

Discourse 15: The Psychological Effects Of Loving The Transient World

عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ يَقُولُ: إِنَّهُ مَا سَكَنَ حُبُّ الدُّنْيَا قَلْبَ عَبْدٍ إِلَّا التَّاطُّ فِيهَا بِثَلَاثٍ: شُغْلٌ لَا يَنْفَدُ عَنَاؤُهُ وَفَقْرٌ لَا يُدْرِكُ غِنَاهُ وَ أَمَلٌ لَا يَنَالُ مُنْتَهَاهُ. أَلَا إِنَّ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ طَالِبَتَانِ وَ مَطْلُوبَتَانِ، فَطَالِبُ الْآخِرَةِ تَطْلُبُهُ الدُّنْيَا حَتَّى يَسْتَكْمِلَ رِزْقَهُ وَ طَالِبُ الدُّنْيَا تَطْلُبُهُ الْآخِرَةُ حَتَّى يَأْخُذَهُ الْمَوْتُ بَغْتَةً.

It has been narrated from Ibne ‘Abbas that he said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) say: 'The one who is plagued with love of the transient world within his heart will be overcome with three trials: Continuous thoughts about the transient world will tire him and they will never stop; (one will develop a) poverty which will never be satiated; the long desires and wishes (which one possesses) will never be fulfilled.

Be aware! The transient world and the next life are both searchers and things which are being sought after (by others). So then, the person searching for the next life is being sought after by the transient world so that it (the transient world) can complete its granting of sustenance (to that person), and the one searching for the transient world is being sought after by the next life so that it can take him through a sudden death, gratifying itself!”¹

In the traditions, we see that the topic of 'love of the transient world' usually refers to 'worshipping the transient world' and not mere affection for it, governed by a balance. In this regards, there are various expressions used in the traditions such as, 'Love of the material world is the precursor to all sins.'

In addition, there are various sub-divisions within the traditions which explain the effects that love of the

material world exert on the psychology of a person.

The traditions tell us, “The person who is plagued with love of the transient world will be overcome with three tribulations and in reality, these are three spiritual inconveniences.”²

Almost the same phrase is mentioned in Nahj al-Balagha where it is mentioned:

مَنْ لَهَجَ قَلْبُهُ بِحُبِّ الدُّنْيَا، إِتَّاطَ قَلْبُهُ مِنْهَا بِثَلَاثٍ...

“The one whose heart is taken over by love of the transient world will have his heart overcome by three things...”³

1. One's mind will continuously be preoccupied and due to this, he will always feel tired and this exhaustion will never go away.
2. One will be plagued with perpetual poverty, which is actually spiritual poverty, from which there is no way to become prosperous! The more “things” which a person attains from the transient world, the more he will feel that he does not have enough as in reality, being needless is not something which is based on the outer, material aspects of a person; rather, it has its roots in the inner recesses of the soul. The one who worships the transient world will always be hungry for more and will never be satiated with what he has.
3. One will also entertain long desires which have no end to them. The long desires will also not give up enticing the person, and anytime one of the material desires is fulfilled, another desire will take its place – in this way, the desires would have no end to them!

Such a person (who has these continuous desires) would never be able to find tranquility since he has lost control of his soul and whatever tranquility and ease he had would be taken away from him. Even during the state of Salat, one's mind would be focused on the transient world such that he would be oblivious to what he was saying; while eating food, his thoughts would be on the material world, making him unaware of what he has eaten!

At this point, it is necessary to mention the following:

1. People give importance to those things which, in reality, have no value to them – but why is this? The answer to this lies in the fact that people feel it is important to have peace of mind during the short life in the transient world.

However today, we see that even though people's lives are much better and organized, still the various psychological and mental pressures are present – rather, they have increased! In other words, the physical difficulties that existed in the past do not exist today, however the spiritual challenges have

increased! A prime example is that long journeys are now made in a short period of time. In the past it used to be said:

السَّفَرُ قِطْعَةٌ مِنَ السَّقَرِ.

“Traveling is a fragment of the hell.”

However with all of the ease in life today, we see spiritual problems on the increase since the mental tranquility of the people has decreased!

Therefore, we must ask ourselves why it is that the people's mental tranquility has decreased. According to the traditions, there are two reasons for this phenomenon:

1. People do not possess true faith.
2. People are busy worshipping the transient world.

We see that worship of the transient world takes place in some of the best centres of worship such as the hajj, and this is merely one place where this issue grabs hold of a person! It is amazing to see what the servants of Allah (SwT) perform at the hajj time! While in Makkah, the people are transported into another (spiritual) world, however when worship of the transient world takes over a person, then even while in the city of Makkah, such a person would run after the temporal world!

