

Chapter 8: The Shortest Road to Success

In the scheme of creation, every being that comes into existence develops and grows in struggle and adversity right from the first day of its life until the time when it attains to the apex of its perfection. This is a law of nature that rules over all existents.

Every person is inclined to select the shortest route to success in life and to get the fastest results from his efforts. But in any enterprise one cannot shorten his route without patience and reach the desired objective. There is no possibility of progress or development without this moral virtue.

Anyone who desires to achieve success and lead a fruitful existence, whether he is a man of ordinary talents or someone endowed with exceptional creativity, will power, intelligence and genius, must cultivate patience by drawing inspiration from the workings of the system of creation. With wisdom and a realistic outlook, he should view life in its vast and resplendent panorama.

A great work is never accomplished instantaneously and spontaneously. A huge amount of energy and time is required to implement big plans and to bring valuable undertakings to fruition. A short-lived effort, however brilliant, will not result in lasting success.

Yes, it is by self-reliance and endurance that one can remove all the various kinds of obstacles from the path of progress and plough through adversity and hardship, because victory is always associated with a series of problems and impediments.

We observe some people achieve remarkable success in life, while there are some who languish behind the caravan of life. The basic difference between those who succeed and others who fail and lag behind lies in the quality of their efforts and the extent of their steadfastness in the face of life's adverse factors. There are many people who, instead of thinking of a solution, come to a standstill as soon as they encounter a small obstacle on their way, although they possess real and remarkable abilities; or they act in a haphazard manner without accomplishing with seriousness and steadfastness any of the tasks that they undertake. Their morale is always shaky and accompanied with a lack of confidence. Negligence and default have become second nature with them. Such people never achieve success in life.

Life is a relentless and intense struggle extending from the first phases of life to its last moments. Patience and fortitude are the most effective weapon in this unceasing battle. Victory on this battlefield belongs to those who are courageous and unflinching and who do not succumb to obstacles under any condition. No matter how frequently they may stumble and fall, they rise up and continue their endeavour and overcome difficulties with sagacity and level headedness.

If our spiritual capacities be of a mediocre or even a poor quality and should we be of quite ordinary intelligence, fortitude can strengthen and complement our personality. The removal of one obstacle and the solution of a problem prepares us further for facing new obstacles and creates a measure of inner resilience. Every small task that we accomplish adds to the momentum of the flywheel of our activity, guides us towards bigger and worthier tasks, and gives greater preparedness to our minds in combating problems and pursuing our goals.

Dr. Marden describes the role of adversity in the development of man's spiritual faculties in these words:

In the same way as the best and strongest tools are forged with the help of the heat of a furnace, so also noble morals develop in the straits of hardship. The greater the hardness and brilliance of a diamond, the more is the friction required to grind it.

Kant, the German philosopher, says: "A pigeon in its flight considers the air to be the only hindrance in its way; it imagines that had there been no air it would have flown faster and with greater ease. Yet without the air it would have been unable to fly in a vacuum and would fall to the ground. Hence the same element that poses resistance to the pigeon in its flight is basically that which makes flight at all possible."

The effort to climb to an elevated station is greatly valuable: even if one fails to reach his intended goal, such effort would make him stronger. An encounter with great events may lead lethargic persons who do not use their brains and have no aim in life to acquire unprecedented abilities and success in life.

Often a young man faced with his father's death or the loss of wealth or some other calamity, loses the crutches that he leaned upon and acquires an unusual and remarkable vigour. Imprisonment has often revealed the hidden fire that lay in many individuals. When God wishes to train a man and raise him to a high station He sends him to the school of necessity and need not to that of ease and good fortune.

Take two acorns each of which has been plucked from the same oak tree and which are almost identical. Plant them in two separate places one on a mountain slope and another in a dense forest.

Then observe how their roots grow. The oak that grows on the mountainside where it has to withstand wind rain and storms runs its roots in all directions and grows into a sturdy and shadowy tree. But the oak planted in the woods since it is situated under the shadow of other trees grows to be lean and weak.

In the same way take two boys who are about similar and bring them up in two different places. That is put one of them in an environment where he is forced to face hard and difficult conditions right from his childhood and is deprived of wealth or any kind of supports. Such a one should he stumble and fall will get up again with a firmer determination like a ball which bounces to a greater height the more forcefully

it is hit against the ground. The greater the obstacles he encounters the more determined he will become. But the other child brought up in ease and plenty and in the care of a team of nurses who got everything he desired and had lots of money will be less resistant in the face of hardship and will break down sooner.¹

The Bounteous Source of Strength

Every human being is innately endowed with the capacity to face adversity. It is our duty to employ our resources for encountering adverse conditions and bring our remarkable powers into action. Man's latent inner powers comprise a bounteous source whose treasures are never exhausted. In fact the more they are put to use the more profuse their flow becomes. Despair and despondency and the inability to resist hardship are not due to any inborn lack of capacity. Rather it is the chain of despair and faint heartedness which shackles the hands of some people and neutralises their power of resistance to problems.

