

How to Reach Our Goal

Having understood our ultimate goal it is necessary for us in our journey to discuss the way to that goal. This topic needs an independent book. But here we shall try to review briefly the most important points assured that our readers who take their lives seriously will follow this journey through further studying and reflection.

Before anything we should pay attention to two points:

We should observe our goal constantly during our lives, day and night; otherwise we cannot utilise our power for our aim and the ordinary affairs will capture our attention and gradually it may make us doubtful about the necessity of following that aim. It is all too common for human beings who are not successful in their pre-decided program to try to get rid of their difficulties through a denial of that program.

We should pray and ask Allah seriously to help and save us. We cannot continue this spiritual journey without His special help. Yes, with His help there will be no obstacle and nothing can stop us. So in the relationship with Allah we should not feel self-sufficient, because we are completely and absolutely dependent on Him. However in the relationship with others we should trust ourselves and rely on our powers without allowing despair to capture our hearts. The Prophet (S) who was the bravest man and stood against all enemies and was able to change the world said:

“O My God! Do not ever leave me by myself even for an instant. “

Let's listen to Imam Sajjad (a.s.) when he asks Allah for help:

“Glory be to Thee! How narrow are the paths for him whom Thou has not guided! How plain the truth for him whom Thou hast guided on his way! My God, so make us travel on the roads that arrive at Thee and set us into motion on the paths nearest to reaching You!”

“Make near for us the far, and make easy for us the hard and difficult! Join us to Thy servants, those who hurry to You swiftly, knock constantly at Your door, and worship You by night and day, while they remain apprehensive in awe of You! You have purified their drinking places, taken them to the objects of

their desire, granted their requests, accomplished their wishes through Your bounty, filled their minds with Your love, and quenched the & thirst with Your pure drink”

The right path towards our happiness is worship, servitude. Allah says:

“Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you should not serve the shaytan? Surely he is your open enemy, and that you should serve Me; this is the right path.” (36:60,61)

The prophet Jesus (a.s.) also told the children of Israel:

“Surely Allah is my Lord and your Lord, therefore serve Him, this is the right path.” (3:51)

Worship does not necessarily mean special kinds of worshipping. Every action or even thought which is done for Allah's pleasure is considered as a worship. The worship in this broad sense is able to occupy all our life. Our works or jobs, our speaking or listening, our eating or drinking and even our sleeping can be for His pleasure and can be helpful in our spiritual movement.

We studied during our discussion about the goal of the creation that human beings are created to worship Him and that it is to their own benefits. We knew that there is a hierarchy of goals and we understood the place of worship, as one goal within the hierarchy.

If we want to worship Him and get close to Him, it is not enough to practice some prayers or fasting and the like. It changes all aspects of our being. First of all, we should know Allah and His religion. Secondly, we should obey those laws (act according those laws). Thirdly, we should make our characters and spiritual qualities as He pleases. Thus, there are three realms of improvement: creeds, deeds and virtues.

What should we do in respect to our creeds? According to Islam every person is asked to investigate religion. One should think, reflect, study and discuss religion. Some religious beliefs are necessary for all people, such as the main principles and some are not necessary for all people. So it is not necessary nor expected, that every person must know all the details about, say, the resurrection through personal investigation.

To make an inquiry into religious beliefs one should first of all depend on one's reason. After realising the truth of the religion or the Prophet (S) one can use the guidance of the Glorious Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet for further studies. Moreover the Prophet (S) has wanted all Muslims to refer to his household for understanding the real interpretation of the Glorious Qur'an and his pure tradition. The Prophet said:

“I leave two precious things among you that by grasping them you will never go astray after me: the Divine book and my Household. And they will never separate from each other until they come to me near the fountain (kawthar). Be careful how you behave with them after me.”

