

Fourth Rule

STEADINESS AND LOYALTY

The scholars have defined this stage, as after feeling remorse about a sin and asking forgiveness for it, we must endeavor not to commit that vice repeatedly. It is vital that we are patient over these matters and avoid stepping or falling into the traps laid down by Shaytan, The Accursed.

Allah (SWT) has stated,

Indeed! Repentance acceptable with Allah (SWT) is only for those who do evil ignorantly and then turn unto Allah (SWT) soon after.
(Qur'an - Chapter 4, Verse 17)

We need to learn to be loyal to our Creator and put all our trust in His Mighty. As per Allamah Tabai's suggestion,

It is possible that if our powers (of imagination, passion, anger, lust and sensuality) are subjected to the dictates of reason and good sense and the teachings of The Prophets (AS) and Imams (AS), they may bring about felicity and good luck in you. None of The Messengers of Allah (S) has ever demanded to eradicate sensuality and desire, or to extinguish the fire of passion or anger and ignore the inventions of imagination. Nevertheless, they have rather advocated for controlling and bridling them and making them function under the command of reason and Divine Laws. Apparently, these powers are vital in one's life.

A Brief Note on Patience

As long as we are balanced and steady and avoid being impatient, we stand to achieve success in this journey. One of the most strenuous aspects in Islam and what we must struggle to possess as one of our main weapons to overpower the Nafs is patience, the head of faith. Endless bounties are stored in it. Allah (SWT) promises a great reward in this world and the next for patience.

The following is a tradition of al-Sadiq (AS) from the dignified al-Kafi, in which The Imam says,

Verily, patience is to faith what the head is to the body. The body perishes without the head, and so when patience goes faith disappears.

In a similar vein, al-Sajjad (AS) says,

Indeed! Patience is to faith what the head is to the body. One who has no patience has no faith.

al-Khumeini (AR) writes the following on Patience (Sabr),

Patience is the key to the gates of felicity and the main means of deliverance from mortal perils. Sabr makes man bear calamities with ease and face difficulties with composure. It strengthens the will and the power of resolution. It brings independence to the dominion of the soul. Anguish and anxiety on the other hand, aside from their shameful character, are symptoms of the soul's weakness. They deprive one's being of stability, weaken the determination, and enfeeble the intellect.

Degrees of Patience

We are obliged to be patient on three occasions, the first being the time of affliction and calamities - keeping in mind that afflictions are not always a result of our sins and disobedience to Allah (SWT), but can sometimes be a test to examine the level of our obedience and perseverance to The Almighty.

Sayyid al-Khumeini (AR) quotes Imam al-Sadiq (AS) in one of his noble sayings that Prophet Ayub (AS) had suffered so many afflictions that his entire body (with the exception of his eyes and intellect) had decomposed and worms had made the entire body a place for their living and sustenance. However, he never swerved in his faith and always asked Allah (SWT) for deliverance and guidance. In several cases, therefore, we may have to encounter adversity simply because Allah (SWT) has reserved a higher place for us in Paradise and to attain that level we must be tested to the extreme limit. He has said,

A person who is not happy with My Orders, not patient with My Afflictions, not thankful for My Bounties, not content with My Gifts, then he should look for another lord other than Me and he should get out of My Universe.

A person, who does not get what he wants in this world and becomes sad by it, it is as if he is angry with Me. A person who complains of calamities to another, which has befallen him, it is as if he has complained about Me.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

The greatness of a man's rewards goes with the greatness of suffering, and Allah (SWT) did not love people but that He subjected them to suffering.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) says,

No doubt, Allah (SWT) Almighty treats a believer with tribulations in the same manner as a man treats his family with gifts after an absence (upon a journey). Moreover, He restrains him from the world in the same way as a physician prescribes restraints for a sick man.

