

A Discourse On Taqwa

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This text elaborates on the definition, meaning, value, and effect of Taqwa, or God-wariness, and self-restraint, and explains that it gives a person insight, or the ability to make correct decisions, and the strength to overcome difficulties and live in a God-centric way.

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A Discourse On Taqwa

Murtadha Mutahhari

This paper is based on a lecture delivered by Ayatollah Murtadha Mutahhari in on October 21, 1960 in Farsi, published in Dah Goftar.

Abstract

In part 1 of this article, Ayatollah Mutahhari elaborates on the definition, meaning, value, and effect of Taqwa, or Godwariness, and self-restraint, as emphasized in the Qur'an and Nahj al-Balaghah. He demonstrated that 1) fear of God is, in fact, fear of His justice, 2) piety is more than merely performing religious duties, 3) Taqwa is a freedom rather than a restriction, and 4) true perfection lies in a person's freedom to do wrong and yet he or she refrains from doing so.

In part 2, Mutahhari offers an additional description of Taqwa: it gives a person insight, or the ability to make correct decisions, and the strength to overcome difficulties. In order to achieve these qualities, a person must rid himself or herself of vain desires which hinder one's ability to clearly reason and reach a virtuous state as a result.

As stated in Part 1 of this text, the term Taqwa refers to Godwariness and self-restraint. As the term muttaqi is usually understood as one who "fears God," it is important to note that this fear is interpreted as fearing God's punishment rather than fearing His qualities. The two effects of Taqwa mentioned in the holy Qur'an are 1) providing a person with insight and 2) giving one the strength to overcome difficulties.

The Term Taqwa

أَفَمَنْ أَسَّسَ بُنْيَانَهُ عَلَى تَقْوَىٰ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٍ خَيْرٌ أَمْ مَنْ أَسَّسَ بُنْيَانَهُ عَلَىٰ شَفَا جُرُفٍ هَارٍ فَانْهَارَ بِهِ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ
وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

“Is he who founds his building on God wariness and [the pursuit of Allah's] pleasure better off or he who founds his building on the brink of a collapsing bank which collapses with him into the fire of hell? And Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot.” (9: 109).

Taqwa is the Islamic concept of having self-restraint. It is used 251 times in the Holy Qur'an as either a noun or a verb. The term Taqwa comes from the Arabic root “*wa-qa-ya*” which means “protection” or “support.” Taqwa is not meant to mean “fear” or “avoidance”, but because having fear is a prerequisite to protecting oneself from something and to avoid it, it may sometimes refer to having fear.

Also, since protection from something requires a feeling of fear alongside it, it may in some cases metaphorically refer to “avoidance” or “fear”. Both meanings are accurate although there is no evidence to confirm that this metaphorically means “fear” or “restraint.”

While it is widely believed that the commands *ittaqu' Allah* means “fear Allah” and *ittaqu an-nar* means “fear fire,” these commands actually refer to protecting oneself from Allah's punishment and the harm of fire. Moreover, those who practice self-control by refraining from acting upon desires that require patience and a resolute attitude are called *muttaqeen*, which is an Arabic term for “those who practice Taqwa.”

It is important to note that Taqwa is not about performing religious obligations such as prayer and fasting: it is about living a pious life. A person possessing Taqwa abandons living an animalistic life and chooses to live a moral one. Though there are other definitions of it, such as social and political Taqwa, religious Taqwa has a more superior and elevated status. It is only on the basis of religion that a person can create a well-grounded Taqwa in himself. As stated in the Qur'an:

أَفَمَنْ أَسَّسَ بُنْيَانَهُ عَلَى تَقْوَىٰ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٍ خَيْرٌ أَمْ مَنْ أَسَّسَ بُنْيَانَهُ عَلَىٰ شَفَا جُرُفٍ

Is he who founds his building on God wariness and [the pursuit of Allah's] pleasure better-off or he who founds his building on the brink of a collapsing bank... (9: 109).

In his *Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur'an*, Raghīb says that the meaning of the word *wa-qa-ya* is to protect something against everything which may damage it and Taqwa means to put the soul under protection against whatever threatens it. However, sometimes according to the rule of using the cause instead of the effect and vice versa, the words fear and Taqwa are used interchangeably. In religious law, Taqwa

means keeping one's self from whatever leads him to commit sins so that he refrains from prohibited acts.

Raghib explicitly says that Taqwa simply means to protect oneself. He also says that this word can be translated as fear and does not denote that in the example of *ittaqu' Allah* the metaphoric meaning is intended. And as we said, there is no reason to affirm that in such sentences any metaphor is used. The strange thing is that this word is translated as restraint (*parhizkari*) in Farsi.

It has never been seen that any linguist ever claims that this word is used in this meaning. As it was mentioned before, Raghib translated this word as fear but did not use it as restraint. It is not certain where, when, and why this word became translated as piety in Farsi. I suppose that only Farsi-speaking people get the meaning of restraint from the word Taqwa. No Arabic-speaking person understands this word in this way. There is no doubt that in practice, the prerequisite of having Taqwa and self-protection for something is to avoid it, but it does not mean that the word "Taqwa" has this meaning.

Fear Of God

It is necessary to understand that it is not expected for one to harbour negative thoughts of God when fearing Him. God is not meant to be viewed as an abominable or frightening entity. Rather, God is absolute perfection and the best source for a human being to love. The concept of human beings having to fear God actually refers to fearing the rule of divine justice. This notion is seen in the following supplication:

يا من لا يرجى الا فضله ، و لا يخاف الا عدله

O Who is not hoped but for His favour, and is not feared but His justice.[1](#)

The notion of fearing His justice is seen in another supplication:

جللت ان يخاف منك الا العدل ، و ان يرجى منك الا الاحسان و الفضل

You are too great to be feared but Your justice, and to hoped but for Your beneficence and favour.[2](#)

Justice in itself is not a vile entity. Fearing justice actually alludes to fearing oneself because of his past wrongs, or a person fears that he may break the limit and violate other people's rights in the future.

