**Straightforwardness (Istiqama)**



**46:13**. Surely those who profess, "Our Lord is God," and then follow the Straight Path (in their belief, thought, and actions), they will have no fear, nor will they grieve.(8)



**46:14**. They are the companions of Paradise, abiding therein as a reward for what they used to do.(9)

52. Sufyan ibn Abdullah, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “I said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, tell me something about Islam which I could not ask from anyone but you.’ He said, ‘Say, “I have believed in Allah” and then go straight.’” (Sahih Muslim, Iman, 62). (10)

 People of truth have interpreted straightforwardness as avoiding all deviation and extremes, and as following in the footsteps of the Prophets, the faithful, the witnesses (of truth), and the righteous (in belief) in their religious deeds and daily lives. The verse: Those who declare: "Our Lord is God," and afterwards are straightforward, the angels descend upon them (saying): "Fear not nor grieve, and good tidings to you of Paradise which you were promised" (41:30) informs us that angels will receive in the Hereafter those who acknowledged God's Lordship, affirmed His Unity, and followed the Prophets in their beliefs, deeds, and daily lives. Such a blameless life will cause these people to receive the good tidings of Paradise at a time when all people will tremble with fear and worry on the Day of Judgment.

An individual's conduct becomes straightforward by performing religious duties; one's ego (inner self) becomes straightforward by following the Shari'a's truth; one's spirit becomes straightforward by acting in accordance with knowing God; and one's innermost senses or faculties becomes straightforward by complying with the Shari'a's spirit. The difficulty of being straightforward in all of these levels caused the Prophet, the most straightforward of people, upon him be peace and blessings, to say: Sura Hud and others similar to it have made me old, [1] thereby referring to the Divine command: Be straightforward as you are commanded, which is in sura Hud (11:112).

The Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings, never deviated from the Straight Path, and was always straightforward in his deeds, words, and feelings. He guided Companions who sought salvation and eternal happiness to straightforwardness by saying: Declare: "I have believed in God," and then be straightforward, a saying that concisely sums up all essential elements of belief and conduct.

If people claim progress on the path to the Truth but are not straightforward in their state and conduct, all efforts will be in vain, and they will have to account in the Hereafter for the time spent without straightforwardness. [2] To reach the intended destination, an initiate must be straightforward at the beginning, maintain it throughout the journey, and be straightforward at the end of the path, as gratitude for being rewarded with knowledge of God. Being alert to possible deviation at the beginning, engaging in self-supervision during the journey, being closed to wrong thoughts and actions, and considering only God's pleasure and approval at the end are significant signs of this state:

**I know one among the people of straightforwardness:
He was the most distinct in the realm of guidance.
He sold his soul to the lights of (Divine) Identity, [3]
And died purified of all the dirt of human nature.**

A servant should seek straightforwardness, not wonderworking or the power of spiritual unveiling or discovery. God demands straightforwardness; however, a servant desires extraordinary spiritual abilities. When they told Bayazid al-Bistami about a man who walked on water and flew in the air, he said:

Fish and frogs also float on water, and insects and birds fly in the air. If you see a man float on his rug on water without sinking and sit cross-legged in the air, do not show any interest in him. Rather, consider whether he is straightforward in his state and conduct, and whether they are in accordance with the Sunna (the way of the Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings). [4]

What Bayazid advises is that a believer be straightforward and completely humble as a servant, not one flying in the atmosphere of wonders.

Straightforwardness is the last step on a three step stairway leading to nearness of God. The first step is consistency, where a traveler strives to embody Islam's theoretical and practical dimensions. Success in this continuous effort brings one's carnal self under control. The second step is settlement or tranquillity, where an initiate purifies his or her inner self of the vices contaminating the spirit and heart (e.g., show, fame, and vanity, all of which cannot be reconciled with servanthood), thereby purging the heart of all that is not God. The third step is straightforwardness, where the doors of Divinity and creation are slightly opened to the traveler, and the Divine gifts are bestowed in the form of wonderworking and blessings, although he or she neither desires nor seeks them.

Straightforwardness, the last station of the way, means living without deviation from loyalty to God and under His direct protection; it is an environment in which Divine gifts and favors are bestowed. Flowers never fade away and hills and slopes do not experience winter, for it is an environment of eternal "spring." This is what is pointed out in: If only they were straightforward on the path, then, assuredly We would give them to drink of "water" in abundance (72:16). So long as people pursue straightforwardness on the path of belief in Divine Unity and fulfill their covenants with God and His Messenger by fulfilling the Divine ordinances, Divine gifts and bounties will flow abundantly.

Our master, upon him be peace and blessings, declares: So long as the heart of a servant is not sound and straight, his belief cannot be true and upright; so long as his tongue is not true, his heart cannot be sound and straight. [5] He also declares: Every morning, the parts of a man's body warn his tongue, saying: "Fear God concerning us. For if you are true, we will be true and straight; if you are crooked, we will also deviate." [6]

Finally, let us hear from As'ad Mukhlis Pasha a very significant warning:

Straightforwardness requires always being true and steadfast;

Fix one of your legs in the center, and let "the free arm of the compass" [your other leg] travel around. [7]

[1] Al-Tirmidhi, "Tafsir al-Qur'an," 57.
[2] Muslim, "Iman," 62; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 3:413.
[3] In other words, he submitted himself wholly and without reserve to God.
[4] Al-Qushayri, Al-Risala, 397; Ahmad ibn 'Abd Allah Abu Nu'aym, Hilyat al-Awliya' wa Tabaqat al-Asfiya', 10 vols. (Beirut, 1967), 10:40.
[5] Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 3:198.
[6] Al-Tirmidhi, "Zuhd," 61; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 3:96.
[7] In other words, one is to be well-grounded in Islam and to keep the company of those who can provide proper guidance.

Sep 1993, Vol 15, Issue 176

**(8) 46:13.The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(9) 46:14.The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(10)Nawawi, Imam. Riyad As-Salihin; The Gardens of the Righteous: A collection of authentic hadiths. Tughra Books Press, Inc. 2014**