

(۱۷۷) لَيْسَ الْبِرُّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ ۚ قَبْلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ ۚ  
ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ ۚمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّنَ وَعَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ۚ  
ذَوَى الْقُرْبَىٰ بِيٍّ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَأَبْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ  
الصَّلَاةَ وَعَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ ۚ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا ۚ وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ  
وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ

*It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is the one who believes in Allah and the last day and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggars and for (the emancipation of) the captives, and keeps up prayer and pays the zakat, and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflict – these are they who are true and these are they who are the pious (177).*

## Commentary

It is said that when the *qiblah* was changed from Baytu '1-Maqdis to the Ka'bah, there ensued a long drawn out controversy and conflict in the public. It was then that this verse was revealed.

**Qur'an:** *It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West:* *al-Birr* ( *الْبِرُّ* = righteousness); *al-barr* ( *الْبِرُّ* ) = righteous), it is a perpetual adjective. *Qibal* ( *قِبَل* ) = towards, in the direction of), *al-qiblah* ( *الْقِبْلَةُ* ) = a certain direction) is derived from it.

*Dhul-qurba* ( *ذُو الْقُرْبَى* ) = relative ); *al-yatama* ( *الْيَتَامَى* ) is plural of *al-yatim* ( *الْيَتِيمُ* ) = orphan; he who has lost his father); *al-masakin* ( *الْمَسَاكِينُ* ) is plural of *al-miskin* ( *الْمِسْكِينُ* ) = miserably poor, one who suffers a worse condition than *al-faqir* ( *الْفَقِيرُ* ) = poor).

*Ibnu 's-sabil* ( *إِبْنُ السَّبِيلِ* ) = one stranded in journey); *ar-riqab* ( *الرِّقَابُ* ) is plural of *ar-raqabah* ( *الرَّقَبَةُ* ) = neck; it refers to slave). *al-Ba'sa'* ( *الْبِئْسَاءُ* ) is a *masdar* like *al-bu's* ( *الْبُؤْسُ* ), both having the same meaning: hardship, poverty.

*ad-Darra'* ( الضَّرَاءُ ) too is a *masdar* like *ad-darr* ( الضَّرُّ ) and both mean affliction with injury or loss, for example, when a man is afflicted with a disease, injury, or loss of property or child. *al-Ba's* ( الْبَأْسُ ) = intensity of war).

**Qur'an: *but righteousness is the one who believes in Allah:*** Instead of defining righteousness, the verse turns to describing the righteous ones; thus it introduces the people in the light of their attributes. In this way, it points to the fact that abstract ideals and abstruse ideas have no value in Islam unless they appear in concrete shape in the character of a man.

It is a well-known style of the Qur'an that it explains and defines a condition and a rank by introducing the people having that rank and condition; it is never satisfied with mere theoretical explanations of good and bad, virtue and vice.

The words, "the one who believes in Allah and the last day...", define the righteous ones, and explain their real state. The verse introduces them with all three aspects of belief, deeds and morals, in three stages. the first stage begins with the words, "the one who believes in Allah;" the second is the sentence, "these are they who are true;" and the third is, "and these are they who are the pious."

Allah begins the first stage, saying: "the one who believes in Allah and the last day and the angels and the Book and the prophets". It is a comprehensive description of all the true gnosis which Allah wants His servants to believe in. The belief referred to in this verse is the perfect belief which can never fail to produce its effect.

When a believer attains to this stage of faith, his heart is never assailed by any doubt or confusion; he does not take a dim view of whatever befalls him, nor is he offended if afflicted with a misfortune.

Likewise, his morals and actions are safe from adverse influences. This interpretation is further supported by the phrase, "these are they who are true". Truth, in this verse, is general and unconditional; it is not restricted to any condition of man's heart or any activity of his limbs. It means, they are real believers, true in their belief; as Allah says:

***But no! by your Lord! they do not believe until they make you a judge of that which has become a matter of disagreement among them, and then do not find any straitness in their hearts as to what you have decided and submit with total submission*** (4:65).

Thus, their condition fits the fourth stage of the belief, described under the verse:

***When his Lord said to him, Submit*** (yourself), ***he said: "I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds"*** (2:131).

