

## On the Necessity of Having Affection for the Poor

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In a beautiful hadith, known as Hadith-i Mi'raj, it is reported that God Almighty told His Prophet (s): "O Ahmad! Indeed, loving the poor and accompanying them is nothing but loving God." The Prophet (s) asked, "And who are the poor?" The Almighty replied, "Those who are content with little, remain patient through hunger, and stay grateful through prosperity; those who do not complain about their hunger or thirst, do not lie, and do not become angry at their Lord; those who do not grieve over what they lose and do not rejoice over what they acquire. O Ahmad! To love Me is to love the poor. Thus, bring the poor nearer and let them sit around you" (Majlisi 1403AH, 74:23).<sup>2</sup>

### Qualities of the Faithful Poor

According to this beautiful hadith, the faithful poor possess qualities that qualify them for achieving a high level before God so much so that loving them becomes equal to loving God. Of course, we are not talking about people whose poverty is a result of their idleness; rather, we are talking about people who despite their hard work are still poor because of things that are beyond their control. The faithful poor are content

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<sup>2</sup> The Prophet (s) usually sat in his mosque and people gathered around him. It was an honour for the people to sit near him, so God orders the Prophet (s) to bring the poor closer and to honour them in the presence of others.

with the little share they have of this world and are not greedy for the blessings God has bestowed upon other people.

Another quality of the faithful poor is the way they react to their poverty. People confront poverty in different ways: some start complaining to God that why out of all people they have become poor, yet some remain patient and do not moan even though they do not have access to the basics of life. The poor who are patient will not become angry at God. Not only they do not moan or complain to people about their problems, but even in their hearts they do not have any complaint against God. This is because they have reached a certain level of *tawhid* that they believe God brings the best for them or at least they know that a true believer does not complain against his Lord.

There are people who raise the standards and not only do not complain or moan but also keep their poverty hidden from others. The Qur'an says about these people that "the unaware one suppose them to be well-off because of their reserve" (2:273). They try to be content with the little they can acquire and not to be dependent on others. They do not talk about their problems to gain people's pity or help.

Furthermore, they do not forget God as soon as they prosper. In the same way they remembered God in their difficulties, they remember God in times of prosperity and thank Him for His blessings. In other words, they do not grieve during difficulties to such an extent that they become hopeless, and they do not feel excessively joyous in times of happiness to forget God, as God says in the Qur'an: "So that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor exult for what comes your way" (57:23).

It does not matter for them whether they have a lot or a little. They are not so attached to this world to become arrogantly happy when they achieve something or to become excessively sad when they lose something.

## **Wealth and Poverty: Means of Trial**

If the whole world is given to a person, it is a blessing of God and a means for trial; and if it is taken away from him, it is another type of trial. Of course, being patient at times of difficulty does not contradict trying to eliminate it; rather, it means to be calm while they are being resolved.

According to His wisdom and good will, God has decreed certain destinies for His servants. Of course, this is not incompatible with their free will and no one is forced to his destiny. Each person enjoy a share of divine blessings, and God gives each of them what is good for them and after all these blessings are nothing but a means of trial.

If a believer is given the whole universe or if he is afflicted with oppression and persecution, he who trusts God knows that it is good for him and sees his tests and problems as expiating his sins and elevating him spiritually. Unlike what a simple-minded person might think, being poor is not a sign of God's anger, just as being rich is not a sign of God's love. Afflicted with poverty, a person who is not familiar with the teachings of the prophets may think that he is being humiliated by God. The Qur'an reads, "And when He tests him and tightens for him his provision, he says, 'My Lord has humiliated me'" (89:16). However, "whenever his Lord tests him and grants him honour and blesses him, he says, 'My Lord has honored me'" (89:15). Both of these attitudes are false; poverty is not humiliation, and blessings are not necessarily honor; rather, they are both means by which we are tested.

Everything occurs out of God's wisdom and goodness. A believer knows that God is in control of everything. Nothing is out of His power or knowledge, and the measure of things, small or big, is in His hands: "He directs the command from the heaven to the earth; then it ascends toward Him" (Qur'an 32:5).

Therefore, every incident, pleasant or non-pleasant, happens according to a plan—which we are not supposed to be fully aware of, since those

incidents are the means of our trial; if we knew the reason, trial would be pointless. Of course, for those in high levels of faith, it might not make any difference whether they know the wisdom behind their trials or not, as they are always content with what God decides for them. But for the rest of people some vagueness is necessary.

