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Mohammad Ali Shomali

This paper is based on Lecture 11 of a series of lectures entitled, "Spiritual Struggle of Karbala." This lecture was delivered by Dr. Shomali on the Day of Ashura in Muharram 1433/Nov & Dec 2011 in London.

Abstract

On the day of Ashura, Imam Husayn (a) and his companions displayed the greatest morals while their enemies possessed the vilest traits. This paper presents some of the most prominent and finest of the Imam's and his companions' virtues, namely, ardent love for Allah (swt), great honor, and unwavering patience.

Those who truly love Imam Husayn and mourn for his suffering can – through Allah's mercy – join him in the countless rewards he received as a result of his patience and the actions that stemmed from it. An additional illustration of the three types of patience will be offered, specifically, patience pertaining to performing obligatory acts, refraining from forbidden acts, and patience during calamities.

These three actions earned Imam Husayn immense heavenly rewards, and furthermore, Allah grants these rewards to those who wholeheartedly commemorate the tragedy of Karbala and endeavors to courteously visit him (a).

Imam Husayn (a) and his companions exhibited the greatest values a persona can achieve. Conversely,

their enemies showed the worst vices a person can suffer from. Devising a comprehensive list of the virtues manifested in the Imam's action on Ashura would bring about an exceedingly long list. In what follows, we will refer to selected virtues that stood out as the finest of these virtues, namely love for Allah (swt), honour, and patience.

Love for Allah

Sometimes we obey Allah (swt) because we do not want to get punished or blamed by Him. However, sometimes it is not merely a matter of obedience. When you love Allah (swt), this love drives you to want to serve Him even when it is not compulsory. For such people, recommended acts become necessary because they know that this is what the Beloved wants. If you live with a special person whom you love, you willingly wait to do something for him or her. As soon as this person gets thirsty you bring a nice drink or enjoyably get anything else he or she might needs.

Thus, love is a level much higher than obedience. Love is to go out of your way to please your beloved. It is love that kept the companions of Imam Husayn (a) with him, even after he gave them permission to leave. Even though he encouraged them to leave the battlefield to a safe haven with Imam's family members, none of them left. Although they knew they would inevitably face death, they decided to stay with him (a), since such a death was more desirable for them than to be far from their beloved Imam.

Honour and Dignity

Imam Husayn's (a) speeches, especially from Medina to Karbala, displayed his firm desire for honour and dignity. When it comes to honour, there is no question of giving it up. It is unfortunate when people take time to consider whether or not to give in to the temptation of sinning, and try to find excuses. A true believer does not need to reconsider committing a sin or not, especially when his or her honour is concerned.

One way to better understand the importance of it is to bear in mind that one of the universal tasks of all the prophets was to help people establish social justice. The following verse shows the cenral position of justice:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

Certainly, We have sent all the messengers with manifest truths and gave them book and scale [***law***] ***so that people establish justice.*** (***57:25***)

Another value close to justice, something that comes directly under justice, is dignity. The highest right we have as a human beings is dignity. Many people think that the highest and the most important right is life. However, although the right of life is very important, dignity surpasses it. A person's dignity is more

important than his life. If I'm kept alive while being treated like an animal by having food thrown along with constantly being humiliated, what is the value of such life? Is life the most important right given to a person? The most crucial right is to be treated as a human being with honour and dignity.

Therefore, justice is to give people what they deserve and even more is to treat them with honour and dignity. This essential value was planned by Allah to eventually be achieved at a universal scale. Without having at least a day in which humanity can live with justice and dignity the world will not come to an end. Living with justice in this world is inevitable. The kingdom of Allah must be established on this earth before witnessing and experiencing it in the hereafter.

The Role Model For Establishing Justice

The leader who will succeed in establishing justice is Imam Mahdi. Naturally he will not do so miraculously: if it was expected to be a miracle, there is no need for people to wait. He will eventually and undoubtedly be the leader although people are expected to prepare the grounds for the establishment of justice by a) establishing justice in their own souls and hearts, b) showing this fairness to their brothers and sisters in their community, c) extending this trait to people of other faiths or beliefs, and d) spreading this to other living beings. Such people who have aspired to establish justice can then ask the Imam to use them in his movement which will inevitably spread worldwide justice.

