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## Discourse 30: Six Things Which Lead to Success

عَنْ أَبِي الدَّرْدَاءِ قَالَ: خَطَبَنَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ جُمُعَةٍ، فَقَالَ: أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، تَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَمُوتُوا وَبَادِرُوا بِالْأَعْمَالِ الصَّالِحَةِ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَشْتَغَلُوا وَأَصْلِحُوا الَّذِي بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَ رَبِّكُمْ تَسْعُدُوا وَأَكْثَرُوا مِنَ الصَّدَقَةِ تَرْزُقُوا وَأْمُرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ تَحْصِنُوا وَانْتَهُوا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ تُنصَرُوا.

It has been narrated from Abil Darda' that: "The Messenger of Allah (S) spoke to us on Jumu'ah and said, "O' People! Turn back to Allah (in repentance) before you die; and before you get too busy (in your life) perform righteous deeds; correct the relationship between yourselves and your Lord so that you may gain felicity; and give a lot of charity (sadaqah) so that you are given (by Allah) sustenance; and enjoy goodness upon others so that you may be protected (from the hell fire) and forbid others from evil so that you may be assisted (by Allah)." 1

In this tradition, the Noble Prophet (S) gave us six commandments to follow:

### 1) Tawbah – Turning Back towards Allah (SwT)

Tawbah is one of the blessings from Allah, the Most High, to His servants. How beautifully has Imam 'Ali b. al-Husain as-Sajjad (as) put it in his Munajat of the Taibin (Whispered Prayer of Those who Turn in Repentance to Allah) where he calls out:

إِلٰهِي، أَنْتَ الَّذِي فَتَحْتَ لِعِبَادِكَ بَابًا إِلَى عَفْوِكَ سَمِيئَةَ التَّوْبَةِ، فَقُلْتُ: تَوْبُوا إِلَيَّ

## اللَّهُ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحاً فَمَا عُذْرُ مَنْ أَغْفَلَ دُخُولَ الْبَابِ بَعْدَ فَتْحِهِ؟

“O' my Lord! You are the One who has opened up for Your servants the door towards Your forgiveness and You named it Tawbah when You said, { Turn back in repentance towards Allah – a sincere repentance } – so what then is the excuse for a person who is negligent in entering into the door after it has been opened?”<sup>2</sup>

The meaning of the sentence of the Prophet (S) in the tradition under discussion where he states, “Ask repentance before you die” is that immediately after we have committed a sin, we must turn back to Allah (SwT) – and this is because no one knows when death will come upon them.

In the Noble Qur`an, we read the following verse:

وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا وَ مَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ

“And no soul knows what it shall earn tomorrow and no soul knows in which land it shall die.”<sup>3</sup>

It has been narrated that the Prophet of Islam (S) – with all of the greatness and nobility that he possessed – would ask forgiveness seventy times every day! We claim to be followers of this great personality, so then how many times a day do we ask forgiveness and turn back to Allah (SwT)?

At night, before we go to sleep, how many acts do we bring to memory that we performed during the day? If a person was to sit, examine and meditate upon his actions everyday and ask for forgiveness (for his evil deeds), then the spiritual darkness would be lifted from one's heart, and the soul would become illuminated with the Divine Light.

It is for this reason that the best of actions that one can do before the break of dawn is to ask for forgiveness.<sup>4</sup> Thus, a person should wake up in the middle of the night and in the calm of the night, pray and ask for one's needs from Allah (SwT) and pour out his heart to Him – and in the words of the Qur`an one could be:

مُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ

”Those who seek forgiveness in the early hours.”<sup>5</sup>

Almost all of our major scholars who have written treatises on the spiritual travel towards Allah (SwT) have stated that the first stage in this journey is Tawbah – just as the Prophet of Allah (S) has said:

تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَمُوتُوا.

