

Discourse 17: Characteristics of a True Believer – Part IV

In the previous discussions, we had narrated a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) in which he listed one hundred and three characteristics to Imam 'Ali (as) that a true believer must possess in order to be classified as being complete and one who possesses true faith. Up until now, sixteen characteristics were mentioned and in this discussion, we will cover six more.

...بَرِيئاً مِنَ الْمُحَرَّمَاتِ، وَاقِفاً عِنْدَ الشُّبُهَاتِ، كَثِيرُ الْعَطَاءِ، قَلِيلُ الْأَذَى، عَوْناً
لِلْغَرِيبِ، وَ أَباً لِلْيَتِيمِ...

”(The true believer is one who) stays away from all prohibited things; is at a standstill when it comes to things which are doubtful (in the religion); gives away a lot (to others); bugs and annoys others very little; is a helper to the stranger; and acts as a father to the orphans...”

The seventeenth characteristic of a true believer is that he stays away from all prohibited things, meaning that not only does he refrain from that which is prohibited, but he also keeps away from sins.

There is a difference when we state that a person does not commit sins and when we say that he stays away from sins. There are people who find that when committing certain sins brings about pleasure for them, however because of Allah (SwT), they keep away from these acts. However, sometimes it is possible that through a person's self-building and purification of the soul, one reaches a level that he actually develops an aversion to committing sins and does not gain any sort of pleasure from these acts. It takes a great amount of work and struggle to reach this stage in a person's life such that one can develop pleasure in obeying Allah (SwT) and an aversion to sinning.

The eighteenth characteristic is that one is at a standstill when it comes to things which are doubtful in the religion. Areas of doubt can actually lead to the (performance) of forbidden acts and the one who

falls prey to performing acts which are doubtful in the religion, will eventually find himself following the prohibited acts (as well). These doubtful acts resemble the shoulder on the side of the road (which a person driving a car must avoid to stop himself from falling into the ditch) and is something which the true believer must stay away from.

In reality, the doubtful acts are the sanctuary of the prohibited acts and thus, we must stay away from these since their force and power is just like electricity which is so great such that if a person was to get too near this electricity, it would not only pull the person close, but it would also burn him!

In our traditions, there is a good explanation which has been given that states, “Do not enter into the private property of other people otherwise you may be pulled towards usurpation.”

There are many people who have been pulled towards drug addiction in their lives and in the beginning we see that they give the excuse that they are smoking just to pass time and for pleasure, however it reaches a point where they are completely dependent on such things.

The nineteenth characteristic of a true believer is that he gives a great deal to other people. As we know, the word “a lot” is a relative term. For example, if in order to build a hospital which is needed in a society, a rich person (who has millions of dollars) gives \$100,000.00 then this amount may be – in relation to his amount of wealth – something very small. However if a person who is not well off gives \$1,000.00 (which may be a large portion of his savings), then everyone would congratulate him. Therefore, giving gifts and charity are things which are relative.

During the battle of Tabuk, the Prophet (S) asked the people to prepare the Muslim troops for battle and everyone helped quite a bit. Amongst those who gave in the way of Islam, there was a simple worker who in order to help the Muslim army – worked an extra night and whatever earnings he gained on that night, he presented to the Prophet (S). The Munafiqun (Hypocrites) started to make fun of this person, then the following verse of the Qur`an was revealed:

الَّذِينَ يَلْمِزُونَ الْمُطَّوِّعِينَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي الصَّدَقَاتِ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ إِلَّا
جُهْدَهُمْ فَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنْهُمْ سَخِرَ اللَّهُ مِنْهُمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

“Those who taunt those of the Faithful, who give their Sadaqat (charity) freely, and also those who give to the extent of their earnings and scoff at them (as well); Allah will pay them back their scoffing, and they shall have a painful chastisement.” 1

It was at this time that the Prophet told Abu 'Aqil (the man who had worked extra to help the Muslim troops) to place the dates that he had earned on top of the other dates that others had given so that through his hard work, the entire supply would be filled with Divine spiritual blessings.

The twentieth characteristic of a true believer is that he tries to limit inconveniences to other people. In order for this point to be made clear, we present the following example.

Life is filled with troubles and inconveniences such as the need for everyone to build a house to live in and thus, when this is being done, the place where people would pass from becomes blocked while a house is being built. However that which is important is that those inconveniences that come about naturally in our daily life must be avoided as much as possible. Thus, a true believer is the person who, if he needs to inconvenience other people, keeps it to a minimum amount.

The twenty-first characteristic is that one helps and assists another person who is in a strange land and is an outsider (in that area).

It is very good to help your neighbours and your close family members however in reality, this is nothing more than “give and take” as today you may help your neighbour and tomorrow he will come to your aide. However that which is important is that you help and assist another person and do not expect that he gives you something back in return for your help. Thus, the highest level of assistance is shown to a foreigner or stranger.

The twenty-second characteristic is that one acts as a father to the orphans. In this tradition, the Prophet (S) did not tell us that the true believer is one who helps, feeds and takes care of the orphan – rather, he told us that he acts as a father to the orphans. This means that any job or responsibility that the father would have over his own children is the same thing that the orphan is entitled to receive.

We must keep in mind that these ethical commandments were explained and brought forth in an environment in which anger and hatred for other people ran strong and had a negative effect on the people and the way they interacted with others.

We hope and pray that Allah (SwT) makes us all successful in being able to fulfill these obligations and that we pay close attention to these characteristics of a true believer who has perfected his faith!

1. Surat al-Tawbah (9), Verse 79

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/ethical-discourses-vol1-makarim-shirazi/discourse-17-characteristics-true-believer-part-4>