This tradition is one of the traditions which expresses the authority of the Household of the Prophet in presenting pure Islam. Here is a list of books recording this tradition, but we should note that these are just some samples of Sunni scholars' works and there are many other books by Shi's and Sunni scholars which include this tradition: Sahih Muslim, the Book of fadail (merits) of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Vol. 7, p.122, Sahih al-Tirmidhi, Vol.5, p.328, Khasais a by Imam Nesa'i, p.21; Musnad by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal Vol.3, p. 17; Kanz al-'Ummal, Vol. 1, p. 154; Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra by Ibn Sa'd, Vol.2, p. 194; Jami' at-Usul by Ibn Athir Vol. 1, p. 187; Al-Jami' al-Saghir by Al-Suyuti, Vol. 1, p.353; Usd al-Ghabah by Ibn Athir Vol.2, p. 12; Tarikh al-Dimashq by Ibn 'As5kir, Vol.5, p.436.; Al- Tafsir by Thn Kathrr, Vol.4, p. 113.

We should take care of our beliefs: basic ones and derivative ones. if a person is not expert or skilled in discovering Islamic thoughts and concepts through the Glorious Qur'an or the traditions he must not interpret them according to his desires or weak understanding and he must not rely on those people who are not of sufficient knowledge and expertise. To use their books or sayings is like taking medicine according to the prescriptions of false physicians. Thus, understanding the details of the beliefs is like understanding practical laws.

According to Islam our happiness is not only based on our faith or beliefs. Deeds as well as virtues bear on our happiness. Islamic practical laws are to guide us in the realm of actions especially when our intellect or conscience is uncertain. Every person can learn jurisprudence and the related sciences and become a mujtahid. Then he can rely on his own understanding of the laws. But it is a difficult process and needs much cleverness, long work and practice. Those who are not prepared for this job have two other possibilities.

They can exercise precaution. For example, when they are in doubt about whether something is obligatory or recommended they must do it, or when they do not know whether something is forbidden or allowed they must not do it. To behave in this way is very difficult and even impossible for those who are not learned in jurisprudence. The second possibility is to imitate or follow a person who is proved to be a mujtahid or the most learned and at the same time just, trustworthy, insightful and the like. This kind of reference, i.e., the reference of a non-learned to a trustworthy and learned person is advised by reason and approved by Islam. This is what we do in our daily life, e.g., we take the prescription of our physician or we ask some architect to make a plan for our house and so on.

There are also social duties for us especially in the present situation of the Islamic world. if we want to have respect in this universe and rewards in the other it is not enough' to perform our personal duties. Another role of that insightful, learned and just mujtahid is to declare the duties of the Muslims. Our intellect tells us that through obedience to this authority we can guarantee our material and spiritual happiness. Let's quote what Allamah Muhammad Rida al-Muddaffar has written in his precious book Aq'id al-mamryah:

“We believe that a fully qualified mujatahid is a representative of the Imam, in the case of the latter's absence. Thus, he is an authority over Muslims and performs the functions of the Imam as regards

judgement and administration among the people...

Therefore the qualified mujtahid is not only one who issues fatwas, but he also has general authority over Muslims who must consult him if they require judgement⁴ this being obtainable only from him. It is correspondingly wrong for anyone to give judgement except him or one who is appointed by him, as no-one can pass sentence without his permission. “

After understanding our duties through taqlid (imitation) we should try our best to perform them. The first step is to perform the obligatory ones. if a person disobeys the obligatory duties he stops his movement towards Allah and even goes downwards. The second step is to perform the recommended affairs (mustafabbat).

Besides the performance of obligations we should take care of our spiritual qualities. This topic is studied in ethics, akhliq. To speak briefly, first of all we should recognise our bad qualities. Then we should try to get rid of them. In this way we can clean our spirits from all badness and make our hearts capable of receiving divine illuminations. Besides general ways there are some special ways to treat moral weaknesses particular to each of them. This process should be accompanied with acquiring good attributes and virtue.

These are outlines of the Islamic program for human beings to reach their happiness. We hope that the reader will allow these points by him or herself. It's nice to finish our discussion with two traditions of the Prophet (S):

“Most of my people enter Paradise through piety and good behaviour. They improve cities and lengthen lives.”

“I have been sent to complete noble characters.”

