

What is Piety

PodSeries - Vol 2



Achieve Noble Character

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ShaykhPod Books

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WHAT IS PIETY

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All praises are for Allah, the Exalted, Lord of the worlds, who has given us the inspiration, opportunity and strength to complete this volume. Blessings and peace be upon the Holy Prophet Muhammad whose path has been chosen by Allah, the Exalted, for the salvation of mankind.

We would like to express our deepest appreciation to the entire ShaykhPod family, especially our little star, Yusuf, whose continued support and advice has inspired the development of ShaykhPod Books.

We pray that Allah, the Exalted, completes His favour on us and accepts each letter of this book in His august court and allows it to testify on our behalf on the Last Day.

All praise to Allah, the Exalted, Lord of the worlds and endless blessings and peace by upon the Holy Prophet Muhammad, on his blessed Household and Companions, may Allah be pleased with them all.

Compiler's Notes

We have tried diligently to do justice in this volume however if there are any short falls found then the compiler is personally and solely responsible for them.

We accept the possibility of faults and shortcomings in an effort to complete such a difficult task. We might have unconsciously stumbled and committed errors for which we ask for indulgence and forgiveness of our readers and the drawing of our attention thereto will be appreciated. We earnestly invite constructive suggestions which can be made to ShaykhPod.Books@gmail.com.

Introduction

The following is a short book briefly discussing piety and its different aspects so that a muslim can Achieve Noble Character.

According to the Hadith found in Jami At Tirmidhi, number 2003, the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, has advised that the heaviest thing in the Scales of Judgment Day will be Noble Character. It is one of qualities of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, which Allah, the Exalted, complimented in Chapter 68 Al Qalam, Verse 4 of the Holy Quran:

“And indeed, you are of a great moral character.”

Therefore, it is a duty on all Muslims to gain and act on the teachings of the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, in order to Achieve Noble Character.

What is Piety

Piety is when a muslim dedicates their inward state, such as their intention, and outward actions to the obedience of Allah, the Exalted. This is achieved by fulfilling the commands of Allah, the Exalted, refraining from His prohibitions and by facing destiny with patience. And it involves turning away from the obedience of everything else unless this obedience leads to the obedience of Allah, the Exalted. For example, the obedience of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, leads to the obedience of Allah, the Exalted. Chapter 4 An Nisa, verse 80:

“He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah...”

Therefore, piety refers to the work of the heart and body. The external limbs follow the commands of the inner spiritual heart. In other words, the heart is the king which commands the soldiers namely, the outward limbs. This has been indicated in a Hadith found in Sahih Muslim, number 4094, where the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, advised that when the spiritual heart of a person is pure then their whole body will become pure. But if the spiritual heart is corrupted then the whole body will become corrupt. The Holy Quran has advised that a person can only achieve success when their spiritual heart is sound and pure. Chapter 26 Ash Shu'ara, verses 88 and 89:

“The Day when there will not benefit [anyone] wealth or children. But only one who comes to Allah with a sound heart.”

The spiritual heart is only kept sound when one purifies it of evil traits and replaces them with the good characteristics which are discussed in the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him.

The root of all the evil traits is when one is content with themselves. Only when a person is unhappy with their bad characteristics will they struggle to remove them. But if they are satisfied with themselves they will never strive to remove them. This will only cause a person to adopt more evil traits. When a muslim strives to adopt good characteristics it will improve their relationship with Allah, the Exalted, such as being more patient with His decrees and their relationship with people, such as being sincere when advising them.

One of the characteristics of piety is being vigilant of the divine surveillance of Allah, the Exalted. This means that a muslim becomes fully aware that Allah, the Exalted, sees and hears all their words, deeds, thoughts and desires. Even though, all muslims believe this yet, many fail to act on this truth throughout their day. Whenever one becomes heedless of this fact it leads to sins and disobedience. When a muslim adopts true vigilance and is very rarely overtaken by heedlessness it leads to true modesty of Allah, the Exalted. This is the one who does not commit an act in private which would embarrass them if they did it in front of people. When a person adopts true vigilance of Allah, the Exalted, they reach the level of excellence of faith. When a muslim reaches this high level of faith they act and worship as if they can witness Allah, the Exalted, observing their inner and outer being. This inspires them to abstain from sins and encourages them to perform righteous deeds.

