

Tawakkul

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Introduction

Unlike animals, human beings have aspirations and goals, which they strive to achieve. Some people have greater goals, while others' goals are less lofty. Each group will possibly employ one of the three following ways to pursue their goals: (1) solely relying on the help of others and therefore refraining from making effort, (2) relying on employing their own abilities and talents and arrogantly dismissing the shortcomings in their personal abilities, and (3) to use the resources at one's disposal but, at the same time, rely on the unlimited source of divine knowledge, power, and wealth that is also kind and beneficent. Relying on God, which in the Islamic context is referred to as *tawakkul*, is the manifestation of the third method mentioned above.

The Literal and Technical Meaning of TAWAKKUL

Literally, the root-word *w-k-l* means to rely on others and take agents to do things on one's behalf (Raghib al-Isfahani 1412AH, 882). The essence of *tawakkul* is to acknowledge one's weakness and rely on others. The term refers to relying on God and not on what people may offer (Zubaydi 1414 AH, 15:786). Along these lines, a *mutawakkil* is one who knows that God is in charge of his sustenance and affairs, and therefore he only relies on Him and has no hope in others (Ibn Manzur 1414AH, 11:734). One who relies on God, unlike one who relies on others, enjoys a piece of mind that accompanies him until achieving his goal. Even if he does not achieve his goal, he will not be in despair, because he knows that God wants the best for him, and he is sure that if reaching that goal was in his best interest, God would never deprive him of it.

The teachers of Islamic ethics have introduced *tawakkul* in the following ways:

Khawja Nasir al-Din al-Tusi has mentioned *tawakkul* as one of the twelve attributes that fall under the category of moderation. He defines it as not wanting to have more or less, or sooner or later, things that are not in the power of man. On the other hand, he believes that those who sit waiting for the help of other people without striving have not possessed this virtue (Mu'ini 1383 Sh, 8:588).

In his book *Jami' al-sa'adat*, Naraqī explains *tawakkul* as relying on God in all affairs, leaving all issues to God, disregarding any other source of power, and having faith in His (Naraqī 1388 Sh).

It is reported that Gabriel explained *tawakkul* to the Prophet (s) as follows: "To know that creatures cannot hurt you, do you good, grant you anything, or take away anything from you, and to have no reliance on the creature. When a servant of God possesses these

attributes, he will not rely on anyone other than Him, he will not fear anyone but Him, and he will not expect anything from anyone except from Him. This is *tawakkul*” (Majlisi 1403AH, 68:138).

Explaining the essence of *tawakkul*, ‘Allamah Tabataba’i says,

The truth of the matter is that achieving a goal in this world requires a number of material and non-material causes. When one strives to reach his goal and has provided all of the material causes, the only things that may prevent him from reaching his goal are a number of non-material issues, such as not being determined, fear, sadness, rushing, immoderateness, foolish acts, inexperience, and distrust in the efficacy of the causes. In such a situation, if one relies on God, he will be determined and the mental and emotional barriers will not stand in his way. This is because when one relies on God, he connects with the Primary Cause of the universe and there is no room left for sadness, worry, or despair.

It also seems that *tawakkul* has a metaphysical effect to it as well, meaning that God helps those who rely on Him with non-material causes; the apparent meaning of the following verse [Qur’an 65:3] suggests this: “And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him.” (Tabataba’i 1417AH, 4:65)

Taking into consideration the definitions that we mentioned of *tawakkul* up until now, it is clear that this state results from one’s firm and deep-rooted belief in the oneness of God and His power. Taking God’s *oneness in action* (*tawhid fi’li*) into account, every effect is created with His permission. Nothing else—whether physical or metaphysical, with free will or not—has independence in causing or creating an effect. The chain of causes and effects have no independence and is simply a means through which God manifests His will. Therefore, if

man connects to Him, he will be able to reach all of his legitimate goals.

Another important point about *tawakkul* is that this attribute is not merely a mental matter, and it does not suffice for one to merely say that he relies on God; rather, *tawakkul* requires that one takes only God's will into consideration in his affairs and relies on God with regard to the results. Therefore, *tawakkul* is not a one-way relationship, in such a way that the one does not take on any responsibility and leaves everything to God. *Tawakkul* only makes sense when one employs the causes that God has placed at his disposal to reach his goals and relies on Him at the same time and maintains his peace of mind in the process. One who carries out his duty by employing God's material and spiritual gifts and then relies on Him will always reach the intended result and will not fear anything, because such a person sees God as the one who can affect things in this world. However, if one does not rely on God, he will be constantly worried, for he has forgotten his true Guardian and has put his faith in unreliable entities.

