

Discourse 14: Characteristics of a True Believer – Part I

رُوي أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ قَالَ: يَكْمُلُ الْمُؤْمِنُ إِيمَانَهُ حَتَّى يَحْتَوِيَ عَلَى مِائَةٍ وَثَلَاثَ خِصَالٍ: فِعْلٌ وَ عَمَلٌ وَ نِيَّةٌ وَ بَاطِنٌ وَ ظَاهِرٌ. فَقَالَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ مَا الْمِائَةُ وَ ثَلَاثَ خِصَالٍ؟ فَقَالَ: يَا عَلِيُّ مِنْ صِفَاتِ الْمُؤْمِنِ أَنْ يَكُونَ جَوَّالٌ الْفِكْرِ، جَوْهَرِيُّ الذِّكْرِ، كَثِيرًا عِلْمُهُ عَظِيمًا حِلْمُهُ، جَمِيلٌ الْمُنَازَعَةَ...

It has been narrated that the Messenger of Allah (S) said to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as): “The true believer's faith will be completed when he possesses one hundred and three particularities and these can be divided up into five categories: actions that have been done in the past; actions that are done and continue to be done (in the present and future); (his) intention; the external characteristics; and the internal characteristics.” The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) said to the Prophet (S), “O' Messenger of Allah! What are these one hundred and three particularities?” The Prophet (S) replied, “O' 'Ali! Of the characteristics of a true believer are that he is continuously in thought; he performs the remembrance of Allah out loud; he possesses a great deal of knowledge; his forbearance is great; and his confrontations (with others) is done with beauty...” 1

In reality, this detailed tradition is a complete course in Islamic ethics (Akhlaq) which the Noble Messenger (S) presented to 'Ali (as). In this talk, the Prophet (S) summarized the Islamic morals into five categories which are: past actions, continuous and future actions, intention, internal characteristics and external characteristics.

What is the difference between [فعل] or past actions and [عمل] or continuous future actions? The first word refers to something which was done in the past and stopped in the past which a person sometimes still performs, whereas the second word refers to any action that is continuously being done.

The Noble Prophet (S) said that, “The first characteristic of a true believer is that he is one who is continuously in thought.” By this we mean that he is not a person who is like a rock that is stationary and stagnant – rather he is one whose thoughts are always continuously progressing and he is always striving to grasp new views and is never satisfied with his level of knowledge.

In this part of the tradition, the Prophet (S) has mentioned that the first characteristic of a true believer is in relation to his thoughts – and this shows the importance of thought in Islam.

The greatest act for a true believer is to continuously be in thought, and as it is said that the form of worship that Abu Dharr performed the most was thought and contemplation. If we seriously think about the outcome of the events (before we perform them) then we would not fall into the difficulties that we are in today.

The second characteristic that has been mentioned is the remembrance of Allah (SwT) out loud – in some versions of the tradition the word [جوهری] has been replaced with the word [جهوری] – however both mean out loud. In our opinion, both forms (of the tradition) relate to the fact that the remembrance of Allah (SwT) should be performed out loud.

It should be noted that by performing the remembrance of Allah (SwT) out loud, this does not go against the intention of doing this act simply for the pleasure of Allah (SwT), since in the Islamic legislation, we have been commanded to remember Allah (SwT) both out loud and also quietly. In addition, we have also been told to give the Sadaqah and Zakat both privately and also in the open and each of these has their own benefit and advantage.

When these acts are done in the open (for others to know about) it is a form of tabligh or propagation of the teachings of the religion; whereas when they are done in private and secrecy, it also brings about a special spiritual effect to the person.

The third characteristic of the true believer is that he has abundant knowledge. It has been mentioned in the traditions that the Divine reward that is given to a person (for one's acts of worship) is based on their level of knowledge and intelligence. Thus, it is possible that one person prays a two Rak'at Salat and another person performs one hundred Rak'at of Salat, however the person who performed two Rak'at may actually receive more Divine reward than the other person. In reality worship has a coefficient and the coefficient of worship is knowledge and intelligence.

