

Discourse 9: Characteristics of a Righteous Servant of Allah – Part I

عَنْ إِبْنِ عُمَرَ قَالَ: خَطَبَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ خُطْبَةً ذَرَفَتْ مِنْهَا الْعُيُونَ وَوَجَلَتْ مِنْهَا الْقُلُوبُ فَكَانَ مِمَّا ضَبَطْتُ مِنْهَا: أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنَّ أَفْضَلَ النَّاسِ عَبْدًا مَنْ تَوَاضَعَ عَنْ رَفْعَةٍ، وَزَهَدَ عَنْ رَغْبَةٍ، وَانْصَفَ عَنْ قُوَّةٍ، وَحَلَّمَ عَنْ قُدْرَةٍ...

It has been narrated from Ibne 'Umar that, “The Messenger of Allah (S) once gave us such a speech that made tears flow from our eyes and made our hearts tremble and some of that which we wrote down (of his speech was): 'O' Mankind! Surely the greatest servant (of Allah) is the one who shows humility, even though he may be of high rank or status; and who renounces the world, even though he has a desire for it (its pleasures); and who is equitable and just, even though he has the strength (to oppress others); and who shows forbearance, even though has the ability (to get his rights by force)...”¹

The important issue (which we wish to elucidate upon) that has been mentioned in this section of the tradition is that sometimes a person refrains from committing a sin due to not having the ability to perform that sin. Other times, it is due to not having an attraction to commit that sin – for example, the person who does not like the taste of alcohol (and thus does not drink it) or he likes the taste of it however he does not have the ability (to drink alcohol) or the introductory steps in order to do this sin are not present (for example he does not have money to purchase the alcohol) or he does not drink alcohol due to the negative physical effects that it has on him.

Such a form of refraining from committing a sin for a person who does not have the ability to commit the sin is not important. Rather, what is important is when a person has the ability but he still refrains from committing that sin. Thus, according to the words of the Prophet (S), the best person is the one who, even though he has the status, rank and position in the community, however he is still humble and

modest with others.2

In relation to refraining from sins, we see that people are of various types. There is one group of people who do not commit certain sins because deep down in their heart those acts are detested. Thus, every person must look deep within himself and see what prohibited things he has a desire to perform so that he can refrain from those things.

However this point should also be kept in mind that it is difficult for a person to recognize these things by himself as sometimes there are characteristics within a person that he would not realize he has and maybe after the passing of sixty years of his life, he would then realize that he has these defects. Why is this so? It is because a person never looks at his own self and tries to pick out his own faults and shortcomings.

If a person would like to advance in the spiritual areas of his life and reach to the higher levels of spirituality, then he must look at his own self with a very critical eye so that he is able to pick out his weak points. It is for this reason that it has been said that when one wants to recognize one's own weak points and defects, then he should rely on his enemies or friends who will sincerely criticize him (not those who would hide his defects).

However, better than all of this is when a person learns to criticize himself. If a person knows what forbidden acts he loves to perform then he knows where his defects and slips are and through what channels Shaitan tries to get to him and make use of him, then he will never be held captive by his lower desires or the Shaitan.

In the words of the poet, Mawlavi:

از غم بی آلتی افسرده است

نفس ازدهاست او کی مرده است

It is for this reason that the Prophet (S) has said, "The best of people is the one who even though has the liking (to commit a sin) and has the power and ability (to oppress others) is fair and just, and even though he has status, he is still humble."

This advice is addressed to all people, especially the Scholars ('Ulama), but why? It is because the scholars are the leaders of the people and before going to teach others, they must first train themselves.

The more a person's status (within the society) increases, the more his (small) errors and slips become greater (in the eyes of the people). Similarly, when his duties increase and become more sensitive and critical (to be performed in the proper way), there is a greater danger that they may not be fulfilled how they should be.

الْمُخْلِصُونَ فِي خَطَرٍ عَظِيمٍ.

“The sincere people (al-Mukhlisun) are in the greatest danger.”

While a person is young, he may commit sins and then say, “When I get older I will repent for this sin.” This act of delaying and postponing one's asking for forgiveness is an act of trickery and deceit on the part of Shaitan and obeying one's own lower desires.

There is another person who makes a promise to himself that when the Month of Ramadhan comes along, he will ask for forgiveness. However, as previously mentioned, if a person wishes to be a guest and take part in a banquet, he must first purify himself and put on clean clothing and then go forth to be the guest of another person – not that he takes part in the banquet while wearing dirty, filthy clothes!³

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 179

2. The Noble Qur'an considers humility, modesty and refraining from any form of pride and arrogance as being one of the characteristics of a true believer (Mo'min). This is so because pride and arrogance are the first steps on the ladder of disbelief (Kufr) and when a person exercises humility and modesty in the face of truth, he has actually traversed the first steps towards true faith («man). Those who tread the path of pride and self-conceit and who do not submit and prostrate to Allah (SwT) nor do they busy themselves in His praise and glorification will eventually reach a stage in their life where they will not accept the truth which comes to them from the (righteous) servants of Allah (SwT). Thus, the biggest idol (of worship) turns out to be their own souls. (Tafsir-e-Namunah, vol. 17, pg. 146)

3. The great scholar, Shaykh Baha'i has narrated the following incident, “There was a man named Tawbah who was continuously busy in taking account of his soul and the acts which he used to perform. When he reached the age of sixty, he sat down to review his life and the acts that he had performed and realized that 21,500 days of his life had gone by. At this point, he said to himself, “Woe on me! If each day of my life I committed even one sin, then in the minimum, I would have committed at least 21,000 sins! Do I wish to meet Allah while I have 21,000 sins on my record?” At this point, he let out a loud sigh and fell to the ground and passed away on the spot. (Tafsir-e-Namunah, vol. 24, pg. 465)

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