

Discourse 12: The (Various) Levels of Perfection in Iman

عَنْ نَافِعٍ عَنِ ابْنِ عُمَرَ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ : لَا يَكْمُلُ عَبْدُ الْإِيمَانِ بِاللَّهِ حَتَّى
يَكُونَ فِيهِ خَمْسُ خِصَالٍ: التَّوَكُّلُ عَلَى اللَّهِ، وَالتَّقْوِيضُ إِلَى اللَّهِ، وَالتَّسْلِيمُ لِأَمْرِ
اللَّهِ، وَالرِّضَا بِقَضَاءِ اللَّهِ، وَالصَّبْرُ عَلَى بَلَاءِ اللَّهِ. إِنَّهُ مَنْ أَحَبَّ فِي اللَّهِ، وَأَبْغَضَ
فِي اللَّهِ، وَاعْتَصَمَ لِلَّهِ، وَاعْتَصَمَ لِلَّهِ، فَقَدْ اسْتَكْمَلَ الْإِيمَانَ.

It has been narrated from Nafi' from Ibne 'Umar that the Messenger of Allah (S) said, "A servant's faith in Allah will never become complete until he possesses five traits: complete reliance (al-Tawakkul) in Allah, complete dependence (al-Tafwid) on Allah (what He has decreed), complete submission (al-Taslim) to all of the commandments of Allah, complete contentment (al-Rida) upon what Allah has decreed, and complete patience (al-Sabr) for the calamities that Allah brings forth; because verily that person who loves for the sake of Allah and hates for the sake of Allah and gives (to others) for the (sake of) Allah and holds back (giving to others) for the (sake of) Allah is one whose faith is complete." 1

In this tradition, the Messenger of Allah (S) has elucidated upon the various levels (that one must traverse) in order to achieve perfection in one's faith.

Some of the scholars of Akhlaq (ethics and morality) have also more or less mentioned the same points as the stages which one must traverse on the path of Sair wa Suluk (the path of one who is trying to get spiritually closer to Allah (SwT)).

1. Tawakkul:

The first stage is to have complete reliance in Allah (SwT). In reality, the true believer must be one who says, “Since it is through the knowledge, power and mercy of Allah (SwT) that I have been granted true faith («man) and knowledge, I will take Him alone as the One whom I rely upon.”

2. Tafwid:

The second stage is that of complete dependence on Allah (SwT). In the previous stage, it is said that the true believer is walking on the path towards Allah (SwT) which he himself has chosen. However at this stage, the true believer – in reality – says to Allah (SwT), “O' Allah! You know better than I do and thus, I leave everything in Your hands.”

The Difference between Tawakkul and Tafwid:

At the stage of Tawakkul, a person gives precedence to everything that he feels is for his own personal benefit and thus he sees all the limits and restrictions for his own benefit. However in Tafwid, the person knows that he has individual benefits at stake, however he does not see the limits – rather – he leaves them all up to Allah (SwT) (to fulfill) because he has complete reliance upon Him.

3. Taslim:

This stage is even higher than the previously mentioned level. At this stage, personal benefit has no meaning to the person. At the stage of Tawakkul, one's personal wishes and desires were the topic of discussion, however at the level of Taslim, a person does not even consider his own personal desires.

Question:

If it is truly as you say (that one who is at the level of Taslim does not even make known his personal needs and desires) then there is no meaning to Du'a and supplication, right?

Answer:

The meaning of Taslim is not that we do not ask our needs or desires from Allah (SwT) and that we do not call upon Him. Rather, it means that if we have asked Him for something and our prayers have not been answered (in this world), then we must still submit to Him (in the apparent non-fulfillment of our supplications).

4. Rida:

The stage of Rida is greater than the previously mentioned stages. It can be said that at the level of

Taslim, a person still had personal wants and desires, however he has submitted his presence and gives up his wants (to Allah (SwT)). However at the stage of Rida – even within a person's own soul – there is no resistance in relation to his wishes and desires – and this is the difference between Taslim and Rida.

These levels mentioned form the four stages of the spiritual travel towards Allah (SwT) in the hopes of attaining closeness to Him. It is very easy to explain these levels through words, however how far the distance of travel is between each one of them!

Sometimes, these levels are also known as [فناء في الله] or complete annihilation in Allah (SwT). Although it should be kept in mind that the word [فناء] has two meanings, of which the first is the known and rational interpretation which is reaching to the level of Rida. In this stage, a person forgets all of his own personal wishes and desires while in the spiritual presence of the Pure Essence of his Lord and truly this is the correct meaning of the phrase [فناء في الله] which is also the agreed upon meaning in the Islamic legislations and our intelligence.

Of course this in no way contradicts the philosophy of Du'a (supplication) and requesting our needs from Allah (SwT). Thus, the person who has reached to this final stage of perfection of his «man (true faith) – meaning the stage of Rida – is still in need of Du'a and supplicating to Allah (SwT).

All of these stages can be achieved and reached through patience and perseverance. Principally, patience and standing firm is the root of all forms of happiness and contentment.

The fifth piece of advice from the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in his testament was to observe patience, which in reality acts as the guarantor to being able to perform the first four pieces of advice.

How many times have we seen that in order to reach these levels of perfection, a person readies himself and practices these acts for a few days – however that which is important is that one must have perseverance while treading on this path and must perpetually stay upon it. It has been said many times that any person who has reached the levels of 'Ilm (knowledge), action (upon what he has learned) and Taqwa, has done so through the patience and perseverance that he displayed while on this path.

In the end of this tradition there is a statement made that love and hate, giving to others and holding back things from others, must all be done sincerely for the sake of Allah (SwT) – since all of these are signs of a person who has perfect «man!

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