As for the issue of fear and hope where a believer must always be hopeful and optimistic while simultaneously fearful and worried, it means that he must always be fearful of transgressing in following his unquenchable desires so that they never take the rein of his affairs from his reasoning and his faith, while at the same time he must be hopeful and confident in God, and to rely on God who will always

help him. Imam Ali Ibn al-Husayn ('a) states in the well-known Du'a of Abu Hamzah ath-Thumali:

إذا رأيت مولاي ذنوبي فزعت و إذا رأيت كرمك طمعت

O My Lord! When I look at the sins I have committed, I become fearful and when I look at Your generosity, I harbour hope. [3](#)

The Meaning Of Taqwa

Taqwa is the prerequisite for a person who wants to live his life by certain principles, whether they are religious or not, and he is to have a clear direction in order to move towards a specific goal. In doing so, he is to protect himself against transitional desires inconsistent with his goals and principles.

Thus, Taqwa in a broader sense is a requirement for everyone who wants to be a true human being, live under control of reason, and follow certain principles. In religious context, Taqwa is the quality of those who protect themselves from all that is considered by religion as wrong and sinful. In stating this, there are two kinds of Taqwa: the first is just to avoid facing situations, in which sins may take place and this is the quality of the weak people and leads to seclusion and isolation, while the second is to face challenges and remain persistent and this is the quality of those who are strong in their faith and can play an active role in society.

According to the first type, a person protects himself from sins by refraining from a situation that leads to committing one. This is similar to a person who avoids an infested environment to protect his health.

According to the second type, a person creates a state and power in his soul that gives him a spiritual and moral security. That is, if he does find himself in a situation where the means and causes of sin are around him, that spiritual state protects him and prevents him from committing sins. This is similar to a person who creates a medical immunity in his body so that the microbes of the diseases have no effect on his health.

Now, laymen consider Taqwa to be the first type. For those who are said to have Taqwa, it usually means that he is a cautious man who secludes himself in an isolated corner and refrains from the causes of sin. It has been understood this way because the word Taqwa has always been translated for us as abstinence.

Moreover, abstinence from sin has been gradually construed as avoiding the grounds for sins; later on the meaning changed into isolation and avoiding society. Thus, when this word is heard in ordinary conversation, a state of avoidance and reluctance comes to mind.

Though the prerequisite of leading a reasonable life is to follow specific principles, it is not wise to avoid social life in doing so. The key to living the right way is to create a state of immunity in our soul that

eventually protects us. Sa'di, in his famous book of poetry *Gulistan*, says:

*I beheld an illustrious man in a mountain region
Who had contentedly retired from the world into a Cave
Why, said I, comest thou not into the city
For once to relax the bonds of thy heart?
He replied: 'Fairy –faced maidens are there.
When clay is plentiful, elephants will stumble.'*⁴

In the above poem, the man who secluded himself in the mountains refrains from returning to the city because of the “fairy–faced maidens” who may eventually cause him to “stumble.” This is the first kind of “Taqwa”. However, it is not to a person’s advantage to keep himself away from a slippery surface to refrain from slipping. Better than that is to know how to walk on it without losing his balance. Baba Taher says:

*Beneath the tyranny of eyes and heart I cry,
For, all the eyes see, the heart stores up:
I'll fashion me a pointed sword of steel,
Put out mine eyes, and so set free my heart.*

Undoubtedly, our heart will be captivated by everything our eyes fall upon. However, blinding ourselves is not our only option. A better way is to create a power in our heart so that our eyes do not captivate our heart. If we want to make a dagger with an iron point to release our heart from our eyes, we need another dagger for our ears because everything our ears hear, our heart turns to it.

The same goes for the senses of tasting, touching, and smelling. In this case, a human being becomes like a lion without a tail, belly, and head which Mawlawi (Jalal al–Dim Rumi) described in his story in *Mathnawi*.

Pragmatic Enforcement

In some books on spirituality, reference is made to some people who used some practical method to force themselves to abide by divine law. For example, they used to put pebbles in their mouths to control their tongue from over–speaking or engaging in idle and/or prohibited talk. Usually, this type of approach is taken to represent the perfect example of piety.

However, imposing pragmatic obligations on oneself in order to refrain from committing sins does not necessarily mean one has perfected himself. If we succeed in doing so and abstain from committing sins, indeed, we have refrained from committing sins, yet our soul has not changed. It is simply inactive because it has no means to commit wrong.

Thus, true perfection lies in a person’s freedom to do wrong and yet he chooses to refrain from sinning

without practically imposing anything on himself. These kinds of preventions may be considered perfection only when they are seen as preliminaries to primary stages of creating the attribute of piety.

That is because piety can be created after a course of opposing practices against wrong acts. But the real essence of piety is far from these practices. It is the great and potent holy state of the soul that supports and protects human beings. One has to struggle to achieve the true essence of piety.

Taqwa In Nahj Al-Balaghah

The word “Taqwa” is emphasized in the compilation of sermons and sayings of Imam Ali (‘a) collectively known as *Nahj al-Balaghah*, and it has always been used to mean the habit of strengthening and taming the evil-prompting soul with its unquenchable desires. In this book, Imam Ali (‘a) is quoted to have said:

إن تقوى الله حمت اولياء الله محارمه و الزمت قلوبهم مخافته حتى اسهرت ليااليهم و اظمأت هواجرهم

Certainly, fear of Allah has saved the lovers of Allah from the unlawful and has given His dread to their hearts till their nights are passed in wakefulness and their noons in thirst.⁵

In this passage, Imam Ali (‘a) clearly explains the meaning of “Taqwa” as a spiritual state which saves people from committing sins and considers fear of God as one of its results. Thus, Taqwa does not mean "to fear" but one of the consequences of it is that it makes the hearts wary of Allah. As stated in the beginning, *ittaqu’ Allah* does not mean the command to “fear God”.

