

Happiness and Closeness to God - Part II

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Abstract

In this part of the article, the characteristics of those who are close to God and the fruits of closeness to God are mentioned. The closer a person gets to God, the more prosperous he becomes. For getting closer to God, one needs to pass through the shell of this world. What is in fact blameworthy is not the shell itself but being content with it. In light of closeness to God we can reach happiness which shows itself in this world and in the hereafter. A common misunderstanding among some people is that they think reaching eternal happiness requires sacrificing this world. Happiness in this world is normally manifested in social aspects such as security, freedom, moral and economic development, and so forth.

Keywords: *happiness, closeness to God, happiness in this world, happiness in the hereafter.*

Attributes of Those Who Are Close to God

God has occupied the hearts of those who are close to Him, and they are thrilled by the joy of closeness to their Lord. Assume a person who loves someone very much and knows that his beloved is watching him. Such a person would try to behave in a way that his beloved becomes more attentive to him. But, how would God make a more favorable look at human beings? When they do the best of actions and keep away from vices, such as envy, niggardliness, and hatred; in other words, when they have godly morals¹ and act like Him, because He is absolute, pure goodness.

In many cases, it is not easy to distinguish the good from the bad, or the right from the wrong; and in fact, since God loves us, and has created us to become like Him and develop His perfections and attributes in ourselves, He has informed us through revelation about what is right and what is wrong.

Fruits of Closeness to God

The closer a person gets to God, the more prosperous he becomes. In fact, happiness and closeness to God are two sides of the same coin. As it was mentioned previously, reaching this level is not a convention, as in the military where the superior can promote or demote an inferior whenever he wants; rather, it is a sign of existential development in all aspects of life. So, the one who is close to God is a person who has a greater share of life others may not even understand.

¹ According to a hadith, the noble Prophet (s) said, "Acquire attributes like those of God" (M. T. Majlisi 1406 AH, 6:403).

So, those who are close to God are people who have more access to the divine sources of everything, proportionate to the level of their closeness to God. They reach knowledge, power, wisdom, mercy, pleasure, understanding, will, charisma, and in a word humanity, with which there will be no sadness, sorrow, or worries. However, this level will not be reached except by passing through the material world.

The Relation between This World and the Hereafter

Here, one may ask whether a person who is close to God has to sacrifice this world for the Hereafter and to reach eternal happiness. It should be noted that what is meant by “this world” is a quasi-geographical and certain time frame which mystics refer to as *the realm of life*; that is, if we consider a line for human life, it can have parts, such as the world of Dharr, life in this world, the world of Barzakh, and the Hereafter; and each part having a certain form of life, time frame, living system, and so forth is called a “realm.” In this meaning, “this world” does not have a moral value—it cannot be called good or bad. What is clear is that it is necessary; and development without the existence of material world and this worldly life cannot be imagined for beings like humans.

The next question is why, then, this world is so much criticized, while it is the only bridge for human beings to reach God? The answer is that the question in fact refers to another usage for “this world,” which is human beings’ bad choices in the material world, being content with this world, turning a blind eye on the future, and disregarding true perfection and happiness. In some cases, the glorious Qur’an clearly points out that preferring this world to the Hereafter is condemned and is the cause of wretchedness. God Almighty and Glorified, says,

O you who have faith! What is the matter with you that when you are told: ‘Go forth in the way of Allah,’

you sink heavily to the ground? Are you pleased with the life of this world instead of the Hereafter? But the wares of the life of this world compared with the Hereafter are but insignificant. (9:38)

Also, in another verse, wretched people are described as,

Those who do not expect to encounter Us and who are pleased with the life of this world and satisfied with it, and those who are oblivious of Our signs. (10:7).

In fact, the truth of this world is nothing but the appearance of the Hereafter and the shell to reach the core; unless you do not pass through this shell, you would not reach the core. What is criticized is not the shell itself but being content with it. In fact, the bad choices and bad life of a person are criticized and condemned.

The following verses can be said to be about such choices:

They are the ones who bought the life of this world for the Hereafter; so their punishment shall not be lightened, nor will they be helped. (2:86)

and also,

And among the people is he who sells his soul seeking the pleasure of Allah, and Allah is most kind to [His] servants. (2:207)

The Hereafter is a world for the manifestation of the volitional deeds of human beings in this world. If these deeds are unwise, their manifestations in the hereafter will be pain and torment, but if they are wise, their fruits will be light and joy (Ghazali 1983, 27).

In some cases, the glorious Qur'an calls for attention to this world and benefitting from it faithfully and criticizes those who prohibit themselves from what is permitted by God:

By the means of what Allah has given you, seek the abode of the Hereafter, while not forgetting your share of this world (28:77)

and

O you who have faith! Do not prohibit the good things that Allah has made lawful to you, and do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like the transgressors (5:87).