This kind of people fall victim to a kind of paralysing confusion and perplexity when faced with any trivial difficulty. Their spirit and morale can even be totally shattered in a single encounter with some sudden tragedy which makes them lose their poise and equilibrium. It is harder to remedy this weakness of character than any other moral inadequacy.

Those who rely on the constancy of their efforts are closer to success and advancement than those who depend on their personal talents and abilities. No matter how much intelligence perspicacity and refined positive effort they will not reach fruition.

The world's eminent thinkers didn't come from a particular social class. Rather most of them grew up in difficult conditions and began their climb in the midst of hardships. It was the pressure of hardship and deprivation that gave the strength to survive in the face of various kinds of enervating problems to those who have developed distinguished and sublime personalities whose fame has spread far and wide and who have even brought glory and honour to their societies. It was this factor which gave them toughness and strength and enabled them to climb the ladder of progress with a decisive will.

There is a story that once a Chinese student who had failed to make any progress in his studies took all his books and threw them away out of despair. At that moment he saw a poor woman filing away a piece of iron with untiring tenacity in order to make a needle out of it. This scene produced a great upheaval in his spirit and moved him strongly. It taught him an important lesson: he decided to go back to his class and continue his studies at all cost. He put this resolution into effect and with the fortitude that he developed within himself he came to rank amongst the famous scholars of his age and became one of the foremost scientists of his era.

The Principles of Life

Learning the principles of life is something which must be achieved by their study and through reflecting about them so that one may equip oneself adequately in the struggles of life and attune himself to life. The wheels of life cannot be set into motion with immature fancies and romantic imaginings and ideas. One should not make judgements about life on the basis of frivolous notions. The pattern of problems keeps on changing all the time and they take on a new face. One continually confronts problems which have no precedent and life is nothing except the endeavour to solve these complex problems and difficulties.

Those who are faced with intractable problems that appear to be insoluble under existing conditions have only one alternative before them in order to achieve their goal: to increase their efforts and seriousness to remain steadfast and to make full use of the available opportunities. When they proceed on their way with these qualities their fortitude will ultimately yield its fruits and they will fully attain their sought goal.

It often happens that the hardships which in the beginning cloud the horizon of one's life with their dark and unfriendly countenance appear altogether in a different light in the end. Felicity and success emerge from the dark clouds of adversity that one once sought to escape like flashes of lightning accompanied with beneficent rains that water the fields of one's hopes and aspirations.

The Lessons of Failure

The most brilliant kind of success is achieved by those who are able to analyse the causes of their failure and defeat and derive the utmost benefit from them. Examining the causes of a failure by itself leads one to identify one's difficulties as well as their solution. It opens up in front of one a hopeful and dynamic perspective in which the path to victory is clearly visible. In this way, one can employ one's reserves of thought and energy and alter the whole situation in a radical manner.

The best of one's efforts become manifest when one encounters an obstacle or defeat in the pursuit of his aspirations. There are many individuals who do not discover themselves until they have lost everything.

Those who have inner substance do not give up their perseverance unless they have extracted the elements of greatness from the depths of hardship and defeat and who do not abandon their efforts until they are triumphant. Every work that they begin is marked with vigour and energy and their great personal qualities are cast in the very heat of failure.

It is a mistake to be embarrassed by one's defeat. Obstacles are like thorns that usually grow on the path of men of action. A total bankruptcy occurs only when one takes the failure to make a headway in some task as a permanent defeat and loses all his confidence. The feeling of personal inadequacy and

weakness may bring a person to a standstill and keep him from every kind of effort to make amends for his defeat and frustration.

One of the first urges that manifests itself in a human being is the desire to win and dominate. But if he should always stick to his ordinary routine the will to struggle and endeavour becomes extinguished in his spirit.

It is possible that some precious talents may lie dormant within a person that develop and shine solely as a result of the abrasion of adversity which gives them their burnish. In reality, most people remain unaware of their inner talents and gifts due to the absence of encounter with obstacles and defeats. As a result, they do not become aware of the power that lies latent in the depths of their being.

Dale Carnegie writes:

About twenty-five years ago one day a school teacher forcefully slapped a boy twice in the face for being restless in the class and for constantly chattering and jolting on his bench. The teacher slapped him in front of the pupils and so humiliated him that the poor child went home sobbing. At that time he was no more than five years, but at that tender age he concluded that the way he had been treated was absolutely unjust and unfair. From that moment he came to have a strong feeling of hatred and repulsion for injustice against which he struggled until the end of his life.