For such people who desire to receive inspiration and energy for their efforts in bringing about a life of dignity and honour, Imam Husayn is the role model they emulate. Those who want to help Imam Mahdi by preparing for his reappearance and then support him all the way through so that he achieves this justice and gives all the human being their honour and dignity cannot do this without remembering the Imam.

This is because Imam Husayn demonstrated that although life is indeed important, there are features that outweigh physical life, as he said:

Death is better than losing you honour.

And losing your honour is better than going to hell.[1]

The Imam knew all too well that his life would be saved and he would live a comfortable life with respect and suitable to his needs while continuing his spiritual and societal responsibilities if he pledged allegiance to Yazid. However, regarding the fact that Yazid ordered the Imam to pledge allegiance, Imam Husayn says:

"A person like me would not pay allegiance to someone like him."[2]

A person who has dedicated his entire life in obedience to Allah by no means would pay allegiance to an oppressor like Yazid. There would be no value in his life even if he spent all of it worshiping Allah without

his dignity and honor by having to pledge allegiance to an oppressor. Imam Husayn regarded dignity as an essential part of living, as seen in his speech regarding Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad:[3]

Behold; the illegitimate, son of the illegitimate [by birth], has settled between two, between unsheathing [the sword] and humiliation, and how impossible is humiliation from us! Allah refuses that for us, and his messenger, and the believers, and those pure laps [on which Husayn was brought up].[4]

Patience

Without moral virtues we cannot achieve anything, and if we do, we cannot maintain it. Moreover, without patience, we cannot achieve the virtues of love, knowledge, and honour. If we do achieve them, they can easily be lost without patience. This is why patience is said to represent the head if faith were the body[5]. We cannot retain the quality of being a believer without patience.

Patience has three branches[6]. First, it is to be patient with respect to performing obligatory acts, such as performing prayers on time along with abiding by its conditions. This needs perseverance, especially from the onset. When one loves prayer, it would become very difficult not to pray even for few hours. But in the beginning it might be a burden, especially trying to get out of a warm, comfortable bed on a cold morning. To leave your bed and make wudu[7] for prayers needs patience. Other forms of religious obligations, such as observing hijab[8], giving money in the form of zakat[9] and khums[10], and performing the hajj pilgrimage while leaving family behind needs patience.

The second type of patience is that with respect to refraining from forbidden acts. To do obligatory acts whilst also performing forbidden acts is like preparing a dish and then poisoning it. For this reason we sometimes perform our obligatory duties and then feel that we haven't benefited. Our bad habits and actions prevent us from benefiting from our good acts. In relation to this point, the famous poet, Rumi, tells a story: once there were several farmers who harvested their wheat and regularly placed it in a storage room.

However, to their surprise, each day they would find the storage empty with no sign of a break-in. In the middle of one night when they decided to sleep inside and see what would happen, they saw some big rats taking everything with them. Those rats symbolize our bad habits. Rumi then asks, "If there were no rats in our heart then why do we not see the light of our prayers?"

Most of our problems come from our self as the Prophet (s) said:

"Your greatest enemy is your own self."[11]

A person who has not trained and purified himself by being cautious and carefully evaluating his deeds should not blame others for his problems. During this process, praying at nights play an important role as it is a very good opportunity to reflect on our weaknesses.

Once Ayatullah Qazi Tabatabai, a great Shi'a scholar, put his hand on the shoulder of a young student, later to be the grand Allamah Sayyid Mohammad Husayn Tabatabai, and told him, "If material success in this world is what you want perform salat al-layl12, and if you want happiness in the hereafter [again] perform salat al-layl." Therefore, if we want to grasp any opportunity to train ourselves, many of our problems – if not all of them – will be solved.

Third is to be patient when facing a calamity. This is perhaps the most difficult, because once a person has been stricken by a calamity, such as losing a loved one, it is difficult for him to control himself and to remain patient.

