From the online library at www.worldwisdom.com

CHAPTER 15

ON FORBEARANCE

Forbearance is a kind of behavior superior to the suppression of anger. When an adverse situation seems to violate our well-being, it creates a nervous upheaval. Great effort is required for us not to manifest this upheaval in anger, and it takes time for us to calm down. Forbearance is a condition that prevents such upheaval altogether: it keeps the nervous system in balance at all times. People who possess forbearance have patience and gentleness of character. These are signs of faith and wisdom, which enable such people to use their minds to govern their emotions.

The gentle in character hope for God's love in response to their forbearance. Such response is promised by the Messenger of Allah, as we see in the following prophetic traditions.

Hadrat `A'ishah, the beloved wife of the Prophet (r.a.) reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

> Allah's approval and love are due to whoever is gentle and resists anger. (Isfahani)

Hadrat Fatimah, the beloved daughter of the Prophet (r.a.) reported from her father:

> God certainly loves the one who is well-behaved, well-bred, well-mannered, honest, and gentle, who does not expect anything from anyone and is not envious of others. He certainly does not love those who use foul language and are constantly asking and expecting favors from others. (Tabarani)

The ones who are gentle also hope for the love of the Prophet, since they are imitating him in his behavior. Ibn `Uyaynah related that one of the private prayers of the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) was:

> My Lord, enrich me in wisdom, beautify me with gentleness, honor me with piety, and be good to me in preserving my health so that I may serve others. (Ibn Abi Dunya)

The gentle person realizes that his ability to control negative emotions creates a favorable condition for acquiring knowledge and wisdom, as (according to Abu Hurayrah) the Messenger of God said:

> When you wish to acquire knowledge, pray that you be given a calm dignity and a gentle manner, whether you are learning or teaching. Be

> softhearted and put on your best behavior. Don't be one of those pretentious scholars who are arrogant and overstep the bounds of decency. That will be a sign that your stupidity has vanquished your noble forbearance. (Ibn Sina)

The one with forbearance is promised spiritual advancement by the Prophet of Allah who said (according to `Ubadah ibn Samit):

> Shall I tell you how Allah Most High will raise the spiritual status of people and communities? That will be His blessing upon you if you deal gently with the one who has offended you, if you forgive the one who has tyrannized you, if you are generous with the one who deprived you, if you befriend the one who has abandoned you. (Tabarani, Bazzar)

There are many benefits for the compassionate, soft-hearted, mellow-mannered faithful, and the fiery punishment of Hell will never touch them. It is reported by Ibn Mas`ud that the Prophet asked his Companions:

> Shall I tell you who is safe from Hellfire? The one who is humble, who cares for all of God's creatures, and who serves them with gentleness and dignity. (Tabarani)

The noble wife of the Prophet, Hadrat `A'ishah, reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

> To be compassionate and gentle is one of God's blessings. To be coarse and stupid is one of God's curses. (Tabarani)

Jarir reported that the Prophet said:

> The one who is deprived of compassion and gentle manners is deprived of all good. (Abu Dawud)

Forbearance beautifies its owner and attracts God's love to him. Hadrat `A'ishah related that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

> Wherever there is gentleness, there is beauty. Wherever gentleness has disappeared there is shame. (Muslim)

Forbearance is not a characteristic easy to assume. It becomes permanent through long efforts in enduring controversy, injustice, tyranny, and all other conditions that weigh heavily upon one's ego, and through curtailing anger and the desire to retaliate. Many a pious man has declared that he achieved forbearance by purposefully seeking the company of obnoxious men and suffering their impudence, anger, and violence, practicing patience with them.

Abu Darda' reports that the Prophet said:

> Knowledge is acquired by learning. Forbearance is acquired by suffering the impudence of others without reacting. Whoever makes an effort to obtain that which is good, God gives him good. Whoever is able to stand controversy is saved from suffering. (Tabarani)

Every aspect of good character, such as generosity, humbleness, and valor, is obtained by long practice in fighting corresponding faults, such as stinginess, arrogance, and fear. The worst handicap to acquiring forbearance is harboring doubts about the goodness in other people, especially the other faithful, and imagining bad things about them. This suspicion of one's associates leads to the terribly sinful state of doubting the goodness in God.

Allah Most High says,

> O you who believe, avoid suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is a sin. Do not look for each other's faults and slander each other. Would you like to eat the flesh of your dead brother? (*Hujurat*, 12*)*

And according to Abu Hurayrah, the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

> Beware of suspicion, for suspicion is a lie. Do not seek to know each other's secrets. Do not vent your feelings in reproaches or envy the lives of others; do not slander anyone for what they are or for how they act. When you give and take among yourselves, be fair: neither more nor less than is due. Do not cheat each other. When one of you leaves a woman, another should not propose to her until the first has actually departed. O God's creatures, be like brothers! A Muslim is the brother of all other Muslims. A brother does not tyrannize his brothers, nor leave them helpless when they are tyrannized.