Affliction is an adornment for the believer and a mark of honor for the man of intellect, because facing it directly needs steadfastness and firm-footedness, both of which confirm belief. The Prophet (S) said,

We, the company of The Prophets, are the people who have the hardest trials, then after us come the believers, then the others like them. He who loves this world will affect his state in The Hereafter; and he who loves The Hereafter will affect his worldly existence. So prefer that which remain forever to that which will pass.

It has been said that there is no peace on earth for the faithful believers, and neither has peace been created (for them). There exists no short cut to Paradise. Whoever tastes the food of affliction while under God's protection enjoys it more than he enjoys God's Blessing. He yearns for it when it is not there. Allah (SWT) praised none of His Bondsmen, from Adam (AS) up to Muhammad (S), until He had tested him and seen how he fulfilled the duty of worship while in affliction. God's marks of honor come, in fact, at the last stage, but the afflictions themselves come in the beginning.

Undoubtedly, there is no good in a slave who complains of a single trial preceded by thousands of blessings and followed by thousands of comforts, in this world or the next.

Prophet Ayub (AS) used to say thus in his supplication,

O' Allah (SWT)! Verily seventy comforts and ease did not come to me until You sent me seventy afflictions.

Imam Ali (AS) says,

Steadfastness in relation to belief is like the head to the body. The head of steadfastness is affliction, but only those who act righteously understand.

Imam Ali (AS), in a tradition regarding nature of what is decreed, quotes The Qur'an,

No evil befalls The Earth or your own souls, but it is in a Book (decreed) before We bring it into existence; surely, that is easy for Allah (SWT). So that you may not grieve for what you have missed, nor be exultant at what He has given you; and Allah (SWT) does not love any arrogant boaster.

(Qur'an - Chapter 57, Verse 22-23)

Ayatullah Fadhlullah Haaeri (AR) writes,

Whatever afflicts us, in the earth or in ourselves, it is already in The Book, in The Eternal Book, The Book of Reality. It was there in The Absolute, total decree before it was created. It was decreed in the sense that laws that govern this cosmos eventually will result in what you and I will experience, not decree in a superstitious sense. We are both free and chained. We are chained to the laws that govern existence and we are free to act within these constraints. The interaction of the two is what results in the dynamism of life.

The Imam said this affliction was already there, it was already in The Book and we should not be sorry for what has happened. This world is a theatre, a facade. The test in this world is not to look back. Thus, the man of faith has all of his energies preserved. He is not sorry for what has happened for he has done his best.

The Prophet (S) in response to being told about an occurrence, regardless of how distorted it was would say not to look back upon it, do not feel sorry about it. Clean your heart and live in the present. That is the only contact point you have with Allah (SWT) who is beyond time: now, now, now. The smaller that now is, the less it is in time. Ignorance of how Allah (SWT)'s decree works is well explained in the following Qur'anic Verse:

And among men is he who says: We believe in Allah (SWT); but when he is persecuted in the way of Allah (SWT) he thinks the persecution of men to be as the chastisement of Allah (SWT); and if there comes assistance from your Lord, they would most certainly say: 'Surely we were with you.' What! Is not Allah (SWT) the best Knower of what is in the breasts of humanity?

(Qur'an - Chapter 29, Verse 10)

Affliction is from the injustice of humankind. Man has the option as Allah (SWT)'s deputy on earth to handle or mishandle his representation so that he brings about justice or injustice. Therefore, if we are afflicted by injustice it is our own doing. We have abused our authority, and we have not recognized that authority of Allah (SWT). We have not kept within the bounds of Allah (SWT), nor have we been in fearful awareness. The Prophet was asked on one occasion, 'Who are the people of the (Prophet's) house?' He responded, 'He who is in fearful awareness embraces that part.'

The affliction of Karbala was the injustice of man upon man all over the world. People are constantly remembering events that help us to move more and more towards Tawhid (Unity), and one of the most remarkable of them all is the reactivation of Islam by the blood of The Master Imam al-Husayn (AS).

