

Stages of the Mystics and Stations of the Spiritual Journey. Part III: Fear and Sadness¹

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The station of fear (*khawf*) and sadness (*huzn*) is one of the stations on the path of travellers towards God. Sometimes, fear occurs along with awe (*khashyat*) and sometimes with dread (*rabbat*). Awe and dread are close to each other in meaning, whereas fear is not. Awe is the impression formed due to belief in the greatness of a supreme being and indeed dread is similar to awe. However, fear is the result of actual consequences. Thus, the Noble Qur'an distinguishes between awe and fear and considers [only] those having knowledge to be in awe of God:

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

The Qur'an also sometimes mentions awe and fear together:

“...and hold their Lord in *awe*, and are *fearful* of an adverse reckoning.” (13:21)

The above *ayah* is about those who fear their Lord and are fearful of the judgment in the hereafter. In this *ayah*, fear is associated with the sufferings of the Day of Judgment and awe at the glory of the Lord. Moreover, people of awe are higher in position in heaven than people of fear, regarding which the Noble Qur'an states,

¹ Jawādi Amulī, Abdullah, *Tafsīr-e Tasnīm*, vol. 11: *Stages of Ethics in the Qur'an*, (excerpt from) ch. 3, (Qom: Isra Publication, 1999)

² Ayatollah Jawādi Amulī is a Grand Ayatollah commonly believed to be one of the best Shiite experts in Qur'anic Exegesis and a great mystic. He is the author of an ongoing thematic commentary on the Qur'an called “*Tafsīr-e Tasnīm*”. The title of the 11th volume of his commentary is “*Ethical stages in the Qur'an*”. The third chapter of the book deals with “Positions of mystics and stations of the spiritual journey”. This article is the second part of the translation of this chapter, the first part of which was published in the previous issue of the journal.

“That is for those who are in awe of their Lord.” (98: 8)

A monotheist feels in awe of none other than the Lord, although one might have fear of others. This means that a monotheist will have a natural fear of snake bites and scorpions’ stings, but they will only be in awe of God. They know that a creature will only harm them by order of the Lord; and no creature will have any harm or benefit without His order. For example, bees produce benefits by the order of their Lord:

“...and follow meekly the ways of your Lord.’...” (16: 69)

Furthermore, snakes and scorpions bite and sting in obedience to divine order, because control of every creature is in the hand of God and He guides them on the straight path:

“...There is no living being but He holds it by its forelock.” (11: 56)

A true monotheist will only feel awe of God [and none other than God], although one will have normal reactions of fear to natural events.

Types of Fear

Sometimes, the concept of fear is compared with sadness, sometimes with hope and sometimes with security:

1. When fear is compared with sadness, an interpretation is sometimes given according to which fear is about the future and sadness is about the past. Thus a person will be sad who has failed to achieve a longed-for objective or has had bad luck in the past; but if one anticipates that something will not be obtained in the future or that bad luck will come, one will be fearful in the present. Thus, fear is about things in the future and sadness is about the past.
2. When fear is compared with hope, it is interpreted in such a way that one might be fearful and hopeful at the same time. This means that fear must not lead to despair; but rather it must open up in one’s mind the possibility of the “non-existence of losing the wanted” or the “non-existence of the unwanted” so that hope will rise up. It is said that the fear of “the traveller towards Allah” must not be fear alone but that it must be combined with hope when fear opposes hope (*rajā*). In ethics, they are mentioned together.

3. Having fear of feeling secure (from, for example, God's Wrath or from the occurrence of difficulties) is very good, but [feeling] secure about not having fear is very bad. A person who is fearful will try to compensate for past mistakes, but someone who is not a thoughtful and considerate person and whose heart is hard and occupied by useless issues, feels secure. Accordingly, the Noble Qur'an states,

“...No one feels secure from Allah's devising except the people who are losers.” (7: 99)

Those described in this *ayah* as 'losers' consider themselves in a secure fortress and do not realise that punishment and forgiveness is entirely in the Hand of the One. As we read elsewhere in the Qur'an,

“...With that Allah deters His servants.” (39: 16)

Thus, in the near or distant future, they may lose [God's] blessings or may have a problem and therefore they must not feel secure.

There are two types of security: (a) negative security, which is contrary to fear, as explained as above; and (b) positive security, which is gained by the pious and those whom God has brought near to Himself. God has also promised it to some people: “Those who have faith and do not taint their faith with wrongdoing—for such there shall be safety, and they are the [rightly] guided.” (6: 82)

Travellers towards God live in the hope of receiving this blessing but are not content with their current level or with the type of security in which they will regard themselves as safe and sound and will not fear anything. They are not content with such a feeling of security because, at any given moment, everyone is in danger of becoming ignorant and losing the blessings they have received.