The Reward For The Patient

Now the question arises: what is the reward for a believer who is able to keep his patience with respect to performing his duties, refraining from prohibited acts (haram), and facing a tragedy? Allah (swt) responds to this in the Qur'an:

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمْ ۚ لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا فِي هَٰذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةٌ ۗ وَأَرْضُ اللَّهِ وَاسِعَةٌ ۗ إِنَّمَا يُوَفَّى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

Say: 'O ye my servants who believe! Fear your Lord, good is (***the reward***) ***for those who do good in this world. Spacious is God's earth! those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure!'***(***39: 10***)

Faith without piety is not enough. If you want to cross a channel and simply take one step, you will remain in the middle. You have to walk long enough to cross it. The verse adds that those who do good deeds will be rewarded and that the land of Allah (swt) is very great and vast, suggesting that migration is an option for those who are prevented from practicing his or her faith in a city.

Then, the verse refers to patience – that Allah will reward those who are patient without measure. And this is the only verse in the Qur'an in which Allah (swt) says that He will reward without measure.13

Of course, there are a group of people in the Qur'an, the Mukhlasin (the Purified), the select of the select, who will not even be judged, let alone receiving rewards according to their actions:

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَإِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ

But they impugned him. So they will indeed be arraigned [***before Him***] – [***all***] ***except God's exclusive servants.*** (***37:127-128***)

Therefore, apart from the Mukhlasin – a very special group before God – patient believers are the only

ones whom the Qur'an says will receive reward without measure.

We all have problems in this world. There is no one who is not facing problems. Yet we tend to think about our own problems while assuming others are satisfied. Every person has some type of problem whether it be poverty, illness, lack of security, and so forth.

The life of this world is depicted in the Qur'an when Prophet Adam was in heaven and Allah (swt) told him:

فَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ إِنَّ هَٰذَا عَدُوٌّ لَكَ وَلِزَوْجِكَ فَلَا يُخْرِجَنَّكُمَا مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ فَتَشْقَىٰ

O Adam! verily, this is an enemy to thee and thy wife: so let him not get you both out of the Garden, so that thou art landed in misery. (***20:117***)

Adam was not to follow Satan who in turn wanted to drive Adam and Eve out of heaven. One aspect of Adam's departure from heaven is that he will surely suffer. This world is not heaven.

We hope and pray, however, that our problems are in worldly matters and not our religion. Every pleasure in this world is mixed with pains and difficulties. This is the main point. Either you have your problems in the worldly matters or in your faith. Some people have lost their faith and this is the worst disaster. This is why in one of our supplications we implore Allah (swt):

"Please don't let our suffering be in our faith."[14]15

This world is not a purely joyful and pleasing abode. If you want to enjoy a dish, you are expected to buy the ingredients and take the time to cook it. Even eating out requires a person to make money. Thus, relishing in a very simple matter such as enjoying a meal is not free from some discomfort or sacrifice. Everything has its troubles.

A believer is patient and to such a person Allah (swt) says that all these problems can work as opportunities to earn credit for the hereafter. For example, if you have a disease such as cancer and you remain patient, Allah (swt) rewards you. Although you did not get ill for the sake of Allah (swt), He rewards you because of your patience. The Imams encouraged believers to be patient, as seen in Imam Sadiq's narration:

One child, whom a person loses in his lifetime, is better than seventy that live after him, all of whom mount their horses and fight in the way of Allah.[15]

If one of your children – God forbid – dies in an accident and you remain patient, the reward you achieve is better than the reward you would get if you had seventy children who were killed for the sake of Allah (swt). Of course, no one wants you to suffer, but if you are and you keep your patience, Allah (swt) will appreciate it.

The Second Martyr (al-Shahid al-Thiini) Sheikh Zayn al-Din Ali ibn Muhammad al-Jab'i al-'Amili (1506-1558) who had lost his sons wrote a book in honor of those who experienced the same condition called "Comforter of the Heart at the Loss of Loved Ones."