Entry into his magnificent companionship can only be obtained by unifying the outer law of Islam with the inner reality. One must be a man of Allah (SWT) inwardly and the most kind, gentle, understanding, compassionate, patient, and courageous man outwardly, willing to lay down one's life at any moment. When a person's will unify with The Will of Allah (SWT), then he enters into fighting in the way of Allah (SWT), the path of Imam al-Husayn (AS). Then he is with The Imam at all times. His love of The Imam transforms into the love of Allah (SWT), an uncompromising, absolute love born of total surrender.

The second occasion for us to be patient is when we are about to commit a sin. This world is a transient place for all of us and that we will have to defend all our actions on The Day of Judgment. You and I should look for ways that will most effectively guard us from committing sins. For example, we may want to keep our friends to a minimum, visit only certain places, read only certain specified literature, talk only what is relevant, and so forth.

The final occasion where we have to practice patience is when we have to perform obedient acts for The Love of Allah (SWT), The Great. As He has said,

Indeed, you will not get what I possess, but by being patient with those things which you do not like (but you still do) in order to seek My Pleasure. Patience on My obedience is easier for you than patience in The Fire of Hell.

Whenever we intend to perform a good deed, Shaytan is there instantly to persuade us not to do it. He may practice tricks on us and convince us not to do the deed, but we have to be careful. We should be able to identify these trickeries and discard them. Making a diagnosis and identifying his entrance into our soul is an effective way to solve this issue. And if Shaytan is not successful in convincing us not to do a particular obedient act then he will try his level best to make us do it quickly and with the least of concentration. For example, he may convince us to pray quickly and complete our prayers as fast as possible, or wear hijab in a fashionable manner and spoil its purpose, and so forth.

Allah (SWT) never entrusts His Creatures with heavy tasks, which are beyond their powers, but it is Shaytan and his allies who magnify them in our view. As Allah (SWT) states in The Qur'an,

Allah (SWT) does not impose any soul, but to its ability.
(Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 286)

al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

Verily, The Book of Ali mentions that of all humanity, The Prophets undergo the severest of trials, and after them The Awsiya, and after them The Elect to the extent of their nobility. Indeed, the believer undergoes trial in proportion to his good deeds. So one whose faith is sound and whose deeds are good, his trials are also more severe. That is indeed, because God Almighty did not make this world a place for rewarding the believer and punishing the unbeliever. In addition, one whose faith is feeble and whose (good) deeds are few faces fewer tribulations. Verily, tribulations hasten towards the believer with greater speed than rainwater towards the earth's depths.

We have to realize the importance of worship and abstaining from vice and act without inward anguish. The righteous servant of Allah (SWT) understands his duties towards his Master and never complains about his status. The famous Khwajah Abdullah al-Ansari (AR) writes in **Manazil al-Sairin**,

Patience means restraining the self from complaint about hidden anguish.

What a difference between us and those obedient servants of Allah (SWT) who welcome responsibility, attend to them with pleasure and fulfill them efficiently. We think that Allah (SWT) Almighty has burdened us with duties, consider them troublesome and view them as botheration. We attempt to offer prayers as fast as possible; fast during the month of Ramadhan with anguish and difficulty; perform recommended acts only few times a year, and so forth. Indeed, all our misfortunes are due to ignorance and on account of the lack or absence of faith.

It has been said that patience is concealed anguish, i.e. one never complains about a misfortune. Moreover, that which has been said about The Great Prophets (AS) and The Righteous Imams (AS), who have been characterized with patience, which could mean forbearance concerning physical sufferings or about separation from The Beloved, which is one of the great stations of the lovers.