The question that comes to mind is "Does employing physical and material causes to achieve one's goal contradict one's reliance on God? If one has put his faith in God, can he refrain from striving through his talents and abilities?"

Some interpret *tawakkul* as disregarding physical causes and regard this as reliance on God. The truth of the matter, however, is that *tawakkul* is an inner belief, rather than a physical action. Therefore, *tawakkul* does not mean isolating oneself and confining one's life to "worshipping" God and not striving to make a living because one believes that God will provide his sustenance.

As the great Shi'ite scholar Murtada Mutahhari has explained, *tawakkul* is a concept that revives and revolutionizes the one who

embraces it. According to him, when Islam intends to encourage Muslims to strive, and not fear the difficulties, it calls them to relying on God. However, today this concept has been distorted within the Muslim society. Mutahhari believes that in the Muslim society today, *tawakkul* is a dead and empty notion. When people want to neglect their responsibility and disregard it, they speak of *tawakkul*. This concept is interpreted in our minds exactly opposite to the way the Quran explains it (Mutahhari 2008, 25:453).

This interpretation of *tawakkul* is, with no doubt, wrong. We read in a hadith that the Prophet (s) saw a group of people who were not working on their fields. He asked, "Who are you?" They replied, "We are the ones who rely on God." The Prophet (s) responded, "No, you are the ones who put their burdens on people" (Muhaddith Nuri 1408AH, 11:217). One who knows about God's wisdom understands that the Almighty has willed that every effect comes to being through its causes. Therefore, if one stops striving to make a living, he is acting against the wisdom of God, and consequently his expecting sustenance from God is baseless. If simply asking for sustenance was the way to reach it, no believer would ever strive to make a living and no one would be tested. Therefore, on the one hand, the world works based on a cause and effect system, which means that man must strive to reach his goals, and, on the other hand, striving is a means of man being tested. Striving, dealing with others and respecting their rights are all tests that allow man to grow. Therefore, man must strive and, at the same time, should believe that his sustenance comes from God. As a result, the meaning of *tawakkul* is to put one's trust in God in every matter and have no hope in others, which does not contradict employing causes (Naraqı 1388 Sh, 430).

The opposite of *tawakkul* is not believing in God and His unlimited power and grace. One who does not rely on God in his affairs relies instead on material causes and mediums. The reason for not relying

on God can be the weakness of one's belief, the weakness of his character, or both.

There are many verses and traditions pertaining to the losing of faith in God. In the Qur'an, God says: "Indeed those whom you invoke besides Allah are creatures like you. So invoke them: they should answer you, if you are truthful" (Qur'an 7:194). The Almighty also says, "In fact, instead of Allah you worship idols, and you invent a lie. Indeed those whom you worship besides Allah have no control over your provision. So seek all [your] provision from Allah, and worship Him and thank Him, and to Him you shall be brought back" (Qur'an 29:17).

Imam Ali (a) considers relying on anyone other than God as a sign of abjection and lowliness: "Whoever seeks honor from anything other than God becomes abject" (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 478).

The Different Levels of TAWAKKUL

Some teachers of ethics have mentioned three different levels for *tawakkul*:

The first level is when the *mutawakkil* relies on God the way one relies on an agent or lawyer. This type of *tawakkul*, which is the most basic type, is quite common; it tends to be long-lasting and does not, in any way, contradict one's thinking and striving. The second level is when the *mutawakkil* relies on God just like an infant who relies on his mother as the only person he knows and trusts and seeks refuge to. The difference is that in the latter level, the servant only gives his attention to God and in some ways is not even consciously aware that he is relying on him. This type of *tawakkul* usually does not last too long and only a small group of people are able to achieve it. The third and highest level of *tawakkul* is when the

mutawakkil is like a dead person in the hands of the one who is washing his corps: his movements are like those of that dead person, who has no will and only moves with the will of the person washing his body. The difference between the second and third level is that in the former, the *mutawakkil* does not forget to pray and call out to his mother, but, in the latter, there may be times when he does not do so, due to his sheer faith in the grace and mercy of his Lord. This type of *tawakkul* is extremely rare and is only reserved for the Truthful.” (Naraqī, *Jami’ al-Sa’adat* 1431AH, 3:686-7)

TAWAKKUL in the Qur’an and Traditions

Many verses of the Qur’an and traditions emphasize the importance of the *tawakkul* as a key virtue.