In another hadith, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) says:

نمتى بما أقول رهينه و انا به زعيم. ان من صرحت له العبر عما بين يديه من المثلثات حجزته التقوى عن تقحم الشبهات . . . الا و ان الخطايا خيل شمس حمل عليها اهلها و خلعت لجمها فتقحمت بهم فى النار الا و ان التقوى مطايا ذلل حمل عليها اهلها و اعطوا ازمتها فاوردتهم الجنة

The responsibility for what I say is guaranteed and I am answerable for it. He to whom experiences have clearly shown the past exemplary punishments (given by Allah to peoples) is prevented by piety from falling into doubts...

Beware that sins are like unruly horses on whom their riders have been placed and their reins have been let loose so that they would jump with them in Hell. Beware that piety is like trained horses on which the riders have been placed with the reins in their hands so that they would take the riders to Heaven.⁶

In this sermon, the definition of Taqwa is to control or to dominate the soul. A person who is not strong enough to disobey his desires and surrenders his control to his soul is likened to an unskilled rider on an unruly horse who lacks willpower.

The prerequisite of Taqwa and self-control is increasing one's willpower and having a spiritual and rational personality, like a wise horseman who skillfully rides his horse, and his horse, in turn, quickly obeys him. The person who is riding the unruly horse of desires, lust, avarice, and ambition is dependent on these vices and lets his reins of will slip away from his hands would not be controlled by wisdom and insight.

As for the one reliant upon Taqwa, it is like he is riding the horse of self-control and holds the reins of will. He handles himself in all directions. In this regard, Imam Ali ('a) says:

فان التقوى فى اليوم الحرز و الجنة و فى غد الطريق الى الجنة

Certainly, for today piety is a protection and a shield, and for tomorrow (the Day of Judgment) it is the road to Paradise.^{[7](#)}

The Imam ('a) expands on piety by presenting a very moving example:

ان التقوى دار حصن عزيز و الفجور دار حصن ذليل لا يمنع اهله و لا يحرز من لجأ اليه

Know, O creatures of Allah, that piety is a strong house of protection while impiety is a weak house which does not protect its people, and does not give security to him who takes refuge therein.^{[8](#)}

Here, piety (Taqwa) is likened to a strong house of protection.

In yet another well-known sermon, titled "The Pious" (*al-Muttaqin*), Imam Ali ('a) responds to the request of Hammam Ibn Shuray who had asked him ('a) to describe who the pious are, so much so that he could clearly visualize them.

At first, Imam Ali ('a) gave a brief answer; however, Hammam was not contented and insisted the Imam ('a) expand on it. Thus, the Imam ('a) answered giving more than one hundred spiritual characteristics and mental and moral qualities of the pious. According to historians, as soon as the Imam ('a) ended his speech, Hammam was so impressed that he cried out and passed away.

Thus, it is clear that Taqwa is a spiritual state which is like a fortress, amulet, or a trained horse for the soul. In short, Taqwa is a spiritual power.

Taqwa: Freedom Or Restriction?

Taqwa is not a restriction; it is a protection. Even if we call Taqwa a restriction, then this restriction is truly a protection. Just as it is erroneous to call a house a restriction even though it is built with walls, rooms, solid doors, and windows to keep its inhabitants safe from harmful weather and to keep its

furniture and equipment in safe areas, Taqwa, like a house, is a protection. We can call something a restriction when it deprives us of a gift or happiness, but something that averts dangers from us and protects us against them is a safety, not a restriction.

In the Qur'an, Taqwa is defined as a garment in that it protects the body from the cold and hot weather in the same way a house protects people. In the Qur'an, after mentioning the clothing for body, it is stated:

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُؤَارِي سَوَاتِكُمْ وَرِيشًا وَلِبَاسُ التَّقْوَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ

Oh Children of Adam! We have certainly sent down to you garments to cover your nakedness and for adornment. Yet the garment of piety—that is the best. That is [one] of God's signs, so that they may take admonition. (7:26).

In providing guidelines for having Taqwa, Imam Ali ('a) states in one of his sermons:

الا فصونوها و تصونوا بها

...you should take care of it and take care of yourselves through it....[9](#)

Furthermore, Imam Ali ('a) holds that piety is a great cause of freedom. He states:

فان تقوى الله مفتاح سداد و ذخيره معاد و عتق من كل ملكه و نجاه من كل هلكه بها ينجح الطالب و ينجو الهارب و تنال الرغائب

Certainly, piety is the key to guidance, provision for the next world, freedom from all types of slavery, and deliverance from all ruin. With its help the seeker succeeds and he who makes for safety escapes and achieves his aims. [10](#)

Taqwa helps one to reach his goals and protects him against his enemies. In the first place, Taqwa gives human beings freedom in moral and spiritual issues, frees him from the chains of slavery of long desires, and gives him a relief from the sufferings of greed, envy, lust, and anger. It also indirectly gives him social freedom.

Servitude and slavery in society are the results of spiritual slavery. One who is a slave and obedient to wealth and position cannot live free socially. Hence, it is true to say that Taqwa gives human beings “freedom from all types of slavery.” Thus, not only does Taqwa not have a chain or restriction, but it is in fact freedom itself.

Protecting One's Taqwa

Thinking of Taqwa as a fortress and protector might make some people proud and ignorant and they would suppose that a person who has Taqwa never makes a mistake. This may result in never noticing the great risks for Taqwa. But the fact is that, although Taqwa is a perfect state, it involves some danger as well.

