

Chapter 5

Analyses of Selected Hadiths Regarding Piety (Taqwa)

Introduction

Taqwa (piety) is derived from the Arabic word ‘*wiqāyah*’ which means protection, self-defense, covering and averting (danger).²⁰⁶ This word and its derivations have the meaning of protecting from what is harmful and painful.²⁰⁷ Taqwa is used for God and human beings in the Qur’ān; if it is used for God it conveys a meaning that The Being that people must fear from His punishment and if it is used for human beings it means one’s using intellect in highest level and providing all the necessary conditions to protect himself from a bad result.²⁰⁸ The prominent Muslim scholar Jurjani defines the pious person (*muttaqi* –the one who has taqwa) as the one who performs God’s commands and observes His prohibitions.²⁰⁹

In fact, taqwa is a comprehensive term denoting a believer’s strict observance of the commandments of the Shari’ah and the Divine laws of nature and life.²¹⁰ God has two sets of laws: one includes the Shari’ah laws (including the pillars of faith, and principles of worship and morality) governing human individual and social life, and the other, the Divine laws of the creation and operation of the universe studied by the natural sciences.²¹¹ Human beings can be successful by observing both of these sets of laws. Religion and science is two faces of one truth and one must combine and observe both to be under the safekeeping of God. According to Muslim sages and scholars, the universe is “the Created Qur’an,” where God’s laws issuing from His Attributes of Will, Destiny, and Power are operative; and The Qur’an, the collection of Divine laws issuing from God’s Attribute of Speech, is “the composed universe” or “the universe in words.”²¹²

Taqwa has two aspects; one is related to this world while the other aspect is related to afterlife. The result for complying or not with the worldly aspect usually comes here, while for the latter, in the Afterlife. If today Muslims are defeated against the western world this is because they have neglected the *taqwa*’s worldly aspect. They misunderstood it and only paid attention to its other worldly aspect. The worldly aspect which is studying nature and life and discovering the laws of God in nature has been neglected by the Muslims over the last three centuries. On the other side, the West has studied nature well and read the book of the universe in the light of science. They have discovered God’s laws in nature and used this knowledge to occupy and colonialize the Muslim world.

Just as the Qur’ān is the book of God, similarly the universe is His book that needs to be read and understood. Believers must read both books and constitute their worldview accordingly.

There are many verses dealing with *taqwa* include;

²⁰⁶ Ibn Manzūr, *Lisan’ul-Arab*, vol.6, pp. 4902-4903.

²⁰⁷ Zabīdī, *Tāj al-Arūs*, vol.4, p. 230.

²⁰⁸ Hamdi Yazir, *Hak Dini Kur’an Dili*, vol.1, pp. 161-163.

²⁰⁹ Jurjani, *Kitāb al-Tārifāt*, p. 256.

²¹⁰ Fethullah Gulen, *Sufism*, vol.1, p. 45.

²¹¹ Ali Unal, *The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, see footnote for 2; 2.

²¹² Gulen, *Messenger of God*, p. 115.

“O you who believe! Keep from disobedience to God in reverent piety with all the reverence that is due to Him, and see that you do not die save as Muslims (submitted to Him exclusively).”²¹³

“O you who believe! Act in reverence for God and piously, without doing anything to incur His punishment, and always speak words true, proper and straight to the point, that He will make your deeds good and upright and forgive you your sins. Whoever obeys God and His Messenger has surely attained to a mighty triumph.”²¹⁴

“...Whoever keeps from disobedience to God in reverence for Him and piety, He enables a way out for him (of every difficulty), and provides for him from where he does not reckon. Whoever puts his trust in God, He is sufficient for him (for all his needs). God surely executes what He decrees; assuredly God has appointed a measure for everything.”²¹⁵

“O you who believe! If you keep from disobedience to God in reverence for Him and piety to deserve His protection, He will make a criterion for you (in your hearts to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and right and wrong), and blot out from you your evil deeds, and forgive you. God is of tremendous grace and bounty.”²¹⁶

Analyses of Selected Hadiths regarding Taqwa

First hadith

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قِيلَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ مَنْ أَكْرَمُ النَّاسِ؟ قَالَ: أَتَقَاهُمْ فَقَالُوا: لَيْسَ عَنْ هَذَا نَسْأَلُكَ، قَالَ: فَيُؤْتَفُؤُ نَبِيُّ اللَّهِ ابْنُ نَبِيِّ اللَّهِ ابْنِ خَلِيلِ اللَّهِ. قَالُوا: لَيْسَ عَنْ هَذَا نَسْأَلُكَ، قَالَ: فَعَنْ مَعَادِنِ الْعَرَبِ تَسْأَلُونِي؟ خِيَارُهُمْ فِي الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ خِيَارُهُمْ فِي الْإِسْلَامِ إِذَا فَفَهُوا

Abu Hurayra reports: “It was asked, ‘O Messenger of God (pbuh)! Who is the most honorable amongst mankind?’ He replied, ‘The most honorable of them is one who is the most pious of them.’ They said, ‘We are not asking about this.’ He then said, ‘The most honorable of men is Yusuf (Joseph), the Prophet of God, the son of God’s Prophet, who was the son of the Prophet of God, who was the son of the Khalil of God.’ Again, they said, ‘We are not asking you about this.’ He enquired, ‘Are you then asking me about the classes of the Arabs? The best of them before Islam are the best of them in Islam, provided they comprehend it well.’”²¹⁷

²¹³ Qur’ān 3: 102.

