

## Third Rule

# **MODERATION AND RESTRAINT**

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) says,

(Moderation) It is one of those important principles, which the spiritual traveler must follow, for a little negligence in this respect not only hampers his progress, but often because of lack of attention to this aspect, he may get tired of the spiritual journey itself.

It is inherent that we may show much zeal and enthusiasm in our deeds in the beginning. Half-way through, we may encounter wonderful manifestations of The Divine Light, and later on we may strongly resolve to spend most of our time in prayers and sacrifice our lives in The Way of Allah (SWT).

However, under too much pressure we may be fed up, leave the work incomplete and cease to take interest in commendable tasks. *We are cautioned that there is no compulsion in religion and one should not try to force oneself into worship.* Indeed,

Allah (SWT) has not ordained any hardship for you in the religion.  
**(Qur'an - Chapter 22, Verse 78)**

We need to constantly remind ourselves that Allah (SWT) is All-Merciful and accepts as little as possible from His Beloved Creation. However, it is mainly our intentions that always count in the end. We should not be misled by momentary zeal and energy that would only be temporary.

This principle of moderation is derived from this tradition also according to which Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said to Abdul Aziz Qaratisi (AR),

Abdul Aziz! Faith has ten degrees like the steps of a ladder, which are climbed one by one. If you find anyone below you by one-step, pull him up to you gently and do not burden him with what he cannot bear, or else you will break him.

He (AS) also advised his followers the following about worship,

Do not force yourselves into worship.

Moderation is the basis of all teachings of Islam and going to extremes has been prohibited in all its orders and regulations. Moderation has been recommended in the matter of worship, acquisition of knowledge, food, dress, friendship, and so forth. Allamah Taba Tabai (AR) writes in his Tafsir al-Mizan,

Islam recommends the golden mean and the path of moderation in this sense that a Muslim should pay attention to the strengthening of his body as well as his soul, because man does not consist of a body only just as he does not possess soul only, but he is the combination of both and in order to attain real prosperity one must protect and strengthen this combination.

### **Moderation in Worship**

Even though we have observed intense forms of worship in The Prophet (S), The Aimmah (AS) and some of The Great Scholars of Islam, The Prophet (S) has enjoined us to worship Allah (SWT) and fulfill our desires only to an extent, with The Sole Purpose – Allah (SWT) – at all times.

Islam is a firm and sound religion. Take firm steps in carrying out its orders and do not make the worship of Allah (SWT) wearisome and annoying for His creatures. If you do so, you will be like a hasty camel-rider who does not reach his destination and also makes the camel collapse.

Therefore, it is vital that we attend to our desires satisfactorily (keeping Allah (SWT) in mind and that He is the origin of all good) and worship Allah (SWT) accordingly. Islam does not desire any difficulty for us. The Prophet (S) himself always preached moderation and campaigned against all sorts of extreme actions, as we see in several Sufi practices today and many of them are un-Islamic. We need to learn to fulfill our desires in a lawful manner and take care of our relatives and their needs. Truly, excessiveness is harmful for the person who practices them as well as for those who watch such practices and may also be eluded. Imam al-Sadiq (AS) says,

Do not make yourself reluctant in the matter of Divine Worship. That is, do not over-burden yourself with 'recommended' articles of worship and thus tire yourself because as a result thereof you will become reluctant in the matter of worship.

Imam Ali (AS), in connection with his guidelines to his son at the time of his death, said,

My son! Be moderate in the affairs of life and also practice moderation in the matter of worship of Allah (SWT) in such a way that you may always be able to continue it.

Moreover, this is the main purpose of all worship - so that we are able to continue the act until our last breath. To an extent, The Divine Leaders (AS) have considered stepping beyond the limit of moderation to be the consequence of ignorance.

Imam Ali (AS) says,

It is seen that the ignorant persons are either extravagant or fatigued in all matters and moderation is never observed in them.

However, on the other hand, prolonged worship has been divinely prescribed. Mirza Jawaad Agha Maliki Tabrizi (AR) writes that The Prophet (S) through his repeated recommendations had emphasized the importance of prolonged prostration. About Imam al-Kadhim (AS), it is reported that some times he prolonged his prostration from morning until noon.

During Agha Mirza's stay in Najaf al-Ashraf, he once asked a Marja' as to what special act had he tried in his own life time which was effective for a spiritual journey in his journey? The Marja' replied,

To prolong the prostration during a period of 24 hours and reciting of invocation, 'There is no Allah (SWT), save You! Glory is to You! Lo! I have been a wrong doer.'