The Importance of Knowledge in Decision-making

In our previous discussions we came to the conclusion that human beings are not the same; some are good and highly respected because of their own decisions and deeds and some are bad and worse than animals, again because of their own decisions and deeds. The last topic, “Free-will”, was selected in order to reject all the excuses expressed by unsuccessful people who want to shift the responsibility completely to others or to the society or the environment or the like.

In the present discussion we want to understand those factors which bear on our decision-making or will. We may divide them into three categories:

a) knowledge.

b) desires and inclinations.

c) power and ability.

If something is unknown to me and I do not have any information at all about it, I can never decide to do it. Let's consider a simple example. Suppose you want to buy a certain book. What kinds of knowledge do you need?

I) You should know your need. What kind of book do you need?

II) You should know your desire and favourite style of writing.

You should know and consider your background in that aspect or realm. How much do you know about that subject? To what extent you can proceed with the subject? If you are a student of high school, you may not make use of book which are written for experts on math or physics.

You should know where to find and buy books.

You should know the content, the style, the writer and the price of the book which you want to select and buy.

If you have complete knowledge but you do not have any desire to read or have books, you will not decide to buy. Thus, the importance of the second factor is clear. Also the importance of power is clear. If you feel that you cannot do something you will not decide to do it. All actions require some kinds of power. Now let us turn to our own case.

On the way to perfection human beings are equipped with desire. All have some degree of self-love, so they desire and make efforts for their well-being, for a better future. Yet, they often make mistakes in deciding what is really better for them. Human beings also have power to follow the path to perfection. Yet, they are different in the amount of power they have spiritually, mentally and physically. For example, some can understand facts or decide what to do much better than others. Some can resist sin much easier than other people. Some are very respected and honourable and are not attracted to temporary material interests easily. Some are very healthy in their bodies so they engage in more voluntary fasting to obtain greater spiritual rewards.

All these differences are natural. Indeed, they are necessary demands of this material universe. But we should know that according to Islam, rewards or punishments and their amount are and will be decided in consideration of man's power and abilities. If someone has really no power to understand or to act according to Islamic rules, he is excused and Allah is most generous towards him. This group are very small in number. Most of people are wise enough and also sufficiently able to understand and follow the right path toward their perfection, although they actually possess different amounts of power and ability. Allah, the Wise, takes these differences into His consideration. He expects more of those who are given more talents or abilities than others. Generally one of the principles in His judgement is:

It means the most precious deed is the most difficult one. If a person needs more time to learn how to

pray or to memorise verses of the Glorious Qur'an, his rewards will be greater and Allah will help him more.

Thus, human beings generally have no difficulty in power and desire or inclination which are needed in every decision and.. action. But what do you think of the third factor, knowledge? Most difficulties arise from a lack of knowledge, from ignorance. Now let's see which kinds of knowledge we need in our journey towards His pleasure.

Here is a list of facts which we should know:

We should know ourselves. How are we created? Why? What are our needs? What are our real desires or motives? What are our faculties and abilities? Are there any tasks or duties for us?

What is our present situation? Under what conditions do we live? How is our life in this universe? Is it the only life that we have? Is there any eternal life for us? What good or bad qualities do we have?

What is the best position for us? What values and goods can we acquire? What is a perfect man like?

What are the results of our deeds? What is the effect of this single decision or even intention on our fate? Generally, how can we transit from the present situation to the favoured and ideal one?

We can summarise these necessary kinds of knowledge as: knowing our origin, knowing our present, knowing our nature, and knowing their interactions.

There is a famous tradition from Imam 'Ali (a.s.) which is closely related to this discussion. Imam 'Ali said:

Thus, every person needs to know his origin, his present, and his future. Having acquired this knowledge one can behave and manage his life properly. Otherwise he cannot plan for his life because he has not acquired the necessary knowledge for deciding his goals and his way of life. For example, if I did not believe in the Hereafter and eternal life, my goal might be something to be obtained in this world. Or if I did not believe in the relationship between my actions and my happiness on the Day of Judgement, I would not care about my actions. If I believed that I was created through chance and not by Allah, the Wise, I would lose my hope in His help and mercy and would lose my confidence.