However, there is a higher level of security that is not granted to every traveller. This occurs when a person reaches the station of “contentment” or an even higher one where they have no fear and no sadness because they have nothing to lose in the future since their only beloved is God Who will never be lost! One will feel fear if one had great liking for or attachment to perishable things such as property or relatives like one's father, mother, brother or children, due to the fear of losing them, according to the following verse:

“What is with you must vanish: what is with God will endure....” (16: 96)

However, if someone is not attached to such things and is solely enamoured with and fascinated by love for God, then one will have nothing in one's heart but God and no love but for Him. Therefore, if one has no love but for God, the object of one's love will never be gone; and, thus, one will have no fear. Such a person will neither become fearful that his love is likely to be lost nor will he become sad due to such a threat. On the contrary, his love is surely the Eternal and therefore, he is in a "secure place".

It is the same regarding the past. You have not lost anything in the past if your love in the past has also been God. In this way, such a person arrives at the station of *wilayah* [friendship and guardianship] and friends of God have no fear or sadness:

"Look! The friends of Allah will indeed have no fear
nor will they grieve." (10: 62)

The meaning of the *ayah* is relevant to our discussion only if its message expresses something which is true and exists and is not merely wishful thinking. If, indeed, it was only wishful thinking, it will have no relevance to our current discussion and could only be associated with our previous discussion where it was mentioned that God, the Almighty, will fulfil His promise to some people who will neither have any fear or sadness.

The person who arrives at the station of "contentment" is superior to all those in the afore-mentioned stations. Although such a person will lose some things and will suffer some hardships, however, because they are content with what pleases God, they will consider none of these hardships unpleasant. No loss or gain will be unpleasant or pleasant for them. There are only pleasant or unpleasant feelings for the person who themselves demands things and makes their own decisions and requests for things. However, if one considers one's demand to be fulfilled by the will of God, one will not have any unanswered demands and such a person will have no worries about losing what they might have wanted nor any worries about any unwanted incidents.

Regarding those who have arrived at such a station, it is written in the Qur'an,

"Look! *The friends of Allah* will indeed have no fear
nor will they grieve." (10: 62)

This is a statement based in reality about such people and is not merely a wish as it will indeed be so in both worlds. However, such a high position will not be achieved by those who are at the beginning of their journey towards God. On the contrary, having fear and sadness is a virtue for them. Furthermore, for those among them who are at the intermediate level, having a combination of fear and sadness is considered as perfection, until they reach the point where they are sure that their connection with God has a divine colour and they find that since God is “better and more lasting.” (20: 73), then the connection with Him will be of utmost goodness and perpetuity. Otherwise, the traveller will become extremely sad if there is any possibility of losing such a state and connection. This is so because as long as such fondness exists between the loving servant and their beloved Lord, the loving servant enjoys the existence of the Beloved, but if there is any decline in this connection, even the Eternity of God will not be enough to provide a sense of security for the traveller.

The Origin of Fear

When a traveller realises that an obligation has been neglected, one becomes sad about why it has been neglected and one becomes fearful of the punishment that will possibly be received in the future. Such people also have the same fear and sadness about a sin committed in the past.

Even those travellers who are just, in that they do not abandon an obligation or commit a forbidden act, will still be fearful and sad about the recommended things that they have not done. For example, they will regret missing the recommended time for prayer, and, therefore, they will redo the prayer later or they will be afraid that losing the time of one daily prayer may deprive them of some future virtues; or they will be sad about abandoning a recommended action or they will be afraid of not receiving a special blessing in the future because of abandoning a recommended action.

Above all, even if they perform all obligations and recommended actions and abstain from all forbidden and reprehensible actions and do not have any fear or sadness, they will still assess their deeds in comparison to divine blessings, and will realise that they have not been able to appreciate and thank God adequately for all of them, because performing obligations and abstaining from sins is a divine blessing in itself, and thus merits renewed thanks. Therefore self-

evaluating persons will always consider themselves indebted and will be sad about not being able to pay their debts and, therefore, will be fearful of being deprived of some blessings in the future. Thus, fear and sadness are means for travellers on their journey towards Allah.

Praised and Criticized Types of Fear and Sadness

Just as many other human attributes, such as avidity, can be considered as either positive or negative and consequently of one of two types, praised or blamed, so, too, can fear and sadness.

