**MUHASABA – MURAQABA**

**(Self-Criticism and Self-Supervision)**



**59:18**. O you who believe! Keep from disobedience to God in reverence for Him and piety, and let every person consider what he has forwarded for the morrow. Keep from disobedience to God in reverence for Him and piety. Surely God is fully aware of all that you do**.(1)**



**5:105**. O you who believe! (Do not busy yourselves with those who follow different ways!) Your responsibility is your selves (so consider how you are faring along your own way). Those who go astray can do you no harm if you yourselves are guided (and so know the right way, and then follow it without deviation). To God is the return of all of you, and He will make you understand all that you were doing (and call you to account for it)**.(2)**

Abu Ya’la ibn Shaddad ibn Aws, may Allah be well pleased with him, narrates that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said: “A wise person is one who keeps a watch over his bodily desires and passions, and checks himself from that which is harmful and strives for that which will benefit him after death; and a foolish person is one who subordinates himself to his cravings and desires and expects from Allah the fulfillment of his futile desires.” **(3)**

**NARRATOR**

**Shaddad ibn Aws**

a) Shaddad ibn Aws is the child of a Muslim family. b) His nickname was Abu Ya’la or Abu Abdu’r-Rahman. c) He was superior in terms of knowledge and mildness of character. d) He narrated approximately fifty hadith from Allah’s Messenger. e) He passed away at age seventy-five in the fiftyeighth year after the Emigration, in the city of Jerusalem.

**EXPLANATION**

The indications of wisdom, specified in the hadith as control over one’s carnal self and striving for the Hereafter are, to a large extent, connected to a belief that is complete. Control over one’s carnal self implies making reason sovereign in one’s life. Regulating one’s actions in consideration of their repercussions in the Hereafter is the attitude of the wise, in the true sense of the term. The Qur’anic verse, “…*and let every person consider what he has forwarded for the morrow*,” (al-Hashr 69:18) demonstrates just how judicious are the works of those who strive for what will benefit them in their life after death. Moreover, Imam Tirmidhi indicates that the expression translated as “who keeps a watch over his bodily desires and passions” refers to “a person who calls their carnal self to account before it is called to account in the Hereafter.” Subsequently, he narrates two views in support of this contention. Umar has said: “Call yourselves to account before you are called to account.” Make preparations for the supreme tribunal. The reckoning in the Hereafter will be easy for those who hold their carnal soul answerable in this world.

An indication of weakness has been regarded in the hadith as subordinating oneself to their carnal desires and fancies and then being in expectation from Allah. Perhaps the sole consolation for those who have become enslaved to their carnal souls is baseless misgiving. The following verses serve as severe caution in this regard:

O human! What is it that deludes you concerning your Lord, the All-Munificent? He Who has created you, fashioned you, and proportioned you (in measures perfect for the purpose of your creation); Having constituted you in whatever form He has willed. (al-Infitar 82:6–8)

It is that supposition of yours which you entertained about your Lord that has tumbled you down into perdition, and so you have come to be among the losers. (Fussilat 41:23)

1. Allah describes to us a scene pertaining to the Hereafter as follows:

On that day you will be arraigned for judgment, and no secret of yours will remain hidden. Then, as for him who is given his record in his right hand, he will say: ‘Here, take and read my record! I surely knew that (one day) I would meet my account.’ And so he will be in a state of life pleasing to him. (al-Haqqa 69:18–21)

As stated in the verse, a person who is aware while in this world that they will one day be brought to account for their actions and who checks themselves accordingly, will not be left stupefied in the Hereafter; their final destination, eternal life in Paradise, will be one with which they are well pleased and in which they will experience a felicity never-ending. It is precisely these people of whom Allah’s Messenger speaks as ‘the wise’ in this hadith.

2. ***Muhasaba***, which denotes reckoning, settling accounts, and self-interrogation, in a spiritual context signifies the daily self-criticism of a believer who, constantly analyzing their deeds and thoughts, responds to goodness with thankfulness and strives to remove sins with repentance.

3. In view of a remarkable address during one of his sermons, Umar interrupted his own address, saying: “O Umar, you were a shepherd taking care of your father’s sheep!”

