

Discourse 25: The Status of Mankind in This Life and in the Next World

قَالَ عَلِيٌّ : أَلَّا وَإِنَّ الْيَوْمَ الْمِضْمَارُ، وَغَدَاً السَّبَاقُ، وَ السَّبَقَةُ الْجَنَّةُ، وَ الْغَايَةُ النَّارُ...

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) has said, “You should know that today (this world) is the day to prepare (for the next life), and tomorrow (the Day of Judgement) is the day of competition and the prize (for this competition) is Paradise (for the good doers) and the punishment is Hell (for the evil doers).”¹

In this tradition from our master, the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as), we see a very clear explanation of the transient world and the next life. In addition, the picture of the sojourn of humanity in these two places is also presented in this tradition.

In a very interesting explanation of the next life, it has been compared to a competition ground and just as he has said, “Today is the day of preparation.”²

The word “مِضْمَار” comes from the root words “ضمور” and “إضمامار” in the meaning of preparing a horse for a competition. As it is known, in order to take part in competitions, horses must go through intense training so that they can eliminate their body fat and prepare themselves for competition against other horses and this entire time frame of preparation and training is known in 'Arabic as “مِضْمَار”.

In reality, the entire world outlook of Islam in relation to this world and the next life can be summed up in the following two sentences:

السَّبَقَةُ الْجَنَّةِ وَالْغَايَةُ النَّارِ.

“...and the prize (for this competition) is Paradise (for the good doers) and the punishment of Hell (for the evil doers).”

Therefore, this world is the place of preparation and is not our final or ultimate goal. During this time of preparation and training, a person must continuously be within the stage of self-building, and if he slips or falls into neglect for even one second while on this path and is not able to develop the necessary prerequisites, then there will be no chance for him in the field of the next life.

Maybe you have heard of the preparation that astronauts go through in their profession? They have a difficult training mission in which they operate in a weight-less environment. Everything that is outside of the gravity of the Earth becomes weightless and even the human being himself is not beyond this law. This state of weightlessness – for the person who has become accustomed to the gravity of the Earth – is a very difficult and frightening state to be put in. Thus, they must be trained in a man-made weight-less environment so that when they are put face to face in such an environment in space, they are not dazed – rather, they are able to accomplish their goals.

These astronauts are placed in a specially designed chamber and are continuously moved up and down – of course in such a way that would not lead to any broken bones – and after coming out of this enclosed chamber, the face, head and feet of some these astronauts are sometimes bloody (due to minor injuries). No matter how much they try and take care to protect themselves, this free falling is not something that a person can come out of easily with no scratches to his body.

This sensation of weightlessness can be experienced on Earth when a person is free-falling – such as when a person falls from a high place down to the ground. For those few seconds that he is in the air, he will experience what it means to be weightless – the same feeling that the astronauts feel! If we consider the journey that astronauts take, we see that it requires a lot of preparation (on their part) accompanied by difficulties and struggles.

Just imagine what is required for the greatest trip – the one towards the next life! How much must a person prepare for that trip and how many difficulties one has to go through and what sort of things must one's soul struggle to fight against so that one would be able to reach that great and exalted status of the next life! Is it possible that without any struggles or difficulties and by not tasting the pain of inconvenience and of bereavement, one can reach to any station or rank (in the next world)?!

There are many people, who in order to reach higher levels and ranks with the military, go through difficult exercises and training and force themselves to experience the pangs of hunger and thirst such that sometimes they go for long periods of time with only water to train the body:

مزد آن گرفت جان برادر که کار

نابرده رنج گنج میسر نمی شود

کرد

“It is not possible to gain the prize without going through difficulties, The one who went through troubles is the one who will get the reward.”

It is here that we must stop and think – What have we done in this world? What stage have we reached to here?3

If we wish to reach to grand and lofty (spiritual) levels and we desire to attain proximity to the Lord, then we must endure and withstand the difficulties and challenges and must struggle against our soul.

If we look at those people who only live for this material world, we see that they have not attained the materialistic pleasures of the world without going through difficulties – thus, how can we assume that without any difficulty or challenge, we would be able to reach to the (lofty levels of the) next life?