A muslim can only achieve true vigilance of the all-encompassing vision of Allah, the Exalted, by establishing all their obligatory duties according to their conditions and etiquettes. A muslim must also turn away from all acts of disobedience, both major and minor sins, and if they slip up to quickly and sincerely repent. This includes making up for any missed obligations according to one's strength and fulfilling the rights of the people which have been violated. Once this has been achieved a muslim should strive to establish the recommended voluntary good deeds which are from the traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon

him. Even though, one will not be able to act on them all they should prioritize the voluntary deeds according to the priority set by the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. Meaning, they should not cherry pick deeds according to their own desires. Finally, they should turn away from those deeds which are not classified as sins yet, are disliked in Islam, such as the excess use of something which is lawful. These steps have been summarized in a Hadith found in Sahih Bukhari, number 6502. This Hadith advises that the one who achieves this will be empowered by Allah, the Exalted, so that they only act according to His pleasure. This empowerment includes being vigilant of the all-encompassing vision of Allah, the Exalted.

Out of the two commands, which are performing good deeds and refraining from sins, the latter is more important. Prohibitions often violate the rights of the creation and preventing this is more important than performing the obligations. This is why it is said if a person cannot worship Allah, the Exalted, they should not disobey Him. This is indicated in a Hadith found in Sahih Bukhari, number 7288. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, commanded people to completely abstain from his prohibitions but ordered them to fulfil his commands according to their strength. This is because it is generally easier to abstain from doing something physical than to perform a righteous deed meaning, to be inactive is generally easier than being active.

It is vital for muslims to understand a truth which will protect them from the major sin of pride, an atom's worth of which is enough to take a person to Hell. This is confirmed in a Hadith found in Sahih Muslim, number 265. The truth is that any success one achieves in worldly or religious matters is only due to the mercy of Allah, the Exalted. It is not possible to achieve anything good, such as piety, if Allah, the Exalted, did not provide one with the knowledge, inspiration, strength and opportunity to do so. Having pride over one's efforts and achievements is more than enough to destroy one's success. When a muslim gives no value to their righteous deed and instead remains grateful to Allah, the Exalted, it is hoped Allah, the Exalted, will make their deed special in both this world and the next.

A muslim can only achieve piety when they believe they are not better than others. This is important to understand as one does not know the ultimate end for themselves or others. Plenty of people who appeared evil became good muslims and plenty of muslims who appeared good will be admitted into Hell on Judgement Day. An example of this is mentioned in a Hadith found in Sahih Muslim, number 4923. It describes three people who will go to Hell because of their bad intention even though they appeared to be great muslims namely, a scholar, a charitable person and a martyr.

Humility is an important and obvious characteristic all should adopt as anything good one possesses has been granted to them by none other than Allah, the Exalted. So how can one be proud of a thing which is created and innately belongs to another? The source of humility, as well as other good characteristics, is not being satisfied with oneself whereas, the root of pride and many other evil traits is being content with oneself. When one is satisfied with themselves they become blind to their faults and only observe perfection within themselves. This person will always believe they are good enough therefore, do not need to change for the better as they have already achieved noble character. Whereas, the one who is unsatisfied with themselves will find it easy to observe their negative faults, which will allow them to root them out until they achieve noble character. This person remains humble even if they achieve their goal as they truly understand that Allah, the Exalted, granted them the knowledge, inspiration, strength and opportunity to fulfil their goal. When one becomes this self-alert it aids them in controlling their desires thereby preventing sins. This muslim will consistently perform righteous deeds and avoid sins. This is true obedience and servanthood to Allah, the Exalted, which is a result of one being unsatisfied with themselves.

