

TAQWĀ

by Amena Tanveer

Taqwā has been variously defined as: fear of Allah, piety, righteousness or God-consciousness. During the farewell pilgrimage, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) had said, "Taqwā is here," pointing to his heart.

What follows from this God-consciousness is love of pleasing Him and hope for His mercy, balanced by fear of displeasing Him or earning His wrath. What emerges from this love and fear of Him is the natural inclination to virtuous thoughts, words and deeds.



In Ayahs 3-5 of Surah al-Baqarah the concept of taqwā is clarified by explaining who the people are who have it:

They who believe in the unseen, establish prayer and spend out of what We have provided for them. And who believe in what has been revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what was revealed before you, and of the Hereafter they are certain. Those are upon [right] guidance from their Lord, and it is those who are the successful.

Ibn `Abbas said, "They are the believers who avoid shirk with Allah and who strive to obey Him, those who fear Allah's punishment which would result if they abandoned the true guidance that they recognize and know. They hope for Allah's mercy by believing in what He revealed."

In Surah al-Baqarah, Ayah 177, those with correct belief confirmed by their deeds are described as muttaqeen (those who have taqwa):

Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives zakah; [those who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the muttaqeen.

Indeed, those who have taqwa of Allah, obeying what He ordained and abstaining from what he forbade, will be guided to differentiate between truth and falsehood. This will be an achievement, a security and a way out for them in the affairs of this life, all the while acquiring for them happiness in the Hereafter. They will gain forgiveness, thus having their sins erased, and pardon, having their sins concealed from other people, as well as being directed to a means of gaining Allah's tremendous rewards.

Once recognized, the divine standard of taqwa serves as a powerful tool and weapon to cut through the dense growth, strangling vines and thorny bushes obstructing the path of Islam. And once the path is cleared, one will no longer measure an individual's worth by wealth, intelligence, beauty, talent, lineage, race, colour, gender etc. These are favours from Allah, given so that each person might feel gratitude towards his Lord and demonstrate that gratitude by using whatever gift has been bestowed on him in ways

which bring purity and soundness to his own heart and benefits and betterment to his fellow humans.

Taqwa is an inner virtue, the extent of which is known only to Allah. One recognizes that his abilities, talents, intelligence and wealth carry a responsibility. The Quran says:

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted. (Al-Hujuraat, 49:13)

Allah mentions taqwa in connection with the issues on which the foundation of society rests: orphan's rights, marriage, divorce, inheritance etc.

O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer. (An-Nisaa', 4:1)

Justice is to be done. Fairness is to be maintained. Rights are to be given. To whom is this addressed? To the people who fear Allah, because love and fear of Allah is the basis of worship and obedience.

Who can attain taqwa? **Only those fear Allah from among His servants who have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Forgiving.** (Fatir 35:28)

It is only those who have knowledge among His servants who fear Allah as He should be feared, because the more they know about the Almighty, the All-Powerful, the All-Knowing, who has the most perfect attributes and the most beautiful names, the more they fear Him. And then, when they convey the Message of Allah to His creation and fulfill that with which they have been entrusted, they can fear no one but Him.

[Allah praises] those who convey the messages of Allah and fear Him and do not fear anyone but Allah. And sufficient is Allah as Accountant. (Al-Ahzāb, 33:39)

Examples of former peoples are given in the Qur'an, with the results of faith and obedience to Allah and the results of disbelief and disobedience. The lesson will be derived from them only by those who have taqwā.

And We have certainly sent down to you distinct verses and examples from those who passed on before you and an admonition for those who fear Allah. (An-Nūr, 24:34)

And Allah has said:

So fear Allah as much as you are able, and listen and obey and spend [in the way of Allah]; it is better for your souls. And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul - it is those who will be the successful. (At-Taghābun, 64:16)

"As much as you are able" means as much as you can bear or endure. It pertains to the obedience of orders. When ordered by Allah to do something, we must do as much of it as we are able. For example, when sick we can pray sitting or even lying down, when fasting we can break the fast if we fall ill, etc. Prohibitions, however, are those acts that are forbidden to do. There is nothing to prevent us from not doing them, so we must stop immediately. So what Allah is saying is that when I command you to do something, do as much of it as you can, but whatever I forbid you, avoid it.