For example, avidity or greed is neither good nor bad in nature but rather it depends on the object of this greed or avidity. If someone is greedy for indulgence, pleasure and deception, it will be reprehensible because they become attached to this world which is the source of conceit and deceit. This type of greed is referred to as avarice and niggardliness, about which the Qur'an says,

“...And those who are saved from their own avarice
—it is they who are the felicitous.” (59: 9)

However, if someone has avidity for divine forgiveness, proximity to and reaching Allah, it is good and the Qur'an supports this by saying,

“...[they] supplicate their Lord in fear and hope...” (32: 16)

Fear and sadness are not good or bad in nature; but depending on the object, they can sometimes be good and sometimes bad. The Noble Qur'an states,

“Look! The friends of Allah will indeed have no fear
nor will they grieve.” (10: 62)

Elsewhere, in *Surah Hadid* [Iron], the Qur'an points out that all of the world's phenomena are for the purpose of examination. Therefore, human beings are sometimes in the depth of misery, sometimes at the height of power, sometimes settled and sometimes falling down, and these are all simply divine examinations:

“so that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor
exult for what comes your way...” (10: 23)

This *ayah* advises us that we should neither become overjoyed if we gain a certain privilege, nor should we ever be sorrowful if we lose a privilege. Someone who is sitting an exam will be only become sorrowful if failure is considered likely to happen and one will only be

happy and relaxed if one thinks success is very likely. Failure or success in worldly positions should not be a cause of happiness or sadness, because the fruit of this world is nothing but deception.

The Noble Qur'an states,

“For him who stands in awe of his Lord will be two gardens.” (55: 46)

And also,

“But as for him who is awed to stand before his Lord and forbids the soul from [following] desire, his refuge will indeed be paradise.” (79: 40-41)

Friends of Allah are distinguished as “the people of fear” and it is also the same for sadness and grief. Although they are exempt from sadness the Qur'an states about them that,

“...you see their eyes fill with tears because of the truth that they recognize.” (5: 83)

This explains that when friends of Allah hear *ayāt* of the Qur'an and the truth is thus revealed to them, they become sad because they have not yet achieved the truth and also because they have missed an opportunity to be brought near to Allah. Therefore, not only do their tears fall, but these tears spill over and stream down their face as if their eyes are falling and not just their tears.

Thus, sadness for the loss of an intellectual virtue or a divine perfection is in itself a virtue because it prepares the way to regain the lost virtue.

Some kinds of sadness block the sun [of life]. Essentially, the root of the word *ghamm* [in Arabic] is *ghumām* meaning “cloud” because clouds block the sun and its light and so they were called *ghumām*. If sadness comes to one's heart, it blocks the light of knowledge and thought and makes one seem to be living in a closed atmosphere. This type of sadness is criticised for blocking the sun, light and warmth [of one's life]; whereas sometimes clouds can, in fact, provide the right conditions for rain which clears the air and causes abundance in the land and will be beneficial in providing a better atmosphere for radiating light and clean air.

Sadness due to not achieving a certain privilege is like a dry cloud that has no benefit and only blocks the light and heat of the sun, limits the sky and dries up gardens.

On the contrary, there are those who will be sad and cry when they come to know the Lord because they had been deprived of His blessings until that moment. These are the close friends of God and are free from the chains of Satan.

“That is only Satan frightening his followers!.” (3: 175)

God describes those people who are sad in the hereafter as follows:

“Indeed he used to be joyful among his folk,” (84: 13)

The person who has been joyful in this world, will then be sad all the time in the hereafter because a misplaced joy has real sadness within it. Every untruth has an equivalent truth so because the joy of this world is artificial, it has real sadness inside it. For example, if one is given a position which is not deserved, one will experience artificial joy and real sadness. However, this sadness is hidden and the joy is visible for a time, but because the world revolves around justice and truth, it would not take long for this artificial joy to vanish when one's incompetence is discovered and one is withdrawn from that position. It will be then that true sadness will appear. Therefore, experiencing joy is not exclusive to this world and is felt in spiritual experiences and issues relating to the hereafter.

Pleasure due to worldly things is mentioned in the Qur'an as:

“...yellow, of a bright hue, pleasing to the onlookers.” (2: 69)

And it is also referred to when it states,

“Indeed he used to be joyful among his folk,” (84: 13)

Regarding happiness about spiritual matters, the Qur'an says,

“All command belongs to Allah, before and after, and on that day the faithful will rejoice” (30: 04)

This implies that when the theists succeed, all Muslims become happy. The above mentioned *ayah* has two messages. Firstly, whenever we hear about theists' success, we should become happy and prepare the ground for them. At that time, the Qur'an was talking about the war between the Eastern Roman Empire and Iran and at that point Muslims were not at war with non-Muslims nor were Arabs at war

with anyone. However, the Qur'an suggests that the faithful must be happy about the victory of theists over atheists and thus it encourages Muslims to have enthusiasm regarding the victory of the concept of the Oneness of God.

