

Discourse 14: Two Opinions In Regards To The Material World And The Next Life

عَنْ نَافِعٍ عَنِ ابْنِ عُمَرَ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ يَقُولُ: أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، هَذِهِ دَارُ تَرْحٍ
لَا دَارَ فَرَحٍ، دَارُ التَّوَاءِ لَا دَارَ اسْتِوَاءٍ، فَمَنْ عَرَفَهَا لَمْ يَفْرَحْ لِرَجَاءٍ وَ لَمْ يَحْزَنْ
لِشَقَاءٍ. أَلَا وَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَلَقَ الدُّنْيَا دَارَ بَلْوَى وَ الْآخِرَةَ دَارَ عُقْبَى، فَجَعَلَ بَلْوَى
الدُّنْيَا لِثَوَابِ الْآخِرَةِ سَبَبًا...

It has been narrated from Nafi' from Ibne 'Umar that he said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) say: 'O' people! This (the world in which we are in) is the abode of grief and is not the adobe of happiness; it is an abode mixed with intricacies and difficulties. The transient world is not one in which things are constant and smooth.

Therefore, the person who has a cognizance of it (the transient world) will not be happy with what it grants him, and will not be saddened by the loss he entails. Surely Allah has created the world as a place of trials and has created the Next Life as the abode of rest and in this way, the difficulties of the transient world are the means through which the rewards of the next life are earned."¹

In this tradition, two views in relation to the transient world and the next life have been expressed.

1. The transient world is the abode of sorrow, grief and difficulties and is not a place in which everything is easy.

This is something that we can see with our own eyes as everything is constantly in change and nothing remains stagnant. From the point of view of science, it has been proven that the Earth is going through a (physical) decline and even the Sun, with all of its greatness, will also one day cease to give us light, just as it is mentioned in the Noble Qur'an:

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ

“When the sun is covered over (and darkened).”²

Day by day, the entire universe is going towards decay and erosion and this is something which the scholars refer to as entropy. Therefore, we must not think that the transient world as the abode of happiness and pleasure.

If we were to truly understand the essence of the world just as has been explained, then we would never be happy with our meagre victories, nor would we become grief stricken with our sorrows!

Indeed, this is the correct viewpoint and is the true 'Islamic world view' of the transient world. This is also the essence of the verse of the Noble Qur`an which states:

لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَيْكُمْ

“So that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor be exultant at what He has given you.”³

We know that the Sun rises every day and sets every night – neither do we show our displeasure at the rising of the Sun in the beginning of the day, nor its setting in the evening. If a person was to have certainty that the transient world is also something which is not constant (and will set just as the Sun sets), then he would have been able to instill the following two lessons on nurturing of the soul conveyed by the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in Nahj al-Balagha. In one of his sermons, the Imam (as) has summarized the entire meaning of Zuhd (asceticism) in one sentence:

الزُّهْدُ كُلُّهُ بَيْنَ كَلِمَتَيْنِ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ قَالَ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ: لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَيْكُمْ –

“The entire essence of Zuhd (asceticism) is contained within two statements from the Qur`an where Allah (SwT) has said, ”(So that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor be exultant at what He has given you.)”⁴

Thus, asceticism means deliverance and freedom from the binds and shackles of the material, transient world.

2. The second point of view in relation to the transient world is contained in the words of the Noble Prophet (S) where he states, “The material world is the place of trials and tribulations.”

Thus, the transient world is just like the mother's womb which is the preparation ground for the fetus in which it readies itself to come into the life of its 'next world'. Just as the fetus grows in its mothers' womb, is fashioned and perfected and is finally ready to come into this world, so too our growth in this world is to prepare ourselves for the next life in the Hereafter.

In summary, the transient world is a school of learning and training (for the next world).

If the fetal and pre-delivery stages are correctly correctly, then after birth in the next life, we will be able to make the best use of the blessings of that existence! However, if the fetus is brought into this or the next world with deformities, then there will be great difficulties and trials to go through – and of course there is no way for it to return back to its original home!

Without doubt, the transient world is the abode of difficulties.

In reality, the nature of the life of this world is such that there is not a single stage which we pass through which is void of difficulties, problems and tribulations, whether these difficulties take the form of physical or spiritual trials or both. In addition, we do not see a single person who is free from experiencing these tests.

In many thought-provoking traditions from Imam 'Ali b. Husayn as-Sajjad (as) we read statements such as, "Ease does not exist in this world and for those who live in the world. Ease is limited to those in Paradise and the people in Paradise, while difficulties and tribulations have been created for the world and the people of the world."

Without doubt, if anyone is given a portion of goodness of this world, then he would instantly desire to have double that which he is given! It is for this reason that we are told that the person who is given more in the material world is actually poorer and more needy than others since when he gets more wealth, he then needs someone to help him protect his wealth! Therefore, there is no ease and comfort in possessing wealth while in the material world!

The Imam has then stated:

كَأَنَّ مَا تَعِبَ أَوْلِيَاءُ اللَّهِ فِي الدُّنْيَا لِلدُّنْيَا، بَلْ تَعِبُوا فِي الدُّنْيَا لِلْآخِرَةِ.

"The intimate friends of Allah would never struggle in the transient for the transient world, rather, they would strive in the transient world for the next life!"⁵

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 187

2. Surat al-Taqwir (81), Verse 1

3. Surat al-hadid (57), verse 23
4. Nahj al-Balagha, Short Saying 439
5. Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 27, pg. 203

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