, how can we be able to fulfill the rights of all these graces which creatures are not able to count?

Attention to this point that the graces of Allah are uncountable and He has a lot of rights upon man inspires a feeling of modesty and humility in man who still feels indebted to Allah even if he has not perpetrated any sin.

Therefore, if man cannot fulfill all the thanksgiving for Allah's graces and discharge His rights, the greatest work he can do is to preserve the condition of repentance and quitting the small sins, humble submissiveness to Allah and acknowledging sin and dereliction of duty. This in itself withholds man from pride and delusion, because when man gets deviated from the correct path, he gets stricken by materialism, complacency and self-indulgence, and when he gets guided to the correct path and performance of duties for the first time, he gets afflicted by pride and egotism. He compares himself with the others and tells himself that people do not know the value of Allah's favors and are contaminated by sin, but we have been successful at discharging [divine] duties and appreciating blessings!

Therefore, despite that we ought to be responsible and practical people with regard to our duties, we ought not to be stricken by pride; this is the greatest lesson of edification of character that can be deduced from the words of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a).

In this same section, the Noble Prophet (S) besides encouraging work and effort and discharging of abilities and perceiving the importance of the rights of Allah, he warns against being afflicted by pride

and self-admiration.

The Shortness Of Life And The Immortality Of Good And Bad Works

“O Abu Dharr! In the passing of the day and night, you have a life that is always heading towards diminution, and your works remain preserved and suddenly death arrives and in that case every person who performs good works will reap good results and every person who does a bad work will harvest regret and every farmer reaps what he sows.”

One point which impels man to work and make effort and brings to appearance the incentive to be active and perform duties is attention to this point that life is in the process of being spent. Whether we like it or not, our life gets decreased with every breath we take and we cannot manage to bring the wheel of time to a halt and seconds cannot be turned back and in the words of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a):

“Every breath man takes is a step towards death.”²

We ought to be careful not to lose this capital freely, a capital that is always decreasing and wearing out, until death arrives and there is no running away from it, as Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“... A person who fears death does not escape it and he who loves to stay alive forever will not live forever.”³

The only way of preventing the loss of life is a profitable transaction and what better transaction than that man should build his heaven by means of his life, because that is the only capital which can purchase the value of life, as Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“Is there no free man who can leave this chewed morsel (of the world) to those who like it? Certainly, the only price for yourselves is paradise. Therefore, do not sell yourself except for paradise.”⁴

Therefore, what losers are people who bargain their great [and] priceless asset of life with the fire of Allah’s wrath! Perhaps those who expend their lives in pursuing vanity imagine that with the passage of life, their works also vanish. What void imagination! Even if this inebriety is a transitory and passing intoxication, and [it is] the inebriety of the Day of Resurrection which is everlasting; but still man’s works remain conserved because works have a connection with man’s soul and Allah, the Exalted. Even though we live in an inebriety which is heading towards diminution, but still we have a relationship with the eternal world and our works will be stored there.

a) The embodiment of man’s worldly works on the Day of Resurrection

One of the acknowledged principles in regard to the Day of Resurrection is the preservation and embodiment of deeds, which has been hinted at by Allah in the Qur’an; amongst which is:

وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يَا وَيْلَتَنَا مَا لِهَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظِلُّمُ رُبُّكَ أَحَدًا

“And the Book shall be placed, then you will see the guilty fearing from what is in it, and they will say, ‘Ah! Woe to us! What a book this is! It does not omit a small one nor a great one, but numbers them all;’ and what they had done they shall find present there; and your Lord does not deal unjustly with anyone.”⁵

At another juncture it states:

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ * يَرَهُ وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

“So he who has done an atom’s weight of good shall see it. And he who has done an atom’s weight of evil shall see it.”⁶

b) The Suddenness of Death is A Cause of Vigilance and Wakefulness

No man knows up to when he is going to remain alive and when his hour of death arrives, as the Qur’an states:

...وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ ...

“... And no one knows what he shall earn on the morrow; and no one knows in what land he shall die...”⁷

One of Allah’s graces is that no man knows the time of his death, because if we knew when our hour of death arrives, we would get more afflicted by pride and egoism. Of course, knowing or not knowing the time of death makes no difference for those [people] who have high spiritual capacities and are always reflecting about discharging responsibilities.

It is possible for Allah to announce to them when their hour of death arrives, although it is far from wisdom for Allah to announce the hour of death to us for whom knowing the hour of death would result in more procrastination and [our] putting off duties. Divine wisdom necessitates that we always ought to be concerned that perhaps the hour of death will arrive [just] one moment later and it is in this instance that we can make better use of our lives.