Nevertheless, the intent of the Sheikh Ansari when he says that patience means abstinence from complaint is complaining to creatures. Otherwise, complaining to Allah (SWT), The Almighty and beseeching Him for relief is not opposed to patience. Prophet Ayub (AS) complained to Allah (SWT) and said,

Behold! Shaytan has visited me with weariness and chastisement.
(Qur'an - Chapter 38, Verse 41)

Moreover, Allah (SWT) yet praises him, saying,

Surely, We found him, a steadfast man. How excellent a servant he was. He was penitent.
(Qur'an - Chapter 38, verse 44)

Moreover, Prophet Ya'qub (AS) said,

I make complaint of my anguish and my sorrow unto Allah (SWT).
(Qur'an - Chapter 12, Verse 86)

al-Khumeini (AR) writes,

Dear servant of Allah (SWT), an impatient person complains of his troubles to everyone, and this, aside from causing disrepute among people who look down upon him as a weakling of instable character, makes him lose his standing in The Court of Allah (SWT) and in front of His Angels. What faith in Allah (SWT) has that servant who cannot bear an adversity that visits him from his Beloved, The Absolute, and after having received thousands upon thousands of His Bounties and while being immersed in the sea of His Favor, opens his mouth in front of people to complain as soon as adversity strikes him?

If you have faith in your Lord and believe all the affairs to lie in Him and none other, if you believe none else to have any say in the matters, of course you will not complain of the hardships of life and the adversities that strike you before Allah (SWT) Almighty. Rather, you will accept them willingly and thank Him gratefully for His Bounties. Hence that inner agitation, those plaintive utterances, those unbecoming bodily movements, all these bear testimony to our lack of faith. Gradually, those complaints assume the form of enmity towards Allah (SWT) and things go out of one's control. Finally, he departs from this world to face eternal wretchedness and gloom, with a spirit infused with the enmity and hatred of The Lord of Bounties

Khawajah Naqir al-Din al-Tusi (AR) states,

Sabr restrains the inner being from anguish, the tongue from complaint and the bodily members from untoward movements.

In a noble tradition of al-Kafi, Abu Hamzah al-Thumali (AR) reports Imam al-Sadiq (AS) as having said,

Whoever of the believers that bears patiently with a tribulation that befalls him, has a reward of a thousand martyrs.

When the believer enters his grave, prayers is on his right, zakat (alms to the poor) on his left, virtue faces him, with patience taking him under its shelter. When The Two Angels charged with questioning enter upon him, patience says to zakat, prayers and virtue, 'Take care of your companion, and if you fail to assist him I will take care of him myself.'

No words can better offer solace & comfort than those of The Infallibles (AS), which are noted below:

al-Baqir (AS) said,

A wakeful night due to illness is greater in reward and better than worship of a whole year.

The Prophet (S) has also said,

If a believer suffers a bout of fever, his sins fall off him like the (dead) leaves of a tree. If he becomes bed-ridden, then his groans are Tasbih (Glorifications of Allah (SWT)) and his cries are Tahlil (Declarations of God's Unity - perhaps by experiencing his own weakness/pain he realizes The Almighty's Unique strength). In addition, his tossing & turning on his sickbed are like the one who brandishes his sword in the way of God (perhaps due to his great efforts to resist the onslaught of wherever that may distance him from God). So if he returns to his brethren and friends, worshipping God, then He forgives him, so congratulations to him if he repents and woe on him if he returns to a sinful life ...'

Imam al-Ridha (AS) says,

Sickness is for a believer a means of purification (from sins) and mercy (to gain higher stations) and for a disbeliever a means of punishment and curse; and the sickness continues with a believer until all his sins are washed away.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) continues in the same vein to say,

A splitting headache for a night washes away all sins except the major ones.

