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True nature of this life

This present life in itself is one of the blessings of Allah. It is the only opportunity that we have. If we want to purify ourselves we should utilise it in the best way. Every moment of this life is so precious that no price can be considered for it. There is a famous tradition from the Noble Prophet(S):

“Whoever has not made any improvement in one day has lost “

In many prayers from our Imams we find the request for a long life. On the other hand, the Glorious Qur'an teaches us that disbelievers who do not believe in His religion and the day of resurrection are afraid of death. They wish they could live for a thousand years or even more.

“And you will most certainly find them the greediest of men for life (greedier) than even those who are polytheists; every one of them loves that he should be granted a lift of a thousand years, and his being granted a long he will in no way remove him further off from the chastisement, and Allah sees what they do.” (2:96)

Thus, both believers and disbelievers like to live, but their reasons and their attitudes towards death and life are completely different. Disbelievers or those who claim to be believers but do not practice the faith enjoy this life because they think that there is no other life or because they have not obeyed Allah and have committed sins or crimes, so they are afraid of His punishment. These people like this universe and this life just themselves. They are engaged in a circular life. They work to earn money, to buy food and clothes and to prepare a shelter for themselves. And if we ask them: Why do you need food and so on? They will Say: “Otherwise, we cannot work; we cannot live.”

But for real believers this universe is precious because they can reach His pleasure, they can worship Him. The only opportunity for human beings to act and to improve themselves is in this life. After death, we cannot perform new acts. Today we can act and there is no judgement (reckoning) and tomorrow there will be judgement (reckoning) and no action. It is possible to do something in this life which will continuously bring His rewards. For example, if a person builds a school or hospital or the like with pure intention or if a person spreads his knowledge through teaching or writing or the like or if he has trained good children he will receive more and more rewards after his death. But it is obvious that even in these

cases, there is no chance for acting after death.

Therefore, this life is very valuable. According to Islamic traditions, one of the first questions on the day of the resurrection is about the life, as another question is about youth. It shows the special importance of this period of life. To see a clear picture of the Islamic attitude towards life, it's nice to consider this prayer of the fourth Imam (a.s.):

“And Let me live as long as my life is a free gift in obeying You, but if my life should become a pasture for Satan, seize me to Yourself before Your hatred overtakes me or Your wrath against me becomes firm!”

And to get a clear picture of the ordinary attitude towards life, one may consider this verse of the Glorious Qur'an: 'That this world's life is only play and amusement and adornment and boasting among yourselves, and a rivalry in the multiplication of wealth and children, like the rain, whose causing the vegetation to grow, pleases the husband men then it withers away so that you will see it become yellow, then it becomes dried up and broken down; and in the hereafter is a severe chastisement and (also) forgiveness from Allah and (His) pleasure; and this world's life is naught but means of deception.’”

Without faith, this life can be divided into five parts. Some scholars consider these five parts in a chronological order, so they are five succeeding phases. During the childhood the main activity is playing 'la'ib'. Then it is the turn of 'lahw', including all the activities a person does just to enjoy himself in his free time or, in other words, just to make himself busy, like listening to music or watching movies or solving puzzles or collecting things or reading novels without any purpose or aim. Then when a person becomes young and ready for marriage, he or she takes care of his or her body and hair and generally his or her beauty.

He or she spends much time in front of mirrors or in the barber shops or in the cloth-shops. This is the period of adornment, 'zfrzah'. Then when he or she becomes graduated and finds a job and gets married, starts to exalt himself or herself over others and to be proud of himself or herself. This is the period of 'tafdkhur'. And finally after trying his best and working for many years he or she thinks about the results of his or her life: children, money, property and fame. He wishes to be the best. This is the period of 'takdthur'. This verse shows that we should not forget our happiness in the Hereafter and we should not allow ordinary affairs deceive us and capture our attention. Otherwise we will be lost in the chain of trivial wants and activities such as playing and so on. This part of our discussion will conclude with a phrase from Imam 'Ali (a.s.) about the God-wary, 'muttaqrn':

“They endured (hardship) for a short while and in consequence they secured comfort for a long time. It is a beneficial transaction that Allah made easy for them. The world aimed at them but they did not aim at U. It captured them but they were freed from it by ransom.”

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