The above mentioned happiness refers to the minor jihad which is external, but the internal jihad is much more important. Therefore we must be immensely happy if we win the war between virtues and vices. If someone who is suffering from envy, ignorance or sins can suppress their envy, remove their ignorance through gaining knowledge and repent from their sins and moves on towards obedience, then they should be happy. If victory in the minor jihad (the external jihad) brings happiness, then surely winning the greater jihad (the internal jihad) must bring an even greater happiness which will be eternal because the immateriality and eternity of the soul result in the enduring nature of human attributes.

Regarding the happiness and joy of the faithful in the heaven, the Qur'an states,

“So Allah saved them from the ills of that day, and granted them freshness and joy.” (76: 11)

Furthermore, elsewhere the Qur'an reports that when the record of the virtuous is given to them in their right hand, they join those they are close to and other faithful people, while being happy,

“and he will return to his folks joyfully.” (84: 9)

Fear is also of two types: fear of God, which is very good and fear of the world, which is very bad. Fearing God is considered praiseworthy because in the Qur'an, God values the angels because of their fear:

“They fear their Lord above them, and do what they are commanded.” (16: 50)

The angels' fear of God is an admirable fear. They do not have fear of losing property, children or position. Divine people have the same kind of fear and therefore the above *ayah* is true about them as well because they also:

“...supplicate their Lord in fear and hope...” (32: 16)

They work for the sake of God and fear only Him. In a narration from the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a) we read,

“The best kind of worship is that of the free (*abrār*), the lovers and the grateful ones who worship out of gratitude, not out of fear. However, even those who are free have fear due to their feeling of separation from God.”³

In the Supplication of Kumayl we read,

“Suppose that I may endure the heat of Your fire, yet how would I then endure not gazing upon Your generosity?”⁴

Such a fear is a beneficial, subtle and rational fear not motivated by the self.

Anxiety is neither good nor bad in nature, but what it pertains to is sometimes good and sometimes bad. For example, the Noble Qur’an admires those who are apprehensive of the Judgment Day:

“...and who are apprehensive of the Hour.” (21: 49)

Sometimes, a person’s anxiety warns them about hell which is in fact God’s warning and is ‘*Insha*’⁵, not a descriptive statement.

Sometimes there are *ayāt* about men of God such as the following *ayah*:

“The Great Terror will not upset them,…” (21: 103)

This is God’s promise that they will be kept safe from the terror of the Judgment Day.

Hope is also not good or bad in nature. It is good if one’s hopes rest on the source of power; as referred to in the following *ayah*:

“...expect a commerce that will never go bankrupt,” (35: 29)

The Commander of the Faithful, ‘Ali (a) advised five things in his will, among which was,

“None of you should have hope save in his Lord.”⁶

³ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Subhi Salih, (Qom: Al-Hijrah, A.H. 1395) part of Sayings, no. 237

⁴ Sayyid ibn Tawus, *Iqbal al-A’mal*, (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, A.H. 1390) 707.

⁵ Any grammatical expressions other than statements including imperatives, conditionals, exclamations, etc.

⁶ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Subhi Salih, part of Sayings, No. 82.

Since the Mighty and Merciful Lord is the One God to be worshipped, there is no reason for someone to put their hope in other than God because, no one can fulfil a task but God. Thus, one must fear none but God because no one is All-Independent but God.

Inclination and aversion are among the neutral issues which are neither good nor bad in nature. The Noble Qur'an reproaches those who are inclined towards this world:

“and you eat the inheritance rapaciously, and you love wealth with much fondness.” (89: 19 – 20)

However, human beings can reach a state where they do not covet other people's property and would even donate their own to others:

“...but prefer [the Immigrants] to themselves, though poverty be their own lot...” (59: 9)

These are the people of true inclination.