The Prophet (S) once exclaimed that a sick person enjoys four features: *no sins are recorded; God, The Almighty orders The Angel to record for him all the good acts that he would have otherwise performed in his health; the sickness spreads to the parts of his body and cleanses his sins from them, and hence if he dies, he departs as a forgiven man and if he survives, he lives as a forgiven man.*

al-Sadiq (AS) says that Imam Ali (AS) once visited Salman, The Persian (AR) when the latter was sick. He explained to him,

'O' Salman! None of our Shia (sincere followers) suffers pain but due to his previous sins, and the pain is a means for his purification.' Salman said, 'So we have no other reward in it save the purification.' Imam clarified, 'O' Salman! You all (Shia) will be rewarded for the forbearance, for beseeching and supplicating to The Lord, virtues will be recorded for you all, and your stations will be elevated, but the pain is specifically for redemption and purification.'

al-Sadiq (AS) narrates a similar incident when The Prophet (S) himself visited Salman on his sickbed and explained to him,

O' Salman! In your illness, you enjoy three features: you are being remembered (with special attention of extra mercy) by God; your prayers are granted and, the illness washes away all your sins.

Furthermore, al-Sadiq (AS) *advises us to visit our sick ones, and ask them to pray for us, because their prayers are equivalent to the prayers of The Angels.*

It is now clear that there are various degrees and levels of patience, and its reward and merit vary accordingly. Imam Ali (AS) quotes The Prophet (S) as having said,

Patience is of three kinds. Patience at the time of affliction, patience concerning obedience and patience concerning disobedience. One who bears patiently with affliction, resisting it with a fair consolation, Allah (SWT) writes for him 300 degrees (of sublimity), the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between Earth and Heavens. In addition, one who is patient about obedience, Allah (SWT) writes for him 600 degrees (of sublimity), the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between the earth's depths and The Throne.

And one who is patient in regard to disobedience, Allah (SWT) writes for him 900 degrees (of sublimity), the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between the earth's depths and the furthest frontiers of The Throne.

In another discourse, Imam al-Sadiq (AS) quotes The Prophet (S) having said to his followers,

A time will come upon the people wherein political authority will not be attainable without bloodshed and tyranny, nor wealth without usurpation and stinginess, nor affection without discarding religion and pursuing lust and desire. Whoever lives in such times and bears patiently with poverty despite possessing the capacity to become rich (illegitimately), and bears up with hostility despite being capable of acquiring favor and affection, and bears with humiliation despite possessing the capacity to acquire honor, Allah (SWT) will give him the reward of 50 truthful ones, of those who confirmed me.

An astonishing tradition on patience concerns the following narration from al-Shibli, which concerns a youth from among the Lovers exclaiming at al-Shibli that, *patience from Allah (SWT) is the patience of most difficult quality.*

al-Shibli cried and swooned. The kind of patience Allah (SWT) practices is on our sins and disobedience and is the hardest of patience. Indeed, a statement from the Invocation of Adeelah states, *Allah (SWT)'s Mercy (always) overpowers His Anger.*

Imam al-Sadiq (AS), in a noble tradition of al-Kafi with a continuous chain of transmission going up to him, states,

Verily, the servant has certain stations near God that cannot be realized without one of these two attributes: either the loss of his wealth or affliction in his body.

And,

The greatness of man's reward goes with the greatness of suffering, and God did not love a people but that He subjected them to suffering.

In al-Mahasin it is narrated that Imam al-Baqir (AS) said,

Whenever God The Almighty loves someone, He will throw him into trouble and storm him with calamities. When he prays to God for help, God will say,

O' My Servants! I hear your prayer and have the power to immediately fulfill your requests if I so wish, but I will save it for you; and what I save for you is better.

A Metaphor

It is said that one day a man exclaimed to Allah (SWT) that whenever he is receiving good tidings and in good times, he can see two pairs of feet on the desert walking with him. However, this very person gets extremely sad and disappointed that when he is experiencing affliction and is in deep problems, he finds only his one pair of feet walking on the desert and making marks on the sand. Therefore, he complained to Allah (SWT) convincingly and remarked, *'Where are you, O' Allah (SWT), when I'm in despair and feeling lonely?'* So Allah (SWT) replies, *'I am with you - only that when you are in deep trouble I carry you in my arms and walk together with you.'*