Therefore we will speak of the following subjects successively:

- a) Our origin
- b) Our present
- c) Our future
- d) The Ultimate goal

e) How to reach our goal.

Our Origin

One of the most fundamental things for a human being on the way to perfection to know is that he is created by Allah for a certain purpose. There are different approaches to this matter. In Islam every person is first of all invited to study this problem and make a certain judgement about it. Nothing less than certainty of belief in Allah is acceptable. There are different ways to prove the existence of Allah and a variety of reasons. But according to Islam it is not a difficult process to understand that Allah, the One, is Existent. Every one; at every level of knowledge and understanding, can settle this problem easily. Usually when a person is a disbeliever it is because of his will, although there might be rare cases of people who have studied this problem seriously and who were really longing for the truth, but they could not find it. Usually, atheism is just an assumption. Observe the following verse:

“Is there doubt About Allah, the maker of the heavens and the earth?” (14: 10)

In Islam every value is due to the relationship with Allah. Our happiness is based on our voluntary devotion to Him. It is like the lives of plants and animals which depend on the light of sun. The sun does not need them, but they cannot survive without the sun.

Thus, we should change the common approach to Divine law or commands. They are not some boring duties assigned to us by Allah in exchange for His favours or His services to us. We are not to perform His commands in response to His blessings. We should know that His commands are only for our benefit. His religion, His prophets and His laws are the most precious blessings that we have ever received. Even thankfulness to Him (shukr) is for our benefit.

“And when your Lord makes it known: If you are grateful, I would certainty give to you more.” (147)

If we are thankful, we increase our capacity to receive more blessings. With more thankfulness, again more blessings will be brought. It is an endless process. If we are not thankful, it is not harmful to Allah, but decreases our capacity for receiving His blessings, so we loose some blessings and if we continue, we will loose more.

We should always recall that He is our Lord, that our real happiness and freedom can be achieved only with our obedience to Him. There are only two ways: to be servants of Allah or to be servants of others such as oppressors or unjust governments or idols. To satisfy Allah is easy, because He is the One and He only wants our happiness. He never makes mistakes and never wants impossible things. But disobedience to Allah leads us to try to obey many gods, although it is not possible. If one wants money and fame and good position and comfort and the like, no matter how much of them he acquires, he will never be satisfied.

“Allah sets forth an example: There is a slave in whom are (several) partners differing with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition?” (39:29)

If we think deeply we will understand that those different and conflicting gods are really our own different extreme desires. So there are two ways : to be servants of Allah or to be servants of our devious soul.

“Have you seen him who takes his low desires for his god? will you then be a protector of him?” (25:43)

“Have you then considered him who takes his low desire for his god, and Allah has made him err having knowledge.” (45.23)

Finally, consider the true story which happened during the time of Imam Musa al-Kazim (a.s.). Once Imam (a.s.) was walking in a lane. When he was passing by the door of one house, Imam knew that there was some celebration there in which dancing and forbidden music and wine were used. Then a slave-maid opened the door and came out to put the garbage outside. Imam asked her: “Is the owner of this house a slave or a free person?” She answered: “Free”. Imam said: “Surely he is free, because if he were a slave, he would fear his life and would not make such a session.

When the slave-maid returned, the owner asked her why she was late. She answered that a man with such and such appearance was passing and questioned me and I replied to him in this way. The owner was shocked and began to think deeply about this sentence: “if he were a slave, he would fear his lord.” Suddenly he stood up and without putting on his shoes he went out of the house and looked for that man. When he reached Imam (a.s.) he repented. This man was Bushr ibn Harith, given the title of 'hafi', meaning shoeless. He became a real believer.

Our Present

Having discussed our origin, it is necessary to study our present situation and our future. Now let us turn to the former and the latter will be our topic in the next discussion. In order to certify our goal and practical program to reach that goal, we should know our qualities, capacities, abilities, opportunities and so on.

These are articles of our knowledge about our present. We have studied some of them in the previous chapters such as: good attributes of human beings, the vices attributed to human beings and free-will. Here we just mention some other aspects of our present situation.

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