## 2) Performing Good Deeds

A person does not always think about his free time, ease and comfort and naturally feels that he will stay young for his entire life. One's thoughts are not always free and thus many obstacles can often be placed in one's path.

If you pay close attention to those around you, then you will notice that there are some people who have everything (materialistically). These people are not lacking anything in their material life however they say, “The yearning to learn and study has been taken away from me.” If one would like to increase knowledge, then one must develop Taqwa within oneself and must work towards self building and purification of the soul since whatever one has is through Taqwa (Allah consciousness). We must also perform good deeds before we get to a stage in our life where we are overcome by difficulties.

## 3) Reconciliation with Allah (SwT)

We see that, in relation to the events that happen around people, they are of three categories:

There is one group of people who only look at what others are saying; there is another group who look partially at what others are saying and also partially at what Allah (SwT) has commanded them to perform; and the third group are those who only pay attention to what Allah (SwT) has commanded them to do and ignore other people.

Keeping in mind this brief introduction, we see that when any event takes place, a person must see what it is that Allah (SwT) has ordered to be performed and do only that.

By this we mean that the first right that is upon us is that we must see what Allah (SwT) wants and then we should see what the people are saying. If a person is to first establish a firm relation with Allah (SwT), then in return, Allah (SwT) will correct that person's relation with other people (and thus, whatever the people want will be what Allah wants). This fact can be seen in a hadith from the Commander of the Faithful,, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in which he said:

مَنْ أَصْلَحَ بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ، أَصْلَحَ اللَّهُ مَا بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ النَّاسِ.

“A person who corrects his relationship between oneself and Allah, Allah will correct the affairs between himself and the people.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the only way to reach the path of true happiness is that we establish a close relationship with Allah

(SwT).

## 4) Giving Great Amounts of Sadaqah

Giving Sadaqah to others brings with it two important benefits:

1. One's sustenance will be increased;
2. Maladies and difficulties will be removed from a person.

In relation to an increase in sustenance, we see that this goes against the apparent aspect of this world, meaning that if a person gives charity in the way of Allah (SwT) then according to his bank account and the apparent outcome of this charity, his pocket should be empty. However according to the Islamic narrations, this act will actually increase a person's sustenance and wealth!

One should give Sadaqah in whatever amount possible such that the Prophet (S) has told us that we are even permitted to give away our old clothing as charity (if we don't have anything else to give) and in addition, this act of Sadaqah increases a person's life span.

When starting any journey, it is advisable to count the number of days that one will be away and actually put aside an amount of money to give in Sadaqah and this is something that all of us should act upon because this act of charity will serve as a barrier against anything that may come upon us.

## 5) & 6) Amr Bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar, Forcefully Commanding to that which is Ethically Right and Vigorously Forbidding from that which is Evil

These two important things have great benefit in them and in relation to them, the Commander of the Faithful,, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) has stated:

وَمَا أَعْمَالُ الْبِرِّ كُلُّهَا وَالْجِهَادُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ، عِنْدَ الْأَمْرِ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَالنَّهْيِ عَنِ  
الْمُنْكَرِ، إِلَّا كَنْفَتَةٌ فِي بَحْرِ لُجِيِّ.

“All of the righteous actions, including Jihad in the way of Allah – in relation to the act of Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar – can be comparable to the water in one's mouth and the water that is in the deep oceans.”<sup>7</sup>

Not paying attention to an act that another person is doing and leaving him to do as he wishes, which we usually refer to as “minding your own business” or “what does it matter to me,” or due to some other reason such as not wanting to trouble our friends and acquaintances or so as not to be a nuisance, we

refrain from this act. There is a famous saying which says, “What is the need to tie a handkerchief around the head when it does not hurt?” Acting in this way will slowly get us to the point that wicked acts will take rule over a society and the righteous doers will become less in number and good acts in general will be forgotten.