In this book, he says that according to many narrations we understand that if a believer knows how much Allah (swt) has prepared for him because of his suffering, he would wish that in this world he was cut into pieces by scissors.[16]

Many will wish they had suffered in the world when they witness the generosity of Allah (swt) on the Day of Judgment. Allah (swt) will know what happened to us and will not forget us. He will reward us on the Day of Judgment as a result of all the problems that were not under our control. The Prophet Muhammad (s) suffered more than any other prophet:

"No prophet was annoyed like I was."[17]

Didn't Allah (swt) love him? Why did he have to lose his father before being born and then his mother early after that and then his grandfather, uncle, and his dear wife, Lady Khadijah? He was tortured and saw his companions being tortured, and when he moved to Medina he was forced into many battles.

Was all of this because Allah (swt) had abandoned him? No. This is because Allah (swt) had destined him such a great level he could only achieve through this suffering. Narrated from the Prophet (s):

If Allah decides for a servant to reach a certain rank which he did not achieve by his deeds. Then Allah will try him, in his body or money or children, and then He grants him patience, until he reaches that rank.[18]

Sometimes Allah (swt) in His plan decides that you must reach a certain rank. However, your deeds cannot get you there because either you don't have enough good deeds or that rank is so high that your deeds would fall short of reaching you there. How much can you do in this world if you do good deeds all day and night? Allah (swt) tries and tests you in your body, wealth, or child(ren) when He wants to make sure that you reach that position. If you remain patient, you can achieve that position by your patience.

The Suffering of Imam Husayn (a)

Now let us return to Imam Husayn. When the Imam left Mina he did not go to Mecca to prevent himself from being killed because he wanted to preserve the sanctity of Mecca. He performed the umrah al-mufradah[19] instead of the hajj and left for Karbala. But before leaving, he delivered a speech where he clearly informed people that he is going to be killed:

Whoever is ready to give the last drops of his heart for us, and has made himself prepared for meeting Allah, let him depart with us, for I am I'm going to move tomorrow morning insha-Allah.[20]

During this speech, the Imam also said:

We are patient in the face of Allah's trials, and He will reward us with the reward of those who are patient.

Imam Husayn (a) clearly says that he wants to be patient to achieve the reward that does not have measure. The Imam even used the verb ajr which derives from the same root of ajr used in verse 39:10[21] regarding the measureless reward of the patient. Through his patience, the Imam achieved an unlimited position in which Allah (swt) gave him whatever he wants whether for himself, his family, or for those who sincerely love him.

Allamah Bahr al–'Ulum, a very pious and outstanding scholar, was once pondering over why Allah (swt) rewards the visitors of Imam Husayn (a) abundantly as mentioned in various narrations. The mentioned rewards are so much that makes it difficult to understand why. While busy with this thought, a person came asking him what he was thinking about. After listening to Allamah's response, this person responded by narrating a story:

One day, a king and his companions left their palace to go hunting. During the trip, the king got lost. It was getting dark and he was not able to find any of his companions to show him the way. After lots of struggles and attempts, all he found was a tent of an old lady who lived with her son. Their only possession apart from the tent was a goat that provided them with milk as their only food. Not even knowing the true identity of their guest, they slaughtered their goat and prepared a good meal for him.

Then they prepared a bed for him to sleep. The next day, the king found his companions. When he returned to the palace he called for a meeting in which he asked for an appropriate way to reward those people. All the ideas they came up with were rejected by the king because he said the old lady and her son gave me all they had while they were not in debt to me, so now even if I give them my entire kingdom it will not compensate for what they did for me.

Hearing this story helped Allamah realize why Allah (swt) treats Imam Husayn (a) in such a way: the Imam gave everything he had for Allah (swt). Thus, Allah (swt) grants so much reward not only for Imam Husayn (a) but also to those who visit him. There is no limit in Allah's riches: He gives those rewards to Imam Husayn (a) and has yet more to give. Of course, this is, indeed, an excuse for Allah (swt) to provide for His creatures, since He is always looking for excuses to give due to His boundless generosity. It is a shame that sometimes we can be so indolent that we do not even give Him an excuse to help us and offer us His abundant blessings.

