

Stages of the Mystics and Stations of the Spiritual Journey – Part VI

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Abstract

This paper explores three significant moral virtues that a faithful person ought to cultivate in order to be able to follow the spiritual path to God. With respect to God's perfect attributes including knowledge, power, benevolence, and so forth, one should trust God not only in performing actions considered to be unavailable but also in carrying out what is available since God is the Cause of All Causes. At a higher level, one should please God and be pleased with Him. Beyond the

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station of contentment, one ought to submit his whole heart to God without having any independent desires for any goals. The priority can be explained thus: while in the station of trust a wayfarer's desires are seen by him to be prior to God's will and in the station of contentment His will is seen to be prior to his desires, the station of submission requires them to be formed by God's will.

Keywords: *trust, contentment, pleasure, submission, desire, want*

19. Trust (TAWAKKUL)*

Tawakkul, one of the spiritual stations that a wayfarer must pass through on his way towards God, literally means choosing a trustee (*wakil*). The attorney is then entrusted with the responsibility to ensure that the affairs of his client are correctly looked after. Whenever a person is unable to perform an action, either because of lack of knowledge or due to inability, he will seek a *wakil* to undertake the task. As man is limited in his knowledge and ability, he is unable to manage his affairs on his own. So, it would be wise of him to depend upon a source that has unlimited knowledge and power.

Therefore, trust is when an individual sees himself as ignorant and weak in relation to his affairs and thus entrusts them to God, the All-knowing, the All-powerful. In order to reach our goals, we continuously employ causes and means. In order to reach the station of trust, it is essential to attribute all these causes and means to God and to see Him

* Excerpted from Khawajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's *Arwsaf al-ashraf*, chapter 5.

as the Ultimate Cause or the Cause of All Causes; we should not claim any independence for ourselves or anything else before God.

Trust is not to negate all causes other than God, but to view God as the primary and original cause of all actions and to see everything else as manifestations of His power and will. Therefore, no cause is independent in its causation but can act only in that manner which has been ordained by God.

Due to His unlimited knowledge and power, God is the best wakil:

So it is that God does whatever He wishes. (Quran 3:40)

But God does whatever He desires. (Quran 2:253)

And whoever puts his trust in God, He will suffice him. Indeed God carries through His commands. Certainly, God has ordained a measure [and extent] for everything. (Quran 65:3)

God is that unconquerable and unbreakable cause that no barrier can prevent Him from achieving His purpose, nor can anything separate Him from His will: "God judges, and there is none who may repeal His judgment" (Quran 13:41). All causes and means depend on God, and He is sufficient for all who put their trust in Him: "So disregard them and put your trust in God, for God suffices as trustee" (Quran 4:81). It is He who guides man, wants good for him, and never betrays him. So, only He must be trusted and depended upon:

And why should we not put our trust in God, seeing that He has guided us in our ways?

Surely, we will put up patiently with whatever torment you may inflict upon us, and in God let all the trusting put their trust. (Quran 14:12)

The holy Quran states that

“one who disavows fake deities and has faith in God has held fast to the firmest handle for which there is no breaking; and God is all-hearing, all-knowing” (2:256).

However, he who puts his trust in anything other than God has merely grasped at a spider’s web:

“The parable of those who take guardians instead of God is that of the spider that takes a home, and indeed the frailest of homes is the home of a spider, had they known!” (29:41)

A true seeker of God’s trusteeship is the one who places God’s will and desire before his own; he chooses God-pleasing acts over self-pleasing ones and stays within the boundaries of the divine law.

The Domain of Trust and Employing Causes

Some people assume that the domain of trust is distinct from that of employing causes; that is, there is no room for trust whenever the tools, causes, and facilities for an action are available and that one needs to depend on God only when the requirements for an action are absent. For instance, they think that we have to prepare as much military power as we can—and here there is no place for tawakkul—but we should trust God with regard to the other factors of victory over the enemy that are not under our control.

The same has been assumed with regard to supplication and seeking intercession—that they are needed only when one lacks the ordinary means for accomplishing task. Both of these assumptions are, however, invalid; it is not the case that an individual performs some of his tasks via normal means only and the others with trust in God, supplication, and seeking intercession. These elements are to be present in all our actions, even when we employ the ordinary tools and means. Just like rosewater is found in the petals of the rose, trust, supplication, and intercession are to be present in all spheres of our actions. We should trust in God and supplicate Him even when we employ the ordinary means to achieve our goals. This is because, on the one hand, those means have been provided by God, and, on the other hand, they may become unavailable if God wills so.