This is definitely an empty belief and a great mistake that people think that honour and dignity lie in the hands of other people and not in the hands of Allah (SwT), whereas it clearly says in the Qur`an that:

تُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ

“He gives honour to whomsoever He pleases and He debases whomsoever He pleases.”<sup>8</sup>

In another place in the Qur`an we read that:

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعِزَّةَ فَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ جَمِيعاً

“Whosoever desires honour, then with Allah alone is all the honour.”<sup>9</sup> !

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1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 186

2. The word used in this verse “نصوح” comes from the root word “نصح” which means sincere advice which one gives to another person. Thus, in this verse it refers to sincere repentance. The Noble Prophet (S) has said that, “Sincere repentance means that a person does not return back to committing the sin (which he has asked forgiveness for), just like the milk of a mother can not return back into her breast.”

Of course sincere repentance can only be accomplished when a person has complete understanding and awareness of the sins and their punishments – meaning that if we feel and know that committing sins will result in the punishment and burning in the hell fire, then we will never even come close to sins.

3. Surat Luqman (25), Verse 34

4. At the time when peace and tranquility have covered over everything and when all of the negligent people and those who are unaware (of the realities of life) are deep in sleep and the business and transactions of the material world have quieted down, those spiritual personalities and those whose hearts are spiritually alive rise up to remember Allah (SwT). While in His Grand presence, they seek forgiveness and ask for His pardon and drown themselves in the glory of the Divine Light and greatness of their Lord. With their entire presence, they cry out with the call of true monotheism and these people have been mentioned in the Noble Qur`an as follows:

مُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ

“Those who seek forgiveness in the early hours.” (Surat Ale`Imran (3), Verse 17)

Question: Why is it that from all the time that exists in the night and day, only the “late night” (or the early hours of the morning before sunrise) has been mentioned (in this verse), whereas we know that it is permitted to ask for forgiveness and

return back to Allah (SwT) at all times?

Answer: Our reply to this question is that because of the calmness of the material world and the tranquility and pleasure that has been achieved through the rest and sleep of the previous day, a person has more opportunity to pay close attention to Allah (SwT) and this explanation can easily be seen through trial and experimentation.

In addition, we see that when it comes to solving difficult issues, many of the scholars would make use of the late night/early morning period because at this time, the light of thought and the soul of the person is brighter and clearer than at all other times. Since the essence of worship and asking forgiveness is paying close attention and having presence of the heart then such a time of the night is the most worthy of all other times. (Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 2, pg. 344)

5. Surat Ale `Imran (3), Verse 17

6. Nahj al-Balagha, short saying 89

7. Ibid., short saying 366. A few points must be mentioned here:

(1) The word “معروف” comes from the root word “عرف” meaning something which is known, whereas the word “منكر” comes from “انكار” or something which is unknown.

Good deeds and actions are things that are well known to everyone, whereas bad deeds and things that are not liked are things that are unknown – and thus, the natural disposition (Fitrah) of a person is well aware of the first category, however not acquainted with the second type of action.

(2) Is the act of Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar a responsibility that can be deduced through our intellect, or is it something that is simply a commandment from Allah (SwT) to follow?

Some of the Muslim scholars are of the belief that the nature of these two acts (Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar) is that they are obligatory (and legislated by Allah (SwT)) but can only be proven from the narrated sources (the Qur'an and traditions) and the intelligence has no part to play in legislating this act. Thus, they believe that our intelligence can not tell us that if we see another person doing a bad or despicable act, then we are to stop him from doing it.

However we must keep in mind the interrelation of the society to one another and that there is no evil act which takes place within the human beings that is only limited to one particular part of that society. In fact, whatever happens can be compared to a fire (which has the potential to spread) and as such it is possible that it affect other areas. Thus, our intelligence has commanded us to act according to these two sources (the Qur'an and traditions). In other words, within the society there is no issue referred to as “individual dangers” and as such, any loss or harm that reaches one person in the society has the possibility of turning into a “societal danger” and it is because of this reason that the mind and intelligence commands a person who is living there to keep his spiritual environment pure and clean and one must not stop at any means to achieve this.

