

Question 8: Allah, Love or Fear?

Question: Should the remembrance of Allah (awj) evoke fear or love?

The co-existence of fear and hope, and in some cases love, in respect to Allah (awj), should not be a source of confusion as this phenomenon permeates all relationships of love to varying degrees. However, because of its over-conspicuousness, we are blind to it. It must be noted that even as routine a matter as walking is the result of fear, hope, and love, for without hope we will not embark on walking, and without walking, we will not reach our destination, and without fear we will not exercise caution and thus will be hurt, and again will fail to reach our destination. This issue becomes all the more clear when using automobiles, electrical appliances, incendiaries, etc. for we take pleasure in using them, but if our usage is not contained and tempered by fear and caution, using them might end in our destruction.

Therefore, it is correct to say that one must fear Allah (awj), love Him, and have hope in Him all at the same time. For loving Him and having hope in Him will bring about harmony on the one hand, and will on the other hand, compel us to take action, struggle, and push forth in our endeavour to acquire the elements that will secure His satisfaction and ultimately lead to being blessed by His effusions, graces, and bounties in this world and the hereafter. His fear will evoke humility and servility; it will strengthen the spirit of obedience and preclude us from committing sins that might otherwise incur Allah's (awj) wrath and chastisement.

This coexistence of fear and hope in this world—the world of cultivation and striving which calls for being vigilant, for guarding the fruit [of our endeavours] so that we may benefit from them in the hereafter wherein there will be no need for caution as it is not the abode for cultivation and striving but that of harvesting—for ordinary people will lead to a serenity in the hereafter which will be free of any trace of fear and anguish. Fear alone will entail despondency, spiritlessness and depression. Hope and love alone will result in being deceived by our base spirits, in boldness toward Allah (awj) and sin. Thus neither of the results of fear or hope is desirable when taken individually and without being harnessed by the other.

Brief Answer

Detailed Answer

Fear, hope, and love are *wijdani* phenomena [i.e. they are experienced directly and intuitively and as such their comprehension does not rely on mental concepts or sensational experience] and thus are without need of being defined. The human being experiences fear when faced with certain issues, such as:

- a. When his life, property, reputation, etc. are endangered;
- b. When overwhelmed by the grandeur of something or somebody;
- c. When he feels clueless regarding the outcome and repercussions of an action or his fate. Although, it must be noted that it is possible that in certain cases all these factors be present.

Likewise, the feeling of love and affection is evoked in response to certain factors, such as:

- a. Finding certain attractive and beautiful aspects in the beloved such that one's attraction to the beloved is the entailment of one's fondness of the beauties that the beloved manifests. Traditional poets detest this love as being "in pursuit of the veneer" and thus he who nurtures this love is condemned to disrepute.

However, this is not a universal truth. If the beauties found in the beloved are passing, ephemeral, and superficial, the poet is correct. But, if the beauties and perfections that the beloved possesses are of the nature of moral values or if those beauties and perfections are existential and real ones, the resulting love would not be merely "pursuit of the veneer" and disreputable; rather its upshot would be harmony.

- b. The feeling of dependence on and need of the object of affection such that one intends to exploit that object of affection in pursuing one's aspirations. In this type of relationship, one is attracted to the object of affection for one's own sake and not for the object's sake.
- c. The love that swells in one's heart as the result of feeling indebted to one's patron. In this relationship, the lover is attracted to the beloved as the result of the bounties and benevolence he has received from the beloved and as such is beholden to the beloved.
- d. The beloved seeks the love of the lover and strives to captivate him in order to minister to the lover and to succour him. It is possible that more than one of the above categories be involved in one case of love.

If we examine the matter closely, we will notice that in all our actions and reactions fear, love, and hope are combined to various degrees. Although in some cases one of these factors might be the dominant

and there is not always an equal balance, their coexistence is inevitable. However, this is one of the issues that is obscure to us due to its conspicuousness.

Hope and love impel us to action both in our daily activities and in the risky tasks we undertake. Fear on the other hand restrains us so as to exercise caution, to assess the repercussions of our actions and to prepare the adequate preliminaries. Had we been only equipped with love, we would be reckless, which would have entailed our early destruction. And had fear been unrivalled, we would never undertake any action even such mundane things as drinking and eating, for there is always the risk of a drop of water or a bite of food going down the wrong pipe, causing suffocation.

Therefore, there should be no confusion as to the coexistence of fear, hope, and love regarding Allah (awj). And if there is, it is only another sign of our obliviousness to self-knowledge and our psychic states.

To explain this further: The existence of fear, hope, and love with regard to Allah (awj) in different people is proportionate to their knowledge of Allah (awj) and His Attributes of Beauty and of Majesty, their knowledge of the true religion, their past conduct, and their assurance or lack of assurance regarding their future.

Those who are captivated by the magnificence and grandeur of the Truth or have in the past sinned and have dishonoured the Divine presence—in their case, fear overshadows love and hope. But on the other side of the spectrum are those who are entranced by Divine Beauty and Mercy. They have experienced the Divine graces and favours and have in the past been cautious of their conduct and have honoured the Divine presence and in instances where they did slip and commit sin, found the door back to Allah's (awj) favour and forgiveness, seized it, and thus made a genuine repentance. In their case, love and hope overpower fear.