It is also narrated:

Assign for your souls a share from the world by giving it what it desires of the permissible and of what does not harm your nobility and what there is no extravagance in it. By that, seek help in religious affairs, since it is narrated that he is not from us, who leaves his world for his religion or his religion for his world. (M. B. Majlisi 1403 AH, 75:346)

Thus, this world is not bad in itself; a person may be at the peak of power, wealth, and fame in this world and be close to God; on the contrary, a person may live in poverty and hardships and be away from God.

Eternal happiness is not achieved but in this world and by leading a godly life in it. In this regard, Imam Khomeini says,

The keys of the door of happiness, doors of Paradise, door of wretchedness, and doors of Hell are in your own pocket. You may open the doors of Paradise and happiness to yourself or do the opposite. The control of everything is in your hand. God, the Mighty and Glorified, has completed the proof and has shown the ways to happiness and wretchedness and granted apparent and hidden opportunities. What comes from Him and His friends is perfect. It is our turn now; they are guides and we are followers. They have done perfectly, left no excuse, and did not do slightest dereliction of duty. So, you should wake up of ignorance and find your way to happiness and use your life and competence, for if the time passes and this youth and life and the treasure of strength are lost, there will be no compensation. If you are young, do not wait until you get old, for in your old age, you will suffer problems old ones know and you are ignorant about. Correction in your old age and weakness is among difficult issues. If you are old, do not let the rest of your life to be wasted, for whatever its length is, you have a path to happiness as long as you are in this world and a door to happiness is open to you; do not let it be closed and do not let this path be blocked, for then volition will be unavailable to you and you will have nothing to do but regret and sorrow for losing the opportunity. (Khomeini 1388 Sh, 42)

A person who wants to step in the path of perfection and happiness needs to take a look at his present status, reflect on the happiness he seeks, and think about how he should reach his desirable destination from his present place. An important point which should not be ignored is that this world is the available context for that goal, and if a

person does not do anything to correct himself in this world, he cannot expect anything in the Hereafter.

Aspects of Happiness in This World

The first principle of Islam is happiness in this world and in the hereafter for all human beings. In Islam, the hardships and calamities in this world are never desirable in themselves, the same way punishment in the Hereafter is not God's primary will for anyone.

A common misunderstanding among some religious people is that they think reaching eternal happiness requires sacrificing this world and that all pious people lead a difficult life here.

In fact, it needs to be noted that the primary will of God for people is never hunger, insecurity, poverty, or difficult death. So, if some pious people experienced a difficult life in this world, it was in order to save other people. It is clear that if all practical plans of Islam were implemented, there would be no poor people in the society to receive charity; no one would ever be killed so that his children become orphans; and so forth. With a simple reckoning, it can be understood that God wanted the best for all His servants, and it is only a group of people who cause wretchedness for themselves in this world and in the Hereafter.

If there is no prohibition with regard to enjoying the permissible material blessings of God, righteous people deserve to enjoy them more than anyone. The prophets of God too in their supplications frequently asked God to bestow upon people a life full of happiness, security, and calmness in this world. Some of these supplications are mentioned in the Qur'an, and we are advised to repeat and learn them. For example, see the supplication of Prophet Abraham (a) who says: "My Lord, make

this a secure town, and provide its people with fruits —such of them as have faith in Allah and the Last Day” (2:126); Prophet Jesus (a) also says,

O Allah! Our Lord! Send down to us a table from the sky, to be a festival for us, for the first ones and the last ones among us and as a sign from You, and provide for us; for You are the best of providers. (5:114)

The supplication of Prophet Solomon (a) is also notable:

My Lord! Forgive me, and grant me a kingdom that does not befit anyone except me. Indeed, You are the All-munificent’ (38:35).

Below, we will mention some of the aspects of happiness in this world that can be achieved by acting upon Islamic teachings.

Individual Happiness

Many individual aspects of happiness are manifested in social happiness as well; aspects such as security, freedom, moral development, economic development, and so forth. Thus, to avoid repetition, we will discuss them in the next part. Here we will mention briefly only one aspect of individual happiness that has been less discussed.

The closer a person gets to God, the more perfect he becomes, and will manifest, to the extent of his closeness to God, divine names and attributes. This will give him certain powers that he previously lacked: the right usage of such powers for the guidance of people and solving their problems in life provides new grounds for the person to get closer

to God. The best examples of such powers are the miracles of the prophets (a) and the friends of God.

Social Happiness

Easy life and welfare, provided that they do not harm our eternal happiness, are considered among the aspects of social happiness. Acting according to divine rulings and observing an Islamic lifestyle provide the grounds for the emergence of different aspects of welfare and development in a society.

These aspects are sometimes concrete and tangible and sometimes non-material and spiritual. Below, we mention some of the tangible and perceptible aspects of social happiness.