In conclusion, trust, supplication, and intercession are not outside of the realm of the causes, and those who believe in God must ask and depend on Him in all aspects of their lives. It has been mentioned in a tradition: “Secure your camel and trust in God” (Majlisi 1403 AH, 68:138). While trusting in God, the camel must be tied correctly and firmly.

The Fruits of Trust in God

The Quran has mentioned numerous benefits for trusting in God, one of which is earning the love of God: “Indeed God loves those who trust in Him” (3:159). And God does not desert His beloved ones, who trust in Him, and suffices them: “And whoever puts his trust in God, He will suffice him” (65:3). “God suffices as trustee” (4:81), because He is “all-mighty, all-wise” (8:49). Therefore, He is the best trustee: “God is sufficient for us, and He is an excellent trustee” (3:179).

In respect to the Battle of Uhud, the holy Quran says that many Muslims were wounded and were not a large number to begin with. A group of them fled and a group of them were martyred. However, the remaining ones put their trust in God and with His unseen assistance they were protected, returned from the battle-field with honor, and created fear in the hearts of the disbelievers:

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, "God is sufficient for us, and He is an excellent trustee." So they returned with God's blessing and grace, untouched by any harm. They pursued the pleasure of God, and God is dispenser of a great grace. (Quran 3:173-74)

Self-Reliance or Trust in God?

One of the Western ideas that has made its way into the thinking of Muslims is that self-reliance is a virtue, but Islam has not promoted such an idea, as man in reality has no ownership over anything, not even "his own benefit, loss, life, death, or resurrection" (Majlisi 1403 AH, 83:83). How then can he rely on himself?

That which Islam counts as a virtue and emphasizes is the dependence on and trust in God. Imam Jawad (a) is reported to have said, "Reliance on God is the fee for all that which is expensive and the ladder by which the highest levels are reached" (Majlisi 1403 AH, 75:364). A believer relies on the infinite and independent power of God, not on anyone or anything else. Islam views self-reliance and the reliance on others as a vice. God instructs the believers, when confronted with the attacks of the enemies, to say, "God is sufficient for us, and He is an excellent

trustee” (Quran 3:173), not to consider their military might and capabilities sufficient.

One who is powerless and owns nothing must rely on God, not on himself. Imam Sajjad (a) prays,

How can I attain goodness, O Lord, while it is not found anywhere save with You? And how can I find redemption while it cannot be attained save through You? Neither he who has done righteous deeds can dispense with Your aid and mercy, nor can he who has sinned and rebelled against you and displeased you find an exit out of Your power ... Had it not been for You, I would never have known who You are. (Majlisi 1403 AH, 95:82)

Errors in Application

Some people confuse tawakkul with burdening others, which is severely reprimanded in our traditions: “Wretched is the one who places his burden upon the shoulders of other” (Majlisi 1403 AH, 74:140). Based on such traditions, some jurists have stated that, for those who have the possibility to work and provide for themselves and their families, it is *haram* (forbidden) to stop working and to become a burden on the society.

We mentioned that tawakkul should not be a reason for abandoning the ordinary causes and means. This, however, concerns ordinary people; some people may reach such a high station that for them trust in God replaces the usual and material causes. Examples of this can be seen during the life of Imam Ali (a): he would enter the battlefield without armor or would patrol the streets without any guards accompanying him. Imam al-Sadiq (a) is reported to have said,

Qanbar, the slave of Imam Ali, deeply loved him. Whenever the Imam went out at night, Qanbar followed him carrying his sword. One night the Imam saw him and asked, "What are you doing, Qanbar?" Qanbar replied, "I have come to protect you, O my master." "Woe to you!" said the Imam, "Are you trying to protect me from heavenly beings or worldly creatures?" Qanbar replied, "From worldly creatures." The Imam then said, "Surely, worldly creatures cannot do anything to me unless they are granted to do so by God from the heavens. So return!" (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:59)

At times, some individuals, as a result of certainty, find such profound trust in God that the ordinary causes fade away in their eyes: "Indeed, my Lord is with me. He will guide me" (Quran 26:62); at other times, they return to their normal state and try to place tawakkul and the use of causes in their proper places; that is, he trusts in God and, at the same time, acquires all the tools and means necessary for his goals.