It is not impossible for a person to live under the protection of Taqwa and at the same time, he himself protects Taqwa too. Imam Ali (‘a) has referred to both kinds of protection in the following sentence: “You should take care of it and take care of yourselves through it!” Thus, we must protect Taqwa and it should protect us. Also, we must seek proximity to God through Taqwa and also ask God to provide us with it. Imam Ali (‘a) also stated:

اوصيكم عبادالله بتقوى الله فانها حق الله عليكم و الموجهه على الله حقاكم و ان تستعينوا عليها بالله و تستعينوا بها على الله

I advise you, O' creatures of Allah, that you should have fear of Allah because it is a right of Allah over you and it creates your right over Allah, and that you should seek Allah's help in it, and its help in (meeting) Allah. [11](#)

However, the dangers that weaken Taqwa must be taken into consideration. It is seen in religious rulings that Taqwa is known as a guaranteed protection and immunity against many sins, but there are some limits for the other sins which are more appealing.

For instance, it is not stated in religious rulings that being alone in a place where there is a tool used for robbery, drinking wine, or homicide, is forbidden. Or it is not forbidden to be alone in a house at night, in which there are no obstacles for a person if he wants to drink wine. Faith and Taqwa will guarantee him protection.

But as for the sexual instinct which is stronger and more provocative, Taqwa does not guarantee it and it is forbidden to be alone with the opposite sex because the sexual instinct is a danger that can destroy Taqwa even though Taqwa is so strong.

There is a verse in a famous poem of Hafiz that whenever I come to it, the issue I have mentioned comes to my mind, as if Hafiz wanted to state this spiritual fact in the very sweet way of his own:

*Of coins, is it that they examination take
So that, after their own work, all the cloister-holders take?
In my sight, the counsel is that all work, friends
Should let go; and, the curl of the tress of a friend take.*

The tip of the Saki's tress, happily the companions take:

If the sky permits them, a little rest they take. [12](#)

Then he says:

To lovely ones, boast not of the strength of thy arm of chastity. [13](#)

For, among this tribe, with a single mounted one, a fortress, they take. [14](#)

In the above verse, Taqwa is likened to a fence, just as Imam Ali ('a) had described. Then, it is said that the power of "the lovely ones" is much more than this fortress and no one can cast it in their teeth. In this corps, even a single rider can conquer a fence, and collective attack is not needed.

The Value And Effect Of Taqwa

In addition to the dramatic effects of Taqwa in the afterlife and the fact that it is the only way of salvation for human beings from everlasting wretchedness, Taqwa has many other values and effects in this worldly life. Imam Ali ('a), who emphasized Taqwa in his instructions and urged people towards it in a very outstanding way, has referred to numerous outcomes of Taqwa. For example, he stated:

عتق من كل ملكه و نجاه من كل هلكه

Freedom from all types of slavery, and deliverance from all ruin. [15](#)

Or elsewhere, he stated:

فَإِنَّ تَقْوَى اللَّهِ دَوَاءٌ دَاءِ قُلُوبِكُمْ وَ بَصَرٌ عَمَى أَفْئِدَتِكُمْ وَ شِفَاءٌ مَرَضِ أَجْسَادِكُمْ وَ صَلَاحٌ فَسَادِ صُدُورِكُمْ وَ طُهْرٌ
دَنَسِ أَنْفُسِكُمْ وَ جِلَاءٌ عَشَا أَبْصَارِكُمْ وَ أَمْنٌ فَرَعِ جَاشِكُمْ وَ ضِيَاءٌ سَوَادِ ظُلْمَتِكُمْ

Certainly, fear of Allah (Taqwa) is the medicine for your hearts, sight for the blindness of your spirits, the cure for the ailments of your bodies, the rectifier of the evils of your breasts, the purifier of the pollution of your minds, the light of the darkness of your eyes, the consolation for the fear of your heart, and the brightness for the gloom of your ignorance. [16](#)

In fact, Imam Ali ('a) holds that Taqwa is beneficial for all the difficulties and hardships of human beings. In fact, if we do not merely consider the negative aspect for Taqwa and think of it in the same way as Imam Ali ('a) did, we must agree that Taqwa is one of the pillars of a person's life, whether in one's personal or social life, and that the basis of life would be unstable without it.

The value of something becomes clearer when it is known whether or not something else could replace it. Taqwa is one of the necessary components of life because nothing, whether it be power, money, or

law-making, can replace it.

Among our daily problems is the existence of too many rulings and regulations which continually change. Laws and regulations are created for special issues and then they are changed and new ones are made. However, laws are not enough to reform the society.

Of course, there is no doubt that law itself is also a fact of life. Aside from general divine laws, people need a series of civil laws. But societies are not entirely reformed by them. Restrictions are introduced by the law; thus, people should have a kind of power to see the value of these restrictions and to accept them. This faculty is called Taqwa. It is said that the law should be respected. This is true, but if the principles of Taqwa are not applied, can we still expect people to observe all the laws and regulations all the time?

For instance, there are some problems in our life which are officially discussed and, in the media, people are asked to suggest their solutions for them. The increasing number of people getting a divorce, the revision of the election system, and traffic regulations are some of them. Though I may not know all the reasons for the increase in the number of divorces, I do know that losing Taqwa is a major reason.

If people did not lose Taqwa and were not so unrestrained, we would not have such a high number of divorces. In the past, people had more difficulties and needs in their lives, but due to their commitment to religious and moral values, there were less cases of divorce. Certainly, the problems we see in family life today are more than in the past. Taqwa and faith can solve many of them.

Today, we have lost them and although our resources today are better than in the past, we face more problems. Considering the rise in the divorce rate, we can try to decrease it using the force of increasing the restrictions of the law for men and women, using the force of the regulations, the administration of justice, executive power of the government, and by changing regulations and laws. However, all of these options will not solve the main problem.