Then he pointed to his heart and said thrice,

> This is where the fear of God should be—in your hearts. If you dare to hurt your Muslim brother, that is sufficient to earn you God's curse. It is forbidden by God to harm the property, the honor, or the physical being of another Muslim. God does not look only upon your actions, but sees also your thoughts and the intentions of your hearts. (Muslim)

Forbearance does not mean permissiveness. It is permissible, in fact it is incumbent upon a Muslim to act for the sake and in the name of God against people who are flagrantly and undoubtedly sinning, revolting against God, committing indecencies, hurting others—in order to make them stop. For God says:

> Why should you be divided into two parties about the hypocrites? God has upset them for their evil deeds. Would you guide those whom God has thrown out of the way? For those whom God has thrown out of the way, never shall you find the way. (*Nisa'*, 88*)*

Suspicion is very wrong as a basis for action. Sufyan al-Thawri says that there are two kinds of suspicion. One is a sin: that is when you pass judgment against someone based upon your suspicion. The other is not a sin: that is when you suspect someone of having done something wrong, but refrain from judging or condemning him. This point of view is the right one.

The opposite of suspicion is to think well of everybody. Even if there are signs to make you doubt the innocence of someone, it is still best to think of that person as innocent. To think badly and continue to be suspicious of someone who has been proven innocent is a sin. Thus it is best for you to have good will toward one and all. Above all, you should think well of your Lord.

Abu Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said that God says:

> I am as My servant thinks of Me. If he thinks well of Me, I am good to him. If he thinks ill of Me, I am bad to him. (Bukhari)

According to Ibn Mas`ud, the Prophet said:

> I swear upon the one and only God who created all and everything that He only offers you what you hope for from Him. All good is in His power. (Tabarani)

And Abu Hurayrah reported that he also said:

> To think well of God is one of the best forms of worship. (Abu Dawud)

Jabir ibn `Abdullah added, "When your life in this world ends, hope for God's mercy at your last breath."

Abu Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s) said:

> On the Day of Judgment, God will condemn a sinner to Hellfire. When he is brought to the edge of the fire, he will look back and say, "O my Lord, I always thought well of You!"
>
> Then God will pull him back from the fire and say, "I am as My creature thinks of Me." (Bayhaqi)

Another affliction that keeps us from developing the good characteristic of forbearance is to believe in bad omens and bad luck. This conception

can even drive people to consulting fortunetellers, soothsayers, and oracles in order to thwart imagined bad signs. This is a sin in our religion, which is based on intelligence. There are many prophetic traditions on this subject. One is reported by Ibn Mas`ud, who reported that the Prophet said:

> Considering something or somebody to be ill-omened and a bringer of bad luck is a form of the unforgivable sin of attributing partners to God. Whoever does this is not one of us. If people are affected by such a sick feeling in their hearts, they should summon up their faith in God, who does only that which is best for His creatures. Let them count upon God and submit to Him. (Abu Dawud)

Abu Hurayrah reported that the Prophet said:

> There is no such thing as bad luck, nor do one person's troubles pass to another person like a contagious sickness. There is no one who can bring you bad luck. (Bukhari)

In another tradition reported by Ibn `Umar, the Messenger of God said:

> There is no such thing as bad luck or a bad omen. If you have a shy and nervous horse that throws you off, or a mean wife who makes you miserable, or too small a house surrounded by bad neighbors, you may attribute it to bad luck, but it is your own doing and your own fault. (Bukhari, Muslim)

The opposite of believing that others can bring you bad luck is to believe that somebody or something can bring you good luck. You may feel elated by being in the presence of a saintly person and believe that the contact will bring you good fortune. You may be surprised on a sacred religious holiday by meeting someone you love whom you have missed, and consider that a good omen. A deep saying or the counsel of a wise person may touch you and seem to change your life. Positive incidents like these are to be accepted as good.

According to Anas ibn Malik, the Prophet said:

> There is no such thing as bad luck, but I like good omens.
>
> The Companions said: "What kind of good omens, O Messenger of God?"
>
> And he said, "The best are good words." (Abu Dawud)

He also liked to hear well-wishers say, "Guide us well," "Lead us to success," and such words when he was about to start on a voyage.

To believe in such omens enforces our positive wishes and strengthens our will to do good. There must not be any belief that such incidents have some influence over God's will or over one's destiny! They should only increase our hopes to receive good news, which can only come from God.

`Urwa ibn Amir related:

> When some people were talking about luck in the Prophet's hearing, he told them, "Think positively. No bad luck can prevent a Muslim from what is required of him or what he has to do. If some among you encounter difficulty, pray to your Lord that He bring you success or eliminate the obstacle. He is the only one who can grant success and remove the difficulties in your lives. People have no power unless God gives it to them." (Abu Dawud)

Some people confuse the Prophet's acceptance of good omens in Islam with such practices as opening the pages of the Holy Qur'an with eyes closed and putting one's fingers on a verse, hoping to receive an answer to one's problems. This is not permissible, as it resembles the practice of the pre-Islamic pagan Arabs, who drew straws to decide what to do. It is an insult to the Holy Book to use it as a fortuneteller, seeking news in it from the unknown.

Another hindrance to forbearance, in fact a sign that a person has no capacity for forbearance, is avarice.

"On Forbearance"

Features in

The Path of Muhammad (s.a.w.s.): A Book on Islamic Morals and Ethics
© 2005 World Wisdom, Inc.
by Imam Birgivi
Interpreted by Shaykh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Halveti
Foreword by Shaykh Abdul Mabud
Introduction by Vincent Cornell
All Rights Reserved. For Personal Usage Only
www.worldwisdom.com