

Module III

Section II: Comprehension of God (continued)

iii. Dealings and Practices

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The dealings of God with His servants and the manner in which He deals with them are called *sunnatullāh* by the Qur’ān. The Almighty says that these practices are permanent and unalterable. Consequently, for a true comprehension of God, just as knowledge of His attributes is essential, knowledge of His dealings with His creation is also essential. We shall now present the details of these dealings and practices:

1. Tests and Trials

God has created this world for trial and test. Every single person on this earth faces these trials and as such His practice of putting mankind through trials is a universal phenomenon. Whatever is ingrained in human nature comes to surface because of these trials; the secrets of the inner personality of a person are revealed through these very trials and the levels attained by a person in his ideologies and in his deeds are ascertained through these very trials. The Qur’ān says that life and death have been created for the very purpose of judging that who among mankind adopts a rebellious attitude towards his Creator and who leads a life according to the liking of his Creator. No doubt, the Almighty has knowledge of everything; however, He has set the practice for Himself that He does not merely reward and punish people on the basis of His knowledge; on the contrary, He does so on the basis of their deeds. For this very purpose, He has implemented the system of trial on this earth:

[He] Who created death and life that He might test you as to which of you is best regarding deeds. And He is also Mighty and Forgiving. (67:2)

The circumstances of sorrow and happiness, poverty and affluence, grief and joy which befall a person in this world are governed by this very practice of God. Through such circumstances, the Almighty tests His servants and differentiates the good among them from the evil. When He blesses someone with affluence and status, He tests whether such people will remain grateful to Him or not and when He afflicts someone with poverty and hardships, He tests whether such people will remain patient or not:

We are inflicting you with sorrow and happiness to test To Us shall you return. (21:35)

All these facilities and provisions with which this earth is endowed with are meant to test man. These provisions, in other words, are not provided to him for his indulgence and pleasure; they are a means to try him. By providing them to man, the Almighty is judging whether a person seeks the comprehension of His Creator and in this way attains success in the Hereafter or loses his way by indulging in them:

We have decked the earth with whatever is in it so We can test them that who is the best regarding his deeds. (18:7)

2. Guidance and Error

In this trial, man has been asked to guard himself from going astray and consciously adopt the guided path. The Qur'ān has informed us that this guidance is found in the very nature of a person. Moreover, once a person attains the age of intellectual maturity, the signs of the heavens and the earth around him direct his attention to this guidance. If a person values and treasures this guidance and benefits from it and is grateful to his Lord for it, it is the practice and law of God that He increases the glow of this guidance and creates in a person a further desire for this guidance, and as a result of this induces in him the urge to benefit from the guidance brought by the prophets of God:

Light upon light. God guides to His light whom He wills and God cites parables to mankind and God has knowledge of all things. (24:35)

And those who are guided, He will increase their guidance and also grant them their share of piety. (47:17)

This can be called culmination of guidance and the Qur'ān has stated with full clarity that without the will of God even a desire for obtaining it is not produced in a person. This will of God is also related to this law of guidance of His. God is aware of everything and is also wise: He gives this favour to only those who accept the guidance ingrained in their nature:

This [Qur'ān] is only a reminder. So whoever wishes he should take the path leading to Allah and you do not wish [O People!] until Allah so wishes [according to His law]. Indeed, Allah is all-knowing, wise. He admits into His mercy whomever He wishes [on the basis of this knowledge and wisdom]. And for the wrongdoers, He has prepared a grievous punishment. (76:27-31)

If a person decides upon evading this ingrained guidance, refuses to use his intellect, and deliberately deviates from the truth, then in the words of the Qur'ān this is *zulm* (wronging the soul) and *fisq* (defiance), and the Almighty never guides a person who continues to wrong his soul and persists in defiance and He leaves him to wander in the darkness of error and misguidance:

It is not possible for anyone to profess faith [in the Prophet] except by God's permission. [This permission is only granted to those who use their intellect] and those who do not use their intellect He puts on them the dirt of [error and misguidance]. (10:100)

The consequence of such behaviour is that the obduracy, stubbornness and selfishness of such wrong-doers increase and they are deprived of the ability to think and understand in the right way. A state reaches when the Almighty seals their hearts in retribution of this wrong behaviour:

Those who have decided to reject [this Book], it is the same to them whether you warn them or not; they will not believe. Allah has [now] set a seal on their hearts and on their ears [in accordance with His law], and on their eyes is a veil and great is the penalty that awaits them on the Day of Judgment. (2:6-7)

At another place, the words are:

These people keep solemnly swearing by God that if a sign comes, they will definitely believe in it. Tell them: "Signs are with God" and how will you know that even if signs come they will not believe and [in retribution of their sins] We will turn away their hearts and eyes [from the truth] since they refused to express belief at first and We will let them wander about in their wrongdoing. (6:109-110)

3. Beyond-Capacity Directives

The Almighty never gives a directive to human beings in the *sharī'ah* revealed by Him which is beyond their capacity. In all that emanates from God for human beings, it is always made sure that they are not burdened beyond what they can bear and whatever directive be given is given keeping in view human capacity and capability. Consequently, a person will not be held liable for sins done out of

forgetfulness or misunderstanding or done inadvertently, and God's only requirement of man is that he should follow His directives in both form and spirit with full veracity and honesty. Verses such as (:) (God does not burden a person beyond his capacity, (2:286)) and other similar ones mention this very practice of God. However, this does not mean that if people adopt a rebellious behaviour, then too the Almighty does not burden them beyond their capacity. It is evident from the Qur'ān that for reprimand and training¹ or for punishment² or to show them the consequences of their evil deeds³ or to make them aware of their helplessness against the power of God⁴ people are certainly burdened beyond their means.

4. Rise and Fall of Nations

Under the law of trial which has been mentioned earlier, just as God selects people to make them undergo a trial of patience or of gratitude, in a similar manner He also selects nations for this purpose. As a result of this selection, when a nation once rises among the comity of nations the practice of God with it is that He keeps it on this position until it itself plunges into lowliness with regard to morality and knowledge. This is an unchangeable practice of God and when, after repeated warnings, He decides to humiliate and depose a nation no one can stop Him and no power of this world can help that nation against the Almighty. The whole history of mankind bears witness to this practice of God:

God does not change His dealing with a people unless they themselves change their characteristics and when God decides to afflict them with a misfortune, none can ward it off. And for such people there is none who can help them against God. (13:11)

Consequently, the Qur'ān has said that this phenomenon of rise and fall shall happen with every nation of this world, and as a result some of these nations would be destroyed and others inflicted with great punishment. History tells us that first the Hamites and then the Semites were selected for this purpose and for the past five hundred years the progeny of Japheth have been chosen for this purpose. These are last peoples on which history will be ending. The Qur'ān says that after this the Day of Judgement shall come:

There is no nation which We shall not destroy or sternly punish before the Day of Judgement. That is decreed in the Book of God. (17:58)

1. In the verse (2:286) just quoted, subsequent words are: "Lord do not lay on us a burden such as You Laid on those before us."

2. This is a very common subject of the Qur'ān and can be seen at various places.

3. The Qur'ān, 68:42; 4:100.

4. The Qur'ān, 2:24.

5. Divine Help

When the Almighty entrusts a person or a group with any of His missions and asks them to achieve it, then He also provides His help to them. This mission can relate to propagation of His message and it can also relate to *jihād* and warfare. Many verses such as (:) (Helping the believers is incumbent upon Us, (30:47)) clearly say that the Almighty has held it mandatory on Himself to help the believers who have taken up such a mission:

Believers! if you help God, God will help you and strengthen you. (47:7)

This help does not come randomly. It is based on a rule and it comes in accordance with it. What makes a person worthy of help is perseverance and piety. The Qur'ān says that when in the battle of Uhud the Prophet (sws) in order to raise the morale of his people told them that the Almighty will help them with three thousand angels, the Almighty endorsed his proposal and out of His grace even increased this number by two thousand; however, at this instance, the Almighty clearly said that the promise of this help is dependent on the condition that Muslims should show perseverance and abstain from showing disobedience to God and His Prophet (sws):

Yes! If you persevere and are fearful of God, and your enemies launch an attack on you at that very time God will help you with five thousand angels who will be marked with specific signs. (3:125)