Regarding the issue of elections, we see that some people insist on the view that problems in elections have arisen from flaws in the election law that have been created during last fifty years and are not compatible with today's needs. I am not going to defend the present election law. It certainly has defects. But do people act even according to the current law? Is the current law the cause of corruption?

Or is corruption happening because people do not act even according to current law, and no one considers any limit for himself or gives others any rights. Would the current law allow anyone to enter a city and forcefully tell them "I am your representative whether you accept it or not?" while people of that city have never seen or heard of his name before? Such corruptions cannot be stopped by simply developing or changing the law. It is only possible when there is a kind of awareness, faith, and Taqwa among the people.

Finally, regarding the lack of commitment toward traffic laws and speeding, does the problem exist

because of existing regulations or because of something else?

Nowadays, we are frequently facing many social issues. People ask why the divorce rate is rising and why people commit crimes such as robbery and murder. Why has cheating become common? Why has prostitution become common?

It is the weakness of faith and the destruction of the fortress of Taqwa that cause such corruptions. It is very strange that there are people who speak and write about these questions frequently, but they themselves cut down the roots of these concerns from the souls of the people and lead them into moral anarchy, into destruction of foundation of Taqwa, and into impairing the immunity of Taqwa because they essentially do not believe in it. If there is no faith and Taqwa – we take refuge with God – people become more vulnerable and may even consider stealing, cheating, and committing crimes as acceptable acts.

Taqwa And Health

As said above, Imam Ali (‘a) has stated about Taqwa:

Certainly, fear of Allah (Taqwa) is ... the cure for the ailments of your bodies... [17](#)

It might be asked what is the relationship between Taqwa (a spiritual issue) and physical health? Of course, Taqwa is not a tablet and medicine, but if Taqwa does not exist, a physician is not good enough to heal the ailment of someone who is in need of Taqwa.

A person who has Taqwa is satisfied with his limits and his rights, feels calm and confident, and has inner peace. This results in a healthier heart; tensions will not cause him to suffer from stomach ulcers and from pain in his intestines. He will not become weak and infirm because of being liberal in sexual relations. The well-being of his body, social life, and spirit all depend on Taqwa.

Taqwa And Insight

Taqwa leads to clear-sightedness and insight as it is stated in the holy Qur’an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقَانًا

...If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion for you... (8:29)

This verse illustrates that insightfulness is among the important effects of Taqwa and we can say that this has paved the way for the mystic journey.

Taqwa And Deliverance

The other effect of Taqwa is that the one who has it can get himself out of predicaments and hardships. The Qur'an says:

وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا

...And whoever is wary of Allah, He shall make a way out for him and provide for him from whence he does not reckon. (65:2).

وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَالِغُ أَمْرِهِ قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدْرًا

And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him. Indeed, Allah carries through His command. Certainly, Allah has set a measure for everything. (65:3).

The Relationship Between Taqwa And Insight

To understand the relationship between Taqwa and insight, it is necessary to discuss it from a scientific and philosophical perspective. The question arises as to how it is possible for Taqwa, an ethical virtue relating to one's conduct, to have an effect on one's wisdom, reason, and judgment. There has been disagreement as to whether having Taqwa is the only way to achieve a high level of wisdom.

Taqwa And Practical Wisdom

For the most part, Muslim philosophers, as well as their Greek predecessors, agreed that the rational part in human beings is divided into two categories: practical and theoretical. That is, reasoning produces these two kinds of thought productions that greatly differ from one another. The wisdom created by Taqwa is practical, not theoretical. Theoretical reason is responsible for knowing the eternal aspects of the universe. It is the basis for natural and mathematical sciences, as well as divine philosophy. The role of the intellect in these sciences is to judge facts. To gather a fact, a piece of information is gathered and judged based on its verity. However, practical intellect is a person's ability to make decisions, i.e., what would be the right thing to do. Practical reason is the basis for life sciences and moral principles. According to early scholars, it is the basis for ethics, the management of houses, and politics of cities.

However, practical intellect is also a basis for life sciences and moral principles. Practical intellect is a person's ability to make decisions. Practical intellect is the one which creates the concepts of goodness and badness, virtue and vice, the necessary and unnecessary, and rules and regulations. The way in

which a human being makes choices in his life is related to the manner in which he works and makes decisions. Taqwa causes one to use his intellect effectively which brings about wisdom. With Taqwa, one can better recognize a problem and its solution; he is more capable of making good life decisions. Taqwa has no connection with theoretical intellect nor does it affect one's theoretical intellect. In other words, Taqwa does not improve mathematical skills or an aptitude for natural sciences. This also applies to divine philosophy, unless it has a philosophical aspect and it proceeds with logic and reasoning to organize premises and reach a conclusion.

Taqwa, purity, and spiritual striving (jihad) have effects on the other kind of divine sciences in which theoretical intellect, philosophy, logic, and reasoning do not exist and the order of premises and the way of thinking is not from result to premises and not from premises to result. The idea that Taqwa results in wisdom and insight is not related to theoretical intellect. Perhaps the reason why some scholars do not accept this matter is that they associate this matter to theoretical intellect. But this applies to practical intellect and it can be stated that before any reasoning, experience proves this matter. In fact, Taqwa affects insight and intellect; it does not mean that intellect is like a light and Taqwa is its oil or the system of intellect is like an electric plant that at a time it produces some kilowatt electricity and when Taqwa enters, it adds some more kilowatt electricity to the electricity produced by the plant.

