

wards Allah, and parents, and companions, and so on; fear of Allah; total reliance on Allah; turning in repentance to Allah; relating all things to Allah; drawing near to Allah; curbing expectations; and being prepared for death and what follows it.

Shaytan and his helpers, on the other hand, require the *nafs al-ammara*, the self that urges evil – the opposite of all this.

The most difficult challenge to the self at peace is to free itself from the influence of *shaytan* and the *nafs al-ammara*. If it undertakes this struggle, then it becomes *nafs al-lawwama*, the reproachful self; and if the struggle is won, then it becomes *nafs al-mutma'inna*. If even one good action were to be accepted by Allah, one would have success by virtue of it, but *shaytan* and the *nafs al-ammara* refuse to urge the self to do even one such deed.

Some of those who were given knowledge of Allah and of their own selves have said, "If I could know for certain that even one of my actions had been accepted by Allah, then I would be happier at the arrival of death than the much travelled wayfarer is at the sight of his family." Abdullah ibn Umar said, "If I could know for certain that Allah had accepted even one of my prostrations, there would be no long lost friend dearer to me than death itself."

The *nafs al-ammara* urges evil and openly opposes the *nafs al-mutma'inna*. Whenever the latter presents a good deed, the former presents an evil deed in return. The *nafs al-ammara* tells the *nafs al-mutma'inna* that *jihad* is nothing more than suicide, a widowed wife, orphaned children, and wasted wealth. It tries to convince the *nafs al-mutma'inna* that *zakat* and *sadaqa* are nothing less than an unnecessary expense and a burden, a hole in your pocket, which will lead you to depend on others, so that you too

will then be like the poor.

Bringing the Self to Account

When the self that urges evil overwhelms the heart of a believer, the only remedy is to bring it to account and then to disregard it. *Imam Ahmad* has related on the authority of *Umar ibn al-Khattab*, may Allah be pleased with him, that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "The intelligent person is the one who brings his self to account and acts in preparation for what lies beyond his death; and the foolish person is the one who abandons himself to his desires and cravings and expects Allah to fulfil his futile wishes." ³

Imam Ahmad also related that *Umar Ibn al-Khattab*, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "Judge your selves before you yourselves are judged; and weigh your selves in the balance before you yourselves are weighed in the balance. When you are brought to account tomorrow, it will be much easier for you if you have already brought your selves to account today – so do so, before you come to the Final Gathering for:

◀ On that Day you will be exposed – whatever you have hidden will no longer be hidden. (69:18) ▶" ⁴

Al-Hasan said, "A believer is responsible for his self, and he brings it to account in order to please Allah. Judgement will be lighter on the Day of Judgement for the people who have brought their selves to account in this life, but it will be severe for the people who did not prepare for it by bringing their selves to account beforehand."

A believer is distracted by something that he likes, so he says to it: "By Allah, I like you and I need you, but there is no means by which I can have you, so you have been

kept from me." When whatever it is, is out of his sight and beyond his reach, then he returns to his senses and says, "I did not really want this! What made me preoccupied with it? By Allah, I shall never concern myself with it again!"

The believers are a people who have been prevented through the Qur'an from indulging in the pleasures of this world; it comes between them and what might destroy them. The believer is like a prisoner in this world, who tries to free himself from its shackles and fetters, placing his trust in nothing in it, until the day he meets his Creator. He knows full well that he is accountable for everything that he hears, sees and says, and for everything that he does with his body. ⁵

Malik ibn Dinar said, "May Allah grant mercy to a servant who says to his self, 'Aren't you such and such? Didn't you do such and such?' Then he rebukes it and puts it in its place, and disciplines it and restrains it in accordance with the Book of Allah, Mighty and Glorious is He, and becomes its guide and master."