Promotion of Public Services in Quantity and Quality

A prosperous society is a society where public services are offered widely and at an acceptable quality to meet people's needs without humiliating anyone and without being exclusive to a certain group while others are left deprived of them. In his letter to Malik al-Ashtar, Imam Ali (a) wrote, "Do not appropriate to yourself that in which the people have an equal share" (Nahj al-balagha, letter 53).

Cultural Development

A society that acts according to Islamic rulings pays more attention to cultural affairs, moral issues, educational activities, and building and development of cultural centers in that society. Thus, even using obscene language about a cultural center such as a mosque is regarded as using foul language toward Muslims. Another important element of cultural development is public self-confidence: "Do not weaken or grieve: you shall have the upper hand, should you be faithful" (3:139).

Powerful Financial Structures

Properties and wealth, which are symbols of a prosperous economy, are considered human beings' support in the Glorious Qur'an. In Islam, if a society follows the rules of religious economy, such as interest-free loan and paying *khums* and *zakat*, economy will grow based on production.

An economically prosperous society is a society that keeps away from accumulating wealth and living in luxury and avarice, and focuses on production and making its wealth beneficial. The Prophet (a) said, "Correcting properties and making it beneficial is a noble act" (Shaykh al-Saduq 1413 AH, 6:166). In some hadiths, facilitating business and trade, development of agriculture and animal husbandry, increase of arboriculture, and, most importantly, distributing wealth justly are considered among good deeds (Kulayni 1407 AH, 1:141; M. B. Majlisi 1403 AH, 100:95).

Inter-systemic Interactions

Relationships between humans in Islam have certain manners sometimes based on religion and human beliefs and sometimes based on merely human principles. Of course, in a comprehensive approach, inter-systemic interactions in an Islamic society can be divided into two general branches of interactions between the government and people and interactions between the members of the society. With regard to the importance of the second branch, it should be said that a human society is prosperous when it reaches the goals below:

Interaction of Muslims with each other. In a faithful society, brothers support each other materially and spiritually without any expectations.

They become sad for each other's grief and happy for each other's happiness and successes (Javadi Amuli 1391 Sh, 275-304).

Interaction with the followers of divine religions: In an Islamic society, the followers of other religions live peacefully. They have common public rights such as the rights to hygiene, social laws, citizen right, and so forth.

From the view of Islam, an ideal society is not necessarily void of non-Muslims, but it is a society where there are strong and logical relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims; in such a society, a Magi, a Jew, or a Christian are not deprived of their human rights and should never be abused. It is reported that once one of the companions of Imam al-Sadiq (a) called a Magi "illegitimate" out of anger, justifying his verbal abuse by referring to the fact that the Magi's parents did not marry according to Islamic laws. However, Imam al-Sadiq (a) rebuked him and said that it was enough that their marriage was legitimate according to their own religion ('Allama al-Hilli 1413 AH, 9:93).

Interaction with enemies: According to Islamic teachings, if a prosperous society engages in war against an enemy for legitimate reasons, it must not fail to observe justice and equity even in the war. Such a society would never practice mass murder, kill children, the elderly, or women, or poison the cities or towns of the enemy (Ibn Abi Jumhur 1405 AH, 3:186).

Development of Various Aspects of the Social Life

When a person goes to a physician for a check-up, the physician, without checking all the details about his body, examines some major elements, such as the heartbeat, brain activity, and respiration, and tells him about the quality of his health. If we compare the society to a

human being, then by checking some major elements, we can realize whether it is on the path of perfection and happiness or not. Below, we will mention some of these major elements.

Public security: A society is prosperous if it has security, and not just in general; rather, in a prosperous society, each member each member should feel secure in financial, cultural, and political aspects. According to some hadiths, when the Twelfth Imam (a) returns and establishes the ideal human society, one will be able to leave his precious belongings in a public place and they will be safe.

Freedom: One of the fruits of observing individual and social instructions of Islam is freedom. This freedom should develop so that an innocent person never feels fear, despair, or unjust limitations. In a Muslim community, people should only follow divine rulings and are not bound by false customs, laws, or the tyranny of people or groups: “It does not behoove any human that Allah should give him the Book, judgment, and prophethood, and then he should say to the people, ‘Be my servants instead of Allah’” (3:79). That is why Imam Ali (a) said, “The worst of governors is the one whom innocents fear” (Tamimi Amidi 1366 Sh, 345). Freedom provides the necessary atmosphere for everyone’s effort toward social development. In a conversation between Imam al-Sadiq (a) and one of his companions, the issue of freedom of speech is mentioned. The transmitter of the hadith reports that Imam al-Sadiq (a) asked him, “Can you gather in one place and discuss and express what you want and criticize anyone and express your love for anyone you want?” and he said, “Yes.” The Imam (a) then said, “Is life anything other than this?” (Kulayni 1407 AH, 8:229).

