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Lesson 9: The Value and Importance of Prayer and the Differences of Status of the Dwellers of Paradise

Subdividing Some of the Prophet's (S) Advices

The Prophet's (S) advices which have been the object of discussion can be divided into three sections:

First section

The first section was about waking man up from negligence because he is, on the basis of his animal nature, more motivated by worldly activities, satiating his sensual instincts and desires of the flesh. It is for this reason that he forgets the beginning [of creation] and the Day of Resurrection.

Even though some people are aware about the goal and ultimate aim of their creation, but still most of the people are heedless of the aim of their creation. They do not know the reason why they have been created and where they are going and what they ought to do. Therefore, they have to be awoken and the sense of responsibility incited in them. The first section of the prophet's (S) admonitions was in the direction of getting rid of negligence and making man pay heed to his responsibilities and that the priceless asset of life is at his free disposal which he ought to derive benefit from.

Section two

After man's being aware about the ultimate goal and the need to select the path which leads him to that aim, the incumbency of acquiring knowledge and gaining awareness is brought to attention; it is for this reason that in the second section concentration has been placed on acquisition of knowledge and the responsibilities of the divine scholars. It has also been mentioned that the most necessary knowledge is awareness which imparts the ultimate goal of creation and conveys the means of attaining it, which is

called divine sciences.

Third section

In this section the need for putting our knowledge to practicable usage in fulfilling our known responsibilities and duties has been mentioned, and it has been made known that works find fulfillment in two aspects: the first aspect is the positive and constructive activities, that is to say the activities that ought to be done. The second aspect is the negative activities, that is to say, the prohibited and the forbidden works which ought to be abstained from. The fundamental point in this section is the need to perceive the heavy price of sin and the effects of getting contaminated by it. After these three sections, the fourth section of the Prophet's (S) admonitions will be discussed.

Fourth section

Man ought not to content himself with discharging the obligatory duties and abstaining from the forbidden actions and imagine that he no longer has [any more] duties.

Even though attaining this position is important, but still this is just the first step for attaining his ultimate goal. It is axiomatic that man cannot manage to abstain from sins and perform the obligatory actions and in short, a person cannot take the next steps without taking the first step, but this [first] step, in comparison with the remaining steps, is a short distance already traversed, and man currently has a very long way to go. Therefore, man has to be encouraged to undertake effort and activity and awaken in him the motivation not to content himself with discharging the obligatory works and quitting sins and the forbidden actions.

The Station of Allah's Devotees and Nocturnal Worshipers

"O Abu Dharr! Allah takes a group of people to paradise and then grants them so much favor that they get tired of it, but when they look at the others residing in higher levels of paradise, they recognize them and say, 'O Lord! These are our brothers whom we used to live with in the world, why have you given them preference [over us]?'"

"It will be said in response, 'Far from it! Far from it! They were hungry when you were full, and they were thirsty as a result of fasting when you were satiated, and they kept vigil at night performing acts of devoted worship while you slept, and they were outside in the way of Allah while you were enjoying ease inside your houses'."

On these sentences the Prophet (S) has portrayed a scene of the hereafter, a scene where man has found his way to paradise as a result of discharging obligatory actions and abstaining from forbidden actions. There is no room for him to talk about hell and its perceptions, because he has been saved from the danger of the inferno and has become a dweller of the Garden of eternal bliss, but he has been a

man of myopic ambition who contented himself with the low levels of heaven and did not have the resolve to undertake higher steps and attain higher levels [of paradise]. Now, they portray to him that even if you attained heaven by means of your discharging obligatory duties and responsibilities but still there are other people who are higher than you and you ought to try to attain their stations.

Allah makes a lot of people enter heaven and grants them a great deal of graces, to the extent that they get occupied with utilizing and deriving pleasure from those blessings but for a time. (The Prophet's (S) expression is that Allah grants so many blessings to them that they eventually get tired of them. Of course, this phrasing is common parlance, otherwise there is no tiredness in the Garden of eternal bliss, as the Qur'an states:

لَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَلَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا لُغُوبٌ ...

“...toil shall not touch us therein, nor shall fatigue therein afflict us.”¹

(Therefore, the Prophet's (S) intention is that they will be granted whatever they want.)

All at once these dwellers of the Garden look at their friends who have achieved higher stations, and get surprised. They make a humble petition, saying, “O Lord! These were our friends with whom we associated in the world, performed the prayers with in the same row and were of the same regiment during divine battles, why have you preferred them over us and granted them higher stations?”