God has given enough knowledge to His prophets and some of His Friends, with which they can foresee the events that happen in future. For a student who has studied well and knows all the lessons by heart, it does not make any difference whether he knows the questions before the exam or not. This is the example of the prophets, who act according to the will and pleasure of God in all situations. But for the others, this is not the case. If they knew their trial beforehand, they would only focus on it and neglect other aspects of their lives.

Although we do not know why God has destined some people to be poor and others to be rich, or some to be afflicted with diseases and others to be healthy, we know for sure that having a prosperous life in this world does not make one closer to God, just as lacking it does not make one distant from Him. On the contrary, God gives more trials to those whom He loves. There is a hadith, in which Imam Ali (a) states,

الْبَلَاءُ لِلظَّالِمِ أَدَبٌ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِ إِمْتِحَانٌ وَلِلنَّبِيِّاءِ دَرَجَةٌ وَلِلأَوْلِياءِ كَرَامَةٌ

Affliction is a punishment for the oppressor, a trial for the believer, a degree for prophets, and an honour for the Friends [of God]. (Majlisi 1403AH, 67:12)

Therefore, the criterion for being respected and honored is not the amount of wealth; rather, it is how much one fulfils his duty: if he is rich, how much he uses his wealth in the right way, and if he is poor, how much he is patient. God Almighty says,

No affliction visits the earth or yourselves but it is in a Book before We bring it about. That is indeed easy for God. (Qur'an 57:22)

Therefore, when a blessing is bestowed upon us, we should not become arrogant, since everything happens according to an accurate plan that is intended to test us; and if a calamity befalls us, we should not become impatient, because that is also for our best.

Of course, it is not easy to feel the same when receiving or losing a blessing, but at least we can try not to exaggerate in expressing the way we feel. For us, it is not the same to have the whole world or to have none of it. We are easily stressed and distracted when we lose even some of our possessions—let alone losing our entire belongings. But at least we can try to remain patient as much as we can.

The more we train ourselves to be patient with calamities and to avoid arrogance when we receive blessings, the closer and dearer we will be to God and the more perfect our soul will become; otherwise, we will be attached to this world and will be its slaves.

### **Associating with the Poor**

The final passage of the section of Hadith al-Mi'raj that we discuss in this article reads,

يَا أَحْمَدُ؛ مَحَبَّتِي مَحَبَّةُ الْفُقَرَاءِ فَادْنِ الْفُقَرَاءَ وَ قَرِّبْ مَجْلِسَهُمْ مِنْكَ

O Ahmad! To love Me is to love the poor. Thus, bring the poor nearer and let them sit around you.

The pious and noble poor who are indifferent to the attractions of this material world are loved by God, and loving them equals loving God, for they have planted within themselves the beautiful virtues mentioned above. God orders His messenger to associate with them and love them.

A question may rise here regarding the reason behind the emphasis that God has put on loving the poor, considering that among both the poor and the rich one can find pious and impious individuals. The answer is clear. Showing love to all poor people is not equal to loving God; rather, only the poor who have the qualities mentioned are qualified for such

love. Therefore, the focus is on those qualities. If a rich person possesses them, loving him will be the same as loving God too. A rich person will have the same status if he has not become arrogant by the plentiful blessings he has and does not become impatient in case he loses them.

Among the prophets, there have been those who had abundant wealth and power but were not attached to them. For them, having or lacking the wealth was equal, and they spent what they had in the right way. Thus, not all poor people deserve that degree of love and not all rich people deserve dissociation; the criterion for being loved by God is to have the mentioned qualities.

The point about poverty that makes the poor special is that their lives are free from elements that lead to rebellion or arrogance; the rich and the powerful are more prone to these vices because of their wealth and power, as God says in the Qur'an:

Indeed man becomes rebellious when he considers  
himself without need. (90:6-7)

Add to this the fact that arrogance is the worst of all corruptions and the root of disbelief, and a wealthy person is in danger of it. The Qur'an says: "God does not like any swaggering braggart" (57:23). God loves humble people, and the poor are more likely to be so, and hence God tells us to love them. On the other hand, loving the good people among the rich may be caused by material motivations, and God does not accept impurity in any way. That is probably why we do not see much emphasis on loving the righteous rich.

## **Bibliography**

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