The fourth characteristic of the true believer is that he has a great deal of forbearance. By this we mean that just as his knowledge is vast, his forbearance too is great.

A scholar interacts quite frequently with people within his society and if he does not possess forbearance, then he will definitely fall into troubles. We should take the forbearance and self-control of Prophet Ibrahim (as) as an example. In history, we do not have any group of people who were more corrupt than the people of Prophet Lut (as) and their punishment too was the most frightening of all other

forms of punishment:

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا جَعَلْنَا عَالِيَهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا حِجَارَةً مِّنْ سِجِّيلٍ مَّنضُودٍ

“When Our decree which was issued came to pass, We turned (the cities) upside down and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay spread layer upon layer.” 2

Their punishment was such that their cities were turned completely upside down. At one point, the Angels came down to let loose the punishment on these people which consisted of the raining of stones upon them, however they first came to Prophet Ibrahim (as) and gave him the good news that a son was born to him and his wife which made Prophet Ibrahim (as) extremely happy. After hearing this, he prayed to Allah (SwT) for the permission to intercede for the people of the tribe of Prophet Lut (as) and it is quoted in the Qur`an that it was said:

فَلَمَّا زَهَبَ عَن إِبْرَاهِيمَ الرَّوْعَ وَجَاءَتْهُ الْبُشْرَى يُجَادِلُنَا فِي قَوْمِ لُوطٍ. إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَحَلِيمٌ أَوَّاهٌ مُنِيبٌ

“When fear had passed from (the mind of) Ibrahim and the glad tidings had reached him he began to plead with Us for Lut's people. For Ibrahim was without doubt forbearing (of the faults of others), tender-hearted, oft-returning to Allah.” 3

It takes a great deal of forbearance for a person to pray for his intercession to reach to a tribe of people (such as that of the people of Lut (as)) and this is one sign of the nobility, forbearance and magnanimous heart that Prophet Ibrahim (as) possessed. Thus with this said the scholar too must have a great deal of tolerance and as much as possible, must try to correct the wrongs within the society slowly and try not to and remove all the wrong doings immediately.

The fifth characteristic of a true believer is that his method of speech is beautiful and when he discusses or speaks to others, it is through beautiful exhortation and he does not resort to a war of words or harsh disputes.

The conditions of our society today are very delicate. The dangers are only one step away from us and in these present conditions, what does our intelligence tell us to do? Should we just take any issue that comes up as a pretext or excuse to jump into the battle arena or does our intelligence tell us that the time we are living in right now is a time that demands harmony and unity?

Thus, we must always go back to the Qur`an:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

“And hold tightly to the rope of Allah all together and do not be divided...”

Is today not the day of unity of the entire nation? What does our intelligence tell us in regards to this?

The writers, those in charge of the government, the representatives of the Parliament, the University students, and all others!! I swear by Allah – we must all wake up!

Does our intelligence tell us that anytime an issue comes up that we must use this as an excuse to gather together and make our way from the Universities to the Masjid or other parts of the city such that the enemies can take advantage of such movements and activities?

It is our hope and prayer that if there is discussion and even disagreement then these take place under the banner of:

جَمِيلٌ الْمُنَازَعَةُ.

That we must have beautiful discourses and dialogues with one another as this is one of the characteristics of the true believer we must keep in mind the rules and laws and that the standards of unity are maintained.

A majority of the people within our country are religiously minded and when the Month of Ramadhan or the days of 'Ashura come around, we see the entire scene of the country changes – thus we can say that the people have a strong connection with the religion. Thus, we must gather around the religion which is our source of power and worth and make the best use of this agent that we have!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 64, Section of the Signs of a True Believer, pg. 310, tradition 45

2. Surat Hud (11), Verse 82

3. Ibid., Verses 74 and 75

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