Unity and integrity: It seems that one of the most important elements of pure social life is the unity and integrity of the society; a unity based

on which any kind of division-making and developing fear, disappointment, and resentment in the hearts of believers are considered great sins and sometimes equal to murder or abandoning Islam (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:345).

Observing the law: Observing the law, especially when it is against one's personal interests, is among the principles very much respected by Islam and, in some instances, considered as a source of life for the society (Qur'an 2:179).

Enjoining the good and forbidding the evil: Caring for people and protecting them from dangers and mistakes are greatly emphasized by the Glorious Qur'an in a manner that the best of people in the view of the Qur'an is the Islamic community that enjoins the good and forbids the evil (Qur'an 3:110). Imam Musa al-Kazim (a) considered well-wishing for people among the signs of the Shi'a (Shaykh al-Saduq 1966, 1:158).

Scholarly discussions among all people: Scholarly and research activities are desirable at any level, and it can be learned from Islamic teachings that beneficial scholarly discussions should become the concern of all people. Maybe this is why Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, "Meet each other, discuss, and keep this alive" (Shaykh al-Saduq 1402 AH, 35). Also, he (a) asked his companion Fudayl, "Do you have discussions?" Fudayl answered, "Yes. May I be your ransom!" The Imam (a) said, "Indeed, I love such meetings" (Himyari 1413 AH, 36).

Keeping secrets and trusts: Another characteristic of a faith community is keeping secrets and covering each other's defects. People, media, rulers, and everyone need to try to keep secrets. A society that refrains from backbiting, fears slandering, wishes well for everyone, and believes in God and the Day of Judgment never pries into people's affairs or

discloses their secrets. The Glorious Qur'an (49:12) and our Imams (a) have emphasized on this. In his advice to Imam Ali (a), the noble Prophet (a) prohibited unauthorized interference into the secrets of people and considered such an act as deserving admonition (Shaykh al-Saduq 1413 AH, 2:355).

Happiness and cheerfulness: In a society, living with faith in God and His mercy, where people invite each other to goodness, there would be no fear or sadness. People of such a society believe in the competence of their leaders and are truly happy, hopeful, and cheerful.

In the Islamic view, happiness is a spiritual state, not a result of mocking others or committing sins; it is a state that originates from the achievement of perfections. However, this state also has apparent manifestations, such as smiling and being sociable. In Islam, achieving such states are not only advised but also highly recommended. Imam al-Rida (a) said in this regard: "Assign a part of the day to entertainment and recreation, and draw strength from happiness and its satisfaction" (M. B. Majlisi 1403 AH, 75:346).

Happiness in the Hereafter

After experiencing happiness in this world, the ones close to God will be given the good news of achieving happiness in the Hereafter. But, what are the characteristics of people in Paradise and the nature of their happiness? It seems that there should not be any essential difference between happiness in this world and happiness in Paradise. From the Qur'an, it can be understood that there are similarities between the blessings in this world and those in the next world, but there are also differences. We can summarize the major features of Paradise as follows:

1. **Eternity:** This world cannot give the true taste of happiness to human beings due to its time-bound and limited nature; so, there must be a place where there is no death. The Glorious Qur'an mentions eternity as one of the attributes of life in Paradise and promises the dwellers of Paradise eternal happiness: "Those who are wary of their Lord will be led to paradise in throngs. When they reach it, and its gates are opened, its keepers will say to them, 'Peace be to you! You are welcome! Enter it to remain [forever]'" (39:73).
This eternity is not just immortality but also a divine guarantee of happiness and prosperity. God has given this guarantee to man that if he enters Paradise, he will be given his due place according to his closeness to God and will receive blessings that he will never lose.
2. **Having individual and collective happiness:** Another issue that bothers human beings in this world is that not only they themselves suffer but also they witness the pains and hardships of their loved ones. However, in Paradise, human beings have individual and collective happiness forever, and they will not have any grief about their loved ones.
3. **Contentment:** Since the people of Paradise are the same moral, pure, and kind people who are close to God, there is no envy among them. Even if the dwellers of the paradise have any perception of the differences between each other's levels, they will not be unhappy about that and will even enjoy it, like a person who becomes happy of the victory of his favorite sport team, even though he does not receive any reward for its victory.

Conclusion

It seems that every person has a relative understanding of happiness and prosperity and tries to reach it as much as he can. Islam offers a clear definition of happiness. According to religious teachings,

happiness is achievable in this world and in the Hereafter. One who gets close to God is the one who achieves true happiness. He lives happily in this world and in the Hereafter forever.

Reaching this level is based on man's volitional deeds, and religion is basically nothing but a practical plan for achieving eternal happiness and salvation. Thus, through his spiritual growth, man can reach eternal happiness regardless of his gender, color, race, or age.

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