

Discourse 15: Characteristics of a True Believer – Part II

In our previous discourse, we related a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) which he conveyed to Imam 'Ali (as) where he mentioned that a true believer would not be considered as such until he possess one hundred and three characteristics and these characteristics are divided up into five categories. In our previous discussion, we explained what these five categories were. Now we will relate five more characteristics.

...كَرِيمٌ الْمُرَاجِعَةِ، أَوْسَعُ النَّاسِ صَدْرًا، أَذَلَّهُمْ نَفْسًا، ضَحِكُهُ تَبَسُّمًا، وَاجْتِمَاعُهُ
تَعَلُّمًا...

”(The true believer is one who possesses) noble interactions (with others); his (spiritual) bosom is the most expansive from all other people; his soul is the most humbled (of others); his laughing is done (only) with smiling (not out loud); and his gathering (with others) is (only) in order to learn something... ”

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The first characteristic mentioned above is that a true believer's interaction with others is of a noble nature. This line actually has two meanings:

1. The meetings or interactions that the people have with him are dignified and venerable – meaning that when they want to meet him, if he has the ability he meets with them or he gives them a promise that in the future he will meet with them. If this are not possible then he excuses himself that he will not be able to meet with them. In this regards, the Qur`an states:

قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَذَى

“Speaking a good word (to others) and asking forgiveness (from them) is better than charity which is followed by aggravating (the other person).” 2

2. When such a person goes to meet other people, he does so with nobility and dignity. By this we mean that if he needs something from another person, he requests it from him with the proper etiquette – not that he is forceful or persistent in asking the person for a particular thing. Thus, he does not impose himself on others and then due to humility, they are forced or compelled to give him what he wants.

The next characteristic of the true believer is that he is one whose (spiritual) bosom is expansive – meaning that his heart is much more (spiritually) open than all other people. In relation to the spiritual openness of the heart, the Qur`an states the following:

فَمَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ وَمَنْ يُرِدْ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُ يَجْعَلْ صَدْرَهُ ضَيِّقًا حَرَجًا

“So then that person whom Allah intends one who is deserving of guidance) to guide (to the Truth) – He opens his heart up (to receive) al-Islam and whoever He intends (that person who is not deserving of guidance) to leave in misguidance, He constricts his heart.” 3

What is the true meaning of having an expansive chest? Those people who possess an expansive (spiritual) chest are able to endure anything that happens to them (things one does not enjoy, difficulties, trials), and he is a person who is not affected by people speaking bad about him and is also one who does not become hopeless quickly.

He is a person who takes in knowledge and information of various types and if a person was to speak or do something bad to such a person, he would keep this in the back of his mind and would not fill his head with the bad things that happen to him. However the person who has a constricted spiritual bosom is the person who, when afflicted with the smallest difficulty becomes upset and does not have the ability to accept and handle trials and tribulations.

The eighth characteristic is that one's soul is humbled. In the language of the 'Arabs, the word [ذلت] means humility and the meaning of the word [ذلول] is that of one that is disciplined. However in Persian, the word [ذلت] carries with it a very negative connotation – thus, it should be said that this characteristic is in the meaning of humility, meaning that a true believer has extreme humility and is humble in the presence of other people.

Whether another person is great or insignificant, he respects everyone and does not wait or expect that others should show respect to him (first).

The ninth characteristic of a true believer is that he possesses the trait of not laughing with a loud voice.

It has been mentioned in the tradition that the Prophet (S) never laughed with a loud voice – thus, even the laughing of a true believer should be done with dignity and following etiquette.

The tenth characteristic of the true believer is that when he is sitting in a gathering, he strives to learn and gain knowledge in something, and one does not busy himself with backbiting and other things which do not pertain to him or which have absolutely no benefit!

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1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 64, Section of the Signs of a True Believer, pg. 310, tradition 45
 2. Surat al-Baqarah (2), Verse 263
 3. Surat al-An`am (7), Verse 125

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