

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ



Al-Baqara (The Cow) 2:153

O You Who Believe!

- Seek help with patient perseverance and prayer.
- For Allah is with those who patiently persevere.

Commentary

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR)

A single theme joins the five verses (153 – 157) like a pearl-string; the sentences from a sequence and the topic is developed harmoniously; the beginning leads to the end, and the end points to the beginning. It shows that they were revealed together, not separately. The context indicates that they must have been revealed shortly before the law of *al-jihad* (war in the way of Allah) was promulgated and the Muslims were ordered to fight in the cause of religion.

The verses prepare the believers for some trials which they will have to undergo, some misfortunes which will befall them. Not the usual type of trial and hardship, but some extraordinary misfortunes which will afflict the whole community and will continue, recurring every now and then.

Man, like any other creature in this world, always faces some hardships and troubles, which disturb and disrupt the pattern of his personal life. Death, sickness, fear, hunger, grief, poverty and deprivation are but a few examples of such personal misfortunes. It is the course, which Allah has laid down for His servants. This world is a place of struggle and competition; the life is a chain of never ending changes and transformations. And you shall not find any alteration in the course of Allah and you shall not find any change in the course of Allah (Qur'an – Chapter 35, Verse 43).

The verses encourage the believers to fight for Islam. They are told that there is coming to them a trial, a hardship. Only if they bear it patiently, they shall reach the high ranks of spiritual perfection, receiving the blessings and mercy of Allah, and being guided aright by Divine Guidance. Also, it tells them how they may get help in bearing those burdens they should seek assistance through patience and prayer. Patience will protect them from fear and anguish, and will save their plans from disruption. As for prayer, it will turn their attention to their Lord, and help them in putting all their affairs in the hands of the Almighty Allah, because all power belongs to Him.

We have explained briefly about patience and prayer, under the verse; *And seek assistance through patience and prayer; and most surely, it is a hard thing except for the humble ones* (Qur'an – Chapter 2, Verse 45). Patience is one of the most important characteristics, which the Qur'an praises very highly. It repeatedly tells the believers to be patient and there are about seventy verses on this theme. It praises it in such laudable ways as ... *and bear patiently that which befalls you; surely it is of the acts which require determination* (Qur'an – Chapter 31, Verse 17); *And none are made to receive it but those who are patient, and none are made to receive it but those who have a mighty good fortune* (Qur'an – Chapter 41, Verse 35); *only the patient will be paid back their reward in full without measure* (Qur'an – Chapter 39, Verse 10).

Likewise, prayer is one of the greatest acts of worship and devotion, which the Qur'an always exhorts the believers to do. It has been praised in these words; *surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil* (Qur'an – Chapter 29, Verse 45). Wherever Allah exhorts the people to some good deeds, prayer is always placed at the head of the list.

Then Allah praises patience that Allah is with those who have this virtue: In this respect, this verse differs from the verse (Qur'an – Chapter 2, Verse 44) which had focused attention on prayer; and most surely, it is a hard thing except for the humble ones.

But this verse singles out the patience, because here the talk is about-facing the difficulties and fighting against the enemies; and in this context, patience acquires a greater importance. Surely, Allah is with the patient ones. It is a special proximity unlike the company mentioned in the verse; *and He is with you wherever you are* (Qur'an – Chapter 13, Verse 4). This latter verse says that Allah controls your affairs and His knowledge encompasses you; while the verse under discussion means that Allah helps and aids the patient ones. Patience, therefore, is the key to get relief from distress.

Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 45 - Man seeks assistance in such affairs and tasks as he cannot manage alone, and in hardships and difficulties which he cannot overcome himself. In reality there is no helper except Allah. Man can, therefore, manage all his affairs and overcome all his difficulties by courage and steadfastness (i.e. by patience) and by looking towards Allah (i.e. by prayer). These two factors are the best way to get assistance: patience makes even the great misfortunes look trivial, and putting all his confidence in Allah awakens the spirit of faith; and thus man comes to realize that the cause which he is relying upon can never fail to produce the desired effect.

as-Sadiq (AS) said:

Whenever Ali (AS) faced a difficulty, he used to stand up for the prayer and then recite this verse: and seek assistance through patience and prayer.
(al-Kafi)

The same Imam said about this verse:

The patience means fasting.

