

The Importance of Good Company

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Allāh تعالى سبحانه و تعالى says in the Glorious Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ

O you who believe, adopt the Taqwā of Allāh and be in the company of the truthful [Pious]

(Sūrah At-Taubah, 119)

In the *āyah* [s. sign/verse] mentioned above Allāh تعالى سبحانه و تعالى addresses the believers. The believers are those who have accepted *īmān* [faith & certitude] in Allāh تعالى سبحانه و تعالى, His Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم and all the fundamentals of *dīn*. *Imān* is indeed a great gift from Allāh تعالى سبحانه و تعالى and its preservation is of great importance, for salvation requires it to be preserved until the last dying breath. The one who is successful in this endeavour is guaranteed the abode of paradise, as for the one who has opened the latches and invited in *Shaytān* [the disobedient devil] to thief him of his blessing, his resting place is an abode of eternal torture. May Allāh تعالى سبحانه و تعالى save us all.

Allāh تعالى سبحانه و تعالى in this verse is instructing the believers to adopt *taqwā*. It is without doubt an injustice to translate such a phrase as merely “The fear of God” or as “Righteousness”, without providing detailed elucidation of its context and its manifestation as *taqwā* entails both the notion of virtuous actions and the abstinence from sinful actions.

Allāh تعالى سبحانه و تعالى says in the glorious Qur'an:

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ ۚ فِيهِ ۚ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ

That is a book in which there is no doubt, guidance for the God fearing, who believe in the unseen, establish prayer and spend out of what We have provided for them. (Sūrah Al-Baqarah, 2-3)

These *āyāt* [pl. signs/verses] elucidate the qualities of those who have acquired *taqwā* (*the muttaqīn*). Such blessed individuals accept with certitude and resolute conviction in what Allāh سبحانه و تعالى has revealed and the Prophetic traditions which have reached us through authentic means, despite not having experienced aspects of it in the physical realm. Quite evident today is the notion of absolute sensory reliance whereby people claim to accept only that which their senses can perceive disregarding anything further based on the absurd principle “If I cannot experience it, it does not exist”. The science of logic (*mantiq*) defines information as being acquired from 3, the sensory organs, the intellect and known fact reached through multiple authentic narratives such as historical events. Thus we establish that those who claim to such a notion based upon the sensory organs alone are in denial of the role of their intellect and authentic narratives in the acquisition of knowledge.

The second quality mentioned in *āyāt* is that those with *taqwā* establish the prayer. Here the word used for establishment is *yūqimūna* which is derived from the word *iqāma* which means to straighten out. This verb not only implies the correct performing of the prayer, is also indicates perpetual regularity and a prayer performed with humility and concentration.

The third quality mentioned is that those with *taqwā* are those who spend in the way that pleases Allāh سبحانه و تعالى, whether it is the fulfilment of the obligatory or the supererogatory almsgiving. This verse highlights clearly that all wealth is in fact the possession of Allāh سبحانه و تعالى who has provided it to us as a blessing and in reality that which we believe to have earned is no less than another bounty from our Lord, whose rights we are expected to fulfil. In this verse we can identify that what man covets, namely wealth, is a means to achieve the pleasure of Allāh سبحانه و تعالى. These 3 aspects are in essence the way to be included amongst the *muttaqīn*.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ

O you who believe, adopt the Taqwā of Allāh and be in the company of the truthful [Pious]

(Sūrah At-Taubah, 119)

It is now fitting to refer back to original *ayah* mentioned at the beginning of this article and look at it with a renewed perspective of depth with consideration to the neglect of the command to adopt *taqwa*.

The greatest loss one can face in this world is the thievery of his/her *īmān*, such a loss is not one that can be measured in monetary value or termed as that loss which causes a temporary state of emotional distress, rather this theft is one whose value cannot be measured and whose consequences reside in the realm of eternity. Each act of disobedience we commit carries along with it the ‘aromatics’ of *kufir* [disbelief], each one taking us a step away from the purity of *Islām*. Those who continually disobey Allāh سبحانه و تعالی are at a severe risk of losing their faith either during the greater portion of their lives or even more woefully, at the time of death by succumbing to the promise of *Iblīs* [Satan].

قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا أُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمْ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

Iblīs said “My Lord, since you made me go astray, I swear I shall adorn for them [evils] on the earth and shall lead all of them astray, except those of your servants from among them who are chosen (by you).