They will be answered, “You and them have a great deal of differences, they were hungry when you were full; they were thirsty when you were satiated and they used to go hungry undertaking recommendable fasts. When you were occupied with reaping the benefits of blessings and permissible foods, they were fasting. Even if you have not committed any sin, still they used to keep their stomachs empty of food and drink in the hot summer. You used to content yourselves to you discharging obligatory duties and thereafter used to take a rest, but they never went to sleep and were busy with acts of devotion and performing secret prayers to Allah.” In the Qur'an's statement, they were the people who:

كَانُوا قَلِيلًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ * وَبِالْأَسْحَارِ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ

“They used to sleep but a little in the night and in the morning they used to seek forgiveness.”²

The Differences in the Gratification Enjoyed by the Dwellers of the Different Stations of Paradise

In these statements the Prophet (S) reminds us about the different stations and ranks of paradise. It has been explicitly stated in a great deal of the verses of the Qur'an and the *hadiths* that in the same way

that hell has levels, heaven too has ranks and stations. Its lowest level specially belongs to the people who performed their obligatory duties and the highest level of paradise is the station of contentment [*maqam-i ridwan*] which is reserved for the special saints [*awliya*] and sincere worshipers [*mukhlisin*] of Allah.

Allah states:

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَاكِينَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَانٌ
مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

“Allah has promised to the believing men and the believing women gardens, beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual abode, and best of all is Allah’s goodly pleasure, that is the grand achievement.”³

With regard to the sentence ‘and the best of all is Allah’s goodly pleasure [*ridwan*]’, the late ‘Allamah Tabataba’i states, “Allah’s goodly pleasure [*ridwan*] is higher and better than all the blessings of the eternal garden and it is for this reason that the term ‘pleasure’ [*ridwan*] has been used to function as an indefinite or indeterminate noun [in this verse] because indefinite nouns have no limit whatsoever, or that no matter how little the pleasure of Allah, it still is greater than all blessings, not from the perspective that all the blessings are derived from the pleasure of Allah—even if this is the truth—but from the perspective that the reality of servitude and devotional service of Allah to which the Qur’an calls [mankind] is servitude springing from love of Allah, not because of coveting the Garden of bliss and/or fear of hell. The highest prosperity and bliss for a lover is to win the pleasure of their Beloved, not striving to please and satiate himself.”⁴

Servitude out of love and affection for Allah, as has been narrated in some of the *hadiths*, is the highest form of devotion and is especially reserved for the free, liberal and righteous. It is for this reason that it can be claimed that the highest station of paradise is the station of contentment which is especially reserved for the righteous and liberal, who worship Allah with purity of intention.

In connection with the levels of the hereafter, Allah states:

أَنْظُرْ كَيْفَ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَلِلْآخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ دَرَجَاتٍ وَأَكْبَرُ تَفْضِيلًا

“See how We made some of them excel others, and certainly the hereafter is much superior in excellence.”⁵

This *ayat* makes it known that the differences in the levels of people depends upon their efforts and endeavors. It is not so that a person whose works are little will be the same with a person whose works are many. In addition to that, the levels and ranks of the hereafter are not comparable with different

levels of the world, and have nothing to do with the use of facilities; because the hereafter is higher than can be imagined at all.

The criteria for superiority in the world are possession of property and wealth and position and rank in the world, and there is no doubt that these are limited standards. But the criteria for superiority in the hereafter and the differences of its levels depends on the level of man's piety and purity of intention which are the states of the heart and soul of man and without doubt are not comparable with the differences of the world.

As has been pointed out, the Prophet's (S) statements in this section warn man that he ought not to content himself with fulfilling the obligatory actions and abstaining from the forbidden actions, of course a person who contents himself with the low levels of paradise can please himself with this very limit, but a day comes when he sees his friends and peers residing in higher stations and will regret on that day. In order for us to attain the higher levels, it is necessary to reduce our rest and ease and engage in worship more.

It is worth saying that rest to the necessary limit is desirable and sometimes incumbent and all too often the prerequisite for an obligatory duty is itself obligatory, like when one's lack of rest leads to tiredness and lack of vigor during prayer. Or, if he does not sleep on time, he does not understand his lessons. What has been castigated is unnecessary and too much rest, which if it does not lead to hell, at least it holds an individual behind the others.