Tawakkul is an evident attribute in the lives of the prophets. Taking a look at the verses of the Qur’an that speak of this topic shows that in the face of difficulties and hardships, the prophets would always turn to *tawakkul* and that one of the reasons of their victories is possessing this virtue. Below we will discuss some of the Qur’anic verses in this regard:

1. When Prophet Noah (a) confronted his powerful and hard-headed enemies, he persevered by relying on God. In this regard, the Qur’an addresses Prophet Muhammad (s) saying,

Relate to them the account of Noah when he said to his people, “O my people! If my stay [among you] be hard on you and [also] my reminding you of Allah’s signs, [for my part] I have put my trust in Allah. So conspire together, along with your partners, leaving nothing vague in your plan, then carry it out against me without giving me any respite.” (Qur’an 10:71)

2. Prophet Jacob (a) faced an extremely difficult situation. On the one hand, he had lost his son Yusuf, and, on the other hand, a severe drought had pressured him and his people in Canaan, so he was forced to send his son Benjamin with his other sons to attain more wheat from the king. In such circumstances, he advises them to rely on God. The Qur'an relates this event as follows:

And he said, "My sons, do not enter by one gate, but enter by separate gates, though I cannot avail you anything against Allah. Sovereignty belongs only to Allah. In Him I have put my trust; and in Him let all the trusting put their trust." (Qur'an 12:67)

3. In surah *al-Tawbah*, God speaks to the Prophet (s) saying: "Say, 'Nothing will befall us except what Allah has ordained for us. He is our master, and in Allah let all the faithful put their trust'" (Qur'an 9:51).

4. In another verse, God has explained the direct result of relying on Him: "And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him" (Qur'an 65:3). Therefore, God has guaranteed that whoever relies on him will have his basic needs taken care of and will be supported in the face of difficulties and problems: "Does not Allah suffice [to defend] His servant?" (39:36). Therefore, one who relies on others to take care of his affairs has not yet truly embraced *tawakkul*.

Examining these verses of the Quran, one can clearly understand the role that *tawakkul* played in the lives of the prophets and how it helped them in the face of hardships to take away all types of fear and worry.

In the traditions of the Household of the Prophet (s) also, much emphasis has been placed on this virtue and its unique effects. Below, we will examine some of these traditions:

In a tradition narrated from the Prophet (s), *tawakkul* is mentioned as a factor that empowers one when confronting hardships: “One who wishes to be the strongest of people should put his trust in God” (Tabarsi 1965, 18).

Richness and honor are two of man’s yearnings which cannot be attained through any way, but through *tawakkul*. In this regard, Imam Sadiq (a) says, “Richness and honor are constantly moving, until they come across *tawakkul*, wherein they reside” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:65). This tradition means that a heart that relies on God feels honored and powerful, and feels no need to anyone other than God, for it has relied on a power that is greater than all entities.

In another tradition, this same meaning has been narrated from Imam Baqir (a): “Whoever relies on God will not be defeated and whoever asks for God’s assistance and grace will not be overpowered” (Majlisi 1403AH, 68:151). This is why relying on God and holding firm to His “cord” guarantees one’s liberation from difficulties.

In another tradition, *tawakkul* has been referred to as the “truth of certainty”: “The truth (essence) of certainty lies in *tawakkul*” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 196). In another hadith, a person asks Imam Rida (a) pertaining to the essence of certainty. The Imam (a) replies, “The essence of certainty is relying on God, submitting to him, being pleased with his verdict and leaving all issues to him” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:52).

TAWAKKUL from the Viewpoint of Islamic Scholars

Explaining the relationship between *tawakkul* and *kasb* (striving to reach goals) has always been an interesting topic, which Islamic scholars have discussed. Some Muslim scholars and mystics like Khwaja ‘Abd Allah Ansari (Ansari 1417 AH, 65) have regarded these

two concepts as contradictory, while other scholars, like Ghazali, see no contradiction in this regard.

In his book *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*, Ghazali comments that *tawakkul* is sophisticated in theory and difficult to embrace in practice. This is because, on the one hand, acknowledging the causes of this world and relying on them is a form of polytheism. And, on the other hand, disregarding the causes all together is definitely against the practice of the Prophet (s). According to Ghazali, only those whom God has assisted have been able to overcome this difficulty, and have been able to explain it for others (Abbasi 1383 Sh, 8:593).

It is narrated from Sahl b. 'Abd Allah al-Tustari that he stated, "The state of the Prophet [s] was *tawakkul* and striving for a living was his practice. Whoever undermines striving has undermined his practice, and whoever undermines *tawakkul* has undermined the Prophet's [s] faith." Then he stated, "Be careful that if you cannot attain his state and faith, then make sure to emulate his practice" (Maybudi 1371 Sh, 2:362).