²¹⁴ Qur’ān 33: 70-71.

²¹⁵ Qur’ān 65: 2-3.

²¹⁶ Qur’ān 8: 29.

²¹⁷ Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Anbiyā, 8; Muslim, *Sahīh*, Fadāil, 168.

Analysis of the hadith

The narrator of this hadith is Abū Hurayra and the information about him was given previously. Bukhari and Muslim agreed on the authenticity of this hadith and recorded it in their *ṣaḥīḥ* collections. When the Prophet was asked about the most honorable person among people he answered it first as the most pious one (*taqwa-muttaqi*). In its comprehensive meaning, *taqwa* is the only and greatest standard of one's nobility and worth as it is stated in the Qur'ān: "the noblest, most honorable of you in the sight of God is the most advanced of you in *taqwa*."²¹⁸

The honor and value of human beings depends on their level in *taqwa*. The pious seeks refuge in God against the bad results of here and hereafter. They perform the commands of God which lead to Paradise and abstain from the sins which may cause to the punishment in Hell. The believer purifies all outer and inner senses so that none of them can associate partners with God, and avoids imitating the worldviews and lifestyles of unbelievers.²¹⁹ Piety, which is the conscious performance of good and the avoidance of evil, prevents individuals from joining the lowest of the low and causes them to advance on the path of the highest of the high.²²⁰ *Taqwa* is the source of all kind of blessing and with this merit people attain highest level at God's side.

Although seemingly the Prophet did not understand the Companion's real purpose in their question, this is not true. Indeed, he always taught them what would be the most beneficial even if they asked something else. So, he reminded them that the honor should be searched in *taqwa* and people should struggle to attain it. Another point that needs clarification is that if there are ranks among the prophets. First of all, they are all equal as being prophet of God and no one is superior to others. However, in certain virtues some would be greater than others. For example, Moses (pbuh) is superior to others with the merit that he spoke with God and therefore called as '*kalim Allah*' (the one whom God spoke to). Similarly, Jesus (pbuh) is greater than other prophets in the virtue of being '*rūḥ Allah*' (spirit of God). The most honorable of men is Yusuf (Joseph) because his father, grandfather and great grandfather are all prophets therefore Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) addressed him as the most honorable.

Although Muhammad (pbuh) praised the merits of other prophets he refrained from mentioning his own virtues due to his great humility. He was given the title '*ḥabīb Allah*' (beloved of God) by God. God revealed to him the final and universal message that is the Qur'ān which includes the content of all the previous scriptures. He will be the only prophet whom God will grant intercession right in Judgment Day. Other aspects of Muhammad (pbuh) superiority to all prophets include but not limited to: the whole earth is made clean and pure for him and for his followers so they can perform their religious rituals wherever they wish; the spoils of war are made halal for him and for his followers; he was sent to the

²¹⁸ Qur'ān 49: 13.

²¹⁹ Gulen, *Sufism*, vol.1, p. 45.

²²⁰ Gulen, *Sufism*, vol.1, p. 46.

whole of humanity while previous prophets were sent only to their nations; he was given a merit that instilled fear in his enemies from the distance of a month.²²¹

The last part of the hadith is about the importance of knowledge in religious matters. Honor and nobility are not in race, color, language, wealth and lineage. Superiority is in knowledge and *taqwa*. Whoever combines knowledge and practice in his life he will be honorable at the side of God. One cannot understand the Qur'ān without considering the meaning of the fascinating and wonderful concept of *taqwa*. One cannot be *muttaqi* (pious) if he/she does not adhere consciously and continually to the practices and concepts outlined in the Qur'ān.²²² At the beginning of the Qur'ān God states that only pious people can benefit from His guidance; “This is the Book about and in which there is no doubt, guidance for the pious.”²²³ The most lovable act in God's sight is piety (*taqwa*), His most purified servants are the pious, and His peerless message to them is the Qur'ān.²²⁴