The Prophet's (S) Intense Love for Prayer

In continuation of the *hadith*, the Noble Prophet (S) introduces prayer as the best and most praiseworthy work which an individual can occupy himself with during times of leisure:

“O Abu Dharr! The Glorious and Honorable Lord has made prayer the light of my eyes, and made it to me as beloved as food is to the hungry and water is to the thirsty. One who is hungry gets satisfied when one eats food, and one who is thirsty gets satiated with drinking water, but I never get contented with my prayers.”

It is better for a person who has decided to get advice from the Noble Prophet (S), and has chosen His Holiness (S) as his role model, to see how the spiritual wayfaring and conduct of the Noble Prophet (S) is. That is why at this stage the Noble Prophet (S) introduces himself as a practical role model and this is the best means of instruction for people who love the Noble Prophet (S) and would like to traverse his course.

It has been narrated in a *hadith*,

“I love from your world sweet scent and women, but prayer is the light of my eyes.”

That the Noble Prophet (S) said that prayer is the light of my eyes is the best expression which man uses with regard to their most beloved one and say, “So and so is the light of my eyes.”

In the Qur'an Allah, the Exalted, has introduced Prophet Moses (S) as the light of his mother's eyes, where it states that, ***“O Moses we inspired your mother to put the infant in a box and throw it on the sea. Then, the waves of the sea took the newborn to the shores of the sea to My enemy and he got the baby from the sea and I of my own grace showered love upon thee (so that they must love you) and so that you may get built in front of My own eyes (and with My favor).”***

In continuation, it states:

إِذْ تَمْشِي أُحْتَكُ فَتَقُولُ هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ مَن يَكْفُلُهُ فَرَجَعْنَاكَ إِلَىٰ أُمِّكَ كَيْ تَقَرَّ عَيْنُهَا وَلَا تَحْزَنَ

“When your sister went and said, ‘Shall I direct you to one who will take charge of him? So we brought you back to your mother, that her eye might be cooled and she should not grieve...”[6](#)

The Noble Prophet (S) states that prayer is the light of his eyes and because we cannot perceive this point, we will engage in a sweet explanation of it so that it may be comprehensible to us. We need to eat and drink and if we go for hours on end without food, we get very hungry and the most desirable thing for us is food. And likewise, we get very thirsty when we go for hours on end without water and the most desirable thing for us is a drop of cold water.

The Prophet states that his love for prayer is like man's love for food and water when hungry and thirsty with this difference that a hungry man gets satiated after drinking water while I do not get contented with my prayers.

With this expression the value of prayer becomes clear and that if after performing the obligatory duties man finds an opportunity [of free time], prayer is the best recommendable work to get busy with, as was the conduct of the Prophet (S) and the Infallible Imams (‘a) and for the purpose of making this clear, we will cite a few *hadiths*:

Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) states “Ali (‘a) was such that whenever an unpleasant issue occurred, he used to perform the prayers and recite this *ayat*, ***“And seek assistance through patience and prayer, and most surely it is a hard thing except for the humble ones.”***[7](#)[8](#)

Imam al-Sajjad (‘a) states:

“No calamity befell the Commander of the Faithful, Imam ‘Ali (‘a), save that he performed a thousand *rakats* of prayer, gave charity to sixty poor people and fasted for three days on that day.”[9](#)

It has [thus] been narrated in “*Bihar al-Anwar*” with regard to consistence and steadfastness in prayer:

“The Prophet (S) stood for prayer for ten years until his legs got swollen and his face became pale...”¹⁰

“O Abu Dharr! Every man who performs twelve additional *rak'ats* besides the obligatory prayers has a determined right upon Allah that is a palace in the Garden of eternal bliss.”

Prayer is the Key to Prosperity and Bliss

“O Abu Dharr! As long as you are engaged in prayer, you are knocking on the door of the Omnipotent King and the door opens upon every person who knocks a lot on the door of the King.”

This is another expression for motivating man towards prayer. The Noble Prophet (S) states that a person who prays knocks on the door of Allah. A person who has an issue with Allah has to go to the doorstep of His house and prayer is similar to going to knock on Allah's door, and it is not possible for the door of Allah to remain closed to one who goes to knock on it and insists upon his request.

Therefore, if you would like to be the object of Allah's attention and for His door of mercy and acceptance to be opened, knock a lot on it and be steadfast in prayer. It is likely that the door will not get opened on the first and second knock because of man's being contaminated [with sin] or because of divine wisdom, but finally it gets open.