Also he said:

When a man is confronted by a hard misfortune, he should fast. Surely Allah says: and seek assistance through patience, that is, fast.
(al-Kafi)

The author says: al-Ayyashi too has narrated the theme of these two traditions in his at-Tafsir. Interpretation of *patience* as fast is based on the *flow* of the Qur'an.

Abul-Hasan (AS) said about this verse:

The patience means fast; when a man is visited by a hardship or misfortune, he should fast; surely Allah says: *And seek assistance through patience and prayer; and most surely it is a hard thing except for the humble ones.* And the humble one is he who shows humility in his prayer, turning all his attention to it; and it means the Messenger of Allah (S) and the Leader of the faithful (AS).
(al-Ayyashi)

The author says:

The Imam has inferred from this verse the desirability of fasting and praying when one is facing any hardship or turmoil; and likewise, the desirability of seeking the divine help through the medium of the Prophet and Ali (AS) at that time. In this way, the tradition interprets the fast and the prayer as the Prophet and Ali (AS).

Mir Ahmed Ali (AR) and Aqa Mahdi Puya (AR)

Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 45 - Wasta-inu (seek help) applies to worldly as well as spiritual matters as stated in verse 5 of al-Fatihah. *Sabr* (patience) and *salat* (prayer) curb vain desires, pride and self-indulgence and lead to humility, acceptance and obedience. The Arabic word *sabr* has many shades of implied suggestions - willingness to endure, submission, self-control, serenity, poise, and ability to continue.

To liberate the human ego from the clutches of the excessive attachment to bodily wants and material success, a refined discipline has to be built through subordinating the body to the control of the spiritual energy, otherwise mere formal rituals and recitation of chants and charms do not help man to rise above the level of animal life, as has been shown by Ali ibn Abi Talib.

The whole world bears witness to the fact that in wisdom, spiritual achievements, and bodily strength there is no one who can be compared with him. He stands high and above in the select company of the most devoted servants of Allah. The lives of the Holy Prophet, Bibi Fatima, his daughter and the Holy Imams is a brilliant light which throws light on the path to be followed by the sincere faithful who seek assistance (*wasta-inu*) to build up the balanced character mentioned above, and referred to in this verse. It is reported that whenever the Holy Prophet or any of the holy Imams, or Bibi Fatima faced any difficulty, they prayed salat and sought Allah's help.

Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 4 - The literal meaning of *salat* is the middle of the backbone. When used as a verb, it means the bending and unbending of the backbone. It is particularly employed when an animal is curved at the time of delivery. Figuratively, it was used for a bending posture at the time of giving or taking something. From this, it was adopted for prayer, to signify a submissive attitude. The Qur'an has drawn on this word to describe man's praying attitude towards Allah, as well as Allah's turning towards His creatures.

In Islam, the purpose of prayer is to please Allah, and nothing pleases Allah but that which is the most beneficial to His creatures. Therefore, no prayer is approved by Islam save that which has been prescribed by Allah, nothing less, nothing more, as man has no right to add, omit or alter the prescribed prayer.

Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani and a Group of Muslim Scholars

The phrase / *wasta'inu* / *seek help from Allah* is a guiding imperative phrase because at every moment and in all affairs a mortal is in need of Allah's help, whether it is something which is inside his free will, because he is not an absolutely independent subject, though he is created free in will; or it is something which is outside of his will. Real Faith can never be mere empty words. It must express or manifest itself through patience or endurance in all that befalls the individual to show his faithfulness to God, and the help from God must be sought through prayers or supplications to the Lord.

The first is having patience in worldly hardships and perseverance in bearing its bitter circumstances. And also having patience in tolerating the hardship of performing Divine services, and obtaining knowledge and good ethics, patience in withholding one's self from lusts and the fleeting pleasure of committing sins and yielding to low desires, is necessary. This bitterness of hardship, which is short in time, finally results in a sweet fruit, which lasts a long time. Concerning the epithets of the true believers, Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (AS) has said:

The short period of patience resulted in a long period of tranquility for them.

The objective meaning of the phrase *Allah is with the patient ones* is that His help, assistance, guidance, success, favors, the protection from pests, the perfection of intentions, as well as His other blessings are showered upon the patient by Him.

Above all, of the aforementioned bounties, there is the reward of Allah granted to the patient believers in the Hereafter about whom He says:

Those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward
without measure!

(Qur'an – Chapter 39, Verse 13)