After description of belief, Allah mentions some of their deeds: "and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggars and for (the emancipation of) the captives, and keeps up prayer and pays the *zakat*".

Here their prayer is mentioned, and it concerns the Divine Worship. Allah says:

... **surely prayer keeps** (one) **away from indecency and evil...** (29:45);

also, He says:

... **and keep up prayer for My remembrance** (20: 14).

It is followed by mention of *zakat*; and it is a financial obligation promulgated for economic good of the society. And before it all, the verse refers to their giving away wealth to various groups; this habit of theirs spreads the good and enlarges the circle of non-obligatory munificence, in order that the need of the poor may be fulfilled and their condition improved.

Lastly, the verse cites some of their excellent moral characteristics: “and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflict”. *al-‘Ahd* العَهْدُ ) = to promise; to commit oneself to something). The verse mentions “their promise” unconditionally.

Yet, it does not cover the belief and the resulting obligation of following the laws of the *shari‘ah* (as some people have said). Why? Because on going further we find the proviso, “when they make a promise”; and clearly acceptance of true faith and sub-mission to its concomitants is an unconditional obligation; and is obligatory on all the people at all the times.

It does not depend on one’s commitment. However, the “promise”, by its generality, covers every commitment made by man. For example, when he says: I’ll surely do it; or, I’ll never do it. It includes every deal made in business transactions, every word spoken in social and family circles.

Patience is steadfastness in face of hardship, be it a series of benumbing misfortunes or a fight against formidable adversaries.

These two excellent virtues – fulfilment of promise and patience – do not cover all the necessary virtues; but when they are found somewhere, the other virtues invariably always follow suit. One of these two virtues (patience in hardships) has a passive quality, while the other (fulfilling the promise) has an active role.

By mentioning them, Allah in effect says that when they say something they surely proceed to do it, and do not withdraw from it even if they have to face difficulties.

The second stage of introduction is contained in the phrase, “these are they who are true”. Truth is a comprehensive virtue, encompassing all attributes of knowledge and action. Truth is an inseparable concomitant of all basic virtues – continence, bravery, wisdom and justice – and of their branches., Man's life is made up of his belief, words and actions.

When he is true, all the three aspects conform with each other. He does not do except what he says,

and does not say except. that which he believes.

Man by instinct accepts the right and truth; and even if he pretends otherwise, he submits to it in his heart. When he believes in the right truthfully, his word conforms with his belief, and his action with his word. It is then that he reaches the perfection in all three aspects of belief, morality and deeds. His faith becomes pure, his character virtuous and his deeds good.

Allah says:

**O *You who believe! fear Allah and be with the true ones*** (9:119).

The restrictive style, “these are they who are true”, puts emphasis on the description of the righteous. It means – and Allah knows better – that if you want to find the true ones, then these are the righteous.

The third and final stage of their introduction is the phrase, “and these are they who are the pious”: This restrictive style looks at the level of perfection. Piety cannot be complete and perfect, unless righteousness and truth have attained their completion and perfection.

The attributes ascribed here to the righteous are the same which Allah has described in other places. Allah says:

***Surely the righteous shall drink of a cup the admixture of which is camphor. A fountain from which the servants of Allah shall drink; they shall make it to flow a (goodly) flowing forth. They fulfil vows and fear a day the evil of which shall be spreading far and wide. And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive. We only feed you for Allah's sake; we desire from you neither reward nor thanks; surely we fear from our Lord a stern, distressful day. Therefore Allah will guard them from the evil of that day and cause them to meet with radiance and happiness; and reward them, because they were patient, with garden and silk*** (76:5–12).

These verses, about some righteous personalities, describe their attributes of belief in Allah and the last day, their spending for the sake of Allah, their fulfilling the vows and their patience. Again, Allah says:

***Nay! Most surely the record of the righteous shall be in the 'Illiyyin. And what will make you know what the 'Illiyyin is? It is a written book; see it those who are near (to Allah). Most surely the righteous shall be in bliss, on thrones, they shall gaze. You will recognize in their faces the radiance of bliss. They are made to quaff of a pure drink that is sealed. The sealing of it is (with) musk; and for that let the aspirers aspire. And the admixture of it is a water of Tasnim, a fountain from which drink they who are drawn nearer (to Allah) (83: 18 –28).***

If you meditate on these verses in conjunction with those quoted above, you will see the reality of their attributes and their final destination. These verses praise the righteous that they are servants of Allah, and are drawn near to Him.