(Sūrah Al-Hijr, 40)

The believer possesses the tool of *istigfār* [repentance] by means of which amends can be made for those acts which constitute a sin. Repentance is a cleansing process which removes the foul odour of sin and brings in fresh air to the spiritual heart. Other than initial abstinence from sin, the sincere seeking of forgiveness is the key to becoming conscious of Allāh سبحانه و تعالی. However the one that does not sincerely repent or delays repentance, he has poisoned his heart and rendered himself spiritually incapacitated, for insincerity or neglecting repentance altogether is a sin itself. Allāh سبحانه و تعالی has commanded us to seek forgiveness from our sins.

وَاسْتَغْفِرِ اللَّهَ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

Seek forgiveness from Allah. Surely, Allah is All-Forgiving, Very-Merciful.

(Surah Al-Nisā', 106)

We deduce therefore that the Qur'ān gives us the recipe to be from amongst the *muttaqīn* and the consequences of not adhering to it. One should take both these aspects into consideration in all aspects of life. Consider, is the act I am about to do one of those that the righteous do, or it is one that will bring upon me the foul stench of sin, rather it is best to adopt the path of the righteous and gain the favour of my Lord.

The latter portion of the *ayāh* in sūrah *Al-Taubah* which we have up until now delayed in elucidating upon refers to the keeping of pious company. Though it may seem obvious, many people claim that they cannot find righteous company and end up remaining in the company of those who indulge in sin. Shaykh Masīhullāh Khān رحمه الله عليه used to say “In this day and age people complain about the lack of good company, in return I instruct them that if you say good company is unavailable then at least stay away from bad company”. If one accidentally drunk juice laced with poison and the cure was unavailable, would it not be absurd to continue drinking it on the hope that the drinks quality would change? Likewise in the company of those who are evil or inclined towards sinful acts, one cannot hope that to stay in such an environment will do anything but harm the heart and lead one astray.

Shaykh Sa 'dī explains in a poem

“The company of the pious will make you pious,
and the company of the evil will make you evil”

This poetry echoes the words of the Messenger of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم who said:

“Remaining alone is better than an evil companion and a virtuous companion is better than remaining alone.” (Bayhaqī)

“The example of a good companion (friend) in comparison with a bad one is like that of one who sells musk and the blacksmith. From the first, you would either buy musk or enjoy its good smell, while from the blacksmith you would either get burned or smell a bad scent.” (Al-Bukhari)

If we notice carefully, the *āyah* specifically highlights that truthfulness is a distinguishing and recognizable quality of those who are god fearing. The qualities of resolute conviction, establishment of prayer and alms giving are private to each individual and not easily discerned by an outsider. Therefore in order to recognize the pious individual, one should look at whether he is truthful in his speech.

One could now present the idea that those who have adopted the path of piety and who keep companions of the like, shunning those who have strayed from the path are depriving such people of a reminder to reform, thus one could argue it to be an injustice to keep only within a pious circle. This is a correctable notion. It should be noted here that to the Muslims, one should engage in *amr bil ma'rūf nahi 'anil munkar* [enjoining in the good & forbidding the evil] (and to the non-Muslims *da'wah* should be given), but in situations where one's own spiritual health is at stake, one should first adopt measures to fortify the heart before rectifying others, the driver without fuel in his car cannot offer a lift to his neighbour.

The majority of our time spent in the company of others should be spent amongst the righteous who deliver benefit to us. Thereafter a portion of our time can and should be used to give benefit to others who have inclined towards the wrong direction, but one should keep such friendships with the notion of *amr bil ma'rūf nahi 'anil munkar* or *da'wah* in mind, lest the objectives be lost and we ourselves becoming influenced by peer pressure. If one has the choice of a quiet natured companion who is righteous and a companion one who is much more sociable but has directed himself towards sin, the correct method would be to adopt the company of the righteous and together invite the other towards good. *Wallahu 'alam [Allāh knows best]*. The approaches taken towards invitation need not necessitate that a stern approach is adopted; rather gentleness is the best form of persuasion, it is said; “*The rock is eroded by the drop falling onto it gently over an extended period of time, whilst a mass of water thrown onto it at once does nothing but temporarily change the appearance at the surface.*”

May Allāh تعالى و سبحانه allow us to act on this reminder, enjoin in the good and forbid the evil, adopt the company of the truthful, the righteous and may we be from amongst them. May we all be granted the ability to refrain from sin, excel in good deeds and gain entry into the highest levels of *Jannah [paradise]*.

Āmeen [may Allāh accept].