

Discourse 21: Characteristics of a True Believer – Part VII

The 25th of the lunar month of Dhul Qa'dah – according to some of our traditions – corresponds with the event known as Dahwul Ard (Earth Day). It is also the day when Imam 'Ali b. Musa al-Rida (as) proceeded on his journey from Madinah towards Tus (in present day Iran).

As for the first event, we know that the meaning of Dahw is to spread or stretch and it is from the following verse of the Noble Qur'an that we extract this meaning:

وَ الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحِيهَا

“And after that He (Allah) spread forth the Earth.”¹

What exactly does it mean to spread or stretch out the Earth and how do we rationalize this theory with today's science which states that the Earth has come from the Solar System (that we exist in) and is actually a piece of the Sun which broke off?

When the Earth was separated from the Sun, it was a ball of fire with molten liquid upon it. After this occurred, air pressure was formed around the Earth from the water which was being transformed into vapor and with this, a period of heavy rains started to fall upon the Earth. This rain took over the entire face of the Earth and after a bit of time, some of the water settled into the Earth and the dry ground that was covered by water began to show.

Thus, the term Dahwul Ard is in the meaning of that day when the dry Earth was brought forth from the rain and water which was upon the Earth, and according to the traditions, this event started from the House of Allah in Makkah.

Looking at the knowledge and science of today, this theory has not been proven wrong.

In reality, this day was a day of great blessing from Allah (SwT), since He brought forth the dry, barren Earth from under the water which led to this planet being suitable for habitation.

In addition, according to some of the books of history, Imam 'Ali b. Musa al-Rida (as) began his journey from Madinah towards Tus on this day and this is also a great Divine blessing from Allah (SwT) for the people of Iran. It is through his footsteps into that country that lead to the habitability, spirituality, sanctity and the blessings of Allah (SwT) being showered upon them, and if the sacred burial spot of the Imam (as) was not in this country, then the Iranians would have had no place for refuge.

Every year, close to 15,000,000 people perform his visitation (Ziyarat) in order to renew their pledge of allegiance to the Ahlul Bait. It is only through the spiritual shadow of the Imam (as) which covers the country which prevents calamities from befalling the Iranians

In any case, for various reasons, this is a very special day and we pray that Allah (SwT) grants everyone the ability to make use of the Divine Blessings that are accompanied with this day.

We have been narrating a tradition from the Prophet of Islam (S) to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in which the Noble Prophet (S) listed one hundred and three characteristics of a true believer and of them, thirty-one have been discussed, and in today's discussion, we cover another four.

...حَلِيمًا إِذَا جُهَلَ عَلَيْهِ، صَبُورًا عَلَى مَنْ أَسَاءَ إِلَيْهِ، يُبْجَلُ الْكَبِيرَ وَ يُرْحَمُ
الصَّغِيرَ...

”(the true believer is one who) when a person (says) something out of ignorance about him, is forbearing; patient when a person does something bad act to him; shows respect to his elders and shows mercy to the young ones...”²

The thirty-second characteristic of a true believer is that he shows forbearance when a person acts with ignorance in relation to him, and if the ignorant person says something bad to him, then he bears it with patience and he does not reply to the bad thing with something bad.

The thirty-third characteristic is that he bears with patience when a person intentionally commits something bad to him. The difference between this characteristic and the previous one is that the previous characteristic was in relation to when a person said something bad, whereas this second level, it is in relation to a person doing a bad action against him.

In Islam we have both what is known as the legislative law and the ethical law. The legislative law states that if a person does something bad to you, then you are permitted to do something bad to him in return

but only to that limit which he has done to you. In these regards, the Qur`an states:

فَمَنْ أَعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا أَعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ

“So then if a person attacks you then you too attack him just as he attacked you.”³

These sorts of laws have been put into place so that those who wish to perform bad deeds would not go to an extreme (of performing bad acts because they know there would be some sort of accountability even in this world). However the ethical law (in relation to this) is that not only should we not retaliate with bad in the face of a bad deed, rather, we should repel the bad act with something nice! In this regards, the Qur`an states:

وَإِذَا مَرَّ بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِرَامًا

“And when they pass by vain and trivial acts, they pass by with dignity.”⁴

إِذْفَعِ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ السَّيِّئَةِ

“Repel evil with that which is much better.”⁵

وَإِذَا خَاطَبَهُمُ الْجَاهِلُونَ قَالُوا سَلَامًا

“And when the ignorant people address them, they (simply) say, 'Peace'.”⁶

This is the ethical law.

The thirty-fourth characteristic of a true believer is that one shows respect to the elders. The issue of showing respect to one's elders and old people of the community has been mentioned quite often in the traditions. The late Shaikh 'Abbas al-Qummi narrates the following tradition in his work Safinatul Bihar:

مَنْ وَقَرَ ذَا شَيْبَةٍ لِشَيْبَتِهِ آمَنَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَىٰ مِنْ فَرْعِ يَوْمِ الْقِيَمَةِ.

“The person who shows humility to an old person due to his old age, Allah, the Most High, will protect that person from the evil on the Day of Judgement.”⁷

In another tradition it is mentioned:

إِنَّ مِنْ إِجْلَالِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى إِكْرَامُ ذِي الشَّيْبَةِ الْمُسْلِمِ

“Surely one of the greatest things of Allah, the Most High, is the showing of respect to the older Muslims.”⁸

The thirty-fifth characteristic of a true believer is that he shows mercy and compassion to those younger than him.

It is well known that when a person meets a, old person, he shows respect simply for the fact that the person is of old age, and when someone meets a younger person he shows him honour and respect because he has committed less sins than him(since he has been on this Earth a shorter time)!

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1. Surat al-Naziyat (79), Verse 30
 2. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 64, pg. 311
 3. Surat al-Baqarah (2), Verse 194
 4. Surat al-Furqan (35), Verse 72
 5. Surat al-Mu'minun (23), Verse 96
 6. Surat al-Furqan (35), Verse 63
 7. Safinat al-Bihar, under the word شَيْب
 8. Ibid.

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