Hope-inducing Fear

Valuable fear of God has many fruits, among which is inducing hope. If we acquire the feeling that all of God's wrath is expressed under the shadow of His mercy and all His threats are issued together with His promises of rewards, we will discover that He has always been taking us into account and therefore we must always be mindful of Him. God addresses us in a very merciful and encouraging manner in the Qur'an such as in the following *āyat*:

“Remember Me, and I will remember you, ...” (2: 152)

And also,

“...remember My blessing which I bestowed upon you, ...” (2: 40)

However, whenever a servant remembers God, it shows that God has first remembered His servant. Thus, the servant's attention to God is a result of divine attention. First, God's blessings are bestowed upon a servant; and this then provokes an inclination in them so that they start their journey towards God.

Regarding remembrance of God, the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali (a) states,

“Remembrance is not among the performances of the tongue or states of mind, but it is first originated by the Remembered and then made by the one who remembers.”⁷

Although invocation is mostly performed with the tongue and is associated with thought and has its roots in it, however, the cause of invocation and remembrance is not tongue or thought. It is first caused by the action of the Invoked and then performed by the one who remembers. The Invoked is God Whom we invoke, but it is first He who calls us and Whose blessings reach us, as a result of which we are prompted and provoked to recall Him. Then He would acknowledge our remembrance and answer it.

Thus, firstly, God, the Invoked, remembers a servant and then the remembered servant remembers God. Most people are like this; only a very few of them will feel no such tendency at all in themselves. However, truly wise people will deeply appreciate such an inclination and flow of blessings and therefore will not easily ignore it. Whenever they recognize such a feeling within themselves, they will try to benefit from it and go along with that feeling in order to try to perform prayers and supplications and to repent or to do some other good actions. Thus, they respond positively to that divine call in complete contrast to other people who will pay only passing attention to this feeling and at most will only have a temporary feeling of joy, but will not reflect on it.

Sometimes it happens that one experiences a beneficial feeling of being reminded of God, for example, when at a funeral or in a memorial service after a funeral or while visiting a sick person or when listening to advice or a good poem. A negligent person will pay scant attention to it and will not take any action to follow up this feeling by remembering God.

However some people make the most of such feelings. They recognize that God has called them, when they have such a special feeling. Therefore, the illuminating statement of Imam ‘Ali (a) which suggests that the origin of remembrance is from the Remembered is revealed to be a pivotal one. When God calls a person, inclination towards the Truth will be created in them. Thus, they will become mindful of God

⁷ Khunsari, *Sharḥ Ghurar al-Ḥikam*, (Tehran: Tehran University Publication, 1360 A.H.S.) vol. 2, 134, n. 2091.

and consequently will give up false hopes and they themselves will become a blessed tree [with many fruits].

Consequently, the promises and threats of Satan are the key to some people's thoughts so that their lives are based on nothing useful and are fruitless. However for other people the promises and threats of God are the key to their thoughts and this brings forth blessedness, purity and goodness. This is why God considers them to be a heavy gift:

“Indeed soon We shall cast on you a weighty word.” (73: 5)

We know that the Qur'an and the Prophet's Family (a) are “Thiq” [in Arabic] meaning “weight”. Thus, one who has benefitted from their knowledge will be weighty and the scale of their good deeds and faith will be very heavy.

It is mentioned in some hadith that if in one pan of a pair of scales we have the concept of “[there is] no god but Allah”⁸ and in the other pan we have “the whole creation”, the pan containing the concept of “[there is] no god but Allah” will be heavier:

“If all the seven skies and the seven earths are put into one pan of a pair of scales and [the concept of] “[there is] “no god but Allah” in the other pan, it will be heavier even if multiple number of the same quantity of the former is added to the first pan [all the seven skies and the seven earths].”

This is so because the whole creation is material and will be destroyed and disappear:

“When the sun is wound up, when the stars scatter,”
(81: 1 - 2)

“No indeed! When the earth is levelled to a plain,”
(89: 21)

“...yet the entire earth will be in His fist on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand.” (39: 67)

However the concept of the Oneness of Allah remains unchanged and eternal. The same comparison is made regarding the concept of

⁸ The concept of “La ilaha illallah” [in Arabic]

“praise” so that the concept of “All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds,” (1: 2) is compared to “all the skies and earths” and it will even be heavier. The Noble Prophet (s) states,

“If the entire world is a piece of food and a monotheist servant [of God] eats it and then says, ‘All praise belongs to Allah’; surely saying this is better than the world and whatever is contained in it.”⁹

Therefore, a faithful person is weighty. We can understand whom and what we should fear from the above explanation. We should only fear God and no one and nothing else. It is better to have a fear which is the result of the threats [of God] and then brings us closer to His promises which are divine mercy. However, it must be a hope-inducing fear, not a terrorizing one because the former type of fear is a great blessing with many fruits.