It is undoubtedly the responsibility of anyone who believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement, and who wishes to keep his affairs in order, to make sure that he brings his self to account. He must control what it does and what it does not do, even its most insignificant activities, for each and every breath you take during your life-time is precious. It can be used to acquire one of the treasures which ensure a state of bliss that is everlasting. Whoever wastes it, or uses it to acquire things which may cause his destruction, will suffer great losses, which are only allowed to happen by the most ignorant, foolish and reckless of people. The true extent of such losses will only become apparent on the Day of Judgement. Allah, Exalted is He, says:

◀ On the Day when every soul will be confronted with all the good that it has done and all the evil that it has done, it will wish that there were a great distance between it and its evil. (3:30) ▶

There are two ways of bringing the self to account: one precedes action, the other follows it.

The first way is the decision that is made when a believer hesitates before acting. This is the moment of evaluation before intention is formed. He does not proceed until he is sure that it is good and sound. If it is not, then he abandons it.

Al-Hasan, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "May Allah grant mercy to a servant who hesitates at the point of evaluation, and then if he sees that the action is for Allah, he carries on with it, but if he sees that it for something other than Allah, then he holds back from completing it." ⁶

This has been explained as meaning that when the self first feels like doing something or other, and the servant begins by considering its worth, he first stops and thinks to himself, "Can I do this?" If the answer is no, he will not undertake the action. If it is yes, he will again stop and ask himself, "Is it better for me to do it than not to do it?" If the answer is no, he will abandon it and not attempt to do it, but if the answer is yes, he will then pause for a third time and ask himself, "Is this action motivated by the desire to seek Allah's pleasure and reward, or is it in order to acquire power, admiration, and money?"

If it is the latter that has prompted the idea of the action, then he will not undertake it, even if it would result in his acquiring those worldly gains which prompted the idea of the action in the first place – for otherwise this

would result in his self becoming accustomed to associating others with Allah, and it would make acting for the sake of something or someone other than Allah easier for it, and the easier it is to do things for other than Him, the harder it becomes to do things that are intended for His pleasure.

If it is the former that has prompted the idea of the action, he stops yet again and asks himself, "Will I receive help in doing this? Do I have any companions who will help me and come to my assistance if I need their help in undertaking this action?" If he finds that he has no allies to help him, he will hold back from going through with this action, just as the Prophet ﷺ held back from waging the *ji-had* against the Makkans until he had enough allies and sufficient forces to ensure success.

If he finds that there is assistance on which he can rely in undertaking the proposed action, then at last he should start doing it, and he will succeed, by the will of Allah. Failure can only occur if one of these safeguards is lacking, for when they are all combined together they guarantee success. These are the four steps that a servant needs to take in bringing his self to account before he does anything.

The **second** way is that of bringing the self to account after an action. There are three categories of this:

First, bringing the self to account for an act of obedience in which what is due to Allah has not been completely fulfilled or done in the best possible way. There are six things that are due to Allah in acts of obedience:

Sincerity in doing it, devoting it to Allah only, following the example of the Prophet ﷺ, paying attention to doing it well, recognising Allah's blessings in it, and, after all

this, being aware of your own shortcomings in how you do it. A person brings his self to account, but has he given all these prerequisites their due attention and effort? Did he fulfill them in his act of obedience?

Second, bringing the self to account for any action which would have been better left undone than done.

Third, bringing the self to account as to whether or not the intention in undertaking a permitted action was to seek the pleasure of Allah, Exalted is He, and success in the *akhira*, thereby guaranteeing success – or was it in fact to seek the fleeting gains of this life, thereby losing what could have otherwise been gained?

The last thing a person should do is to be inattentive and neglectful in bringing his self to account, by starting out without any preparation, and by treating matters lightly and just muddling along. This will only bring about his ruin. This is the destiny of the people who are arrogant.

Such a one turns a blind eye to the consequences of acting like this and relies on Allah's forgiveness. He neglects bringing his self to account and does not contemplate the outcome of his behaviour. If he does not do this, then he easily falls into wrong actions, until he becomes accustomed to them, and then finds it difficult to pull himself away from them.

All in all, the believer should first bring his self to account as regards his obligatory acts of worship. If he finds himself lacking in these, then he should hasten to rectify his situation, either by catching up with the worship he has neglected, or by correcting whatever he may have been doing wrong in his worship.

Next, he should bring his self to account as regards acts which are forbidden. If he finds that he has done any of them, he must quickly turn in repentance, seek Allah's

forgiveness, and do good deeds in order to eradicate the bad deeds which have been recorded in his record.