### **Moderation in Expenditure**

To make necessary assessment and to exercise moderation in expenditure is one of the inevitable duties of every Muslim. Imam al-Baqir (AS) says that three things ensure the deliverance of man,

Fearing Allah (SWT) openly and secretly.

Moderation in expenditure at the time of affluence as well as indigence.

To say the right thing at the right time of happiness as well as anger.

As we have observed and will in the coming pages, the scholars who have attained such higher stages of spiritual perfection have advised us to refrain from expensive things – houses, furniture, etc. and that this avoidance is one of the ways to kill the appetitive and carnal self within us.

Adam, son of Uaynah, son of Abi Imran al-Hilali al-Kufi said, I heard Abu Abdillah, Ja'far, son of Muhammad (AS) say,

How often a moment's constraint and patience can bring about long lasting pleasure and satisfaction, and how often a moment's indulgence can result in a prolonged grief and sorrow.

In the book, Elixir of Love, the life and experiences of Sheikh Rajab Ali (AR), the author writes that whenever it rained, the ceiling began to drip. One day, an army general, along with some other governmental officials, came to our house. We had placed some basins and bowls under the rain dripping from the ceiling. Having seen our condition of living, he bought two pieces of land and showed them to my father, and said he had bought one for himself and one for him. My father replied, what we have is sufficient for us.

Another of his sons said: 'When my life condition changed for the better, I said to my father, 'Dear father! I have four Tumans and this brick house can be sold for sixteen Tumans. So let me buy a new house on Shahbaz Avenue.'

The Shaykh said,

Whenever you wish go and buy one for you; for me, this one is good enough!

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) narrated that someone went to visit Imam al-Baqir (AS) and said, "May God maintain your health. We travel in the mountains for business and go to snowy places where we cannot pray anywhere except on the snow." Imam al-Baqir (AS) pointed to another man who was there and said,

Do you not want to be like this man who is content with less income and does not have to go on a business trip where he has to pray on the snow.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) quoted on the authority of God's Prophet (S),

Time passes by and you will get what is due to reach you from this world no matter how weak you are, and you will suffer any losses in this world that you are doomed to suffer, and you cannot prevent this no matter how strong you are. Whoever forgets about what he loses will attain peace of mind, and whomever is content with his divinely allocated daily bread will get happy.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) narrated that Sa'd who was one of the people of Suffah was a poor, religious, and abstinent believer. He was really needy. He always accompanied God's Prophet (S) at times of praying, and did not leave him. The Prophet of God (S) who noticed his need and self-respect felt sorry, and once told him that he would help him if he could. Then Jibraeel (AS) descended and gave The Prophet two Dirham and asked The Prophet to give the poor man the money and instruct him to do business with it and live with his God-given daily bread.

Sa'd accepted the money. After The Prophet (S) finished the afternoon prayer, he told him to go after his business since he felt bad for him. Sa'd got up and left. He made a lot of profit from doing business and soon he got really wealthy. He bought a store near The Prophet's mosque and started to collect the profit of his doing business there. Whenever Bilal announced the call to prayer, The Prophet of God (S) went to the mosque but Sa'd did not do his ablution and prepare to pray. He was busy with his world.

The Prophet (S) told him: "O' Sa'd! This world has hindered you from praying." Sa'd said, "What can I do? I will lose my wealth. I have to stay here and attend to the deals I make when the customers come in and go out. Then Jibraeel descended and said,

O' Muhammad! The wealth of this world makes one distant from The Hereafter. Ask him to return the two Dirham I gave you.

The Prophet (S) said: "O' Sa'd! Will you not return the two Dirham to us?" Sa'd said, "Yes. I will even give you two hundred Dirham!" The Prophet (S) said, "No. I just want the two Dirham that I gave you." Sa'd gave him two Dirham." Then suddenly the tables turned around and Sa'd lost all the wealth he had collected and returned to his previous state."

Imam al-Kadhim (AS) said: God, The Almighty said,

I did not make the rich ones rich for their honor near Me, and I did not make the poor ones poor for their humiliation near Me. Rather this is how I test the rich by the poor people. If there were no poor people, none of the rich people could be certified to go to Heaven.

### **Moderation of Food**

Eating and drinking is also one of those matters with regard to which people go to extremes and, of course, mostly towards the side of excessiveness. No doubt, we need food to live and it is necessary that food should reach the cells of our body so that they may continue their life. However, the important question is as to how much food is the body needs and whether excessive food is good or harmful for us.