Even though this method is useful in detecting one's negative characteristics there are others. All of which aid one towards adopting piety. A muslim can become the student of an experienced scholar who can aid them in finding their flaws and teach them how to remove them under the guidance of the

Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him.

A muslim should ensure they possess good friends as one is judged by the company they keep. This is confirmed in a Hadith found in Sunan Abu Dawud, number 4833. A good friend will also help a muslim to abandon bad traits and adopt good characteristics.

It is important for muslims to accept constructive criticism from others. It may indicate pride for those who do not. Useful criticism is excellent in aiding one to find their faults in order to remove them.

Finally, it is important to be aware of the behaviour of others and the impact it has on society. Meaning, if someone's behaviour upsets people then most likely it is a bad characteristic which should be avoided. And if a person's behaviour pleases people then most likely it is a good characteristic which muslims should adopt. This keen perception is an important tool for those who seek piety.

Another aspect of piety is patiently accepting the divine decree knowing nothing occurs in the universe without the decision of Allah, the Exalted. In fact, the entire creation could not grant or remove a blessing from someone without the permission of Allah, the Exalted. This has been advised in Hadith found in Jami At Tirmidhi, number 2516. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, has advised in a Hadith found in Sunan Ibn Majah, number 79, that a person should accept everything that occurs within their life, even if it upsets them, as nothing could have changed the outcome. When a person regrets believing they could have prevented a thing from occurring it only invites the Devil to inspire them towards impatience and dissatisfaction with the choice of Allah, the Exalted. A muslim should be confident that Allah, the Exalted, only chooses the best for His servants even if their short sightedness

prevents them from observing the wisdom behind the choice. Chapter 2 Al Baqarah, verse 216:

“...But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not.”

It is therefore important for each muslim to control their behaviour and not object, through actions or words, to the choice of Allah, the Exalted. If a muslim persists on this behaviour they will move from patience to the level of contentment. This is when one prefers the choice of Allah, the Exalted, over their choice and desires and therefore do not wish for things to change. Whereas, a patient person will desire things to change and even supplicate for it but they will not complain against the decree of Allah, the Exalted. Both are excellent and earn great reward but contentment is a higher level and a superior sign of one's servanthood to Allah, the Exalted.

Being impatient is a blameworthy characteristic and only leads to the anger of Allah, the Exalted. Being impatient with the choice of Allah, the Exalted, is worse than the person who takes bitter medicine which cures them yet, becomes angry with the doctor who prescribed it to them. The things which Allah, the Exalted, chooses might be bitter but they in fact cure a person in the long run. This cure may very well save the person from the fire of Hell on Judgement Day. Therefore, being impatient is not the correct attitude to adopt.

It is important to note, that being patient or content does not mean one should not supplicate to Allah, the Exalted, as there is clear evidence in Islamic teachings which prove that it is a righteous deed. Chapter 40 Ghafir, verse 60:

“And your Lord says, "Call upon Me; I will respond to you....”

Many Hadiths highlight its importance such as the one found in Jami At Tirmidhi, number 3371. It declares supplication to be the essence of worship. In addition, it is a tradition of all the Holy Prophets, peace upon them all, and a sign of servanthood to Allah, the Exalted. So one should supplicate for good things which have been mentioned in the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, and be patient or content with the outcome even if it contradicts their desires.

The next aspect of piety is that a muslim should learn to avoid those things which do not concern them. In fact, the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, advised that a muslim cannot achieve excellence in faith until they behave in this manner. This is confirmed in a Hadith found in Jami At Tirmidhi, number 2317. This includes avoiding constantly monitoring the condition of others and attentively observing their actions. This only leads to grief for the one who observes heedlessness from others and can lead to other blameworthy traits, such as jealousy or ingratitude to Allah, the Exalted, after observing the worldly blessings of others. This of course, does not include interacting with people according to the teachings of Islam, such as greeting others with the Islamic greeting of peace.