Second hadith

أَبِي سَعِيدٍ الْخُدْرِيِّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: إِنَّ الدُّنْيَا حُلْوَةٌ خَضِرَةٌ، وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ مُسْتَخْلِفُكُمْ فِيهَا. فَيَنْظُرُ كَيْفَ تَعْمَلُونَ. فَاتَّقُوا الدُّنْيَا وَاتَّقُوا النِّسَاءَ. فَإِنَّ أَوَّلَ فِتْنَةٍ بَنَى إِسْرَائِيلَ كَانَتْ فِي النِّسَاءِ

Abū Sa'id al-Khudrī reports that The Prophet (pbuh) said; “The life of the world is sweet and green. God makes you generations succeeding one another so that He may try you in respect of your actions. So, beware of the beguilements of the world and those of women. The first trial of Banī Israel was through women”.²²⁵

Analysis of the hadith

The narrator of this hadith is Abū Sa'id al-Khudrī and the information about him was given previously. This hadith is accepted authentic by Muslim according to his hadith criteria therefore he recorded it in his *saḥīḥ*. The other hadith scholars such as Tirmidhi and Ibn Mājah also quoted it in their Sunan books.

The concept of *taqwa* is unique for its comprehensive meaning encompasses the spiritual and material; its roots are established in this world, while its branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit are located in the Hereafter.²²⁶ This world is sweet and green. Its pleasures are temporary but very appealing. Many people have been deluded with them and forgotten the notion of *taqwa*. At the early stage of Islam Believers suffered greatly due to poverty. They later gained wealth and worldly possessions as it is predicted in this hadith. God bestowed many favors and blessings upon Muslims similar to those of past nations. However, this does not mean Muslims are exempted from trial. As it is predicted in the well-known Jibril hadith the Prophet mentioned that the desert Bedouins will compete with each other to build skyscrapers before the end of times. They will be worldlier and stray from Islamic values. Consequently, God will inflict them with trials. As can be seen in the Muslim world today the treasures of

²²¹ For more information please see Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, Tayammum, 3; Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, Masājid, 3.

²²² Gülen, *Sufism*, vol.1, p. 47.

²²³ Qur'ān 2: 2.

²²⁴ Gülen, *ibid*.

²²⁵ Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, Zikr, 99; Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Fitan, 26; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, Fitan, 19.

²²⁶ Gülen, *Sufism*, vol.1, p. 47.

the earth have weakened them and caused them to fight one another for the worldly gains. The only salvation for them is to hold on to the concept of *taqwa* as proclaimed by the Prophet.

Taqwa is like an armor which can protect its holder against the pleasures of this world. With this merit Believers can build both worlds in the best form. However, without *taqwa* they ruin their capacity and waste it in wrong actions. People must fear from God and consider the consequences of their acts when benefitting from worldly means. They should benefit from the world without causing injustice and corruption.

In its limited sense, *taqwa* requires to comply with the commandments of God and refrain from acts that deprive one of eternal bliss and result in Hell punishment. The verse: ‘those who refrain from major sins and shameful deeds’²²⁷ underlines one aspect of *taqwa* in its limited definition and the verse: ‘those who believe and do good deeds’²²⁸ indicates the other.

Strict observance of obligatory religious duties and refraining from major sins are the two necessary and complementary foundations of *taqwa*.²²⁹ In order to avoid major sins Believers should be careful against minor ones too. The Prophet said; “A servant cannot be truly pious unless he refrains from certain permissible things lest he should commit risky things.”²³⁰ Piety is an invaluable treasure, a mysterious key to all doors of virtue and a mount on the way to Paradise therefore the Qur’ān mentions it 150 times, each time resembling a ray of light penetrating our minds and spirits.²³¹

In the hadith the Prophet warned Muslims against women but this does not mean he humiliated them. Women represent beauty and men are naturally inclined to them as well as women are inclined to men. So, both genders are a trial for each other therefore, they must stick to *taqwa* to be safe from the seditions of the other. In this regard, the Prophet gave an example from the previous nations by his expression ‘the first trial of Banī Israel was through women’. Believers must get lessons from them to avoid making the same mistakes. The most attractive favor of this world is woman. But God established many legal injunctions to protect women’s rights and not see them as just sexual objects. In order to benefit from this favor lawfully one must comply with the rules of religion and remain within the boundaries of Islam.

Third hadith

عَنْ ابْنِ مَسْعُودٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانَ يَقُولُ: اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْتَّقَىٰ وَالْعِفَافَ وَالْغِنَىٰ

‘Abdullah bin Mas’ud reports that the Prophet (pbuh) used to supplicate as; “O God! I ask You for guidance, piety, chastity and self-sufficiency.”²³²

²²⁷ Qur’ān 42: 37.

²²⁸ Qur’ān 10: 9.

²²⁹ Gülen, Sufism, vol.1, p. 48.

²³⁰ Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Qiyāma, 19; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, Zuhd, 24.

²³¹ Gülen, *ibid*.

²³² Muslim, *Sahīh*, Zikr, 72; Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Daawāt, 72.