A Story about TAWAKKUL

When Prophet Ibrahim (a) was placed in the catapult, his uncle approached him, slapped him in the face, and said, "Turn away from monotheism." Ibrahim (a) did not pay attention to him. At this moment, God sent all angels to the sky of the earth so that they could witness this scene. All creatures asked God to save Ibrahim. Amongst them was the earth itself, which pleaded to God that there is only one person that worships You on earth and that person is being placed in fire. God replied, "If he calls Me, I will answer his call." Gabriel descended upon Ibrahim (a) and said, "O Ibrahim! Do you need me to take care of your affairs?" Ibrahim replied, "I do not need you, but I need my Lord." At this moment, Gabriel handed him a ring which

had these sentences written on it: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet. I take God as my support and I rely on Him and I leave all my affairs to Him" (Jaza'iri 1404 AH, 104). These sentences, which were a clear manifestation of reliance on God, were held by Ibrahim, and when he was thrown into the fire, God commanded the fire to turn cold. It became so cold that his teeth were shivering. Then God commanded that it be cold but comfortable for Ibrahim, and Gabriel sat with him and began to talk to him (Makarim Shirazi 1389 Sh, 2:269).

The Ways of Enhancing One's Reliance on God

The teachers of ethics have suggested the following ways to enhance the virtue of *tawakkul* in one's character:

1. Reflecting on the attributes and names of God, especially His Oneness, which is the key to *tawakkul*
2. Surveying and contemplating the Qur'anic verses and traditions related to *tawakkul* and its effects
3. Remembering and contemplating the ways that God has blessed man by giving him existence and fulfilling his needs, before he deserved anything
4. Reading the stories and accounts of God providing sustenance for His servants
5. Studying the stories and accounts of earlier people and realizing how God demolished the power and wealth of the powerful and how He provided sustenance for the weak and gave them honor and respect (Naraqi, Jami' al-Sa'adat 1431AH, 692)

A practical step in this regard is for one to continuously repeat to himself that he possesses such an attribute, and little by little he will build a new character. Relying on this new character, he is able to

understand that he must leave things to God and free himself from all unnecessary concerns and worries.

Also, socializing with people who possess this attribute and have created a calm and peaceful life for themselves can help one develop and enhance this characteristic.

The Signs of TAWAKKUL

Similar to other virtues, *tawakkul* has a number of signs which one can recognize in the lifestyle of a person with this attribute. One of these virtues is the peace of mind and tranquility, which stems from being detached from material and worldly affairs and being pleased with God's will. This issue has been pointed out in a tradition narrated from Imam Sadiq (a). In this lengthy tradition, the Imam (a) explains a number of virtues and their opposites and then mentions greed as the opposite of *tawakkul* (Majlisi 1403AH, 1:110). Therefore, one who possesses the attribute of *tawakkul* does not worry about his sustenance and has no greed. The most prominent sign of one who relies on God is that he does not see his sustenance coming to him from anyone but his Lord (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 369).

Another sign of this attribute is one's hope in God and how he disregards all other causes. In this regard, Imam Ali (a) has stated, "All your hope must be in God... and remove your hope and faith in anyone other than Him, for no one has had hope in others, unless he has lost it (and has not achieved his goal)" (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 196).

Another sign of *tawakkul* is altruism (Imam Sadiq (a) 1400AH, 164). One who truly relies on God does not withhold from sacrificing what he has for the sake of others.

The final sign that we will point out in this section is that a *mutawakkil* does not fear anyone but God, because he knows that no

one but God has power in this world. This is why when the Imam (a) is asked about *tawakkul*, he replies, “[*Tawakkul* entails] that he does not fear anyone but God” (Majlisi 1403AH, 75:338).

The Social and Personal Results of Tawakkul

Tawakkul has many ethical results, which encompass the personal and social life of man. In this section, we will discuss some of these effects:

Ethical Results

1. Attracting the Love of God

The most important result of *tawakkul* is that one who relies on God attracts his love and mercy: “And once you are resolved, put your trust in Allah. Indeed Allah loves those who trust in Him” (Qur’an 3:59).

2. Possessing TAQWA and Liberation from Satan’s Control

Human beings are able to free themselves from the control and dominance of Satan to the extent of their faith and trust in God: “Indeed he does not have any authority over those who have faith and put their trust in their Lord” (Qur’an 16:99).