His name was Clarence Darrow and perhaps he was the foremost lawyer and undoubtedly the greatest criminal lawyer of his era. Countless times his name and renown occupied the first pages of American newspapers. Even now the elderly people of Ashtabula in the United States talk about his first trial and the first case that was referred to him. He raised a great clamour over the case although the dispute related to a number of horse bridles all together worth merely five dollars. When asked why he had raised such an uproar over a few horse bridles, he replied: "The main thing is the defence of truth, not the worth of something for which the trial is held." He displayed such vigour and courage in the course of his trials and fought in such a manner as if he were facing a tiger of Bengal and was forced to defend himself. A defendant who had chosen him to fight the case had paid him a fee of five dollars, but since the case was not settled he took it to seven courts at his own expense, pursuing it diligently for seven years until he was triumphant in the end. Darrow used to say that he never accepted a case for money or personal prestige.²

All the remarkable accomplishments and the invaluable services rendered to human society, which are today regarded as ordinary means of life, were in the beginning considered impossible by most people. In the past if someone were bold enough to regard them as possible, he would have been considered a fool and ridiculed even in scientific circles. Today, with all their value, people have forgotten their significance and they do not amaze any onlooker.

But all these inventions and techniques were not discovered by men of action in a short period. They were products of years of painful effort and toil. In some cases, with utmost patience, they devoted their

entire lives to the solution of difficult and complex problems. It was with the untiring efforts of those men of determination that these things entered the world of reality and put on the garment of existence.

Emerson says:

Those who have been successful have all been in agreement over the fact that there is a certain connection between cause and effect. In other words, they believed that in the sphere of life events do not take place by chance and fortuity; rather everything is subject to a law. There is no missing or feeble link between the first and the last links of the chain.³

The Means of Perfection

Steadfastness and struggle in the face of problems are the means of achieving perfection and a prelude to prosperity. Difficulties play a decisive and undeniable role in personal growth and development. Had there been no tests and tribulations in life, piety, human merit and worth would not have any value, and self-discipline and self-restraint would have been irrelevant.

Similarly, if difficulties did not exist and were every effort to lead to spontaneous success, there would not have been any motive for struggle and advancement would have come to a standstill.

Accordingly, the pinch of difficulty and failure is not only not harmful, it brings dormant capacities into action and completes man's moral character and makeup, sometimes becoming even the biggest source of his strength.

One should form a correct picture of life in his mind so that one is not confounded and baffled by events or swept away by life's vicissitudes like a piece of straw in a violent stream. Rather, he should prepare himself like an expert swimmer who is able to swim as he chooses in the shoreless sea of events, and confront all the various factors that affect different aspects of life. If the barrier of obstacles does not allow one to advance and the conditions become too complex, the path of patience is always open, and the intelligent man takes this path under unfavourable conditions.

There are many people who fall victim to unrealistic fancies and build castles in the air. Their great expectations find a place only in the world of imagination. Their ideas remain unfulfilled and never reach the stage of realisation through steady effort and patience. There is a great distance that separates the world of imagination from the world of action. Hence one should enter the active arena of life with a realistic approach to its constructive elements, making patient effort to reach the goal and without neglecting the effort to increase one's energy and zeal. One author writes:

It is a waste of one's life to build castles in the air. Of course, nothing is more enchanting than these fancies wherein one builds for himself high castles in the boundless space of his imagination. But if these wishes are to be transported from the world of imagination to the world of reality, these castles should be built on the ground not in the air.⁴

Most people do not make realistic judgements about themselves. Whenever they face a defeat, they invent excuses to prove that they have not made any mistakes. In such situations, instead of reproaching themselves they hold others responsible for their failure. Only rarely do success and advancement come to a capricious and unsteady person who, as it might happen, is carried a long distance, like a wooden log driven by the river's flood. But even such rare victories are followed by setbacks or defeat. In many cases, such people, when viewing the progress made by others, forget the hard work and toil undertaken by them in attaining their goal and the perils and dangers faced by them.

A European man of arms who felt that his friend was being envious of him said to him:

If you are envious of my laurels, position, and rank, you can obtain them more easily than I did. Come, let us go into the yard. I will shoot twenty bullets at you from a distance of thirty strides. If none of them hits you and will decline my proposal. Very well. But remember that I did not get my present rank and position without becoming the target of bullets a thousand times, each time with death in front of my eyes.⁵

Some people learn only in the shadow of defeat. They discover what they should do in order to be victorious and the things they must avoid. A setback or loss does not upset them, for they have found out that a sustained and steady effort is necessary to compensate for the past setbacks. They learn that losses and setbacks must be made good for in other ways, for the simplest and cheapest way to avoid them in the future is to learn from one's past mistakes and failures. Similarly, one can learn beneficial things from the study of the causes of others' progress and success. A study of life and experience simplify many difficulties.

The facts of history show that all kinds of arms and military equipment—which are by themselves lifeless objects—fetch victory and triumph in the hands of those who possess fortitude. Such men are undefeatable; they preserve their initiative on the battlefield and overpower the enemy, for often the difference between the winner and the loser is no more than a few minutes of fortitude and resistance.