Allah loves those with taqwa, who obey Allah, avoid what He prohibited and adhere to the Shari`ah that He sent with His final Messenger, Muhammad (ﷺ).

But yes, whoever fulfills his commitment and fears Allah - then indeed, Allah loves al-muttaqeen. (Āli `Imrān, 3:76)

We can say that Allah (ﷻ) provides right guidance, and some accept and follow His message while others deny or ignore it. Those who close their eyes and refuse are not guided, while those who apply the guidance they receive and confirm their belief through obedience and worship are strengthened in faith and granted further guidance.

And those who are guided - He increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness. (Muhammad, 47:17)

And in order for guidance to enter a heart, it must be open and receptive. So when one deliberately closes his eyes, ears and his heart to Allah's guidance, He deprives himself of guidance as a consequence of his own choice.

Because of its acute importance, we find that the Prophet's companions were preoccupied with taqwa and used to exhort one another to it. That is because they understood that the best of provisions for this world and the Hereafter is taqwa. They said of Abu Bakr: "Abu Bakr not only excels all of you in fasting or prayer, but he excels you in something that is deep in his heart."

When things come into perspective and the goal is clear, we need to take measures; put it topmost in our priority list, start working towards it and help and support each other to achieve it. Goals need planning and hard work. Merely wishing and giving lip-service to them is not a panacea, a cure-all or a solution for all problems. (In Greek mythology, Panacea was a goddess of universal remedy.)

Especially when "diseases of the heart" are as severe as disbelief (kufr), hypocrisy (nifaaq) and doubt. And other lesser diseases such as injustice, hate, envy, pride, selfishness, anger, blame, fault-finding and disdain are all waiting in the wings to tarnish and taint the heart. Especially so since the shayateen are working overtime, making sin attractive, planting in our hearts the seeds of love of the world, competition for possessions, immorality, feasting of the eyes upon the unlawful, etc...

Our task is laid out: taqwa is the key. A key that will open doors to help us change ourselves, and be agents of change – to release from imprisonment that intrinsic quality of human nature called 'goodness' for which the whole world is searching.

Leo Tolstoy, the Russian moral thinker and novelist said, "It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness." The English language dictionary defines goodness as: "The quality of being good in any of its various senses; excellence; virtue; kindness; benevolence; goodness of character, of disposition, of conduct, etc." In trying to define the good that is within mankind, Aristotle said that man is inherently good and that his tendency for it is deliberate and pre-destined. He felt that if man is truly good within his soul he will be happy. Not necessarily joyful, but content and satisfied. He had spent a large amount of time examining different virtues and behaviors and then determining what the outcome of these attributes would be.

But the search ends with Islam. Goodness is defined by the Shari'ah and not any man-made system. Islam is the only solution and means to reclaim that upright nature.

It is taqwa which renders a person valuable and worthy, a wholesome role model, a gracious companion, a sincere advisor, a qualified leader. As role models for our children, we should inculcate taqwa in their hearts and motivate them to pursue their life goals in whichever specialty or field of halal work they wish and to be callers to truth in their behavior – by being kind, caring and generous; in words and deeds; by not lying, cheating, being unjust or deceiving. Armed with taqwa they can protect themselves from the constant bombardment by evil forces trying to rob them of that very striving – with a single-minded focus, a whole-hearted endeavour to tread the path of Islam, liberate the soul from the depths of ignorance and sin and reach the only goal worth striving for with sincerity: the acceptance and pleasure of Allah.

The Prophet (ﷺ) himself used to ask Allah to grant him taqwa. Ibn Masood reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would supplicate: *"Allāhumma innī as'alukal-hudā wat-tuqā wal-'afāfa wal-ghinā.* (O Allah, I ask you for guidance, taqwa, chastity, and self-sufficiency.)

May Allah accept from us.