Taqwa Helps Intellect

There are different types of friends and enemies. Imam Ali ('a) states:

Your friends are three and your enemies are also three. Your friends are: your friend, your friend's friend and your enemy's enemy. And your enemies are: your enemy, your friend's enemy and your enemy's friend. [18](#)

In the same way that in a militant fight, the enemy's enemy acts in a sense as a friend, since he restricts one's enemy and keeps him busy and therefore not able to plan or harm too much, in the spiritual battle inside us, Taqwa serves intellect by fighting against enemies of the intellect. One's spiritual forces influence each other. They may sometimes weaken or neutralize the effects of each other and there may sometimes strengthen each other. In the past and the present, attention has been paid to contrast that exists between different forces of human being.

The effect of Taqwa on one's insight Excessive desires and biased and obstinate feelings is a spiritual condition that has a negative effect on a person's practical reasoning. Because the domain of practical intellect is related to one's action, it is the same domain of feelings, tendencies, and passions. If these issues exceed the norm and a person becomes controlled by them instead of dominating them, they will command against the intellect, shouting against the call of conscience. For those who ignore this call, they will not hear the call of intellect and will blow dust and thick smoke against its light, rendering the light unable to radiate. For example, we are sitting in here, talking and hearing and seeing, a situation in which one speaks and the others are silent; it is like the lights are shining and the atmosphere is clear.

But if everyone were to speak loudly while the speaker is talking, it would be obvious that even the speaker himself is not able to hear his own voice. And if this place were to be filled with dust and smoke, no one would be able to see each other. This point has been elucidated in several poems. For example, in his Bustan, Sa'di writes:

*Truth is a spotless house
Lust and desire, the blown dust
Do not you see where the dust is blown?
No one can see, though he has a good sight.*

Hafiz states:

*Neither veil nor screen hath the beauty of the true beloved.
But lay aside the dust of the path (of thy existence) so that glance thou canst make.*

Rumi also stated:

When self-interest appears, virtue becomes hidden: a hundred veils rise from the heart to the eye.[19](#)

Sa'di, Hafiz, and Rumi all portray lust, desire, and self-interest as dangerous hindrances to one's ability to achieve a virtuous state and seeing the beauty of Allah.

In another example, consider a young student returning from school thinking it necessary to do his homework. To do so, he has to spend several hours reading, writing, and thinking, knowing too well that the result of being inconsiderate and lazy is failure, remaining uninformed, and the cause of many other misfortunes. We know that his hard work is the result of the call of his intellect. There might be a call of passion against that call of intellect, that feeling of ogling and debauchery in his heart that prevents him from being calm. If this call increases, the young man can no longer hear the call of his intellect, blocking him from attending to the light of his nature as he tells himself, "Let's have a good time now and later I will think about what will happen next." Thus, if such desires exist in one's mind and heart, they will weaken and neutralize the effect of his intellect and in other words, these desires become the enemies of human being's intellect. The poets influenced by the Infallibles ('a), as well as the Infallibles themselves, have all warned people against this call.

Imam Ali ('a) states about pride and self-admiration:

A man's vanity for himself is one the enemies of his intelligence.[20](#)

The Imam ('a) also states:

Most of the deficiency of intelligence occurs due to the flash of greed.[21](#)

Imam as-Sadiq ('a) states:

Vain desires are the enemy of reason”[22](#)

Sa’di also states with regards to this:

Avarice blocks the eyesight of the intelligent Greed traps every living thing.[23](#)

The Holy Prophet (S) states:

The greatest enemy of you is your tempting self and unquenchable desires which are closer [than anything] to you of all and is placed between your sides.[24](#)

‘The tempting self and unquenchable desires’ are the great enemies of a human being because they are the enemy of one’s intellect. The Prophet (S) regards the tempting self and its desires as enemies because “the real friend of everyone is his intellect.”[25](#) We can defend our self against every enemy using the power of intellect; however, if an enemy is able to steal one’s intellect, it would be most dangerous. Using the abovementioned hadith in his poem, Sa’ib Tabrizi says, “How can we spread a restful bed for a good sleep / when we have an enemy like heart in our sides?”

Thus, one’s spiritual conditions and powers have adverse effects on each other because of the contrast that exists between the two. They almost neutralize the effects of each other; in other words, desires and intellect envy each other. Thus, the effect of Taqwa in strengthening the intellect and increasing insight becomes clear.

Undoubtedly, traits such as anger, lust, greed, envy, obstinacy, bigotry, selfishness and alike make a person deaf and blind. The one who has insatiable desires is blind and deaf. Is it possible to doubt about this matter that one of the natural states of a human being is that he does not see his defect in himself and he sees it in others while he is suffering from it more than the other? Is the reason of this blindness toward one’s own defect other than selfishness? If there is any doubt that pious people, who struggle in moralities and overcome selfishness and greed and other vices of the self, can better understand their defects? And is there any knowledge for a human being more useful than he recognizes himself, his defects and the way to correct them?

If we can succeed in subduing the tempting self then we can manage to find out the way of salvation. We would gain a clear insight as a result of having an intellect that is able to reveal our virtues and flaws. We would also be able to better solve our problems with ease, realizing that the hindrance to the call of our intellect were our inordinate desires. Thus, we would understand better, see more clearly, and our intellect would reveal things better to us.

The Difference Between Intelligence And Intellect

There are those who are both smart and intelligent in scientific issues though may not exactly know how to lead their lives. On the other hand, those with average intelligence may know how make better

choices. Thus, people have two kinds of mental abilities: intelligence and intellect. Some people are more sharp-witted; others are wiser. But the fact is that we do not have two faculties: intelligence and intellect. There are quick-witted people who are confused in practical matters because of enemies of their intellect have become inordinate. Such people have confused souls, though they do not have any defect in their intellect.