Many people want to live a long life and they fear death. They wish long lives for each other and pray for this. It is evident that if a long life is accompanied by obedience and service to the Islamic community, then it is a blessing, otherwise if not, it will bring great difficulties. Someone who lives to a ripe old age will witness the deaths of their friends and family members and therefore has to be patient with these hardships and the transformation of a warm and lively life into a cold and dull one.

Those who fear death and hope to have a long life, often have neither thought fully about such a long life, nor have they fully understood the reality of death. They may have thought that death is annihilation and so a human being will be annihilated after death while in reality death is nothing but a migration to a new life, which will be incomparable to this worldly life. Death transports a purified person from this material life, which is filled a variety of problems, to a garden where such a person finds “ease, abundance, and a garden of bliss.” (56: 89). For the faithful, there is no greater joy than death because at that time they will see the Imams (a) and God’s angels of mercy who have a special sincerity and purity. Therefore most negative fears have roots in the ignorance that Satan imposes on the ignorant.

Constructive and destructive Awe

⁹ Majlisi, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, (Beirut, Mu’assasah al-Wafa’, 1403 A.H.) vol. 90, 216.

A human being fears some powers in his heart and regards them with reverence. Such a fear mixed with reverence is called “awe” and is considered to be among the stations of the wayfarers and travellers towards God.

Revering a false power is destructive and revering the truth is constructive. Fearing the power of falsehood is in fact fearing its tyranny and fearing the power of truth is in fact fearing its justice. Thus, fearing oppression is destructive and fearing justice is constructive. One must not fear oppression or an oppressor because their power is false. One must stand against them until they are uprooted. The Noble Qur’an states,

“Rather, We hurl the truth against falsehood, and it
crushes its head, and behold, falsehood vanishes!”
(21: 18)

However fearing a truthful ruler is good because in fact one will be fearing their justice. A just person will judge based on justice and a traveller towards Allah will try not to do anything which arouses the wrath of the just.

Generally speaking, what is found on the path of the traveller is to their benefit and whatever blocks their path is destructive. Things that block the road are troublesome to someone who is walking along that road. Everything that is placed across the road is called an obstacle but whatever runs along the road to the front is called ‘*Qā'id*’ [meaning “leader”] and if it is behind, it is called ‘*Sā'iq*’ [meaning “director”]. Human being needs to have some people walking in front of them in order to follow them. The leaders of the Straight Path are the Imams (a). There are some people who follow the Imams (a) and disseminate their thoughts and these are Shiites [followers] of them. They are called Shiites because they follow their Imams (a), disseminate their thoughts and advertise and publicise their behaviors and traditions.

Reverence is of two types: firstly towards God, the Almighty, which is along the Straight Path and is helpful and then a second type towards other than God which blocks the Path. One will not feel in awe of other than God if one finds out that the power of God is the truth and whatever against it is false:

“...So what is there after the truth except error?...” (10: 32)

They will understand that they are powerless because they are being dominated by God, the All-dominant:

“And He is the All-dominant over His servants...” (6: 18)

Therefore, such a person will be a monotheist in their reverence and their feeling of awe and thus they will only fear God and praise only Him.

The Qur’an describes those who pray while having such a quality, saying,

“Certainly, the faithful have attained salvation, those who are humble in their prayers,” (23: 1 - 2)

It would be problematic if the Qur’an had ordered us to be full of awe and would also have been incompatible with the lenience of religion since the religion which the Noble Prophet (s) brought is easy to follow and tolerant.

“I have risen having the religion of ease and open-handedness”¹⁰

However, it would not be so difficult if people were ordered to be full of awe during prayer since this would not take longer than ten minutes. It is also advised to have other recommended qualities such as purity and presence of heart during prayer which are also among the beneficial qualities to be obtained on the path of a traveller towards God. The Noble Qur’an states,

“Be watchful of your prayers, and [especially] the middle prayer, and stand in obedience to Allah” (2: 238)

The faithful who are addressed by this *ayah* and ordered to do so would be considered by God as those:

“...who are watchful of their prayers.” (23: 9)

Thus, they will be full of awe during every prayer and this will make awe permanent and deeply instilled in them.

Accordingly, the Noble Qur’an addresses them as, “those who are persevering in their prayers” (70: 23) because they always have ritual

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 22, 264.

purity, cleanliness, presence of heart and are mindful of God and they habitually perform obligatory and recommended prayers.