The Importance of Self Discipline

One of the essential and useful principles that contributes effectively to man's progress and development is discipline and the quality of his activity. This is a fundamental rule based on experience and insight. The intelligent man is one who keeps his eyes and ears open to opportunities. His mind is open to the right formulas and solutions, and before every undertaking he gives sufficient forethought to its potential for positive results.

The people who build their lives on deep foundations advance much more rapidly and more confidently than those who act in a disorderly and undisciplined manner. The absence of discipline and orderliness brings great harm, a loss that cannot be easily compensated by anything.

Someone may devote long years of his life to a certain kind of work but due to lack of sufficient insight

and knowledge he makes no remarkable progress despite years of toil. Another person may spend lesser time doing similar work but every day that passes brings him closer to his goal. He benefits from the fruits of his work and constantly adds to the list of his successes.

In the same way, often one who makes undue haste either does not reach his destination safely, or he prolongs his journey by taking the wrong route. The harm of undue haste in making plans and decisions is not lesser than the danger of negligence and weakness of will.

Ultimately, it is calculated action and correct thinking concerning the solution of problems that determine an individual's capacity to make progress. The same holds true in case of nations.

More than anything else society for its survival and edification needs men of fortitude who are not deterred by difficulties and who combine in themselves this characteristic with knowledge and science and employ them in the path of reform. If scientific genius and political acumen are not accompanied with patience and fortitude they will not yield any noteworthy results.

The Noble Qur'an exhorts the Holy Prophet of Islam that in order to achieve success he should never flag in his steadfastness at any stage and that he should resist subversive elements:

***Be steadfast as you have been commanded, you and those who have turned with you (to God).
11: 12***

Be as steadfast (in pursuing your sacred purpose) as you have been commanded to be, and do not follow the desires of the people. 42: 15

In some verses God says to the great Prophet of Islam: "It is possible to attain victory and relief in the midst of hardships. It is possible to attain success as a result of adversity. Whenever you get relief devote yourself to effort and endeavour and put your hope in the great Lord."

In these verses one is reminded that the flame of effort and enterprise must never be allowed to go out. Rather following every success and victory one must prepare oneself to welcome future hardships. That is so because there is nothing like absolute ease in this world and one should not expect to find it here.

Will Durant writes:

Will which is unified desire is ... the characteristic form of growing life; and its strength and stature increase only as life finds for it new labours and new victories. If we wish to be strong we must first choose our goal and plot our road; then we must cleave to whatever betide. The way of caution here is to undertake at first only that which we may rely upon ourselves to carry through; for every failure will weaken us and every success will make us stronger. It is achievement that makes achievement; by little conquests we gain strength and confidence for larger ones; practice makes will.

But then one can be too cautious and by turning away from the beckoning of great deeds remain forever small. Make sure that modest virtues shall not content you; on the morning after your triumph having

feasted for a day, look about you for the next week and larger task. Face danger, and seek responsibility. It is true that they may defeat you may even destroy you; but the date of the one death which you must die is too slight a chronological detail to distort) philosophy. If they do not kill you they will strengthen you and lift you nearer to greatness and your goal. Make or break. 6[

A study of the triumphant life of the Prophet of Islam his patience and steadfastness for the sake of the triumph of truth and guidance of the mankind, will not leave any need for an explanation in this regard. The secret of the victory of Muslims in the early era of Islam was their faith and unflagging resistance against dangerous enemies. The record of these heroic efforts occupies a prominent place in the pages of world history.

Mere Adherence to Islam Does Not Lead to Victory

In some of its verses the Noble Qur'an gives the good news of victory and superior power to Muslims while reminding them that these advantages will not come easily: the Divine good tidings will come true only when the people act knowingly in accordance with their duties. Sincere faith is fruitful when coupled with character. Hence those who separate faith from works their hopes of success will never be fulfilled. It is action and effort which rescue one from the valley of loss and failure.

O believers, if you help God He will assist you and make your feet steady. 47:7

During the Battle of Uhud the Muslims had to face a catastrophic setback for disobeying the Prophet's orders by leaving their positions for the sake of collecting the spoils of war. As a result of this unexpected setback their morale was shaken for they imagined that it was sufficient for them to be Muslims in order to overcome all hostile elements and that they would never face defeat and failure. "Why should we have been defeated and made to suffer at the hands of God's enemies. Why should have our belongings been plundered by them"? they thought. Such thoughts intensely demoralised them. In order to enlighten and console them and make them abandon their unrealistic notions God shows them the way to overcome their hardships:

You shall surely be tried in your possessions and your selves, and you shall hear from those who were given the Book before you, and from those who are idolaters, much hurt; but if you are patient and Godwary, surely that is true constancy. 3: 186

In this verse hardship and the loss of life and property are considered one of the aspects of Divine testing. Men of faith, like all other people, are exposed to undesirable events in the course of this life. This way God tests all His servants. However, the men of faith have such fortitude in face of adversity that their fear and loss of morale are changed into steadfastness and security. Faith leads them to overcome fear and despair, making individuals used to sacrifice and fortitude and thus purifying their hearts, spirits and feelings.