At the beginning, I mentioned that Taqwa, moral struggle and the purity of the soul do not have any [direct] effect on what theoretical intellect is concerned with. Even philosophical theosophy is not associated with these moral concepts. I also mentioned that Taqwa and moral striving have an effect on acquiring divine knowledge in another way. Imam 'Ali ('a) describes the state of a believer who strives against his own desires:

He [the believer] kept his mind alive and killed [the desires of] his heart till his body became thin, his bulk turned light, and an effulgence of extreme brightness shone for him. It lighted the way for him and took him on the [right] path. Different doors led him to the door of safety and the place of [his permanent] stay. His feet, balancing his body, became fixed in the position of safety and comfort, because he kept his heart [in good acts] and pleased Allah.[26](#)

Allah (swt) guides those who strive to seek His pleasure:

يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

With it Allah guides those who follow [the course of] His pleasure to the ways of peace, and brings them out from darkness into light by His will, and guides them to a straight path. (5: 16).

Taqwa And The Refinement Of Feelings And Emotions

Taqwa affects one's feelings and emotions. It makes feelings tenderer. It is not impossible for a pious person to have the same feelings as the feelings of one who is drowned in bad deeds and vices. A pious person who refrains from impurities, bad deeds, hypocrisy, and flattery and instead keeps his self-pure to preserve his dignity and high-mindedness and pays attention only to real issues at stake and not to forms will certainly have more excellent and more delicate feelings and have better reactions to spiritual beauties. He sees the world with a different insight and better feels the intellectual beauty in the world.

Sometimes we face the question as to why there are no great poets like the ones in the past. Why is there no similar delicacy in the words of other poets as with the words of Sa'di and Hafez? That is in the contrary with the fact that all things like science and ideas and the world have advanced in all aspects. I hope the contemporary poets do not feel offended by my words. This is just my impression and many others.

The reason lies in the fact that in addition to natural talent and thoughtful creativity, poets also need a special kind of delicacy and sensitivity in their selves which are achieved when one pays more attention to Taqwa, that is, he has self-determination and broad-mindedness and is not a captive of desires and anger. But if some people insist on introducing earlier poets, who have a clear conscience, as evil persons like themselves it is another issue.

In any case, an evil person with a contaminated heart cannot understand the grace of God; even if he has a high level of intelligence, he would not be able to create the gracious and delicate meanings similar to those which exist in some people's words.

Taqwa And Overcoming Difficulties

The question which arises here is: what is the relationship between Taqwa, a spiritual and moral characteristic, and overcoming difficulties? This relates to another effect of Taqwa which is stated in the holy Qur'an:

وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا

...And whoever is wary of Allah, He shall make a way out for him. (65:2).

وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ يُسْرًا

...And whoever is wary of Allah, He shall grant him ease in his affairs. (65:4).

Imam Ali ('a) states:

Therefore, whoever entertains fear of Allah, troubles remain away from him after having been near, affairs become sweet after their bitterness; waves (of troubles) recede from him after having crowded over him, difficulties become easy for him after occurring.[27](#)

Two kinds of difficulties

As an introduction, it must be stated that there are two kinds of difficulties human beings face. The first type consists of problems beyond one's ability to control, i.e. those caused by natural disasters. The second type consists of problems a person can control and learn how to overcome them. These are social and moral difficulties. Concerning the first type, I cannot comment on whether the Qur'an states anything about saving human beings from these kinds of difficulties or not. However, there is no problem for the existence of such a law as a divine guarantee in the world, such as responding the prayer. But with regards to the second difficulty, there is a sentence in Nahj al-Balaghah which we can consider as an interpretation for this matter. Imam Ali ('a) says:

You should know that whoever fears God, He would make for him a way to get out of troubles and (grant him) a light (to help him) out of darkness.[28](#)

Tribulations are moral and social difficulties. Problems caused by natural disasters are less than those caused by moral and social problems. Most difficulties people face with are due to immoral actions that make a person's life bitter and full of adversity, taking away any kind of happiness in this world and in the hereafter.

Considering that the main cause of one's difficulties is one's self and that everyone shapes his destiny through his own decisions, Sa'di says:

No one would do to his enemy what a fool, for his desires, does to himself.[29](#)

Through my own experiences as well as observing that of others, I have come to the conclusion that most of the difficulties we face are created by ourselves, not by others. Having Taqwa prevents moral and social problems. God gives those who are God wary a unique perception:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ

When those who are God wary are touched by a visitation of Satan, they remember and, behold, they perceive. (7:201).

Because Taqwa increases insight, it will produce the second effect as well which is saving people from perilous situations and difficulties. Difficulties arise in the darkness of sins and desires. When the light of Taqwa is felt, one can distinguish good from the evil, preventing him from experiencing difficulties. If he is involved in a problem, he can find a better way to solve these difficulties through the light of Taqwa. In addition to these effects, Taqwa prevents a person from wasting his powers in forbidden ways and diversions. It is clear that a strong and determined person can make decisions and rescue himself better than the others. Both light and power help in being rescued.

Toward the end of the chapter Joseph in the Qur'an, after Joseph became the ruler of Egypt and his brothers came to Egypt from Canaan to take grains during the famine, they did not recognize him. However, Joseph was aware of who they were although he did not identify himself. The first time his brothers came, Joseph used excuses to keep Benjamin, his full-blooded brother, with himself. The second time his brothers came, they begged and implored Joseph to give them grains. The holy Qur'an portrays their deplorable condition in the following verse:

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ قَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ مَسَّنَا وَأَهْلُنَا الضُّرُّ وَجِئْنَا بِبِضَاعَةٍ مُّزْجَاةٍ فَأَوْفِ لَنَا الْكَيْلَ وَتَصَدَّقْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَجْزِي الْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ

Then, when they entered into his presence, they said: ‘O Emir! Distress has befallen our family, and us, and we have brought [just] a meagre sum. Yet grant us the full measure, and be charitable to us! Indeed Allah rewards the charitable.’ (12:88).