A muslim should restrain themselves from enquiring about the affairs of others. They should avoid listening to gossip as the majority of it is untrue and sinful. A pious muslim will avoid the company of a gossip and backbiter as they may adopt their evil habits. This has been indicated in a Hadith found in Sahih Bukhari, number 2101, where the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, compared a bad friend to a blacksmith. If one does not get burnt the smoke from their work will most definitely affect them. A muslim who desires to adopt piety should avoid attentively observing those who behave as if they were created with no purpose, avoid listening to those who are ignorant of the consequences of their words, avoid interacting with the religiously lazy and avoid seeking comfort with

materialistic worldly people. Anyone who fails to avoid these types of people will not be able to obey Allah, the Exalted, correctly. A muslim should remember not to concern themselves with these people and useless matters as they were created alone, sent to this world alone, entered this world alone, will die alone, be in their grave alone, will be questioned by the Angels in the grave alone, will be resurrected from their grave alone and will be judged by Allah, the Exalted, alone. The one who keeps this in mind only gets involved in matters which concern them.

A muslim should strive to accompany the pious as they will adopt their characteristics such as avoiding the things which do not concern them. This will lead to the perfection of their faith.

The other thing which is a part of avoiding things which do not concern a person is to not pay attention to how people perceive them i.e. whether others like them or not. They should be more concerned about the truth of their condition which Allah, the Exalted, knows best of all. They must strive to rectify any faults instead of being fooled by the compliments of others which can lead to laziness and even pride. This attitude also causes one to concentrate on pleasing people instead of pleasing Allah, the Exalted, which leads to hypocrisy, showing off and other blameworthy characteristics. One should understand a simple concept, the majority of people are not pleased with Allah, the Exalted, even though He gave them countless blessings, how can they then ever be pleased with another person who in reality has given them nothing. This is one of the reasons why pursuing the pleasure of people over the pleasure of Allah, the Exalted, is pointless as it is unattainable.

In order to make it easier for a muslim to adopt piety they should bear an important reality in mind. This material world is a temporary home which will quickly vanish as if it never existed in the first place. This is quite obvious if one ponders over the stages of their own life. They will realise that even though they may have spent years in one place, such as their

secondary school, yet after it finished it seemed as if they were there only for a moment. Even the effects and traces of the experience fade away also. Chapter 79 An Naziat, verse 46:

“It will be, on the Day they see it, as though they had not remained [in the world] except for an afternoon or a morning thereof.”

In fact, the main aim of the Holy Quran and the Hadiths of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, are to teach this important lesson to mankind so that they are inspired to prepare for the hereafter by taking what they need from the material world. For example, the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, indicated this important principle in a Hadith found in Jami At Tirmidhi, number 2323. He advised that the world compared to the hereafter is like a drop compared to an endless ocean. An intelligent person would never sacrifice an ocean for the sake of a drop. It is why the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, advised in a Hadith found in Sahih Bukhari, number 6416 that a person should live in this world as if they were a stranger in a foreign land or a traveller. This is because both types of people dedicate the majority of their efforts towards returning home safely meaning, the hereafter.

The person who behaves in this manner will shorten their hope for a long life in this world knowing they will only be here for a moment even if they live to elderly age. This will inspire them towards the aspects of piety which include hastening towards performing righteous deeds, sincerely repenting from their sins and turning away from the excess and unnecessary elements of the material world in order to prepare for the eternal hereafter. Having hopes for a long life causes the opposite namely, delaying good deeds, sincere repentance and preparing for the hereafter by busying oneself with beautifying the material world.

The one who adopts the correct attitude understands that worldly preoccupations and problems are in fact encouragement from Allah, the Exalted, to renounce the excess and unnecessary elements of the material world.

This world is an abode of difficulty and tests so one should not seek the thing which does not exist within it namely, true comfort and peace. This in reality only exists in the things connected to Allah, the Exalted, and the hereafter. Chapter 13 Ar Ra'd, verse 28:

“...Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.”

Therefore, it is important for a muslim to bear the difficulty of the short journey in this world for the everlasting bliss of the hereafter through the sincere obedience of Allah, the Exalted, by fulfilling His commands, refraining from His prohibitions and by facing destiny with patience.

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