6. Remorse and Repentance

If a person commits a sin, there exists a chance for him to repent. The Almighty has asserted (The Qur'ān, 6:54) that He has made mercy incumbent upon Himself and therefore He never punishes people who after sinning repent and mend their ways. In this regard, the rule is that if people repent immediately after they commit a sin the Almighty definitely forgives them; however, He does not forgive people who deeply indulge in sin all their lives and when they see death approaching start to repent and seek forgiveness from the Almighty. Similarly, He also does not forgive people who deliberately deny the truth if they continue on this denial till death. This practice of God regarding repentance has been mentioned in the Qur'ān in the following words:

God's responsibility is to forgive only those who commit a sin while being overwhelmed with emotions and then quickly repent. It is they who are forgiven by God. God is all-knowing and wise. But He will not forgive those who sin all their lives and, when death comes to them, say: "Now I repent!" nor those who die as disbelievers. It is for these for whom We have prepared a grievous punishment. (4:17-18)

7. Reward and Punishment

In the Hereafter, reward and punishment is a certain reality; however, it is evident from the Qur'ān that at times this reward and punishment also takes place in this world. This lesser day of judgement is a prelude to the greater day of judgement which will take place in the Hereafter. The various forms of this reward and punishment which the Almighty has spelled out in the Qur'ān are:

Firstly, people who are only after this world, live and die for it and are absolutely indifferent to the Hereafter are given whatever worldly benefits the Almighty wants to give them and then their account is settled by Him in this very world and they are rewarded or punished on the basis of their deeds right in this world:

We recompense in this world the deeds of those who desire the life of this world with all its finery and they are not given less in it in any way. (11:15)

Secondly, those who reject their respective *rasūl* (messenger) even after being communicated the truth to the extent that they are left with no excuse to deny it are punished in this very world and those who profess faith in him, blessings of God embrace them from all sides:

For each nation, there is a *rasūl*. So when a *rasūl* comes to a nation, their matter is decided with justice and his people are not wronged. (10:47)

This is an unchangeable practice of God. The accounts of the people of Noah (sws), Lot (sws), Shu'ayb (sws), Hūd (sws) and Šāliḥ (sws) besides those of other prophets which have been narrated in the Qur'ān are a tale of the lesser days of judgement that took place in this world. In human history, such a lesser day of judgement was set up for the last time for the people of the prophet Muḥammad (sws):

And whenever We sent a prophet as a messenger to any city We tested its people with hardships which were financial and which afflicted their persons so that they adopt humility in their supplications. Then We changed their adversity to good fortune so that when they had prospered a lot they said: "Good and bad days also befell our fore-fathers." At last we seized them suddenly and they were caught unaware. And had the people of these cities professed faith and remained God-fearing, We would have showered upon them blessings from the heavens and the earth. But they rejected, and We seized them in retribution of their misdeeds. (7:94-96)

Thirdly, the Almighty has promised the progeny of Abraham that if they adhere to the truth, they will lead all nations of the world and if they deviate from it, they will be deposed from this position and will have to face the punishment of

humiliation and subjugation. The words (Deuteronomy 31 : 9) (keep my covenant, and I will keep yours, (2:40)) refer to this very covenant of the Almighty with the Israelites. The warning sounded in the words (Deuteronomy 31 : 26) (if you do it again, We would also do it again, (17:8)) also refers to this. All the books of the Bible mention the details of this covenant.

And recall when Abraham was put to trial by His Lord in a few things and he fulfilled them. He said: “I have decided to appoint you the leader of mankind.” “And what of my descendants?” asked Abraham. He replied: “My covenant does not apply to the evil-doers.” (2:124)

It is this very promise of the Almighty which is specifically mentioned for the Israelites in the following verse:

If they adhered to the Torah and the Gospel and that what has been revealed to them from their Lord, they would have received the sustenance [of their Lord] from above them and from beneath their feet. [No doubt], there is one group among them who are righteous but those whose deeds are evil abound. (5:66)

It is recorded in Deuteronomy (28:1-25):

If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country ... The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven ... Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you ... The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom ... However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country ... The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. (Deuteronomy 28:1-25)