Thus, Joseph decided to introduce himself to them:

قَالَ هَلْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ بِيُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ جَاهِلُونَ

He said, ‘Have you realized what you did to Joseph and his brother, when you were ignorant?’ (12:89).

He asked if they could remember what they did to Joseph and his brother. The question surprised them:

قَالُوا أَأَنْتَ يَٰيُوسُفُ قَالَ أَنَا يُوسُفُ وَهَٰذَا أَخِي قَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّقِ وَيَصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

They said: ‘Are you really Joseph?’ He said, ‘I am Joseph, and this is my brother. Certainly, Allah has shown us favour. Indeed, if one is God wary and patient Allah does not waste the reward of the virtuous.’ (12:90).

This is the fruit of Taqwa and purity. Joseph became a slave but had kept Taqwa. One of the most distinguished and prettiest women of Egypt made an attempt to seduce him, an anonymous young man, although he kept himself under the protection of Taqwa when he said,

قَالَ رَبِّ السِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ

“My Lord! Prison is dearer to me than to what they invite me.” (33: 12).

The Taqwa Joseph kept in that condition made him the ruler of Egypt. Taqwa, patience, and piety will not be lost in this world; it takes people from the lowest to the highest level of honour and dignity as stated in the holy Qur’an:

فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“...Indeed if one is God wary and patient God does not waste the reward of the virtuous (12:90).

This, it seems that the holy Qur’an summarizes the result of the story of Joseph in one sentence:

“Taqwa is an endurable fruit that saves people from difficulties and take them from the base to the top

level of dignity as it is stated in the holy Qur'an that:

وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا

“...And whoever is wary of Allah, He shall make a way out for him” (65:2).

There is no defeat for the pious who consistently protect themselves.

One cannot help but admire the words and sermons of Imam Husayn (‘a) when addressing his respected family and assuring them with absolute faith and confidence. My God! What high morale, faith, and confidence and where did he gain such certainty from? According to some historical sources, when he (‘a) said goodbye to his family for the second time addressed them:

You must be ready to endure difficulties and be aware that God protects and supports you and He will save you and give you a good destiny, inflict different kinds of punishment on your enemies and grant you blessing and grace for [enduring] these hardships. Do not ever complain and say that which decreases your value.

The faith of Imam Husayn (‘a) in a final victory by which he inspired his family originated from the words of the holy Qur'an:

وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا

“...And whoever is wary of God, He shall make a way out for him.” (65:2).

This kind of confidence and faith was the same as the pious Joseph who said with happiness and satisfaction:

فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“...Indeed, if one is God wary and patient God does not waste the reward of the virtuous (12:90).

and later he reaped the fruit of Taqwa. But Imam Husayn (‘a) knew the result before the story came to the end. The clear words of Imam Husayn (‘a) hit the heart of his family like spears. They endured difficulties such as being held captives, but under the protection of patience and Taqwa, the result of their deeds became what Imam Husayn (‘a) had promised them and God had guaranteed it in the Qur'an. After Imam Husayn's (‘a) martyrdom, Lady Zaynab (‘a) confidently rephrases her brother's statements in the face of their brutal enemy:

Use any trick you want and try hard, but I swear by God that you cannot abandon our names, make our

popularity wane and disrespect us and disfigure the revelation of God in our family. Shame, disgrace, and scandal are the only things which remain with you in this world.

Indeed, during the tragedy of Karbala, Imam Husayn (‘a) and Lady Zaynab (‘a) portrayed their perfection in God wariness, and this trait led them to withstand the suffering and pain of losing their loved ones and having their rights trampled on.

Those living a life led by firm principles increase their willpower and have a spiritual and rational personality. Having Taqwa, or keeping one’s self from that which leads one to sins while being wary of God, helps them reach those goals. It gives a person a sense of deep morality, freeing him or her from slavery of all types, whether it be his own evil–prompting thoughts or servitude in society. It also leads them feel contented, confident, clear– sighted, and tranquil. Not only does it help the individual, but it helps society as a whole, as the destruction of Taqwa is the source of social problems. Therefore, Taqwa is regarded as one of the pillars of one’s life, personal or social, without which one is unstable.

- [1.](#) Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 92, p. 439.
- [2.](#) Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 99, p. 55.
- [3.](#) Al–Misbah by al–Kaf ‘ami, p.588.
- [4.](#) Gulistan, Sa’di, Ch.V, Story no. 17, trans. by Sir Edwin Arnold.
- [5.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Sermon 114.
- [6.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Sermon 16.
- [7.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah , Sermon 189.
- [8.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Sermon 155.
- [9.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Sermon 233.
- [10.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Sermon 228.
- [11.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Sermon 190.
- [12.](#) Ghazal of Hafez Shirazi. Original translation by Henry Wilberforce Clarke (1840–1905) [vol. II, p. 387, Ghazal no. 209 (253), 1891.] Part 2 (version 1.03) Compiled and Corrected by Dr. Behrouz Homayoun Far, Ghazal no. 185, p.172. An online version can be found at:
<http://www2.enel.ucalgary.ca/People/far/hobbies/iran/hafez.html> [7].
- [13.](#) Hafiz uses the term “parhiz” which means here Taqwa:

قوت بازوی پرهیز به خوبان مفروش که در این خیل حصاری به سواری گیرند

- [14.](#) Ghazal of Hafez Shirazi.
- [15.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Sermon 228.
- [16.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Sermon 197.
- [17.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Sermon 197.
- [18.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Maxim no. 295.
- [19.](#) Mathnawi by Rumi, tr. by R. A. Nicholson, Book I, Story III. The Dewish King, his Vazir, and the Christians. [1930]
- [20.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Maxim no. 212.
- [21.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Maxim no. 219.
- [22.](#) Misbah al–Shari’a, ch. 38, p. 223.
- [23.](#) