

Discourse 27: Characteristics of the True Believer – Part IX

We were previously narrating a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in which a total of one hundred and three characteristics of a true believer were explained. Instead of aimlessly wandering around (spiritually), the person who wishes to tread upon the path of Islamic 'Irfan (mysticism) should make use and act upon that which is mentioned in this tradition and one will get closer in his journey towards Allah (SwT).

In our previous gatherings, we discussed forty-one characteristics and today, we cover another four characteristics of a true believer.

... وَفُوراً، صَبُوراً، رَضِيّاً، شُكُوراً...

The Prophet (S) continued: "(A true believer) is: dignified (in the face of challenges), patient, content (with whatever Allah decrees for him), thankful (for the blessings that Allah gives him)."¹

We can actually place this tradition alongside the Khutbah of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) given to Hammam in which 110 characteristics that a muttaqin (those who have Allah consciousness) must possess was explained.

Three of the characteristics given by the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in his talk to Hammam were actually explanations of the words of the Prophet (S) in this tradition:

فِي الزَّلَازِلِ وَفُوراً وَفِي الْمَكَارِهِ صَبُوراً وَفِي الرَّخَاءِ شُكُوراً.

"In the face of calamities they are dignified, and in the face of detestable acts they are patient; and in the

face of ease and comfort, they are thankful.”²

The forty-second characteristic of a true believer is that of “وقوراً”. The word “وقور” is in the meaning of something heavy, and in the Noble Qur'an, we read:

وَ فِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرًا

“And in their ears is a heaviness.”³

Thus, we see that due to the sins that people commit, Allah (SwT) places heaviness in their ears such that they are no longer able to hear the Truth.

In the above mentioned speech to Hammam, the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) further said, “They (those who have consciousness of Allah) remain in the time of trials the way they remain in comfort.”

Sometimes, we see that certain people are like feathers such that even with the slightest movement (in the world around them), they lose their footing because they have absolutely no foundation. There are others who are like a leaf; others who are like the branches of a tree; and some who are like the entire tree – however even if a strong wind was to come about, it would rip the tree out of the ground by its roots! However a true believer is like a mountain such that even with strong winds – not only does it not move at all, rather the mountain actually makes the wind stop in its place – and a true believer is just like this!

وَأَلْقَى فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ

“And He has set up on the Earth, mountains, standing firm, lest it should shake with you!”⁴

In the commentary of this verse of the Qur'an it has been mentioned that if the mountains did not exist on the Earth, then the winds would have destroyed the all of mankind. Therefore, a true believer is one who is able to stop all sorts of corruption and evil and at the same time, move along with the current.

The troubles which the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) alluded to in this speech are sometimes in relation to the inner being of the person such as the inner (lower) passions and desires.

It has been mentioned in Surat Yusuf where it has been stated:

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَا أَنْ رَأَى بُرْهَانَ رَبِّهِ

“And (with passion) did she (Zulaykha) desire him, and he (Yusuf) would have desired her, but he saw the evidence of his Lord.”⁵

Sometimes, these troubles are outside forces, such as the evil whisperings of the many external Shaiatin that exist.

The forty-third characteristic is that of showing extreme patience and again, in the speech given to Hammam , the Commander of the Faithful,, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) said:

وَ فِي الْمَكَارِهِ صَبُورًا.

“And during the times of distress, one is patient.”

This means that in the face of the distressful events in life, the true, perfect believer has patience. It is not necessary that these distressful events come upon a person with great force – rather, even in issues such as sickness, poverty, losing one's loved ones, etc... one must have patience.

In the life of being a student, or and treading upon the path of being a soldier in the army of Imam al-Zaman (as), and even within the period of our youth, there are many difficulties and challenges that come about and if a person does not have patience and fortitude, then one will not be able to reach any stage in one's life.

We personally know of people who used to fast during the hot days of the summer months and at the time of breaking the fast, did not even have a piece of bread, or even money to go to the public bath to take a shower! The difficulties of today are definitely much less than this and vary for every individual.

If do not have patience, then what will happen? If we are not patient, will this change our situation in any way? How beautifully Imam 'Ali (as) has put it:

إِنْ صَبَرْتَ جَرَتْ عَلَيْكَ الْمَقَادِيرُ وَأَنْتَ مَأْجُورٌ وَإِنْ جَزَعْتَ جَرَتْ عَلَيْكَ
الْمَقَادِيرُ وَأَنْتَ مَأْزُورٌ.

“If you are patient, then surely that which has been ordained will be granted unto you and you will be rewarded; and if you are anxious or uneasy then surely that which has been intended will also be granted to you but you will be surrounded (by difficulties).”⁶

Thus, it is best that we observe patience until we are able to achieve the reward. One intellectual stated that: “Whenever I am faced with difficulties, I say to myself:

إِنْ لَمْ أَصْبِرْ فَمَا أَفْعَلُ.

The forty-fourth characteristic of a true believer is that one is content with whatever Allah (SwT) decrees for him.

We must strive and struggle, but with all the work that we put forth, it is only that which Allah (SwT) has decreed that will come to pass and a true believer must be content with this – thus, the stages of Rida and Taslim (contentment and submission) are very important levels.

With the progress in science and technology today, there are many things which have become clear and understandable for us, such as when a child develops jaundice at a young age. Today it has been shown that this yellowness of the child is actually an antibiotic that protects the child from other diseases whereas in previous times, it was thought that this is a great problem. There are many other 'problems' which humanity still does not know the reason why they occur but we must be patient despite everything.

The forty-fifth characteristic of a true believer is that one is thankful. In the Khutbah of Hammam , the Commander of the Faithful,, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) has stated:

وَ فِي الرَّخَاءِ شَكُورٌ.

“In times of ease, he is thankful.”

Often, when a person is in a good period of security, safety, and peace, one tends to forget Allah (SwT). However when one is plagued with difficulties, then one falls into the remembrance of Allah (SwT). The Noble Qur`an has said:

فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ

“And when they reach back to land (after facing difficulties at sea), once again they setup partners with Him (Allah).”⁷

Thus, a true believer is that person who remembers Allah (SwT) at all times – during old age and during one's youth and thanks Allah (SwT) during times of difficulty and ease.

It is our hope that Allah (SwT) gives us all the ability to act upon the words in this tradition, which are sufficient for our entire life time!

Part X

Continuing on the tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in which a total of one hundred and three characteristics of the true, complete believer were explained, we will cover two more in this discussion.

...قَلِيلُ الْكَلَامِ، صَدُوقُ اللِّسَانِ...

”(A true believer) speaks less and is truthful in his speech...”⁸

Thus, the forty-sixth characteristic of a true believer is that he speaks less. In relation to one speaking less, we have numerous traditions which show the importance of this trait since it is through the tongue that numerous sins are committed.

This instrument of sinning is available everywhere, at all times and is very easy to make use of. However as for other sins, there are (other) ways through which they are done and they have a specific time and place in which they can be performed – however the sins of the tongue are the most dangerous ones.

In addition, the tongue is that instrument through which (at least) thirty of the major sins are committed. However for sins such as drinking alcohol or gambling, there is only one instrument of the body at use when performing that sin. Therefore in order to counter the dangers of the tongue, we have been commanded to speak very less – rather – we must observe silence as much as possible.

In relation to the importance of maintaining silence and speaking less, we have many traditions of which, we narrate five short ones from the book Mizanul Hikmah. Contained within each of these tradition is one point in relation to the benefit of not speaking much.

1. Silence – The First Step in the Worship of Allah (SwT):

قال رسول الله : أَلْصُّمْتُ هُوَ أَوَّلُ الْعِبَادَةِ.

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, “Silence is the first form of worship (of Allah).”⁹

Scholars who write and speak about attaining spiritual proximity to Allah (SwT) first off advise their students to observe silence and speak less.

From the point of view of the general (Muslim) population, the person who drinks as much as one drop of alcohol when he is inside a Masjid is a very despicable person – however these same people (who think that this act is despicable) will spend the whole day – from morning to night – in that same sacred place indulging in backbiting, lying, and leveling false accusations against other people and they will not

even tire out in the least! This is because the detestability of the sins of the tongue are very less in the eyes of the people and they do not see such things as being bad to perform. But rather, this is one of the most dangerous things since as a sin gets more and more despicable, the more and more people will try to stay away from that sin, but the sins of the tongue are not even considered as anything bad by the common people.