Rousseau says:

Do you think any man can find true happiness elsewhere than in his natural state; and when you try to spare him all suffering, are you not taking him out of his natural state? Indeed I maintain that to enjoy great happiness he must experience slight ills; such is his nature. Too much bodily prosperity corrupts the morals. A man who knows no suffering would be incapable of tenderness towards his fellow-creatures and ignorant of the joys of pity; he would be hard hearted, unsocial, a very monster among men ...

They (spoiled children) are used to find everything give way to them; what a painful surprise to enter society and meet with opposition on every side, to be crushed beneath the weight of a universe which they expected to score at will.... Sharp experience teaches them that they have realised neither their position nor their strength. As they cannot do everything, they think they can do nothing. They are daunted by unexpected obstacles, degraded by the scorn of men; they become base, cowardly, and deceitful, and fall as far below their true level as they formerly soared above it.⁷

Patience does not mean waiting for fate to solve the problems or surrendering to the tyranny of hardship. One must be careful to note this point so that one correctly understands the role of Divine ordainment in progress and prosperity or fall and misfortune. The Divine law concerning victory is that it is to be attained by effort and steadfastness. This is the indubitable duty associated with faith. God announces the good news of victory that comes as a result of its observance in these words:

O believers be patient and vie you in patience, be steadfast, fear God, haply so will you prosper.
3:200

In this verse the people are reminded that they ought to be forbearing and steadfast in the face of injustice, oppression, dictatorship, and deviance and misguidance on others' part and strive collectively to overcome the problems of their society. They should keep a vigilant eye over their dangerous enemies and stop infiltration of the aliens firmly and patiently. It is the duty of godly men to confront the aggressors with power, fight the enemy, and to avoid every kind of disgrace and abasement. They have the duty before God to observe piety and God-fearing in all their activities so that their efforts attain fruition. That is because it is only in the shadow of piety that one can implement the Divine commands in the best possible manner never forgetting one's duties under any condition whatsoever. External pressures may at times make one deviate towards the right or the left, but piety and sincerity of intention produce a balanced and desirable harmony in his soul.

A European scholar writes:

Tragedies and unpleasant incidents make a training ground of piety and moral merit. hardships bring wisdom and awareness to the mind and rectify one's sense of judgement. They also restrain a person from hedonism, immorality, and sin. God, who governs the world of being with His perfect wisdom and compassion, has sent these hardships and difficulties into the world directing them especially at good

and wise men so that they may learn the way of attaining true ease and prosperity and habituate themselves to patience, fortitude and forbearance in hardships and so as to bring them to the gates of glory and pride.

No one is more unfortunate than him who has never faced adversity and hardship. The real character of such a person who has not undergone any test remains unknown. The merits which are congenital and part of one's nature have no value or worth before God. God rewards man only for merits which, are acquired through effort and endeavour and are manifested in action.⁸

Two Potent Educative Factors

The latent capacities of every being develop and mature when assisted by the various inner and outer agents in the course of its development. Man is also not an exception to this rule, with the difference however that the development of other creatures is confined to specific limits whereas the stages of man's development and growth are unlimited and unbounded. That is why he has a great need of basic and comprehensive education for developing and reaching the station worthy of his humanity. Hence several factors are responsible for his spiritual growth.

Two factors play an important and fundamental role in the growth of human faculties. One of them consists of the heavenly teachings of God-sent prophets which, like a sun, shine on all the domains of the human spirit and gradually liberate it from the darkness of unhealthy traits and qualities, giving the soul its brilliance and burnish.

The second factor which can assist man in reaching this goal and attaining the fulfilment worthy of him are the problems, hardships and difficulties of life. Until man is not reformed and refined in the shadow of the luminous heavenly teachings and the pressures of life and unless his spirit is purged of the impurities of animal traits, his spirit will become subject to mundane things and he is swept away like a piece of straw by the waves of material gain and surrenders to everything except God. As long as his spirit remains confined in the darkness and veils of carnal desires which hold his being in their bondage, he cannot perceive the fruitful and critical role of hardship in bringing him to true independence and fashioning his human personality. As a result the pressure of adversity produces a kind of anxiety and despair in him. The Qur'an says

Surely man was created fretful when evil visits him, impatient ... 70: 19-20

As for man, whenever his Lord tries him, and honours him, and blesses him then he says: My Lord has honoured me. But when He tries him and stints him his provision, then he says: My Lord has humiliated me. 89: 15-16

These states pertain to the condition of an unrefined human being. But when the human heart is revived with the religious urge, it attains the inner freedom which is the goal of all heavenly teachings. Then, he becomes liberated from total reliance on fake materialistic values and becomes the master of his world.

It is a freedom and liberty that is free from the traces of animal unruliness and free from all obstacles and hurdles that hinder man from development, perfection, and sublimity.

