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Friends of God's Fear

The first question, after discussing the issue of love of God that crosses one's mind in respect to the elixir of self-building is that if God is kind and affectionate and His love is the most influential element of evolution, so why is there so much stress on fear of God Almighty in Islamic texts? Why does the Holy Qur'an regard fear of God as the most "eminent quality of the Ulama? And finally, are love and fear consistent?

The answer is yes; the reverend Shaykh gave an interesting example of consistency between fear and love, which will be touched upon in this chapter. Before that, however, the meaning of fear and love of God is to be reviewed.

The Meaning of Fear of God

The First point in interpreting Divine fear and love is that the fear of God is indeed fear of committing sins and evil acts. Imam Ali (a) said:

"لا تَخَف الا ذنبك، لا ترجُ الا ربك"

"Do not fear except of your own sins and do not hold out hope except in God."1

"Do not Fear God!"

One day Imam Ali (a) encountered someone whose face had been transformed out of fear; he asked him:

"What has happened to you?"

The man answered: 'I am afraid of God!' The holy Imam (a) said:

"Servant of God! Be afraid of your sins and fear Divine Justice in judging your wrongdoing against His servants! Obey God in what He has obligated you to do, and do not disobey in what is good for you. So, do not fear God as He does no injustice to anyone and He does not chastise beyond one's deserving."2

Fear of Separation

Hence, nobody should fear God, rather we should fear ourselves not to be encumbered by the outcome of our own unseemly actions. The fear of the friends of God of their unrighteous actions to be punished, however, is different from the fear that other people have. Those who have driven out the love of other than God from their hearts and their obedience to God is neither for the fear of Hell nor for the hope in Paradise, only fear of separation. For them the torment of separation from God is more painful than the Hellfire. Thus the leader of the friends of God, Amir al-Mu[']minin Ali (a) laments in his supplication to God:

فلئن صيرتني للعقوبات مع أعدائك، وجمعت بيني وبين أهل بلائك وفرّقت بيني وبين أحبائك وأوليائك فهبني يا" "!الهى وسيدي ومولاي وربى صبرت على عذابك فكيف أصبر على فراقك؟

"So if you subject me to the punishments with Your enemies, gather me with the people of Your chastisement and separate me from Your friends and favorites, then suppose, my God, my Master, my Protector and my Lord, that I may be able to endure Your chastisement but how can I endure separation from You?3

The reverend Shaykh commented the holy verse, يدعون ربهم خوفا وطمعا (They call on their Lord in fear and hope) (al–Sajdah: 16) as follows:

"What is this fear and hope? Fear of separation from and hope of union with Him. Parallel to this in concept is the saying of Amir al– Mu'minin Ali (a) in supplication of Kumail: فهبني يا الهي... وسيدي ومولاي وربي صبرت على عذابك فكيف أصبر على فراقك 'Then suppose, my Allah... that I may... be able to endure Your chastisement, but how can I endure separation from You?'

.. ووصلك منى نفسى وإليك شوقى

And also in the supplication of Imam al–Sajjad (a): 'Joining Thee is the wish of my soul, and toward Thee is my yearning."

The renowned Gnostic and jurist the late Mulla Ahmad Naraqi also said in this respect:

'Said in supplication the king of *awliya*, may my soul be sacrificed to him, that O my Lord, O God,

Maybe I can tolerate Your punishment, how can I endure Your separation O Friend?

The wet-nurse frightens the kids of fire (and says) do not play o such and such otherwise,

I'll place fire on your hand and foot, stigmatize your face and back, But they frighten the lion (-hearted) man (Ali (a)) of the chastisement of separation with a thousand fold fear and awe. '5

Fear of not being accepted by the Beloved

Friends of God have fear even though they perform their obligations. They fear lest their Beloved does not like them and does not accept them:

(الذين يؤتون مآ أتوا وقلوبهم وجلة أنهم الى ربهم راجعون)

(And those who dispense their Charity with their hearts full of fear, because they will return to their Lord.) (al-Mu'minun: 60)

Acceptance of a Beloved who is absolutely perfect is as important for the friends of God as also the pain of separation (from the Beloved) is heart-rending and unbearable for them. This is so important that Imam Khomeini (ra), as quoted by Tehran Friday prayer leader, at the last moments of his life requested people to pray that God Almighty accept him!

Now see how the Shaykh explains this subtle Gnostic issue by a simple example.

One of the Shaykh's disciples said: 'Once he (the reverend Shaykh) said to me:

"Such and such! For whom does a bride make up herself?"

I said: 'For the groom.'

He said: "Did you understand?" I kept silent. Then he said:

"On the consummation night, the bride's relatives try to make up her in the best possible way so that the groom would have a liking for her. The bride, however, has a secret worry that is unnoticed to others; She is worried that what should she do if she could not attract the groom's interest or if he happens to feel disgust in her.

How can the servant, who does not know whether his deeds are accepted by God Almighty, be not fearful and worried?! Do you make up (adorn) yourself for Him or for yourself and for gaining a good reputation among the people?!

When people die they implore (رب ارجعون لعلي أعمل صالحاً) (O my Lord! Send me back (to life)–In order that I may work righteousness in the things I neglected.) (al–Mu'minun: 99, 100)."

Hence, the reverend Shaykh was always fearful of meeting with God Almighty and would say:

"You say that there is no fear of God, (وأما من خاف مقام ربه) (And for such as had entertained the fear of standing be for their Lord.) (al–Nazi'at: 40), but what on earth should we do if He would not like us and would not accept our deeds?"

The Shaykh's son quoted him as saying:

"O Lord! Purchase and accept us as the old junk-like object as the street vendor calls out: 'I buy (your) broken and junk objects'- O Lord accept and buy us too!"

1. See "Benevolence to Jobless Person Encumbered by a Large Family", Chapter Seven, Part 3.

2. The late Suhayli was quoted as saying: 'What he meant by "Agha Jan" (my dear master) was Imam al-'Asr (aj) who had come to visit the Shaykh at that moment.

3. In the supplication 21 of Sahifah al-Sajjadiya (Psalms of Islam, p. 79) we read:

"And give me intimacy with Thee, Thy friends, and those who obey Thee! " وهب لى الانس بك وأوليائك وأهل طاعتك"

4. Psalms of Islam, p. 247.

5. Mathnawi of Taqdis: 215.

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