The person performing the hajj would run from here to there trying to acquire the ethereal world, whereas perhaps these same people would not chase after these material things while in their home country!

Various Branches of Worship of the Transient World

The worship of the temporal world is not limited to the worship of money alone. Rather, it is possible that the desire to attain a specific status, position or any sort of other worldly ranking may also make up worship of the temporal world.

For example, when a person enters a gathering and is forced to sit at the back of the hall since there is no other room left, he may not be able to sleep that evening. He would be upset and question why he was insulted in such a way. Slowly, this issue would build up and the negative thoughts he conjures in his head may perhaps be extended and he may begin to level insults against Islam and even against things held sacred in Islam! It is for this reason that we are told in a tradition that:

آخِرُ مَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْ قُلُوبِ الصِّدِّيقِينَ حُبُّ الْجَاهِ.

“The final thing to leave the heart of the truthful people (as-Siddiqin) is the love of status and position.”

In one section of the tradition under review, the Prophet (S) has brought a new phrase in which he has shown the fraudulence of the material world, and what an interesting phrase he has used! The Prophet (S) stated that, “Both the material world and the next life are in search of something and also are things which others are searching for.”

Whatever direction we place ourselves, we see that these two things (the material world and the next life) are at the opposite side! When we aim to seek the next life, we see the material world coming after us and we become that which the material world is looking for!

Allah (SwT) has promised that whatever sustenance He has decreed for us will definitely reach us, thus even though we seek the next life (and seek to distance ourselves from the transient world), the material world still comes after us and is in search of us!

The opposite of this theorem is also applicable that if we go in search of the material world, the next life will come looking for us! It will come in search of us to pull us closer to death. We would be so engulfed in the material world, that death would come upon us and we would not even realize it!

We must not think that if one goes in search of the next world that he must deprive himself of the transient world – not at all! If we struggle to achieve the next life, this does not mean we have deprived ourselves of the material world.

I have thought about this issue numerous times and have come to the conclusion that if we desire the material world, then we must be people of the material world AND people of the next life since if we wish to live in this world then we must faith in both of these realities. If we do not have reliance on both the material world and the next life then it is not possible to live a societal life. If millions of bricks were placed in random order on top of one another, they would never make a building. However if we were to follow a methodical manner, then we would be able to build a great structure!

If we are people of the material world, then we must also be people of the next life and must have faith in the theological beliefs so that we would be able to, by putting them all together in an orderly manner, reach to tranquility and peace in the life of this world.

If the entire society were to become true believers, then humanity would definitely be optimistic and act cheerful with one another. In addition, they would have full trust in one other and through this, an atmosphere of sincerity, intimacy and honesty would be brought about.

In the traditions, we are told that the Prophet (S) was:

طَبِيبٌ دَوَّارٌ بِطَبِّهِ.

“A (spiritual) doctor, treating patients with his medication.”

He knew where our pains were and thus, was able to pinpoint our illnesses and was able to show us the medication to take.

If today, one look at the cases in the court systems, he would notice that none of the arguments are of a spiritual type. All of the cases are in relation to the material, transient world! For a small amount of possessions of the material world, people are fighting with one another; being treacherous with one another; and acting criminally with one another!

It may even reach to an extreme in which two brothers would stand opposite of one another in the court fighting against one another! Without doubt, the source of all these sins is love of the material world. In these regards, the Noble Qur`an has told us that:

زَيْنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَ الْبَنِينَ وَ الْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ
وَ الْفِضَّةِ وَ الْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَ الْأَنْعَامِ

“The love of desires, women, sons, hoarded treasures of gold and silver, well bred horses, cattle and tilth is made to seem fair to people...”⁴

Women, children, money, gold – all of these things are simply a beauty for the life of this world!

In this verse, the verb used (زَيْنَ) is the passive tense and the importance of employing this form of the verb is that the people should realize who it is that has made these things an attraction. Is it Satan who has made these things fair seeming; is it one's friends; is it one's own lower desires and passions or is it Allah (SwT) who has done this to test us??

All of these forms of beauty and attraction prevent us from moving in any spiritual direction and it is for this reason that Islam has repeatedly advised us to abandon these distractions so that we can build a wall of defense around us to protect us from our lower desires.

Without doubt, the things in the material world which try to allure and distract us are many! !

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, pg. 188

2. The meaning of heart in this tradition is one's soul.

3. Nahj al-Balagha, Short saying 228

4. Surat ale Imran (3), verse 14

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