Now, Allah describes His servants in these words:

***Surely as regards My servants, thou hast no authority over them*** (15:42);

and He says about those drawn near to Him:

***And the foremost are the fore-most; these are they who are drawn near*** (to Allah), ***in the gardens of bliss*** (56: 10–12).

It is now clear that the righteous are the foremost in this world in reaching nearer to Allah, as they are foremost in the next world in attaining to the bounties of the garden.

If you continue looking at the condition of the righteous in the light of these verses you will unearth many hidden nuggets of spiritual reality.

The above discourse shows that the righteous are in the highest, that is, the fourth, stage of belief, as we have explained earlier. Allah says:

***Those who believe and do not mix their faith with iniquity, those are they who have the security and they are those who go aright*** (6:82).

**Qur'an: and the patient in distress:** The word “patient” in the Arabic text is in accusative case while the other attributes are in indicative. This change has been effected to point out its excellence, to show its importance.

Also, it has been said that when a speech becomes a bit lengthy, several adjectives following each other, then the Arabs break the monotony by interposing negatives between the positives, or by exchanging accusative and indicative cases.

## Traditions

The Prophet said: “Whosoever acted in accordance with this verse, he surely perfected (his) faith.”

The author says: Its reason is clear from the explanation written above. az-Zajaj and al-Farra' are reported to have said: “This verse is reserved for the sinless prophets, because nobody, except the prophets, can perform these things as they should be.”

But this comment shows that they had not pondered on it properly. They seem confused regarding spiritual ranks. The verses of the Chapter of the Man (76:5–12) quoted above, were revealed about the family members of the Messenger of Allah (S); Allah in those verses has named them “the righteous”, although they were not prophets.

Of course, the rank of the righteous is very high, and their position is of very great importance. Allah

praises the men of understanding saying that they: **remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth:**

Then He quotes their prayer, which shows that their highest aspiration was that their Lord should join them to the righteous:

**and make us die with the righteous** (3: 190–3).

Al-Hakim at-Tirmidhi narrates from Abu 'Amir ash-Sha'bi that he said: "I said: 'O Messenger of Allah! What is the completion of righteousness?' He said: 'That you should do in private what you do in public.'"  
" (*ad-Durru 'l-manthur*)

Abu Ja'far and Abu 'Abdillah (a.s.) said: "The near of kin are the relatives of the Prophet." (*Majma 'u 'l-bayan* )

**The author says:** It is an application of this verse, keeping in view the verses of *near relatives* (42:23).

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: "*al-Faqir* (poor) is he who does not ask from the people; and *al-miskin* is of more straitened circumstances than the "poor"; and *al-ba's* ( **الْبَائِسُ** ) is the most wretched of all." (*al-kafi*)

Abu Ja'far (a.s.) said: "The wayfarer is the one stranded in the way." (*Majma 'u 'l-bayan*)

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) was asked about an al-mukatib ( **المُكَاتِبُ** ) who, after making a partial payment was unable to pay (the balance of the stipulated money of) his al-mukatabah ( **المُكَاتَبَةُ** ). He (a.s.) said:

"It will be paid on his behalf from the money of *as-sadaqah* ( **الصَّدَقَةُ** ) = charity money; also *zakat*, because Allah, the Mighty, the Great, says: *and for* (the emancipation of) *the captives*." (*at-Tahdhib*)

The same Imam said about the words of Allah, **and the patient in distress and affliction**: "In hunger, and thirst and fear." And he (a.s.) said about the word, **and in time of conflict**: "In the fighting." (*at-Tafsir*, al-Qummi)

1. In Islam a slave was allowed to enter into an agreement with his master. This agreement, called al-mukatabah, entitled him to gain his freedom on payment of stipulated amount. Such a slave was called al-mukatib. (tr.)

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