Hasan al-Basri, suckled by one of the wives of the Prophet, is a great personality. He would interrogate himself every day, saying, “Were you not the same person who thought of such-and-such in your Prayer the other day? How could you do such a thing in the presence of your Lord? See yourself for what you truly are!”

4. **How to practice self-criticism:**

1. To observe all acts of worship sincerely and earnestly.

2. To see even one’s best acts of worship as wanting.

3. To hold oneself in contempt before others, and to such an extent that one is in perpetual gratitude towards Allah for not being an unbeliever.

4. A person who possesses the gift of eloquent speech must not see himself or herself as knowing everything.

**WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED**

1. Wisdom and foresightedness is reflected in one’s behavior. 2. The delineation between “the wise” and “the foolish” pertains to the situation of evaluating the world and the Hereafter, as well as preparation for life after death. 3. In order for a person to receive the benefit of Divine assistance, they must do what is necessary to this end: “…*Allah’s mercy is indeed near to those devoted to doing good*…” (al-A’raf 7:56) 4. Allah rewards deeds, not vain desires**.(4)**

 **Muhasaba (Self-Criticism or Self-Interrogation)**

Muhasaba literally means reckoning, settling accounts, and self-interrogation. In a spiritual context, however, it takes on the additional meaning of the self-criticism of a believer who constantly analyzes his or her deeds and thoughts in the hope that correcting them will bring him or her closer to God. Such a believer thanks God for the good he or she has done, and tries to erase his or her sins and deviation by imploring God for forgiveness and amending his or her errors and sins through repentance and remorse. Muhasaba is the very important and serious attempt of asserting one's personal loyalty to God.

It is recorded by Muhy al-Din ibn al-'Arabi, author of al-Futuhat al-Makkiya (The Makkan Conquests), that during the early centuries of Islam, righteous people would either write down or memorize their daily actions, thoughts, and words, and then analyze and criticize themselves for any evil or sin they had committed. They did this to protect themselves from the storms of vanity and the whirls of self-pride. They would ask God's forgiveness after this self-analysis, and would repent sincerely so that they might be protected against future error and deviation. Then they would prostrate in thankfulness to God for the meritorious deeds or words that the Almighty had created through them.

Self-criticism may also be described as seeking and discovering one's inner and spiritual depth, and exerting the necessary spiritual and intellectual effort to acquire true human values and to develop the sentiments that encourage and nourish them. This is how one distinguishes between good and bad, beneficial and harmful, and how one maintains an upright heart. Furthermore, it enables a believer to evaluate the present and prepare for the future. Again, self-criticism enables a believer to make amends for past mistakes and be absolved in the sight of God, for it provides a constant realization of self-renewal in one's inner world. Such a condition enables one to achieve a steady relationship with God, for this relationship depends on a believer's ability to live a spiritual life and remain aware of what takes place in his or her inner world. Success results in the preservation of one's celestial nature as a true human being, as well as the continual regeneration of one's inner senses and feelings.

A believer, in his or her spiritual and daily life, cannot be indifferent to self-criticism. On the one hand, he or she tries to revive his or her ruined past with the breezes of hope and mercy blown by such Divine calls as: Repent to God (24:31) and: Turn to Your Lord repentant (39:54), which come from the worlds beyond and echo in his or her conscience. On the other hand, warnings as frightening as thunderbolts and as exhilarating as mercy are contained in such verses as: O you who believe! Fear God and observe your duty to Him. And let every soul consider what it has prepared for the morrow (59:18) bring the believer to his or her senses and make one alert once again (against committing new sins). In such a condition, a believer is defended against all kinds of evil, as if enclosed behind locked doors.

Taking each moment of life to be a time of germination in spring, a believer seeks ever-greater depth in his or her spirit and heart with insight and consciousness arising from belief. Even if a believer is sometimes pulled down by the carnal dimension of his or her being and falters, he or she is always on the alert, as is stated in: Those who fear God and observe His commandments, when a passing stroke from Satan troubles them, they immediately remember (God), and lo! they are all aware (7:201).