3. Indifference towards People’s Approval or Disapproval

People turning away from the path that he has chosen does not frighten the one who trusts in God. Rather, he perseveres in his path with reliance on God and does not fear the obstacles and problems he encounters:

So disregard them and put your trust in Allah, for Allah suffices as trustee. (Qur’an 4:81)

But if they turn their backs [on you], say, “Allah is sufficient for me. There is no god except Him. In Him I have put my trust and He is the Lord of the Great Throne.” (9:129)

4. Peace and Happiness

One of the most prominent attributes of a believer is his inner and outward peace and tranquility, which stems from his reliance on the beneficent and merciful God:

Those to whom the people said, “All the people have gathered against you; so fear them.” That only increased them in faith, and they said, “Allah is sufficient for us, and He is an excellent trustee.” (Qur’an 3:173)

In the most distressful situations, the words of Prophet Muhammad (s), the greatest example of complete reliance on God, was “Allah is indeed with us” (Qur’an 9:40).

Also, trusting in God can lead to one’s happiness. It is through this concept that one takes refuge in the source of all happiness and comfort: “Look! The friends of Allah will indeed have no fear nor will they grieve” (Qur’an 10:62).

Imam Ali (a) said,

Whoever relies on God, God will bring him happiness and whoever trusts in Him, God will take care of his affairs. Relying on God is the firm fort in which no one takes refuge except for a trusting believer. Trusting in God is a way out of every disaster and an immunity from every enmity. (Majlisi 1403AH, 75:79)

5. Increasing One’s Strength

The Prophet (s) said, “If you wish to be the most powerful, trust in God” (Majlisi 1403AH, 68:151). Along these lines, his grandson, Imam Baqir (a) says, “Whoever trusts in God will not be defeated and whoever holds firm to Him will not be overcome” (Tabarsi 1965, 17).

6. Being Hopeful and Removing Despair

One of the natural results of trusting in God is the hope that comes with it. Hope means for one to have peace of mind pertaining to something that he prefers to take place. Fundamentally, the concept of *tawakkul* in the Qur'an is a reviving and dynamic one. In other words, whenever the Qur'an intends to push one towards exerting effort and taking action, the Quran brings his attention to this concept and through it removes all fears and worries of the believer (Mutahhari 2008, 25:452).

General Results

1. Confidence

One who relies on God and his unlimited power feels a great amount of confidence within himself when encountering difficulties and hardships. This confidence, which stems from his connecting with the unlimited source of power, leads to his success in the tasks he takes on. While relying on his God-given talents and the facilities granted to him, he will make the right decision and then ask God for His assistance in reaching the goal. Therefore, *tawakkul* does not, in any way, contradict one's confidence.

Nonetheless, if confidence is defined as one assuming that he is able to carry out all tasks and achieve whatever he desires even if it goes against God's will, such a concept will be in complete contradiction with *tawakkul*. But if confidence is pictured as one striving without any fears or worries to fulfill his needs within the framework that God has placed for this world and while asking for His assistance, it is completely compatible with *tawakkul* (Dawudi 1390 Sh, 81).

2. Success

Another result of *tawakkul* is that one's affairs will be taken care of:

“And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him” (Qur’an 65:3).

Also, it is understood from the teachings of the Qur’an that if God assists one, no one will ever overcome him, and if God defeats one, no one will be able to assist him:

If Allah helps you, no one can overcome you, but if He forsakes you, who will help you after Him? So in Allah let all the faithful put their trust. (Qur’an 3:160)

Imam Ali said: “Relying on God is sufficient” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 196).

3. Having the Best Help

Those who put their trust in God and rely on Him in their affairs, rely on a source of help that never fails: “But whoever puts his trust in Allah, then Allah is indeed all-mighty, all-wise” (Qur’an 8:49).

Conclusion

When man reaches a point of certainty and understanding of the fact that everything in this world functions only with the will of God and that no one is able to help or harm him but God, he trusts in God and leaves his affairs to Him. Only one who believes in the power, wisdom, and mercy of God is able to achieve this state. Such a person is aware of the presence of God at all times. Through this awareness, his abilities are reinforced, and he reaches a feeling of security and peace of mind that remove all doubts when encountering hardships and difficulties. This is because whenever he comes across certain issues that he does not have control over, he leaves them to God.

In other words, although one who trusts in God employs the causes at his disposal, but he still understands that reaching the results that he intends is contingent upon God’s will. Therefore, while attributing the

events of this world to God, he relies on Him for the results, and he is sure that God will assist him in his endeavor; he knows that as long as he relies on God, he is moving in the right direction. This is because firstly God is aware of how he is able to reach happiness, due to His unlimited knowledge; secondly, God only intends the best for him, due to His unlimited mercy; thirdly, God is able to provide all the necessary causes in order to assist him in reaching his goal, due to his unlimited power; and, fourthly, if the believer truly relies on God, he can see that as long as carries out his responsibility, nothing else can stop him from reaching his final goal.

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