Imam al-Ridha (AS) says,

You should know that human body is like a fertile land. If moderation is exercised in the matter of its development, i.e. if necessary quantity of water is provided to it, which should neither be so excessive that the land should drown in the water and change into swamp and bog, nor so scanty that it should remain thirsty and dry. Such land is developed and yields much produce. However, if that land is not properly looked after it becomes barren.

Human body too, is like this. Indeed, The Prophet (S) has cautioned us that,

The stomach is the seat of all ailments and restricting oneself and eating less is the best of all medicines.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has this to say to a wayfarer and spiritual journalist,

Be careful! Do not eat anything until and unless you feel an appetite for it, because otherwise, it would be a matter of foolishness and ignorance.

Do not eat anything until and unless you feel absolutely hungry.

When you eat, always recite the phrase 'In the Name of Allah (SWT),' and eat only lawful foods.

The famous scholar Victor Dean says,

We eat much and as a result of gluttony, we lose the vital energy, which should work to ward off waste matter. Consequently, we are faced with the dilatation of the stomach and the liver and weakness of the kidney. The uric acid is scattered in the body and makes us suffer from rheumatism and swelling of the joints. Fat accumulates on the heart. The flow of blood is retarded. The digestive organ is weakened due to excessive activity...

The famous physician Dr. Alexis Carell says,

Gluttony, besides creating much disorder in one's physical constitution, weakens the nerves, especially the nerves of the brain, and brings about a sort of nervous and mental disorder the effects whereof appear in the shape of indisposition, gloominess, laziness, indifference, conditions of consternation and sleep, grief, domination of thinking, dreadful dreams and groundless fears.

Imam Ali (AS) has said,

Do not extend your hand to food unless you are perfectly hungry and stop eating before you are fully satiated. Chew the food completely and soften it in your mouth and under your teeth and off-load your bowels before you go to sleep. If you follow these four rules, you will not need the services of a physician.

The Prophet (S) warns us further that,

Do not kill your hearts with overindulgence in the matter of eating and drinking, because human heart is like a sown field, which decays and dies if one waters it in excess.

Luqman Hakim once said to his beloved son,

Dear son! When the stomach is full, your faculty of thinking goes to sleep and your tongue of wisdom becomes dumb and your limbs fail to worship Allah (SWT).

Let it be known that Islam strongly condemns everything which human nature desires in excess. So be careful and exercise patience whenever in problems.

### **A Brief Note on Worship**

Worship is a vital element of this journey and we all need to master this aspect before age and weakness overtake us, and much before we begin working on the other rules and exercises. Worship is a strong weapon to destroy our animal instincts and carnal desires.

al-Khumeini (AR) has said,

Man has within himself an idol temple. It is not easy for him to get out of it. He needs Divine Assistance, a hidden hand that may take him out of this dungeon ... Our base desires are The Devil's manifestations. The greatest devil being our own appetitive soul (Nafs) ... The Devil holds influence over us and we are dictated by the emigration is essential for anyone who aspires to attain perfection.

al-Khumeini (AR) reports a tradition that,

For ten years The Messenger of Allah (S) stood on his toes (in his prayers) until his blessed feet became swollen and his face turned pale. In addition, he would stand erect all the night, until a time came when he was consoled by his Lord.

We have not sent down The Qur'an upon thee to cause thee distress.  
**(Qur'an - Chapter 20, Verse 2)**

A similar narration reports that,

Prophet Shuayb (AS) cried so much during his lifetime that he lost his eyesight three times and three times he was blessed with eyesight by Allah (SWT), The All-Merciful. One day Allah (SWT) said to him,

Till when is this going to happen? I have given you Paradise, and Hell has been kept far away from you...! On hearing this remark Prophet Shuayb (AS) replied,

O Allah (SWT)! I cry not for the hope of Your Paradise or fear of Your Hell. I lament because I love you!

Therefore, we have to understand the value and reasons of worship and we should have a sacred time, a few extra minutes or hours -everyday- specifically reserved for Allah and Him only.

When The Messenger of Allah (S) went on his noble ascent (Me'raj), he saw certain Angels in Paradise who would engage in constructing buildings and for some time stopped their work. The Prophet (S) asked Jibrael (AS), "What is the reason behind this?" Jibrael (A) replied,

The material for this building is made up of the remembrance of the individuals of the community. Whenever they engage in remembrance, the material becomes available for building and The Angels too resume their building work. However, when they cease in their remembrance, these Angels too stop their work.

The physical form of heaven and hell is made up of the forms of the good and evil works and deeds of the Children of Adam, which return to them in that world. This has also been referred to in the noble verses of the Qur'an, as in the following utterance of God Almighty,

In addition, they shall find all they wrought present.  
**(Qur'an - Chapter 18, Verse 49)**