Fake values do not tempt a righteous and developed human being and do not overshadow his spirit and understanding. While explaining the philosophy of life's hardships and afflictions, which is human liberation, God says:

That you may not grieve for what escapes you nor rejoice for what has come to you. 57:23

Thus when man liberates himself from the servitude of everything other than God and does not submit to anything except the Truth, he finds a wonderful and extraordinary power within himself. One who is trained in such a school of thought has a broad vision, an awakened heart and a piercing insight.

The principle that one should forget that which is lost and gone and not rejoice on attaining something has another educate result. It is that when the feelings of sorrow and grief felt over some loss preoccupy one's mind they make one's creative faculties and activities to become stagnant. On the other hand, rejoicing over some achievement dwarfs one's efforts and goals making them limited and diverting attention from things which are better and higher. As a result one fails to advance further on the path of progress and edification.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau says

The illusions of pride are the source of our greatest ills; but the contemplation of human suffering keeps the wise humble. He keeps to his proper place and makes no attempt to depart from it; he does not waste his strength in getting what he cannot keep; and his whole strength being devoted to the right employment of what he has, he is in reality richer and more powerful in proportion as he desires less than we. A man, subject to death and change, shall I forge for myself lasting chains upon this earth, where everything changes and disappears whence I myself shall shortly vanish! Oh, Emile! my son! if I were to lose you, what would be left of myself? And yet I must learn to lose you, for who knows when you may be taken away from me?

Would you live in wisdom and happiness, fix your heart on the beauty that is eternal; let your desires be limited by your position; let your duties take precedence of your wishes; extend the law of necessity into the region of morals; learn to lose what may be taken from you; learn to forsake all things at the command of virtue, to set yourself above the chances of life, to detach your heart before it is torn in pieces, to be brave in adversity so that you may never be wretched, to be steadfast in duty that you will never be guilty of a crime. Then you will be happy in spite of fortune, and good in spite of your passions. You will find a pleasure that cannot be destroyed, even in the possession of the most fragile things; you will possess them, they will not possess you, and you will realise that the man who loses everything, only enjoys what he knows how to resign.⁹

In one of his aphorisms, Imam 'Ali ('a) gives this lesson to human beings;

It is through severe adversity that one can attain through higher stations and lasting peace. 10

Emerson, the American philosopher, writes:

The changes which break up at short intervals the prosperity of men advertisements of a nature whose law is growth. Every soul is by this intrinsic necessity of quitting its whole system of things, its friends and home and laws and faith, as the shell fish crawls out of its beautiful but stony ease, because it no longer admits of its growth, and slowly forms a new house. In proportion to the vigour of individuals these revolutions are frequent, until in some happier mind they are incessant and all worldly relations hang very loosely about him, becoming as it were a transparent fluid membrane through which the living form is seen, and not, as in most men, an undurable heterogeneous fabric of many dates and of no settled character, in which the man is imprisoned. Then there can be enlargement, and the man of today scarcely recognises the man of yesterday. And such should be the outward biography of man in time, a putting off of dead circumstances day by day, as he renews his raiment day by day. But to us, in our lapsed estate, resting, not advancing, resisting, not co-operating with the divine expansion, this growth comes by shocks.

We cannot part with our friends. We cannot let our angels go. We do not see that they only go out that archangels may come in. We are idolaters of the old. We do not believe in the riches of the soul, in its proper eternity and omnipresence. We do not believe there is any force in to-day to rival or recreate that beautiful yesterday. We linger in the ruins of the old tent where once one had bread and shelter and organs, nor believe that the spirit can feed, cover, and nerve us again. We cannot again find aught so dear, so sweet, so graceful. But we sit and weep in vain. The voice Of the Almighty said, "Up and onward and for evermore!" We cannot stay amid the ruins. Neither will we rely on the new, and so we walk ever with reverted eyes, like those monsters who look backwards.

And yet the compensations Or calamity are made apparent to the understanding also, after long intervals or time. A fever, a mutilation, a cruel disappointment), a loss Of wealth, a loss Of friends, seems at the moment unpaid loss, and unpayable. But the sure years reveal the deep remedial force that underlies all facts. The death of a friend, wife, brother, lover, which seemed nothing but privation, somewhat later assumes the aspect of a guide or genius; for it commonly operates revolutions in our way of life, terminates an epoch of infancy or of youth which was waiting to be closed, breaks up a wonted occupation, or a household, or style of living, and allows the formation of new ones more friendly to the growth of character. It permits or constrains the formation of new acquaintances and the reception of new influences that prove of the first importance to the next years; and the man or woman who would have remained a sunny garden-flower, with no room for its rests and too much sunshine for its head, by the falling of the walls and the neglect of the gardener is made the minder of the forest, yielding shade and fruit to wide neighbourhoods of men.¹¹

In one of his letters to 'Uthman ibn Hunayf, Imam "Ali ('a) likens those who grow in the midst of hardship and adversity to the tough trees that grow in dry mountains and those who live in comfort and ease to the delicate plants of a garden:

Indeed, the tree of the desert that is used to its harsh and waterless conditions has a tough fibre. The fire produced by its wood is stronger and more intense and enduring. But the trees Of an orchard have a delicate bark and weak fibre and are easily broken. 12

In his exhortations, he declares:

Be careful not to abandon your activity whether you may feel energetic or sluggish. 13

Be diligent in your efforts even if your body's strength does not assist you. 14

One who neglects his responsibilities and the opportunity to fulfil them will be helpless after the opportunity is lost. 15

William John Reilly, the well-known American writer, says:

Millions of people who ceased their efforts at the very dawn of success to relax have perished in that state of rest and immobility. Most of our thoughts are so spontaneous that we never get the chance to be aware of that which goes on in our minds. If we restrain our thoughts for a moment to see what we are doing, we would find that every day we take a number of decisions. At the end of every week, we would have taken several hundred decisions. But we do not notice that most of our decisions were a result of inattention and neglect. That is, we allow things to happen while we imagine that we have taken a decision, whereas, in fact, we have been negligent.

It is wrong, especially, to keep on putting off matters. Indeed, when we delay taking a decision we do actually take a decision. That is, we decide not to act and take the necessary decision regarding a matter, whereas postponing action is itself a kind of decision.

Delay and negligence are very easy, especially if you practically deceive yourself by saying that you will do better in the future and will be more successful. In this way you dope your mind and hypnotise it on the pretext that the future will be better than the present conditions and circumstances. You only deceive yourself by believing that the future will be without problems and hindrances and that hardships and difficulties are temporary and passing. But in fact all good and relatively important tasks are faced with problems. There is no magic in the future. It is the present success that is yours and present opportunities are more valuable than past successes and the hopes and promises of the future. 16

A Superb Advantage

Faith is the unique element which can give such a strength to the human spirit and so expand the area of its activity as to prepare it to face the hardest and most complex of problems without giving in or cowering. The person imbued with faith knows that hardships, no matter how severe, will not stand in front of his undefeatable spirit and will be overcome.

The strength to bear hardship and adversity saves man from certain psychic illnesses. It is the power of faith which definitely increases a person's capacity for forbearance without affecting his mental

equilibrium and his steadiness on the path to his goal. The Prophet of Islam (S) considers this merit as one of the characteristics of godly men:

The man of faith is like a gold bullion. If placed in the furnace it grows red hot and when it is weighed afterwards its weight is not diminished in the least. 17

'Ali, may peace be upon him, said:

The spirit of a person possessing faith is more resistant than the hardest stone. 18

Mann, in the Principles of Psychology, writes:

When our efforts in attaining a goal meet an obstacle which is difficult or impossible for us to overcome, it produces in us the feeling of frustration. The obstacles causing frustration can be external objects in our environment, other persons, our own personal inadequacies, or our incapacity in resolving our inner conflicts. The degree of tolerance for failure differs in individuals. The encounter with a certain degree of failure can produce mental breakdown in some people, while others can easily bear the same kind of failure. Some who have a low level of resistance can lose their poise in confrontation with failure and do something which may take them further away from their goal. 19

Concealing One's Weaknesses

Self-deception aimed to avoid action or inventing pretexts for the inability to perform certain tasks due to a personal weakness have a psychic cause. One who does not manifest stability and perseverance in any matter leaves everything that he takes up incomplete or avoids looking the problems of life in the face. He continually invents excuses to conceal his spiritual inadequacy and deceives himself.

'Ali, may peace be upon him, said:

When faced with intense hardship, at times a man may be led to lie to himself (and thus deceive himself in order to escape responsibility). 20

Today, this matter has been scientifically proved. According to psychologists:

When someone lacks the capacity to do a job, quits it and takes up another job, he justifies it by saying, "I think I can serve my country and a country men better in this profession." The truth is something else. He changed his profession since he did not have the capacity for that job. Men invent reasons to justify their actions and try to make them appear proper and correct.

Untrue justification, like any other defensive action, is either a sign of failure or an indication that one has not learnt the way to confront problems. Persons with obvious shortcomings take recourse in unrealistic reasoning. That which they must do is to recognise their defects and try to remove them. When we face a defeat, our unconscious preserves the feeling of frustration and despair and prompts us to engage in

unrealistic reasoning. The better thing to do is to admit one's despair and deprivation and try to strengthen oneself for overcoming problems. We should forget the defeat which was a result of lack of sufficient effort and remember to use our experience of defeat for future occasions.