If someone keeps their purity and is mindful of God, always saying and remembering His names, it would be as if they were performing prayer all the time, as Bābā Tahir, the Iranian poet, says, “Blessed be the one who is always in prayer.” Regarding such a state, the Qur’an says,

“Is it not time yet for those who have faith that their hearts should be humbled for Allah’s remembrance
....” (57: 16)

This quality is not exclusive to prayer because the Qur’an suggests that a faithful person must always be full of awe for God, mindful of Him and also reciting His names:

“Celebrate the Name of your Lord, the Most Exalted,” (87: 1)

A faithful person must be full of awe towards the Names of God.¹¹

Having True Awe and Tranquillity

In the beginning having rational awe of God will bring apprehension and stress because one will value oneself in relation to God and thus find a sense of humility and become terrified. However if that sense of awe continues, the feeling of fear will be changed to tranquility. God, the Glorious says,

“...whereat quiver the skins of those who fear their Lord, then their skins and hearts soften to Allah’s remembrance....” (39: 23)

And also,

“...Look! The hearts find rest in Allah’s remembrance!” (13: 28)

¹¹ According to the *‘urafa*, a Name of God is a matter of reality, not convention, and that is “the Essence of Truth with a certain attribution”. The words referring to this name reality, and are actually names for the Name and even [attributed] names for names of the Name; because names refer to meanings and concepts and therefore by the Name, we mean those meanings and concepts which coincide with the facts to which the Name is referring and the facts are the true Names of God. The essence of reverence belongs to that “Name of the Real” and His Names of concepts and meanings in creation must be glorified with awe as well as His “Name of the Real.”

This is confirmed when God bestows tranquility and solemnity upon the hearts of the faithful because of their permanent feeling of awe, as said in the Qur'an,

“Then Allah sent down His composure upon His Apostle and upon the faithful...” (9: 26)

Thus, God, the Glorious will grant them tranquility in the way mentioned above. However, someone who does not recognize the different kinds of tranquility and relies on people other than God, is a person who will firstly fear those other than God and rely on them to become calm, but this calmness will be a false tranquility such as that induced by narcotics or alcohol because after passing through that state, the previous disturbed state will recur.

The Noble Qur'an states,

“Do they feel secure from Allah's devising? No one feels secure from Allah's devising except the people who are losers.” (7: 99)

Those who feel secure from Allah's devising are simply those who are in loss. On the contrary, a monotheist will say to themselves that if they do wrong, they will be punished. However, an atheist will deny the Owner of Creation and will not take into consideration any influence from other than themselves due to their disbelief in the Origin of Justice:

“I do not know of any god that you may have other than me.” (28: 38)

And they will say things such as “I am your exalted lord!” (79: 24) or “Does not the kingdom of Egypt belong to me and these rivers that run at my feet?” (43: 51)

Such a person will have a false sense of security. Therefore, the Qur'an states,

“Do the people of the towns feel secure from Our punishment overtaking them at night while they are asleep?” (7: 97)

God will punish them while they are sleeping with a false sense of security.

If someone is not humble and is not full of awe, divine mercy will distract him and God provides him with expansion.¹² God will let them indulge in whatever they wish because such people do not have an experience of that awe, and thus they will fall into vulgarity and will make false claims. However someone who is between the states of contraction and expansion and is humble and full of awe will not become proud about God's mercy upon them since they know that this mercy is not guaranteed and God will also show His wrath because human beings are always being tested by God.

The sense of security of those who are humble before God is real and therefore we read in the Qur'an that,

“Those who have faith and do not taint their faith with wrongdoing — for such there shall be safety, and they are the [rightly] guided.” (6: 82)

Such people are in the fortress of the concept of the Oneness of God:

“The expression of ‘there is no god but God’ is the fortress of Mine. Thus, whoever enters My fortress, will be safe from My punishment.”¹³

Furthermore, such people are also in the fortress of the Family of the Prophet's (a) guardianship which is the impregnable fortress of God.

Tenth: Hope

Alongside fear, hope is another stage in the journey towards God. A traveller must [always] be expectant about God's mercy. Imam Sajjād (a) implores Allah,

“God, three traits have prevented me from asking Thee and one trait has urged me on: I am prevented by a command Thou hast commanded in which I have been slow, a prohibition Thou hast prohibited toward which I have hurried, and a favour through which Thou hast favoured me for which I have not given sufficient thanks. I am urged to ask Thee by Thy gratuitous bounty upon him who turns his face toward Thee and comes to Thee with a good opinion,

¹² Reprieve from God's punishment

¹³ Saduq, *Al-Tawhīd* (Tehran: Armaghan-e Tuba, 1384 A.H.S.) Ch. Thawāb al-Muwaḥḥidīn, hadith no. 23.

since all Thy beneficence is gratuitous bounty and every one of Thy favours a new beginning!”¹⁴

Thus, the only open way for us is the fourth method [“to ask Thee...”] and although we are undeserving however God’s mercy and grace covers everyone (His prophets, close friends, angels and other servants) and so, full of hope, we will depart towards Him by the fourth way which is inclusive of all.

