

The Feeling of Alienation (al-Ghurbah)

فَلَا يَغُرُّكَ تَقَلُّبُهُمْ فِي الْبِلَدِ

"...so be not deceived by their [uninhibited] movement throughout the land."¹

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Among the realities of faith and facts of life is this: the true adherents to the Straight Path of Allah (*aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*) are a small minority, living as strangers in society. The reason is none other than the deviation of most of mankind from that Path and their excessive attachment to this world. The Qur'ān describes the majority of the earth's population:

وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"But most of the people do not know."²

بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

"But most of them do not reason."³

أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

"But most of the people do not believe."⁴

إِنَّهُمْ إِلَّا إِلَّا كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا

"They are not except like livestock. Rather, they are [even] more astray in [their] way."⁵

The degree of alienation varies from time to time, place to place, people to people – for Muslims are a minority among the inhabitants of this earth, and believers are a minority among Muslims. Those of knowledge are few among believers, and those defending the Prophet's *sunnah* are even fewer. In respect to this, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Verily, my community among communities is like a white hair on a black bull."⁶

Although they may find comfort in solitude and suffer isolation in the company of those who seek only to socialize, these servants cannot neglect their duties because the Prophet (ﷺ) declared, "The believer who mixes with people and is patient in the face of their offense is preferable to the believer who does not mix with people and is not patient with their offense."⁷ And Allah reminds:

¹Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:4. Activities not disciplined by fear of Allah may appear impressive but are, in fact, void of blessing in this life and the next.

²Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:21.

³Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, 29:63.

⁴Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:59.

⁵Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:44.

⁶Al-Bukhārī.

⁷Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhī – ṣaḥeeḥ.

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ
"The believers are but brothers."⁸

So how can one avoid his brother for whom he cares and shares responsibility?

Always aware of Allah's presence, however, such souls seldom seek companionship elsewhere, knowing that He alone can comprehend their concerns, appreciate their efforts and relieve their sorrows. And knowing that whatever the people might think, Allah enumerates and rewards that which is unnoticed – sincerity of intention, conscientiousness in deed, and pain born patiently in the heart. So these servants of Allah are careful to avoid what is doubtful or might possibly lead to *ḥarām* (that which is unlawful) and are indifferent to that which is of no benefit in the Hereafter. They fear Allah when dealing with others and even more so when dealing with the subtle affairs of their own hearts. They refuse to compromise *tawḥeed*, and seek opportunities for *jihād*. They cling to the Sunnah when people have abandoned it and avoid innovation in religion while people find it good. They know the gravity of their sins and strive for forgiveness from their Lord. They are the ones whom the Prophet (ﷺ) praised when he said, "Certainly Islam began as [something] alien, and it will become alien once again as it began. So, blessed are the aliens."⁹

Yet, human souls were created as social beings with a natural enjoyment of companionship and feelings of loneliness during periods of isolation. Therefore, Allah assures those who travel on His Path that, in spite of temporary alienation from contemporaries, they do belong to the best company of mankind – none other than the prophets, their truthful supporters, the martyrs and the righteous.¹⁰ Such is the reason for the supplication: "O Allah, guide me among those You have guided."¹¹ Remembering one's companions removes sadness from the heart. Although they may be rare throughout the servant's lifetime, he can certainly look forward to a joyful reception in the Hereafter. Ibn al-Qayyim said, "Every time you feel the loneliness of isolation, remember your companions who have preceded you and be eager to join them; and do not be concerned with others, for they will not avail you at all before Allah. And if they call out to you during your journey, do not turn to them, for whenever you respond to them, they will take you and set you in another direction." Some early scholars used to advise, "Keep fast to the path of truth, and do not succumb to loneliness because of the few who tread it; and beware of the path of falsehood, and do not be deceived by the many headed on it to destruction." In the words of Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*:

قُلْ لَا يَسْتَوِي الْخَبِيثُ وَالطَّيِّبُ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكَ كَثْرَةُ الْخَبِيثِ

"Say, 'Not equal are the evil and the good, although the abundance of evil might impress you.'"¹²

⁸Sūrah al-Hujurāt, 49:10.

⁹Muslim and Aḥmad.

¹⁰See Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:69.

¹¹From *du'aa' ul-qunūt* taught by the Prophet (ﷺ). Related by an-Nasā'ī - ḥasan.

¹²Sūrah al-Mā'idah, 5:100.

وَأِنْ تُطِيعَ أَكْثَرُ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يُضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا تَخْرُصُونَ

***"And if you obey most of those upon the earth, they will mislead you from the way of Allah. They follow not except assumption, and they are not but misjudging."*¹³**

In another sense, however, the believer shares the company of all those creations that worship and praise Allah day and night throughout the universe, and thus, he is actually among the ranks of the majority of His creation.

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

***"Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth exalts Allah."*¹⁴**

For in addition to that portion of jinn and mankind who worship Allah, the animals and plants are worshipping and praising Him. All the angels filling the heavens worship Allah. Seemingly inanimate bodies worship Allah. All forms of energy and matter worship Allah, submitting to the physical laws He has established for creation and praising Him in their own particular way.

وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ

***"And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting."*¹⁵**

Finally, and above all, Allah Himself is with the righteous servant,¹⁶ supporting his efforts and reassuring him.¹⁷ So while the Shayṭān will attempt to infect him with loneliness and despair, his plan is frustrated and defeated by the realization that the believer is in harmony with the entire universe in submission to the will of Allah, whereas those who vainly try to oppose Him are but a small minority that will surely be overcome.

If the adherent to the Straight Path feels himself to be a stranger in this world, all men, in fact, are such. They were not created for this life but are merely travelers along the road to the final destination. So, whoever travels light, sending provisions on before him, will ease his burden and find his home in order upon arrival.

¹³Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:116.

¹⁴Sūrahs 59:1, 61:1, 62:1 and 64:1.

¹⁵Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:44.

¹⁶See Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:128.

¹⁷"So do not weaken and do not grieve, and you will be superior." (Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:139) "If you should be suffering – so are they suffering as you are suffering, but you expect from Allah that which they expect not." (Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:104)