Explanatory Points

In this section, we will discuss a few important points, including the limits of trust, the benefits of seeking it, the emphasis of the holy Quran and the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (a) on it, and its constant presence in the lives of the Prophets and Friends of God.

1. Trust in God must be accompanied by the belief in God as sufficient; that is, the person who entrusts his affairs to God should believe that the Almighty is all he needs. We read in the holy Quran, "But if they turn their backs [on you], say, 'God 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). The grammatical structure of this verse indicates that

only God is sufficient, and thus the only sanctuary for a pure monotheist is God, the all-Sufficient. In this regard, Imam Ali (a) has said,

“There is no witness besides Him, and no trustee other than Him” (Nahj al-balagha, letter 26).

2. Because God is the only All-Sufficient, one should put his trust only in the inexhaustible support of God. Thus, in his encounter with his wrongdoing people, Noah was commanded to say,

“I have put my trust in God. So conspire together, along with your partners” (Quran 10:71).

God also mentions those righteous servants who have managed to escape from the temptations of Satan:

“Indeed he does not have any authority over those who have faith and put their trust in their Lord” (16:99).

Therefore, trust in God is one of the major weapons needed to combat enemies and the carnal soul.

3. Imam Sadiq (a) is reported to have stated that the limit of trust is the station of certainty: “There is nothing except that it has a limit,” said the Imam (a). Abu Basir then asked, “What is the limit of trust?” The Imam responded, “Certainty.” He then asked about the limit of certainty, to which the Imam replied, “To fear nothing in the presence of God” (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:57). This means that the limit of certainty, which is the final stage of trust, is that a person who has entrusted his affairs to God and who has attained certainty is not afraid of anything as he feels the accompanying presence of God.

The fear of God, on the other hand, is only found in the hearts of godly scholars:

“Only those of God’s servants having knowledge fear Him” (Quran 35:8).

These scholars, who are the righteous messengers and propagators of God’s message,

“...deliver the messages of God and fear Him, and fear no one except God...” (Quran 33:39).

Therefore, what is implied by these two verses is that divine scholars, who are the exemplars of trust and certainty, fear God only, because certainty, which is said to be the limit of trust, must contain all the perfections of trust, and when certainty comes, the fear of others is vanished.

4. Trust itself has different levels, since it can be categorized based on its efficient cause, its internal structure, or its final cause. Just as prayer and fasting are performed out of fear of God’s punishment, in order to receive rewards in the hereafter, or to give thanks for the bounties of God and to attain proximity to Him, trust can also have various levels based on its final cause, the highest of which is the “trust of the mystics,” since their only goal is proximity to God. As Imam Ali (a) says in the Supplication of Kumayl,

“O the ultimate destination of the mystics” (Ibn Tawus 1409 AH, 2:708).

5. Apart from being a source for achieving a desired result, trust itself is an act of worship. Honor and contentment accompany trust and

never abandon the one who has sought God as a trustee. Imam Sadiq (a) is reported to have said,

“Surely, richness and honor move around until they arrive at the station of trust, where they reside” (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:65).

Accordingly, a person who has entrusted his affairs to God not only has achieved his goal but has also acquired the source of contentment and dignity. This can be understood from Quran 65:3, according to which God is sufficient for the person who entrusts his affairs to Him, because if God, who is rich and the possessor of all dignity, suffices a person, then surely that person will achieve richness and dignity.

The sufficiency of God for the one who has entrusted his affairs to Him can be clearly derived from the following hadith attributed to Imam Sadiq (a): “If a person is given three things, three other things cannot be withheld from him: if a person is given the permission to supplicate, he will receive its answer; if a person is given the ability to show gratitude for the bounties he has received, he will be granted an increase in them; and if a person is allowed to entrust his affairs to God, he will be given sufficiency in all his affairs.” Then the Imam (a) referred to the following verses of the Quran: “And whoever puts his trust in God, He will suffice him” (65:3); “And when your Lord proclaimed, ‘If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you [in blessing], but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is indeed severe’” (14:7); and “Call Me, and I will answer you!” (40:60) (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:65).

6. The teachings of the holy Quran and the Ahl al-Bayt (a) regarding trust have been commented on and interpreted by Muslim philosophers and mystics in their discussions of practical wisdom. In this regard, Mulla Hadi Sabziwari explains that *tawakkul* (trust) is to

entrust ones affairs to God, who is the Ordainer of all affairs, but not to stop acting, because many affairs come to fruition through the means specified by God, and if one wishes to be righteous, he should focus on purifying his intentions and thoughts rather than leaving action (Sabziwari 1379 Sh, 325).