2. Silence Keeps Shaitan Far Away:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ : عَلَيْكَ بِطُولِ الصُّمْتِ فَإِنَّهُ مُطْرَدَةٌ لِلشَّيْطَانِ.

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, “I advise you to prolong keeping quiet since this act repels Shaitan.”¹⁰

When a person speaks a lot, Shaitan is around him, busy listening to what he is saying and at any moment, it is possible that the person's tongue may begin to swerve and one may start to speak bad things. Sometimes the bad feelings, feuds and enmities which take place within families are due to the useless talk that Shaitan enters into.

3. Silence – The Best Protector:

عَنْ عَلِيٍّ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ): لَا حَافِظَ أَحْفَظُ مِنْ الصُّمْتِ.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said, “There is no protector better for protecting (a person) than silence.”¹¹

We see that sometimes the tongue is the reason why a person is even killed. In the face of jealousy, enmity and other Shaitanic things, remaining quiet is the best protector for a person.

4. Silence – The Source of Dignity:

عَنْ عَلِيٍّ : الصُّمْتُ يُكْسِيكَ الْوَقَارَ وَ يَكْفِيكَ مَوْنَةَ الْإِعْتِدَارِ.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said, “Silence clothes a person with the robes of dignity and reduces the need to always ask for forgiveness”¹²

Those people who speak too much in gatherings are less dignified than others. Thus, it is through maintaining silence that the honour of a person is increased.

In addition to this, a person does not need to always ask for forgiveness because when a person speaks

too much, he will fall into the trap of saying things which may necessitate him to apologize more often. This will lessen his spiritual worth – and if he does not ask for forgiveness, then his worth will be lessened. Thus, if he always has to ask others for forgiveness, then his dignity is lowered and similarly, his honour is also lowered in the eyes of the people since he is always forced to ask others for forgiveness for his errors.

5. Silence – The Garden of Contemplation and Reflection:

عَنْ عَلِيٍّ : أَلْصُّمْتُ رَوْضَةَ الْفِكْرِ.

Imam 'Ali (as) has said, “Silence is the garden of contemplation.”¹³

The person who speaks too much does not have the time to think, nor does he have time to study and do research. However when one is quiet, new thoughts and views are able to come into his head which get him to start thinking and contemplating on other issues.

Thus, when a person's tongue starts working (and he speaks too much), then there is no opportunity left for him to reflect and ponder. For this reason it has been stated that you should associate yourself with those people who speak less since they will inspire you with wisdom.

This is just a small section on the traditions in relation to silence.

Continuing on, the forty–seventh characteristic of a true believer is that he is truthful in his speech and when one does speak, his words are carefully thought out and truthful. It has been mentioned in the traditions that truthfulness in speech is one sign of true faith and it has been stated, “Do not examine people through the Salat they perform or the fasts that they keep, rather, examine and test them through the truthfulness of their speech. If their tongue is under control, then they have some worth to them and if their tongue is not under their control, then they have no worth to them and even if they perform worship of Allah, this worship has no merit in it.”

For every single Prophet that Allah (SwT) raised up, He commanded them to follow two principles in their mission:

أَدَاءُ الْأَمَانَةِ وَ صِدْقُ الْحَدِيثِ.

“Maintain and return trusts given to them and truthfulness in their speech.”

Every morning, the tongue speaks to the other parts of the body and asks how they are doing. The rest

of the body parts reply to the tongue that, “If you leave us, then we will all be okay!”

Insha–Allah, all of us will take this issue as something serious and will speak less and think and will also consider whatever we speak to be a part of the actions that we do (that we will have to account for) and we will not take part in those gatherings in which vain and useless talk is going on.

It is our hope that Allah (SwT) gives us all the ability to act according to these commandments.!

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1. Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 64, pg. 311
 2. Nahj al–Balagha, Speech 193
 3. Surat al–Kahf (18), Verse 57
 4. Surat al–Nahl (16), Verse 15
 5. Surat Yusuf (12), Verse 24
 6. Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 68, pg. 92
 7. Surat al–`Ankabut (29), Verse 65
 8. Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 64, pg. 311
 9. Mizan al–Hikmah, Under the word sumt, tradition 10805
 10. Ibid., tradition 10809
 11. Ibid., tradition 10816
 12. Ibid., tradition 10822
 13. Ibid., tradition 10823

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