Self-criticism resembles a lamp in the heart of a believer, a warner and a well-wishing adviser in his or her conscience. Every believer uses it to distinguish what is good and evil, beautiful and ugly, pleasing and displeasing to God. Through the guidance of this well-wishing adviser, the believer surmounts all obstacles, however seemingly insurmountable, and reaches the desired destination.

Self-criticism attracts Divine mercy and favor, which enables one to go deeper in belief and servanthood, to succeed in practicing Islam, and to attain nearness to God and eternal happiness. It also prevents one from falling into despair, which will ultimately lead to reliance on personal acts of worship to be saved from Divine punishment in the Hereafter. [1]

As self-criticism opens the door to spiritual peace and tranquillity, it also causes one to fear God and His punishment. In the hearts of those who constantly criticize themselves and call themselves to account for their deeds, this Prophetic warning is always echoed: If you knew what I know, you would laugh little but weep a lot. [2] Self-criticism, which gives rise to both peacefulness and fear in one's heart, continuously inspires anxiety in the hearts of those who are fully aware of the heavy responsibility they feel the anxiety voiced as in: If only I had been a tree cut into pieces. [3]

Self-criticism causes the believer to always feel the distress and strain expressed in: Earth seemed constrained to them for all its vastness, and their own souls straitened to them (9:118). The verse: Whether you make known what is in your souls or hide it, God will bring you to account for it (2:284) resounds in every cell of their brains, and they groan with utterances like: I wish my mother had not given birth to me! [4]

While it is difficult for everyone to achieve this degree of self-criticism, it is also difficult for those who do not do so [to be sure that they will be able] to live today better than yesterday, and tomorrow better than today. Those who are crushed between the wheels of time, whose present day is not better than the preceding one, cannot perform well their duties pertaining to the afterlife.

Constant self-criticism and self-reprimand show the perfection of one's belief. Everyone who has planned his or her life to reach the horizon of a perfect, universal human being is conscious of this life and spends every moment of it struggling with himself or herself. Such a person demands a password or a visa from whatever occurs to his or her heart and mind. Self-control against the temptations of Satan or the excitement of temper are practiced, and words and actions are carefully watched. Self-criticism is constant, even for those acts that seem most sensible and acceptable. Evening reviews of words and actions during the day are the rule, as are morning resolutions to avoid sins. A believer knits the "lace of his or her life" with the "threads" of self-criticism and self-accusation. [5]

So long as a believer shows such loyalty and faithfulness to the Lord and lives in such humility, the doors of heaven will be thrown open and an invitation will be extended: Come, O faithful one. You have intimacy with Us. This is the station of intimacy. We have found you a faithful one. Every day he or she is honored with a new, heavenly journey in the spirit. It is God Himself Who swears by such a purified soul in: Nay, I swear by the self-accusing soul! (75:2). **(5)**

[1] Translator's Note: If one despairs (of Divine mercy) concerning his or her eternal life because of his or her sins, relief from Divine punishment is sought. Such a person then remembers and relies on past good deeds. However, this way is utterly inadequate, for only through Divine mercy can one be saved from God's punishment and enter Paradise.
[2] Al-Bukhari, "Kusuf," 2; Muslim, "Salat," 112; Abu 'Isa Muhammad ibn 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, "Kusuf," in Sunan, 4 vols. (Beirut, n.d.), 2.
[3] Al-Tirmidhi, "Zuhd," 9; Muhammad ibn Yazid al-Qazwini Ibn Maja, "Zuhd," in Sunan, 2 vols. (Egypt, 1952), 19.
[4] Muhammad Ibn Sa'd, Al Tabaqat al-Kubra, 8 vols. (Beirut, 1980), 3:360.
[5] 7 In other words, all moments of one's life are spent in self-criticism and con-stant awareness of what one says and does.

**References**

**(1)59:18.The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

##### (2)5:105.The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal

##### (3)Sunan at-Tirmidhi, Qiyama, 25; See also: Sunan ibn Majah, Zuhd, 31

**(4)Tekines, Ayhan. “An Introduction to Hadith” Tughra Books Press. January 2013.**

**(5) M. Fethullah Gulen, Mar 1992, Vol 14, Issue 158**