Next, he should bring his self to account as regards those matters in which he has been negligent. If he finds that he has been negligent in doing what he was created for, he should hasten to the remembrance of Allah and drawing near to Him with an open heart.

Next, he should bring his self to account for the words he has spoken, for the steps his feet have taken, for the things his hands have grasped, and for what his ears have listened to. He should ask himself, "What did I want this for? What did I do that for? Whom did I do this for? Why did I do it like that?"

He should know that every action and every word are accounted for in two books; one is entitled, "For whom did I do it?", and the other, "How well did I do it?" The first question is concerned with sincerity, and the second is concerned with the action itself. Allah, the Exalted, says:

◀ That He may question the truthful about their truthfulness. (33:8) ▶

If the truthful ones are going to be asked about their truthfulness, and will be judged in accordance with how truthful they were, what do you imagine will be the case with the people of falsehood?

The Merits of Bringing the Soul to Account

This involves:

First, identifying the faults of the self. Whoever does not recognise his faults cannot possibly get rid of them. Yunus ibn Ubaid said, "I know about a hundred of the attributes of goodness and yet I cannot find even one of them in my self."

Muhammed ibn Wasi said, "If wrong actions produced flatulence, no one would have been able to sit in my company."

Imam Ahmad wrote that Abu'd-Darda' said, "No man gains full understanding and knowledge unless he detests all the people who are not close to Allah, and then turns his attention to his own self and detests it even more."

Second, knowing what rights are due to Allah. This is important because it makes the servant detest his self and frees him from arrogance and being self-satisfied with his actions. This opens the doors of submission and humility for him, and results in the purification of his soul at the hands of his Lord. He despairs for his self and believes firmly that his survival will not be achieved without the forgiveness, generosity and mercy of Allah. It is His right to be constantly obeyed, remembered and thanked.

Notes

1. Muslim, *Kitab al-Iman*, 2/153; related on the authority of Abu Huraira, who said, "Some of the companions of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, came to him and said, 'We have found something in our hearts which we are proud to speak about.' He asked them, 'Have you really found it?' They said, 'Yes.' Then he said, 'That is true faith.'"
2. *Sahih hadith*, Abu Da'wud, *Kitab an-Nikah*, 6/153; Ibn Majah, *Kitab an-Nikah*, 1/609.
3. *Da'if*, at-Tirmidhi, *Kitab Sifat al-Qiyyamah*, 7/155; al-Hakim, *al-Mustadrak*, *Kitab al-Iman*, 1/57.
4. Ahmad, *Kitab az-Zuhud*, 7/156; al-Baghawi, *Sharh as-Sunnah*, 14/309; Abu Na'im, *al-Hilya*, 1152.

5. See Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa'n-Nihaya*, 9/272; Abu Na'im, *al-Hilya*, 2/157.

6. This saying is supported by a *sahih hadith* transmitted by Muslim, *Kitab al-Iman*, 2/18, on the authority of Abu Huraira, who said that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Let whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day either speak good or keep silent; and let whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day be generous to his neighbour; and let whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day be generous to his guest."

THIRTEEN

PERSEVERANCE

Allah has made perseverance a tireless horse, a relentless cutting sword, an invincible, victorious army, an indestructible, formidable fortress. It and victory are inseparable companions.

Allah, Mighty and Glorious is He, has praised those who persevere in His Book, and says that He gives them endless rewards and supports them with His guidance, might and a clear victory. He says:

◀ And be patient – surely Allah is with those who are patient. (8:46) ▶

By virtue of this companionship, those who persevere gain both in this life and in the next life as they deserve; they win both His evident and hidden blessings.

Allah has made leadership in the *deen* dependent on perseverance and certainty. He says:

◀ And We appointed leaders from among them who guided by Our command, so long as they persevered and firmly believed in Our Signs. (32:24) ▶

And He says that the perseverance of those who persevere is good for them, and He has affirmed this with an oath:

◀ And if you persevere, that is indeed better for those who persevere. (16:126) ▶