

## **VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY JOURNEYS**

We all should appreciate the fact that we are on our way to seek our Lord and that one day we will meet Him, and this meeting will happen to all of us, either in a positive note, or a negative one. Understandably, Allah (SWT), The Exalted, by His Perfect Might and Wisdom has destined two journeys for Prophet Adam (AS) and his children. The first is INVOLUNTARY and the other is VOLUNTARY.

### **The Involuntary Journey**

As regards to the involuntary journey, it can be summarized into six stages. The starting point was your father's loins; the second stage was your mother's womb; the third stage is this physical world; the fourth stage will be your grave; the fifth stage will be The Resurrection Day; and the final stage will either be a Garden from The Gardens in Paradise or an Abode of Eternal Fire and Torture.

### **The Details and Wonders of Conception and Birth of a Child**

Concerning the involuntary journey that we all had to undertake, it is narrated in al-Kafi from Imam al-Baqir (AS) that he said,

When Allah (SWT) wants to create a semen - and it is among that from which covenant was taken from The Loin of Adam (AS) - (or as He may decide later); and wants to put it in the womb, He excites the man for sexual intercourse and reveals to the womb, 'Open your door so that My Creature and My Firm Decree may enter upon you.' Therefore, it opens its door. The sperm reaches the womb and moves therein for forty days; then it becomes a clot for forty days; then it becomes a lump of flesh for forty days, then flow in it interlaced veins.

Then Allah (SWT) sends two 'Creator' Angels who make in the wombs what Allah (SWT) wishes; they enter into the belly of the woman, from the woman's mouth; so they reach the womb, and in it is the ancient spirit that was transferred into loins of men and wombs of women. Then they blow in it the spirit of life and eternity, and they create openings for his hearing and sight, and make his limbs and all that is in the stomach, by permission of Allah (SWT).

Then Allah (SWT) reveals to the two Angels: 'Write on him My Decree and My Destiny and Firm Order; and write down that I may change that which you write.' They say, 'O' Lord! What are we to write?' Thereupon Allah (SWT) reveals to them to raise their heads towards the head of the mother. They raise their heads, and lo! There is a tablet striking the mother's forehead. They look into it and find in it his features, his embellishment, his death time, his covenant - whether he shall be a fortunate or an unfortunate one, and all his affairs.

Thereupon, one of them dictates to the other; thus, they write down all that is in the tablet, and make it conditional on the final decision (of Allah (SWT)). Then they seal the writing and place it between his eyes. Then they make him stand upright in the womb of his mother. Sometimes he disobeys and turns upside down, and this does not happen except in the case of an arrogant and rebellious one. In addition, when the time comes for the fetus to come out, developed or undeveloped, Allah (SWT) reveals to the womb: 'Open your door so that My Creature may go out to My Earth and My Order may be enforced about him, because now time has come for him to go out.'

Then the womb opens the door for the child; so he turns upside down, his feet go over his head, his head reaches the lower part of the (mother's) stomach. It is done so that delivery may be easier for the woman and the child. Then Allah (SWT) sends to him an Angel named 'The Admonisher', who sternly tells him to go out; the child becomes frightened; when it delays some more, The Angel tells him once again to get out; the child becomes even more frightened and falls on the earth crying, terrified because of that rebuke.

### **The Voluntary Journey**

The voluntary journey is of two kinds, the journey of the souls and the heart towards The Almighty, and the physical journey in this Earth. Regarding the spiritual journey towards our loving Lord, scholars have advised us to keep in mind that we have been created in order to enable our heart to make this kind of sacred journey towards Him, attain communion with Him, and to observe His Glory, Beauty, Mightiness, Power, and so forth. Indeed, all of us have been created to know and understand Him. According to a sacred tradition from Hadith al-Qudsi, Allah (SWT) has said,

I was a hidden treasure. I wished to become known. Therefore, I created the creation...

### **The Veils**

It has been repeatedly said that in this life my heart, yours and everyone else's is confronted with veils and obstacles that separates us from our Lord. There are also degrees and stations of proximity to Allah (SWT). We have to overcome all these obstacles to achieve the pleasure of Allah (SWT). Only then can we achieve the pleasure of Allah (SWT). We need to understand that The Sacred Lord will not be revealed to us unless all the veils present in us are torn away.

According to Islamic Scholars, the first veil is ignorance regarding Him and is considered the main cause of our separation from The Almighty. It is very essential for us to convert the darkness of ignorance into illumination by means of pondering over His Unity, Power, Creation, Kingdom, and so forth.

We need to think and contemplate over His Being and Creation for it is considered one of the best forms of worship. Otherwise, one's body and soul will remain in eternal darkness and damnation in the lowest levels of Hell.

The next stage on the path of attaining proximity to our Lord is through obedience and servitude. The Prophet (S) narrates from The Exalted Authority that He has said,

Those who seek nearness to Me do not succeed in attaining their goal except in proportion to their fulfillment of all that I have made obligatory for them. My servant always seeks nearness to me by means of supererogatory acts of worship (the recommended acts) until he attains to My love for him.