Beyond the shadow of doubt, the doors of Allah's mercy are always open for man because it is not possible for Him to invite people, on the one hand, and close the doors of His mercy for them, on the other hand. The doors of Allah's mercy are only closed to those who deny His signs and the proud, who of course have closed the doors of divine mercy for themselves:

...إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا عَنْهَا لَا تُفْتُحُ لَهُمْ أَبْوَابُ السَّمَاءِ

“Lo! They who deny Our revelations and scorn them, for them the gates of heaven will not be opened...”¹¹

It is worthy of mention that what has been recorded in some *ayats* and *hadiths* that there are doors for the sky and/or what has been recorded in this *hadith* that as long as man is in a state of prayer, he is knocking on Allah's door is meant to serve as an intelligible and sensible comparison so that spiritual and metaphysical issues are perceivable and comprehensible to us. The truth is that there is no barrier and veil between Allah and His slave and it is man's evil deeds which serve as a barrier of his attention to Allah and in reality, man gets deprived of Allah's blessings because of his sin. The key which opens the door of Allah's mercy and takes away the barriers is devotion and servitude to Allah and prayer is the best form of devotion.

In continuation of the recommendation about the blessing which a devoted worshiper enjoys, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! Whenever a believing man stands in prayer, Allah’s mercy completely encompasses him up to the Throne, an angel will be assigned for him calling, ‘O progeny of Adam! If you knew what gains you reap during prayer and with whom you speak, you would never stop it’.”

The Noble Prophet (S) states that a person who performs a lot of prayer is covered with the blessings of Allah from the parting of the head to the Throne. It is natural that a person who is interested in station and opportunity lengthens their prayers. Most important of all, Allah appoints an angel that continually shouts to the sons of Adam if they knew with Whom they were having intimate talk and with whom they are conversing with, they would not stop their prayers and never feel tired of praying. Pay heed to before Whom you are standing and with Whom you are having correspondence, so that you may understand the importance of your prayer by means of this awareness. If you knew what benefits, virtues and favors are granted by means of prayer, you would never give an end to it.

Perceiving the Sweetness of Prayer Is the Secret of Its Continuance

For the purpose of the continuity and steadfastness in prayer, what is important is for man to derive pleasure from worship and believe that he is gaining benefit; man quickly gets tired of activities which do not give him gratification. The sweetness of prayer causes man to become more interested in prayer and this satisfaction and enjoyment is not to be achieved save by quitting and abstaining from sin. Wrong-doing leads to the pleasure of worship being divested of man. It is for this reason that the supplication of some of the Infallibles (‘a) was thus, “O Lord make us taste the sweetness of worship.”

It sometimes happens that the best food is prepared for a sick person but because of his illness, he feels that the food has no taste and pleasure. Maybe, a soundly healthy man derives satisfaction from eating one piece of dry bread. Therefore, what is important is that the feeling of need and gratification ought to be enlivened in man.

In the previous sentences, it has been pointed out that the Prophet (S) stated that prayer was more desirably sweet to him than food is to a hungry man and water is to a thirsty man; because they get satisfied from eating and drinking but he does not get contented with prayer.

In regard to the sweetness of worship for an enamored slave, Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) states:

“... If you perceive the sweetness of devotion to Allah, look at the favors and light of worship and brighten your heart, you will not quit even for a moment, even if you are torn to pieces.”^{[12](#)}

In another *hadith*, Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) states:

“... I sought the sweetness of prayer and finally found it in the quitting of sins.”^{[13](#)}

^{1.} Surat Fatir 35:35.

- [2.](#) Surat al-Dharyat 51:17–18.
- [3.](#) Surat al-Tawbah (or Bara'ah) 9:72.
- [4.](#) Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. p. 354.
- [5.](#) Surat al-Isra' (or Bani Isra'il) 17:21.
- [6.](#) Surat Ta Ha 20:40.
- [7.](#) Surat al-Baqarah 2:45.
- [8.](#) Mustadrik al-Wasa'il, vol. 2, p. 481.
- [9.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 41, p. 132.
- [10.](#) Ibid., vol. 10, p. 40.
- [11.](#) Surat al-A'raf 7:40.
- [12.](#) Mustadrik al-Wasa'il, vol. 11, p. 253, section [bab] 17.
- [13.](#) Ibid., vol. 13, p. 173, section [bab] 101.

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