Our suffering over the loss of Imam Husayn (a)

The tragedy of Ashura is not only the tragedy of the Ahlul Bayt (a); it is our tragedy. We are also those whom condolences are offered to. In Ziyarat Ashura, we refer to it as our tragedy when we say:

I ask Allah (swt) to give me because of my pain and suffering over your loss the best reward that a person who faces a tragedy receives.

We do not just participate in the mourning congregations to offer condolences; rather, we are here because it is our tragedy – we have lost our Imam. When we meet on the day of Ashura, we are recommended to say to each other:

May Allah (swt) make our reward for our suffering over the loss of Husayn great!

Today, on the day of Ashura, Imam Husayn (a) reached a lofty status by being patient in the face of this tragedy, a status which he could not have achieved without experiencing it. The true lovers and mourners of Imam Husayn (a) can join him by having the same patience, a patience which resembles the patience of Imam Husayn (a) with fortitude, honour, and love for Allah.

Conclusion

One of the greatest virtues exhibited by Imam Husayn (a) and his companions on the day of Ashura is love for Allah (swt). Love is a higher level than obedience. It is love that kept the companions of Imam Husayn (a) with him even after he gave them permission to leave. Another virtue exhibited by Imam Husayn (a) is honour and dignity – he chose to stand against oppression and living a life of humiliation. Finally, Imam Husayn exhibited unwavering patience. Without patience we cannot achieve anything, and if we do, we cannot maintain it.

According to the narrations, patience in relation to faith (imiin) is like the head to the body. The three types of patience are with respect to a) performing obligatory acts, b) refraining from forbidden acts, and c) during a calamity. A believer is patient with respect to these difficulties, and this patience is rewarded in the hereafter.

Before leaving Mecca, Imam Husayn (a) delivered a speech in which he said, “We are patient in the face of Allah’s trials, and He will reward us with the reward of those who are patient.”

Imam Husayn (a) gave everything he had for Allah (swt), and for this reason Allah (swt) grants him abundant rewards not only for him but also his visitors. The tragedy of Ashura is thus not only the tragedy of the Ahlul Bayt (a); it is also our tragedy. The true lovers and mourners of Imam Husayn (a) can join him by resembling the same qualities.

1. A verse from the poem composed by Imam Husayn on the day of Ashura – Bihar al-anwar, chapter volume, page 193
2. Bihar al-anwar, volume 44, page 324, chapter 37.
3. The son of Ziad ibn Abi Sufyan, who after his father’s death, governed Kufa and Basra and led the army of Yazid during the battle of Karbala.
4. Al-Ihtijaj, volume 2, page 300.
5. Bihar Al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 114, chapter 16, no. 4.

6. Ibid. vol. 68, p. 95, chapter 62, no. 57
7. Or ablution. The Islamic ritual for washing parts of the body in preparation for prayer.
8. Islamic headscarf worn by Muslim women.
9. The religious obligation of giving a fixed portion of one's wealth as a tax, generally to the poor, needy, or to those who collect it.
10. The religious obligation of contributing one-fifth of a certain income to charity.
11. Ibid. vol. 67, p. 64, chapter 45, no. 1.
12. The night prayer – one of the ways of remembering Allah by waking up at night for prayer and supplications.
13. There are verses about the people that Allah (swt) gives them sustenance without measure, but for rewarding the verse above seems to be unique.
14. Bihar Al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 63, chapter 12, no. 11
15. Al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 218
16. Bihar Al-Anwar, vol. 64, p. 212
17. Bihar Al-Anwar, vol. 39, p. 55
18. Musakkin Al-Fu'ad, p. 21
19. Visiting the Sacred House of God (Ka'aba) independently of the hajj.
20. Al-Luhuf, p. 60
21. "Say: 'O ye my servants who believe! Fear your Lord, good is (the reward) for those who do good in this world. Spacious is God's earth! those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure!'"

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