Escapism and fleeing difficulties and problems is a wrong remedy. This trick works only for a short time, and the pain, sickness and weakness soon return. While reacting in regard to a problem, one must ask oneself the question: "Am I deceiving myself and others? Am I trying to justify myself? What should I do in order to solve my problem by being honest to myself?" It is of course not sufficient to give expression to the problem. Rather one should take effective steps and give one's time for its solution. One should refrain from putting it off with excuses. Unrealistic justification is undesirable for it is an unconscious effort at deceiving oneself and others. One must face the reality distinguish the true and the false and try to solve the difficulty.²¹

One should not allow oneself to be overcome by despair and the shattering loss of hope in the most critical and difficult circumstances. 'Ali the Commander of the Faithful may peace be upon him advises that one should not give up hope and try to escape problems in the most difficult and complex of situations. He says:

*The hope of relief comes at the peak of adversity (that is one should be optimistic and hopeful even at the peak of hardship and adversity) and relief comes when the noose of adversity has reached its tightest point.*²²

Fortitude in the face of hardship is one of the things taught by the God-sent prophets for the training of the human spirit. Once one of the prophets of God was told that an old woman was at death's door due to a tragedy that had befallen her. Her only son who was a worthy and gifted man had died. The prophet was told that it behoved a prophet to attempt to console her with kind words and try to pacify her grief by exhorting her. The prophet went to see her. Entering her house he looked around and saw a number of pigeons who had made their nest in a corner of the house. "Have these pigeons hatched any chickens in your house?" he asked her. "Yes they have" she replied. "Do all of them grow up to become old?" he asked her. She replied "Sometimes I kill some of them and make use of their meat." "Do you do that in front of their mother?" he asked. "Yes" she replied. The prophet said "Then do they stop being friendly towards you and desert you?" "Never" she answered.

There at the prophet said to her "O woman! Be careful lest you should prove to be lesser than these pigeons in your attitude towards God and His will. You kill their young ones in front of their eyes yet they don't abandon your house and do not leave you although what you do is only of benefit for yourself and there is no benefit in it for them. But when God took away your son his death was for his and your benefit."

On hearing these words there was a sudden change in the old woman and a revolution occurred within her spirit. She fell in prostration before God and began pleading for pardon. The burden of grief and sorrow was at once lifted from her heart.

What power except the power of faith can help heal a wounded and bereaved heart with a few words and give it undesirable comfort?

Steadiness in Friendship

Steadiness in friendship and love is another virtue that should be cultivated by every Muslim. The Prophet of Islam has commanded his followers to be steady in their relations of love and friendship with one another. In one of his statements he says:

*Verily God loves Muslims to be steady in friendship and to be loyal to their old friends taking care to observe the demands of friendship love and loyalty.*²³

Dr. Aveberry says in this regard:

Much certainty of the happiness and purity of our lives depends on our making a wise choice of our companions and friends. If badly chosen they will inevitably drag us down if well they will raise us up ... Yet how often we know merely the sight of those we call our friends or the sound of their voices but nothing whatever of their mind or soul.

We must moreover be as careful to keep friends as to make them ... And when you have made a friend keep him. "Cherish an old friend" says an Eastern proverb "visit him often for thorns and brushwood obstruct the road which no one treads." The affections should not be mere "tents of a night" ... Death indeed cannot sever friendship. "Friends" says Cicero "though absent are still present; though in poverty they are rich; though weak yet in enjoyment of health; and what is still more difficult to assert though dead they are alive." This seems a paradox yet is there not much truth in his explanation? "To me indeed Scipio still lives and will always live; for I love the virtue of that man and that worth is not yet extinguished ... Assuredly of all things that either fortune or time has bestowed on me I have none which I can compare with the friendship of Scipio."

If then we choose our friends for what they are not for what they have and if we deserve so great a blessing then they will be always with us preserved in absence and even after death in the amber of memory.²⁴

1. Orison Swett Marden, *The Victorious Attitude*, pp. 59–61.

2. Dale Carnegie, *Ramz e muwaffaqiyat dar zindagi*, p. 35.

3. Ralph Waldo, *Raz e Khushbakhti*, p. 23

4. *Ibid* p. 7.

5. Samuel Smiles, *Akhlaq e Samuel*, vol. 2 p 185.

6. Will Durrant, *The Mansions of Philosophy*, p. 271.

7. Rousseau, *Emily*, pp. 100–103.

8. Samuel Smiles, *Akhlaq e Samuel*, vol. 2 p 209.

9. Rousseau, *Emily*, p. 547.

10. al Amidi, *Ghurur al Hikam*, p. 337.

11. Emerson, Compensation, The Social Philosophers, pp 445–6.
12. Nahj al Balaghah, p. 418.
13. Ghurar al Hikam, p. 480.
14. Ibid p. 483.
15. Ibid p. 653.
16. William John Reily, Twelve Ways for Straight Thinking, pp. 103–5.
17. Nahj al fasahah, p. 564.
18. al Majlisi, Bihar al Anwar, vol. 15 p . 94.
19. Mann, The Principles of Psychology, p. 148.
20. Ghurar al Hikam, p. 537.
21. Marguerite Malm and Herbert Soresnon, Psychology for Living, pp. 191.
22. Nahj al Balaghah, p. 351 and 536.
23. Nahj al Fasahah, p. 152.
24. Lord Avebury, The Pleasure of Life, pp. 99, 105–6.

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