

Discourse 21: Modesty

قَالَ عَلِيُّ بْنُ أَبِي طَالِبٍ: مَا الْمُجَاهِدُ الشَّهِيدُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِأَعْظَمِ أَجْرًا مِمَّنْ قَدَرَ
فَعَفَّ لَكَادَ الْعَفِيفُ أَنْ يَكُونَ مَلَكًا مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ.

It has been narrated that the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (as) said, “The reward given to the Mujahid (soldier) who dies in the way of Allah is no less than the one who has the ability to perform a sin, however does not perform it. It is close (to being that) the person who has modesty is (actually) an Angel from amongst the Angels.”¹

In Islam, the status of the martyrs (Shuhada) is something very high and there is no status greater than this. In addition, the verses of the Qur`an present a visage of the martyrs which has not been presented for any other person:

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ

“Do not consider those who have been killed in the way of Allah as being dead; rather, they are alive in the presence of their Lord receiving sustenance (from Him).”²

The one being addressed in this verse is the Prophet (S) and we see that the wording used in this verse has not been mentioned for any other person in the Qur`an!

The martyrs are also given great importance in the traditions. The late Shaykh Kulayni has narrated that the Prophet (S) has said:

فَوْقَ كُلِّ ذِي بَرٍّ حَتَّى يُقْتَلَ الرَّجُلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ. فَإِذَا قُتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَلَيْسَ

فَوْقَهُ بَرٌّ.

“Above every goodness is (another) goodness, until that time that a person is killed in the way of Allah. So then when he is killed in the way of Allah, then there is no other goodness greater than this.”³

There is also a statement given by our master ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (as) in the letter he wrote to Malik al-Ashtar in which he stated:

وَأَنَا أَسْأَلُ اللَّهَ بِسِعَةِ رَحْمَتِهِ وَبِعَظِيمِ قُدْرَتِهِ أَنْ يَخْتِمَ لِي وَ لَكَ بِالسَّعَادَةِ وَ
الشَّهَادَةِ.

“And I ask Allah by the great expanse of His Mercy and by the greatness of His power that he makes my and your end felicitous and (to be blessed with) martyrdom.”

In addition, there are numerous other verses and traditions which show us the great status of the martyrs.

We know that the meaning of martyrdom (Shahadat) is very wide. The standard meaning is that a person dies in the way of Allah (SwT) by being killed in the battlefield. Such a person has a specific set of rules (Ahkam) related to him such that if he dies outside of the battlefield, some of the practical rules do not apply to him, however he is still considered a martyr.

However, there is another meaning to this term and according to this definition, we get a much wider and general understanding of the word. Any time a person dies while fulfilling his responsibility, he is considered as a martyr. For example:

مَنْ قُتِلَ دُونَ مَالِهِ فَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ.

“The person who dies without his wealth is a martyr.”

مَنْ مَاتَ فِي طَلَبِ الْعِلْمِ مَاتَ شَهِيداً.

“The person who dies in the state of seeking knowledge dies a martyr.”

مَنْ مَاتَ عَلَى فِرَاشِهِ وَهُوَ عَلَى مَعْرِفَةِ حَقِّ مَنْ رَبِّهِ وَحَقِّ رَسُولِهِ مَاتَ شَهِيدًا.

“The person who dies on his bed while having cognizance of the truth which has come from his Lord and the truth of His Messenger, dies a martyr.”

In addition, women who die while pregnant are classified as:

...مَاتَتْ شَهِيدَةً.

“...she has died as a martyr.”

The traditions also tell us that:

مَنْ مَاتَ عَلَى حُبِّ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ مَاتَ شَهِيدًا.

“The person who dies with the love of the family of Muhammad (S) dies a martyr.”

Without doubt, such a person has died while on the path of fulfilling his responsibility – meaning that his death is joined with his actions and thus, he is a martyr!

Thus, the meaning of martyrdom is very wide and has a comprehensive meaning to it.

With this said, according to the statement from Imam ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (as) under review, he has told us that the person who spills his blood and dies in the way of Allah (SwT) is not greater than the person who has the ability to perform sins, however due to the intense love of Allah (SwT), stops himself from doing so.

The meaning of modesty in this tradition is not merely limited to lowering one's eyes from the impermissible sexual pleasures (which take place between a man and woman who are not married to one another). Rather, it has a very wide meaning and as such, modesty has been used to refer to 'preventing any sin from taking place.' According to this explanation, a person can gain the reward of being a martyr every single day!

In regards to Prophet Yusuf (as), we see that all of the necessary requirements for sinning were at his disposal, however he renounced sins and said:

قَالَ رَبِّ السِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ وَإِلَّا تَصْرِفْ عَنِّي كَيْدَهُنَّ أَصْبُ

إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكُنْ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ

“He said: 'My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than that which they (the women) invite me towards and if You do not turn their wicked plots away from me, I will yearn towards them and become (one) of the ignorant (sinners).”⁴

From this, we learn that Prophet Yusuf (as) believed that:

1. I know that if I renounce sinning, I will be thrown into prison, however the prison is much better for me than that which these women are calling me to do.
2. O' Allah! I resign myself completely to Your will.

In addition, Asiyah, the wife of the Pharaoh, had all of the material needs at her disposal and was able to become a polytheist and live along side her husband in comfort, however she too renounced sinning:

قَالَتْ رَبِّ ابْنِ لِي عِنْدَكَ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنْ فِرْعَوْنَ وَاعْمَلِهِ...

“My Lord! Build for me a house with You in the garden and deliver me from Pharaoh and his doings...”

People such as these are granted the status of a martyr! The proof of this statement is that since the greatest Jihad is the Jihad with the soul and the person who is in the battlefield of the major Jihad is just like the person who is in the battlefield of the minor Jihad – rather, he is greater than them – thus he too must be a martyr just as the one who takes part in the minor Jihad!

The path of Allah (SwT), reaching to closeness to Allah (SwT), attaining the rank of the righteous people and the status of witnessing (Shuhud) is a clear path, however it is very difficult to traverse.

We must resign ourselves entirely to Allah (SwT), especially while living in this day and age in which the ways to sin are many and close within reach. We must strive to ensure that ourselves, our families and our society are all protected from this evil!

1. Nahj al-Balagha, Short Saying 474

2. Surat ale Imran (3), verse 169

3. al-Kafi, vol. 2, pg. 348

4. Surat Yusuf (12), verse 33

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