According to the above explanation, a traveller towards God will inevitably travel through fear, hope and sadness. They will progress on this journey through hope which is available to all human beings and in this way, they will be able to take themselves into the presence of their Lord no matter in what state they might be or any problems they might have, because they will not reach God due to their own merit but through being hopeful regarding God’s mercy. Therefore, human beings must be hopeful about achieving God’s blessings, forgiveness of their sins and becoming pure. They can be hopeful because “God’s mercy is more immense than our sins.”

Hope of a traveller

In the beginning of their journey, the hope of a traveller towards God is weak, it then becomes stronger in the middle of the road and towards the end it becomes profound to the extent that it transforms into tranquillity.

If a traveller does not prepare the prerequisites for reaching God’s special mercy, they are not a true traveller. They merely hold onto hopes because they only hope about mercy in their heart but not in their mind, since they do not prepare the prerequisites for it. Such a person is like a farmer who expects to reap a good harvest without having dug the ground and sown the seeds! Therefore, such a person is not of those who travel and journey towards God. However, if they do indeed make preparations, they will then be like a farmer who digs the ground, sows seeds and then waits for the resulting produce. This state is called “hope”.

Thus, a traveller will not merely wish. This is why hoping alone is denounced,

¹⁴ *Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, (Qom: Oswe, 1408 A.H.) Supplication no. 12.

“It will be neither after your hopes nor the hopes of the People of the Book...” (4: 123)

Therefore, one must have faith and good deeds.

Despair Leads to Disbelief

Despair is contrary to hope. Despair is really detrimental and despair regarding God’s mercy could even lead to disbelief. A disbeliever does not believe in the Resurrection, heaven and hell and the necessity for being fearful of hell and hopeful of entering heaven.

However, if a faithful person feels despair about God’s mercy it means that either they are having doubts about the power of God or about the limitlessness of His mercy and think that God’s power or mercy is limited. This misconception will lead to disbelief. Therefore, feeling despair is considered as disbelief in the Qur’an:

“...Indeed no one despairs of Allah’s mercy except the faithless lot.” (12: 87)

Thus, it is impossible that someone has faith in God and falls into despair, imagining that God would not forgive them again or that His mercy has ended for them!

In the Noble Qur’an, the faithful are ordered to have hope and prohibited from falling into despair. Regarding hope and despair, the Qur’an states,

“...to supplicate their Lord in fear and hope...” (32: 16)

Although, when considering the complete *ayah*, such *ayāt* are “statements” and have a descriptive meaning, however they are also commands for example, in this case stating that a faithful person must have both fear and hope about the future. They will be fearful due to having doubts about the acceptability of their deeds and they will be hopeful due to the limitlessness of God’s mercy.

On the other hand, despair about God’s mercy is prohibited in the Qur’an:

“Say [that Allah declares,] ‘O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed Allah will forgive all sins....’ (39: 53)

Peoples sins are injustice and oppression upon themselves. Accordingly, the Qur'an states,

“...have committed excesses against their own souls...”

This means that to misuse God's blessings, such as one's soul, intelligence and bodily organs, is “committing excesses”.

Anyway, the Qur'an orders those who have committed excesses not to despair of the mercy of Allah, since it is possible to return to Him. Then, the Qur'an states,

“Turn penitently to Him and submit to Him...” (39: 54)

Moreover, we must make up for the losses in our lives! We will be spending our lives properly if we go to bed early, so that we are not sleepy or tired and we get up early in the morning. Obviously, if one's life is spent in indulgence and self-gratification, one is considered to have committed excesses.

Accordingly, the Noble Qur'an describes the faithful as those who:

“expect a commerce that will never go bankrupt...”
(35: 29)

However some people's trade is not profitable:

“...so their trade did not profit them...” (2: 16)

For others, it is indeed profitable! God rewards those who struggle to reach Him with ten times more than the worth of their efforts.

Thus, hope is opposite to despair and has stages. Moreover, the common factor in trust, hope and wishfulness is “expectation” which means that all people having any of the above mentioned qualities have expectations but the expectations of the wishful are false, the expectations of the hopeful are realistic and those of the trustful are the most realistic of all.

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