In a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) he has told us that, “A sinner who lives amongst other people is like a person who has boarded a boat with other people. When the boat reaches the middle of an ocean, if a person takes an axe and begins to make a hole in the boat where he is sitting, the people around him will begin to protest his act to which he will reply, 'I am doing what I want to do because this is my part of the boat!' If the other people who are with him do not prevent him from this act, then it will not take long that water will fill the entire boat and they will all end up drowning in the ocean.”

With this thought provoking example, the Prophet (S) showed us that the act of Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar is something which is logical and the permission for a person to look after and maintain the society is a natural right which goes back and relates to the eventual outcome of the entire society.

(3) The Importance of Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar

In addition to numerous verses of the Noble Qur'an, there are also countless traditions in the reliable Islamic sources that speak about the importance of these two great societal responsibilities, in which the eventual outcome and punishment for leaving these two important acts in a society have been mentioned, of which we will mention the following:

It has been narrated that Imam Muhammad b. `Ali al-Baqir (as) said:

إِنَّ الْأَمْرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَالنَّهْيَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ، فَرِيضَةٌ عَظِيمَةٌ. بِهَا تُقَامُ الْفَرَائِضُ، وَتَأْمَنُ الْمَدَاهِبُ، وَتَحُلُّ الْمَكَاسِبُ، وَتُرَدُّ الْمَطَالِمُ، وَتُعْمَرُ الْأَرْضُ، وَ يُنْتَصَفُ مِنَ الْأَعْدَاءِ، وَ يَسْتَقِيمُ الْأَمْرُ.

“Surely Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar are two great obligatory acts and through these the other obligatory acts are

protected and the teachings are also protected; as well, through these trading and transactions are made permissible and oppression is kept away; and the Earth is kept habitable and revenge is taken from the enemies and all other acts relate back to these two duties.”

The Noble Prophet (S) has stated:

مَنْ أَمَرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَى عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ، فَهُوَ خَلِيفَةُ اللَّهِ فِي أَرْضِهِ، وَ خَلِيفَةُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ، وَ خَلِيفَةُ كِتَابِهِ

“The person who commands to that which is good and forbids others from that which is wrong (Amr Bil Ma`ruf and Nahi `Anil Munkar) is deemed as the Khalifah of Allah upon His Earth and the Khalifah of the Messenger of Allah and the Khalifah of His Book.”

From these traditions we can clearly deduce that this great obligatory act – before all other things – is a part of the overall plan of Allah (SwT) and the appointment of the Prophets and the sending of the various Divine Books are also a part of His plan.

A person came to the Messenger of Allah (S) while he was sitting on the Mimbar and asked him:

مَنْ خَيْرُ النَّاسِ؟

“Who is the best person?”

The Prophet (S) replied to him:

أَمْرُهُم بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأَتَقَاهُمْ لِلَّهِ وَأَرْضَاهُمْ

“That person who – more than others – enjoins goodness to others and prevents them from the evil and the one who is the most conscious of Allah and who tries to please Allah more than others.”

In another tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) it has been related that he said, “You must command others to perform righteous deeds and must prevent them from the forbidden acts and if you do not do this then Allah will appoint oppressors to rule over you who will neither show respect to the elders, nor will they show mercy to the young ones. The righteous and pious from among you will supplicate, however their prayers will go unanswered. They will request help from Allah, but He will not assist them and these people will even ask for repentance for their sins, but Allah will not even forgive them their sins.”

All of the emphasis which has been placed on these two obligatory acts have been done, so that we can realize the importance of them which in reality are guarantors for the continuation of all individuals and the societal responsibilities which rule over the soul and life of the people. If these acts are not put into practice then all of the practical laws and principles of ethics and morality will lose their worth and value. (Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 3, pg. 37-40)

8. Surat Ale `Imran (3), Verse 26

9. Surat al-Fatir (48), Verse 10

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