

Understanding Fear and Sorrow

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Fear and Sorrow and Abstinence from Sin

One of the spiritual states which impels man to take action and becomes a strong incentive for abstaining from sin is fear and sorrow. The two greatly help man to come to himself, make the most of his time and not use it in pursuit of vain and futile activities. Of course, not every kind of fear and sorrow is praiseworthy and motivates man to search and work. Sorrow which causes man to get affected by dejection and to quit everything leaving him with neither the vigour to worship nor the energy to work is blameworthy and likewise fear which causes the termination of man's hope and leads to despondency in such a way that man too gets pessimistic about himself is blameworthy.

Not only do some of the fears and sorrows not inspire man to spiritual journeying to Allah but become its hindrances and impediments, like the fears and sorrows which occur with regard to the world; one loses an amount of money and they are ever after gloomy and sorrowful as to the cause of their loss. Even in prayer one is thinking about that lost money! Or fear which one has with regard to losing his property and opportunities; man fears that he will lose his post and position. These kinds of fears and sorrows become a hindrance in spiritual wayfaring to Allah.

Of course, sometimes it occurs that sorrow with regard to issues of the world is related to Allah, like when an affliction befalls man and they fear that it might be divine requital. It is natural that this kind of fear and dread will become a source of motion for them. Or one becomes heartbroken at losing some [worldly] favors and a cause of their awakening that they ought not to fall in love with the world. Therefore, it is likely that fear of losing worldly blessings can indirectly motivate man to motion in the direction of eschatological and spiritual perfection.

Fear and Sorrow and the Spiritual Ascension and Growth of Man

It has been said that fear and dread with regard to matters of the hereafter causes spiritual ascendance, perfection and prosperity. In this regard, Allah states:

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ * فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ

“And as for him who fears to stand in the presence of his Lord and forbids the soul from low desires; then surely the Garden—that is the abode.”

With regard to the role of piety in keeping man away from sins and fear of Allah, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“O creatures of Allah! Certainly fear of Allah has saved the lovers of Allah from unlawful items gave His dread to their hearts till their nights are passed in wakefulness and their days in thirst.”

Elsewhere, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) introduces fear of Allah as a sign of good opinion with regard to Allah:

“The most fearful of Allah is the one who holds good thoughts about him.”

The Difference between Fear and Sorrow

Sorrow occurs in circumstances once favor has been divested of man or when harm is directed at him and causes grief and contrition. It is natural that this condition is related to a matter which happened in the past; for instance, man has done an indecent action which resulted in bad effects, one has said bad words which resulted in the disgrace and defamation of someone else and is remorseful as a result of it. Or, he had capital from which he could have benefited enormously but has lost it. In any case, sorrow and grief overtake man once he loses opportunities or he is deprived of blessings and/or calamities befall him.

Fear occurs with regard to the occurrences and matters which will occur in the future: he fears that an ordeal will befall him, an affliction or misfortune will be directed at him, and/or a blessing will be taken away from him. In reality, fear and sorrow are two similar qualities of the soul whose adjuncts are different; one is related to the past and the other is connected to future. For the reason that danger always exists in this world, the being of fear in man is natural because man is an entity that is prone to injury, and there is always the possibility of his health, life and ease and security falling in danger.

The difference between a believer and a unbeliever lies in the fact that the believer does not have an autonomous opinion about the common causes [or ordinary means] and believes that everything springs from Allah, for this reason he fears Allah but a nonbeliever does not conceive Allah, someone in whose hands all the sovereignty lies, and maintains that there are autonomous common causes [or ordinary means]. Of course, in the same way which the believer fears Allah because of conceiving all the authority in Him, it is only in Allah that he puts his faith for the reason that he does not believe in an intermediary role other than Allah.

It has been recorded in a *hadith* that:

“Allah subdues the others for a person who is Allah-fearing and He fills with fear everyone who is not afraid of Him.”

Once a believer has gathered that all the means lie in Allah’s hands and all the sovereignty of the world belongs to Him, he does not perceive any autonomy for others save Allah but only reveres Allah because he has been relying on Allah and fears only Him and day by day his faith gets increased and in the end Allah grants him so much power that he fears none save Allah and the others get overcome by him. He is inflexible in the face of falsehood and discharges whatever obligation he has diagnosed. But people do not fear someone who does not venerate Allah and they compromise with other people in order to safeguard their position and try to gratify others.

The natural disposition of man is such that whenever he is happy and overjoyed with the world and is busy with himself, he lags behind in paying attention to Allah and spiritual matters. Opposite to this merrymaking and joyousness is sorrow and sadness about the past and dread in regard

to the future which make man inclined towards obedience, worship and devotion to Allah. It is for this reason that these two psychological mentalities and emotions have been hailed, as the import of some of the traditions impart [to us] that Allah grants favor upon a community amongst whom there is a sorrowful man. Essentially, people who used to derive benefit from the directions and the divine invitations of the prophets (‘a) and saints [awliya’] of Allah were people who held fear of Allah in their hearts.

... إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ ...

“You warn only those who fear their Lord in secret and keep up prayer...”

While a believer is in this world, he is faced with worries and woes as a result of which he gets sad and grieves and/or gets despondent when he thinks about his pre-destination and looks at the shortcomings of his past. Therefore, that time when he leaves this world which is entirely filled with encumbrances and sorrow towards the eternal world and the proximity of right is when his sadness and sorrow comes to an end and that’s when he gets happy and joyous.

“O Abu Dharr! Allah has not been worshiped in the same way as prolonged sorrow.”

A slave who is always afraid of Allah and has been patient in the face of hardships has been more devoted to Allah than everyone else.

In continuation of the *hadith*, the Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! Every person can make himself cry because of fear of Allah and not every person can make his hearts acquainted with sorrow and force himself to cry because a hard heart is far from Allah; but they do not perceive this denotation.”

As has previously been mentioned, the crying which has been recommended in the *hadiths*, one of which is this *hadith*, is weeping as a result of fear of being deprived of the prosperity of the hereafter and getting polluted by sin and/or lamenting because of spiritual deprivations and due to the absence of the Imam of the Age—may Allah hasten his reappearance—and higher than all these is lamentation because of deprivation from the beatific vision of Allah [*liqa’ Allah*].

Those who are lovers of Allah and cognition of the divine guardianship weep as a result of fear of being deprived of the beatific meeting with Allah

If it is not possible for someone to cry, then at least one ought to inculcate his hearts with topics that cause sorrow and/or meditate upon his spiritual privations and reflect upon his sins in order to make his hearts grieved. If his heart still does not become sorrowful, then he ought to at least dissemble to be anguished. If sadness does not occur for someone and he was always overjoyed and pompous, he gets deprived of Allah’s mercy.

Of course, it is to be taken for granted that every person who has a state of weeping and wailing is close to Allah, because it is also possible for the hypocrites to attain this state as a result of causing and maintaining certain feelings in themselves in order to quickly become sad and start

crying. Opposed to that, it cannot be asserted that whoever does not get sad and does not cry is stone-hearted and far from Allah.

“O Abu Dharr! Allah states, ‘I do not mix two fears and also two securities in [any] one of my slaves. If he were secure in this world, I will scare him in the next world. If he were afraid of me in this world, I will make him secure in the next world.’”

Being secure from divine machinations is a cause of becoming polluted by sin because once man perceives himself at liberty to do whatever he fancies and has no fear and apprehension whatsoever, he has no qualms about committing sin.

The Prophet’s (S) remark in this section is expressive of the fact that man can do something to bring about fear of Allah in his heart. After man has comprehended that fear of Allah is desirable and results in the attainment of the hereafter, the question arises as to how it is possible to cause fear and dread in oneself? In response to this question, it can be said that this state arises in man by making some of the necessary preparations and paying heed to some of the issues:

- Sometimes man knows certain things but because they do not pay heed to those known facts, his faith and knowledge are dormant and faint-colored and an individual becomes negligent and in the end that knowledge and belief does not produce its effects. But every time a person pays heed to the causes giving birth to fear and whenever he tries to pay attention to that fear, his fear and dread increase and affect his behavior.

-The other point is that man can attain a position where he concurrently combines sorrows and raptures. Weak people cannot have sorrow and happiness at the same time. They have either happiness and delight or sorrow at a time. Once the soul gets stronger and more perfect, it is possible that at one time, he becomes happy from one point of view and from the other perspective gets sad and sorrowful, and bit by bit attains a level where as a result of the perfection of the heart and soul, he musters in himself kinds of sorrows and raptures in the same way that the saints [*awliya*] of Allah used to gather in themselves different kinds of fears and sorrows and raptures and hopes.

“O Abu Dharr! On the Day of Resurrection, the sins of a believing slave will be shown, he will say, ‘I was scared of the consequences of this action.’ As a result of this, his sins will get forgiven.”

We have so far understood the importance of fear of Allah and have known its role in giving aid to man in his journeying towards Allah. In regard to this matter the Prophet (S) hints at some of the benefits and profits of fearing Allah in order to produce or strengthen in us the motivation of bringing about fear. He states that one of the benefits of fear of Allah is forgiveness and remission of sins.

In general, every individual can have two conditions:

1. At the time of committing sin, he had no fear of the consequences of his action, and enjoyed deriving gratification from his sins in relaxation and peace of mind and without any worry and anxiety. Such a condition results in being encouraged to sin more and as a result adamant persistence at perpetrating that sin and the end result is the bad end for man.

2. At the moment of perpetrating sin, he is fearful of Allah and his end and destination. He fears to die before succeeding at repentance. This fear and dread causes a decrease of pleasure at the time of committing sin and consequently leads to repentance and the forgiveness of sins.