This world is the house of difficulties and tests and in this temporary residence, the tests of the close, intimate friends (the Awliyah) of Allah (SwT) are harder and much more difficult (than others face):

جام بلا بیشترش می

هرکه در این بزم مقرب تر است

دهند

“Whosoever is closer (to Allah) in this world will have to give a more difficult examination.”

Some of the examinations (of this world) are general while others are specific. The common people are tested in one way while the close friends of Allah (SwT) are tested in other ways and thus, this world must continuously be a place of competition for all people.

Of course, there are some people, who depending on the time period that they live in, who are faced with special tests related to that specific time. For example, that person who was in the battlefield in Karbala or who was taking part in the Battle of Badr had a special test (that he was put through).

During the Islamic Revolution (of Iran) and the time immediately following the Revolution, the situation was very unique and extraordinary and some people were not able to make it through those days. It is as if there was a sieve or strainer that was busy removing all of those people who were not sincere and only preserved those who were genuine and honest. In that period during the course of the Revolution, those who forgave (others), were aware of what was happening (around them) and who were sincere, etc... were known and well-defined (from the others).

In any case, it was a time period that from one point of view, was very dangerous and something that was confusing to people and from another point of view, it also brought about great happiness and joy.

Therefore, in those areas where the difficult storm of the tests of Allah (SwT) are active, it is that same area where some people actually take benefit from such an environment.

However it is also a very dangerous place for those people who have not prepared themselves (for the tests) and thus, they get caught in the tail wind of such a storm and are destroyed!

1. Nahj al-Balagha, Speech 28

2. It has been mentioned in the Qur'an that:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ

“O mankind! Surely you are ever toiling on towards your Lord, painfully toiling, but you shall definitely meet Him.” (Suratul Inshiqaq (84), Verse 6)

This verse points to the fact that the nature of this world's life is that it is not free from difficulties or tribulations at any stage and that there is no difficulty or challenge – whether it be physical and related to our bodies, or spiritual and related to our soul – or both – except that they will definitely occur to us.

In many thought-provoking traditions from Imam `Ali b. al-Husain (as) we read that, “Ease and comfort are not present in this world, nor are they for the people who are living here. Ease and comfort are only reserved for Paradise, and difficulties and trials have been reserved for this world for the people of Paradise. It is for this reason that difficulties and challenges have been created in this world and for those who are living here. Thus, any person who receives a measure of this world in his hand, two times this amount will actually be given to him (in this world).”

In other words, whoever gets more pleasure and enjoyment from this life is actually poorer and more needy (than others) since (when he has more in this world), he needs other people to help protect his wealth and for this, he is also in need of more things (to help him protect himself and his wealth). Thus, in the wealth of this material world, there is no way to gain solace and relaxation.

3. In addition to the competition for the next life, in this world too, we have a form of competition which has been referred to as the competition while on the path of spiritual happiness.

It has been mentioned in verse 133 of Surah Ale `Imran:

...وَسَارِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ

“And compete with one another to reach the forgiveness of your Lord...”

This verse compares the struggling and striving of the righteous doers to the competitors taking part in a contest in this material world. However, the ultimate purpose and aim (of the competition of this life) is the forgiveness of Allah (SwT) and the blessings of the everlasting home in Paradise.

In reality, this verse of the Noble Qur'an has made use of a very interesting, physically demanding similitude which is that: when a person wants to do some act, if he is alone in this endeavour (with no one around him or competing with him), then naturally he would carry out his task slowly and in a normal manner. However, if one was to take his job or work as a competition, that too a competition in which the prize is something very valuable which he has been told about beforehand, then he will definitely put forth all of his energy and strength to get the job done and one will also try to work as fast as possible so that one is able to reach his goal faster.

If the primary goal of this competition (in this life) is to reach the forgiveness (of Allah (SwT)), then it is because it is not possible to reach any spiritual level without first achieving and attaining the forgiveness of our sins, followed by the

purification of the soul.

The first thing which must be performed is the washing away of our sins and then we will be able to reach the level of spiritual proximity to Allah (SwT):

شستشویی کن و آنگه به خرابات درآی

“Spiritually cleanse yourself and remove all that which is bad from yourself.” (Tafsir-e-Namunah, vol. 3, pg. 91)

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