The third of the stages is good conduct. The advice is to hasten to perform good deeds and build up our moral strong enough to act as a barrier opposing Satanic Forces.

### **The Principles of The Voluntary Journey**

This journey of the heart towards our Lord requires acceptance and observance of certain rules. The most important principles are hereby summarized.

The first principle concerns seclusion and detachment from people especially those who hinder you from learning the true Islam and from approaching Allah (SWT). The Prophet (S) has said,

Keep away from them and avoid those who call upon everything other than Allah (SWT). When death comes to one who is seeking knowledge to revive thereby Islam, there will only be one degree between him and The Prophets (AS) in Paradise.

Next, try to protect the organs of your body from disobedient acts, as they would invite Allah (SWT)'s displeasure. Shut your eyes from prohibited looks, keep your ears away from slander and obscene words. Protect your tongue from similar kind of errors and seal your lips from speaking what would invite the pleasure of Shaytan. The scholars have said,

One's speech should always be in remembrance of Allah (SWT), one's silence should be an effort to think and contemplate, and one's looking should be for deriving a lesson.

Always oppose your carnal self (Nafs). Try to observe compulsory acts first and then only perform the recommended acts. It should never happen that you concentrate too much on the recommended acts and give less importance to the compulsory ones.

Take care of your cleanliness, for cleanliness is a weapon of a believer and is capable to evoke inner enlightenment. The Prophet (S) has said,

Ablution (Wudhu) performed on ablution shall be as light upon light on The Day of Judgment.

Sacrifice your sleep and keep vigil during the nights. Fast as many days as you can. Certainly, Allah (SWT) has said in Hadith al-Qudsi,

Fast is for Me and I shall reward it.

Fast has been declared only for Allah (SWT) because it is the only act of worship, which consists of a negative aspect. For example, not eating, not drinking, and so forth, while other acts of worship, like prayer and pilgrimage, etc., consist of positive actions or are made up of positive and negative aspects. According to Allamah Taba Tabai (AR),

The positive acts of worship cannot be pure in showing the worshipper's spirit of servitude or The Lordship of Almighty Allah (SWT). It cannot be free of materialistic imperfections and limitations, and sometimes it may be done to please someone other than Allah (SWT). However, the fast is an act of worship in which one has just to abstain from lust and desire, and restrain oneself from worldly matters. This negative aspect is a thing, which nobody can know except Allah (SWT). It is dealing entirely between the servant and The Lord, and therefore this worship is purely for Allah (SWT) and others can have no share in it.

By saying, 'I shall reward it,' it means that Allah (SWT) Himself will give its reward directly and will not make anyone a link between Himself and His Servant. The servant worshipped Him in a way that nobody knew but Allah (SWT), so he will be given its reward in a way nobody will know it except Allah (SWT).

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) once said to his companions,

The Messenger of Allah, in the early days of his Prophethood, used to fast continuously so that people would think that he would not leave a single day's fast, and then leave the fast continuously so that they would say he would not fast again.. Then he changed this regime and began fasting on alternate days, and this was the fast of Daud (AS). Then he changed it and started fasting three bright days (i.e. 13th, 14th and 15th of the lunar month when the moonlight was the brightest). Then again, he divided the three days - one day each in every ten days, the first and last Thursdays and the Wednesday in the middle. He continued with this regime until he left this world.

Further advice is to,

Avoid planting seeds of greediness into your soul. Be pleased of whatsoever has been given to you. Desire nothing in this world except the pleasure of Allah (SWT). Never be proud of your good actions. Instead, thank Allah (SWT) for giving you a chance to perform that good act. Whenever you stand in front of Allah (SWT) express humility, poverty and abasement. Understand that it is up to Him whether He honors or disgraces His Slave. You should never complain, for complaint of someone who claims to be His Slave and Lover is a shortcoming in one's obedience.

History narrates as observing Prophet Suleiman (AS) who saw Allah (SWT) as his Benefactor through His Bounties, whereas Prophet Ayub (AS) saw The One who tries in His Trials. It is to Him whatever He does. We should be pleased at whatever He does. As Imam al-Sajjad (AS) has said,

Pleased are we with His Actions.

Try to create as much grief in your heart as possible for Allah (SWT) loves a grieving heart. According to The Prophet (S), Allah (SWT) watches your heart and acts, not your apparent behavior and worldly belongings. Indeed, scholars have exclaimed as to how a believer can manage to be cheerful while he does not know what has been written by The Pen of Pre-Eternity about his fate, whether it is felicity or wretchedness. In addition, he is unaware of his end, for he does not know what he will earn tomorrow (in the way of virtue or vice). He does not know whether his obedience will be accepted by Allah (SWT) or not, and whether his sins will be pardoned or not.

The advice is to make haste in performing good deeds. It is reported that once Imam al-Baqir (AS) said to his son Imam al-Sadiq (AS) that,

When you resolve on a good deed, make haste, for you do not know something might happen that may hinder you from performing it.

When a believer does well in his deed, Allah (SWT) multiplies his deed, every good deed seven hundred times ... Therefore, make good your deeds which you do to obtain the pleasure of Allah (SWT).