20) Contentment with God (RIDA)

The station of *rida* (being pleased with God) is achieved when one reaches a level in which not only he earns the pleasure of God but also he becomes pleased with the decrees of God and what He chooses for him. Therefore, pleasure has two types: (1) earning the pleasure of God by performing all obligatory deeds and refraining from all forbidden acts, and (2) being pleased with God's decrees and whatever He does. The latter type is of greater value, but the first type is required from all people.

It is narrated from Imam Sadiq (a) that "the Messenger of God would never say about something that had passed, 'if only something else had happened'" (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:63), as all of his words and actions were in conformity with God's will. This is the peak of the station of *rida*. Such an attitude can be viewed in the lives of the Ahl al-Bayt (a) and their followers, founded upon the firm belief in the fact that God is the all-Wise and that all His works are rooted in His justice, wisdom, and mercy.

Describing the reality of asceticism, which is a prerequisite for arriving at the station of *rida*, God states that all that comes to pass in the external world has already been decreed in a divine and heavenly book.

"so that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor
boast for what comes your way" (Quran 57:23).

It is not right to associate happiness with the occurrence of something good and sadness with its loss; the person who has arrived at the station of rida is pleased with the will of God in both cases. This pleasure is a result of love, which itself is a result of knowledge. A person who believes in God as the source of wisdom and mercy gives his heart to Him, humbles himself in His presence, and is pleased with what He decrees for him.

The Quran describes the wayfarers who have entered this station as follows:

“God is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him. That is for those who fear their Lord” (98:8).

A person who has true fear of God will reach a stage where God is pleased with him and he is pleased with God. This type of fear is an outcome of true knowledge:

“Only those of God’s servants having knowledge fear Him” (Quran 35:28).

This then also forms a union with love. When a person believes in God as the source of wisdom and mercy, he attaches his heart to his Lord and becomes pleased with what God chooses for him.

With regard to the station of rida, the Quran states,

“But no, by your Lord! They will not believe until they make you a judge in their disputes, then do not find within their hearts any dissent to your verdict and submit in full submission” (4:65).

According to this verse, no one is a true believer except if they reach a point where in all of their disputes—whether intellectual, ethical, financial and so forth—they consider the Prophet (s) their judge and refer to him. For a true believer, the reference point for solving all disputes and disagreement must be the holy Prophet (s) and the divine teachings that were revealed to him. When a true believer refers to the teachings of the holy Prophet (s) and accepts them, he becomes not only tranquil but also pleased—no matter whether the result is in his favor or not.

In another verse, the holy Quran states,

“A faithful man or woman may not have any option in their matter, when God and His Apostle have decided on a matter” (33:36).

No believing man or woman has the right to give an opinion on a matter that has been decided by God and the holy Prophet (s) and say, “I do not accept this or that,” as the right to violate the laws of God and His messenger does not go hand in hand with belief.

It is reported that “God commanded the angel Ridwan, the guard of Paradise, to call the souls of the believers” (Majlish 1403 AH, 6:292). The name Ridwan is related to rida. This could allegorically mean that the station of pleasure is a door of Paradise and that a person who is pleased has passed through it, and those who does not reach this station will not pass this door.

21) Submission to God

Reaching the station of rida for a wayfarer does not signify the end of his journey; he still has to pass through a few more stations in order to

reach the final destination. This is because such a person still possesses an inclination but says, "I have harmonized my inclination with what pleases God." And having an inclination shows that the journey has not yet finished. He must proceed until his inclinations and wants fade away. This higher station is known as the station of submission.

Submission is different from trust and rida. In the station of trust, one wants to do something, but because he is unable to do it on his own, he seeks a trustworthy person who can ensure that the action is done properly. And because no one can perform actions better than God, there is no one to trust better than God:

"And in God let all the trusting put their trust"
(Quran 14:12).

However, the station of pleasure is higher than that of trust, because in the station of trust, a person wants God to act in a manner that is in accordance with his wants and desires, whereas in the station of pleasure God's wants find primacy and those of the servant become secondary. Now, in the station of submission, the servant has no want to begin with, and thus addresses God, "Judgment is that which you feel is correct and grace is that which you do."¹ Such a servant has given his heart to God and thus has nowhere to plant wants and dreams. It is this type of wayfarers that submit in full submission (Quran 4:65).

¹. This is a part of a famous sonnet of the great Iranian poet, Hafiz.

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