

Discourse 16: Characteristics of a True Believer – Part III

In our previous discussions, we had begun explaining a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) in which this great personality detailed one hundred and three qualities which the true believer must possess. Ten of these qualities have been explained in detail, and now we embark on explaining six more characteristics:

مُذَكِّرُ الْغَافِلِ، مُعَلِّمُ الْجَاهِلِ، لَا يُؤْذِي مَنْ يُؤْذِيهِ وَلَا يَخُوضُ فِيمَا لَا يُعْنِيهِ وَلَا
يُشْمِتُ بِمُصِيبَةٍ وَلَا يُذَكِّرُ أَحَدًا بِغَيْبَةٍ...

”(The true believer) is that person who continuously reminds those people who are negligent; they are teachers of the ignorant people; they do not aggravate other people who aggravate him; and they do not interfere in those things which are not their business; and if another person falls into a tribulation, (the true believer) does not rejoice at it; nor does he back-bite another person” 1

The eleventh characteristic of a true believer is that he “continuously reminds those people who are negligent” meaning that the true believer is a person who advises those around him who are inattentive (to the faith).

A person is said to be negligent (Ghafil) when he knows something however he does not pay attention (concerning that thing). For example he knows that drinking alcohol is haram (prohibited) however he does not pay attention to that ruling.

The twelfth characteristic of a true believer is that he is a “teacher of the ignorant person” – meaning that he teaches others around him who may be unaware (of their religious responsibilities). The ignorant (Jahil) is a person who does not know (something).

What is the difference between scolding the person who is negligent and guiding the person who is ignorant and (what is the difference) between Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar (Forcefully commanding to that which is ethically right and vigorously forbidding from that which is bad or evil)? These three obligatory acts must not be mixed up or confused with one another.

The negligent person is one who knows the (Islamic) rulings, however he is not attentive (meaning that he has forgotten the issue or ruling at hand). For example he knows that it is prohibited to backbite another person, however he forgets this and may get involved in an act of backbiting.

The ignorant person is the one who does not know the ruling and thus, we wish to teach him the ruling – for example a person who does not know the rulings in relation to backbiting.

The ruling of Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar is also something that is performed in regards to an issue in which the person is aware of the issue at hand and the rulings pertaining to it and is neither negligent of it, nor is he ignorant.

With this said, the question arises that what is the ruling of each of these?

In relation to a person who is negligent and inattentive, if the issue is not so important such as the eating of something which is najis (ritually impure), then it is not wajib (obligatory) to remind that person; thus this issue is only limited to those important tasks, for example, shedding the blood of an innocent person thinking that he is a sinner (one for whom the death penalty has been specified for in Islam and must therefore be killed after going through the judicial procedure).

The person who is ignorant to the rulings must be taught them and this act is a wajib (obligatory) one.

In relation to Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar in which a person knowingly and intentionally performs a sin, we must command him to good and prevent him from committing evil through the use of kind words.

Thus, each of these three acts is wajib (obligatory), however their scope is quite different from one another.

That which is normally seen among the common population is that they say “Let Musa be on his own faith and 'Isa be on his own faith” (meaning that we should not interfere with other people or pry into their lives) or some people say that, “You are not going to be in my grave” (so then do not tell me what to do and what not to do) but these are all words which have absolutely no meaning.

We must guide one another and not be indifferent to this issue. It is not equivalent to interfering in the lives of other people. Rather, it has been mentioned in the traditions that the example of a person who lives among a group of sinners is similar to a person who is sitting in a boat in his own area and drills a hole in the bottom of the boat. When other people start to ask him what he is doing he replies, “I am making a hole in my part of the boat” to which the people reply to him, “We all share the same eventual

outcome. If the boat has a hole in it, then we will all drown!”

There are other examples in the traditions such as the one in which it states that if a store in the shopping market of town catches fire, then when the people who work in that plaza get together to help put out the fire, the owner of that shop has no right to say “Why are you interfering here – this is my shop!” Since in reply, the people would say, “We too are working in this same plaza and it is possible that the fire from your shop may also affect and burn down our shop.”

These two examples are accurate portrayals of the philosophy behind Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar and are proof that this is a general responsibility for all people since we all share a common eventual end.

The thirteenth characteristic of the true believer is that he does not irritate people who irritate him. In the Islamic understanding, we have two terms which are different from one another:

1. 'Adalah:

The meaning of this word is: To that amount that you have been oppressed, you are permitted to oppress the other party (not more than this).

2. Fadilah:

This is something other than 'Adl or justice and in reality, is what we refer to as 'Afw or forgiveness. By this we mean that we do good to a person who does bad to us and this is one of the greatest characteristics, such that the Prohpet of Islam (S) has said:

يُعْطَى مَنْ حَرَمَهُ.

“The person who has prevented you (from something) should still be given (his right).”

يُعْفَوُ عَنْ مَنْ ظَلَمَهُ.

“The one who has done oppression should be forgiven.”

يُصَلِّ مَنْ قُطِعَهُ.

“Try to establish ties with the one who broke off relations.”

The perfect true believer does not go after 'Adalah, rather, he goes after Fadilah.

The fourteenth characteristic of a true believer is that he does not interfere in things which are not his business. The phrase in this tradition [ما لا يعينه] is in the meaning of [ما لا يقصده] which means that the true believer stays away from anything that is not related to himself.

One of the most important challenges that people face is when others interfere in things which are none of their business. This even happens at the level of government and also as we see when one country tries to interfere in the affairs and business of another country.

The fifteenth characteristic of a true believer is that if another person falls into a tribulation, he does not rejoice at the misfortune of that person.

In life, we have both good and bad days and a true believer is that person, who when difficulties fall upon him, does not resort to rejoicing at another's misfortune. The true believer is a person who does not say, “You see what kind of troubles Allah has placed upon you! I told you that you should not do such and such an act!” Speaking in such a way to another person is a very cowardly, foolish thing to do and is just like rubbing salt into a wound on the body. Although it is very likely that the person is facing some tribulation due to some bad deeds that he performed, however a true believer must not rejoice at this sort of thing because maybe tomorrow, a tribulation may come his way, since all of us face difficulties in our lives.

The sixteenth characteristic of a true believer is that he does not backbite another person. As for the importance of not backbiting another, it is sufficient for us to mention that the Late Shaykh al-Ansari, in his book al-Makasib has mentioned that if a person who backbites does not ask Allah (SwT) for forgiveness before passing away, then he will be the first person to enter into the hell fire and if he asks for forgiveness and it is accepted from him, then he will be the last person to enter into Paradise.

Backbiting destroys the character and respect of another Muslim and as we know, the character and respect of a Muslim is sacred, just as his blood is sacred and sometimes it can be seen that his character and respect are actually more important than his blood (life)!

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 64, pg. 310

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