The Pre-Ordination Of Man’s Sustenance And Its Inaccessibility

To Others

“O Abu Dharr! The position of one who does not hurry will not be taken away by another man and the covetous greedy person will not attain what has not been ordained for him.”

Man is confronted by two great calamities in life; the first is that life compels him to pursue his needs and wants, as a result of which he is stopped from fulfilling his duties, and the second is that when he succeeds at discharging divine duties, he gets afflicted by pride and self-admiration which is a fire that exterminates (good) works. A way of preventing these calamities has to be thought out.

Some people imagine that discharging their obligations impedes on their lives. They imagine that getting busy with the world is a need which cannot be avoided and this in itself is a hurdle for performing divine and religious responsibilities; these excuses and pretexts are the devil's temptations. What eliminates these temptations is attention to this point that Allah, the Exalted, has predestined a determined subsistence for every person and no matter how hard man strives, he will not attain more than what has been ordained for him.

One of the doctrines which has been mentioned in the Book and the Prophet's (S) sayings and paying attention to it is incumbent upon man is the issue of the pre-ordination of sustenance and we currently intend to explicate the notion of the pre-ordination of sustenance and that man is not responsible for his subsistence, whether he strives or not. We will briefly mention that in religious sciences, importance has been accorded to this issue.

In a lot of instances in “*Nahj al-Balaghah*” mention has been made of the subject of the pre-ordination of sustenance. It has been mentioned in this very *hadith* that if man is lazy at acquiring his sustenance, another person consumes his subsistence and if a person has a lot of greed at collecting possessions and strives very hard to acquire a greater share for himself, he will not attain what has not been ordained. Therefore, attention to this point forestalls the devil's temptations.

When the devil intends to stop man from discharging his divine duties and seduces him to currently be pursuing bread and water (daily sustenance), he ought to hit the devil's mouth and say, “Keep quiet! My sustenance is preordained and will not be allotted to someone else.” Of course, this belief is attained when man has perfect certitude about the preordination of sustenance by Allah, the Exalted.

What has been said about Allah, pre-ordaining the sustenance of individuals, does not imply that man ought to stop striving for his daily sustenance and say that Allah will grant him his sustenance. It has been discussed in its proper place that man ought to strive to alleviate his needs and Allah is disgusted by lazy and self-indulgent people.

The discourse about the preordination of sustenance is for people who get seduced by the deceptions and temptations of the devil, they imagine that if they strive to discharge divine duties, they along with

their wives and children will die of hunger. Allah is greater than that he should leave hungry a person who is trudging the course of devotion.

The Unity Of Divine Actions And The Source Of Allah's Beneficence

The Unity Of Divine Actions [*Tawhid-i Af'ali*] And The Source Of Allah's Beneficence

“Every person who attains good has been granted it by Allah and every person who remains safe from harm has been protected by Allah.”

Another point worth mentioning is that once we get successful at discharging divine duties, performing acts of worship and fleeing from sins, we ought not to imagine that we are very worthy people because Allah is the origin of every good work which is performed by us. It is He who grants us the favor to perform good works and to keep aloof from sin.

Whatever worldly good naturally comes to us with or without effort is from Allah and also it is Allah who wards calamities off. The root of this conviction and perception manifests itself in belief in the unity of divine actions [*tawhid-i af'ali*] that man ought to perceive all good and good works as coming from Allah and also know Him as the Repellant of vices and evil.

The discussion about the unity of divine actions enjoys great importance and it can be said that all the issues about divine decree and pre-destination [*qada wa qadar*] and the like have been said themselves to be prerequisites for man's belief in the unity of divine actions.

The benefit of paying due attention to the unity of divine actions is that pride, self-admiration and egotism get erased from the inside of man and in reality attention to the unity of divine actions is a cure for a lot of ethical vices; amongst them laziness, indolence, jealousy and a feeling of inferiority. With attention to the unity of divine actions, no ground remains for jealousy and no ground remains for either pride or lowliness. When man sees himself in connection with Allah, he does not feel inferior.

Likewise, a person who perceives Allah's greatness does not feel egoistic because he believes everything as coming from Allah. Likewise, if man were to believe that all powers come from Allah and man cannot advance in his work save with Allah's permission, he does not fear any one. Once he has believed that Allah is the Source of all good and no one attains good without His permission, he no longer puts his hope in other than Allah and only trusts in Allah.

[1.](#) Surat al-Nahl 16:17.

[2.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 1117, wisdom [hikmat] 71, trans. Fayd al-Islam.

[3.](#) Ibid., p. 122, sermon [khutbah] 38.

[4.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, wisdom [hikmat] 465.

[5.](#) Surat al-Kahf 18:49.

[6.](#) Surat al-Zilzal 99:7-8.

[7.](#) Surat Luqman 31:34.

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