But finally there are those who are midway between the two previously mentioned positions. That is, they are not sure of their prior deeds being accepted and are thus afraid of their future and the possibility of not being delivered from Divine punishment and chastisement but at the same time hold hope in Allah's (awj) forgiveness and generosity. In other words, their fear on the one hand and their hope and love on the other strike a balance [and so neither side weighs heavier].

The important point is that in most cases, fear and love arise from one's innate self-interest and instinct of self-preservation. That is, most believers love Allah (awj) and have hope in Him due to their fear of Divine chastisement in the hereafter and the possibility of being deprived of Divine effusions, bounties, heavenly joys—the beautiful houris and the marvellous castles. But those who are enthralled by the beauty and perfection of Allah (awj) or are in awe of His magnificence, invincibility, and grandeur, or are affected by both, account only for a small number of the believers. Thus, with the exception of the prophets and the Imams (ع), those who have been able to achieve the latter stage have been very few.

Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (ع) defines these three groups in his legacy of wisdom as follows: "One group

worships Allah in hope of boons and benevolence – such is the worship of businessmen; another group worships him out of fear – such is the worship of slaves; and yet another group worships Allah out of gratitude – such is the worship of those who are free of themselves and of self-worship.”¹

It is for this reason that some prominent scholars state that one of the fundamentals of Islamic pedagogy is love. The Noble Qur`an, the great source of Islamic morals, introduces love as the fulcrum of moral virtues. Imam Ja`far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (ع) says, “Allah the Immaculate disciplined and trained his Prophet through love.”²

The topics of warning (*takhwif*) and encouragement (*tashwiq*) permeate the Qur`an and the narrations of the Ahlul Bayt (ع). However, these two principles are the final stage for the weak believers, but as for the intermediate believers, they constitute the means and the preliminary stage. The believer starts the journey, being spurred forth by warning and encouragement but gradually the compelling force transforms to love.

Hence one need not be confused regarding the coexistence of fear and love in relation to Allah (awj). This coexistence of fear and hope is necessary for the spiritual training, elevation and development of the human being. For fear prevents us from sinning, from bringing destruction to ourselves, and from incurring Divine wrath and chastisement, which in turn leads to greater humility and firmer obedience to Allah (awj). Love, on the other hand, compels one to undertake the obligatory rituals and the supererogatory prayers with enthusiasm and to hasten in achieving the means to Divine grace, mercy, and bounties.

In short, the fruit of the marriage of fear and hope in the human being are hastening to do good, to implant in oneself the moral virtues, and to avoid evil and sin, which constitute the ultimate goal of human creation intended by Allah (awj); that is, to paint ourselves with the colour of the Divine, attaining the station of Divine viceroyalty, reclining in the bounties of the hereafter, and to rid ourselves of all anxiety and anguish. And this has been expressed time and again in the Qur`an.³

Fear alone [uncoupled with hope and love] will entail gloominess, depression, hopelessness, neglect of repentance, and sinking into the whirlpool of sin, being overwhelmed with the misfortunes of this world and the hereafter, etc.

Love alone leads to impudence and shamelessness in committing sins with the false hope of repentance in the latter years of life, and unwarranted expectance of Divine grace and mercy, while one should not expect to benefit from Divine grace and mercy when one is neglectful of attaining those means which secure His grace and mercy.

It is in allusion to this point that Imam Husayn b. `Ali (ع) cries in his `Arafah Supplication saying, “May the eye of he who does not behold You watching over him be blind. And he to whom You have not apportioned some love will lose his asset of existence.”⁴

It is in the hereafter that we will reap the fruit of fear and love. There will be the abode of chastisement for those who did not respect this blessing or who lost hope in redemption, drowning in the whirlpool of sin, or whom were deceived and thus failed to prepare provisions for their eternal life. There will be the abode of blessing and peace, free of all forms of anxiety and fear for those who succeeded in keeping the balance of fear and hope, those who refrained from sin and prepared sufficient provisions of good deeds for their eternal life.

For further reading on this topic refer to books of ethics, the chapters on fear and hope, love, and friendship. The following are a few suggestions:

1. Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli, *The Levels of Ethics in the Qur'an*
2. Imam Khomeini, *An Exposition of Forty Hadith*
3. Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi, *Ethics in the Qur'an*

1. Nahj al-Balaghah, short saying #237:

قَالَ (ع): إِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ رَغْبَةً فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ التُّجَّارِ، وَإِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ رَهْبَةً فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ الْعَبِيدِ، وَإِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ شُكْرًا فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ الْأَحْرَارِ

2. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 17 pg. 3:

أَبِي إِسْحَاقَ النَّحْوِيِّ قَالَ: دَخَلْتُ عَلَى أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) فَسَمِعْتُهُ يَقُولُ: إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّوَجَلَّ أَدَبَ نَبِيِّهِ عَلَى مَحَبَّتِهِ

3. Surat al-Baqarah (2), Verse 62:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ﴾

4. Mafatih al-Jinan, Imam Husayn's (ع) supplication on the day of 'Arafah:

...عَمِيَتْ عَيْنٌ لَا تَرَكَ عَلَيْهَا رَقِيبًا، وَخَسِرْتُ صَفْقَةً عَبْدٌ لَمْ تَجْعَلْ لَهُ مِنْ حَبْلِكَ نَصِيبًا

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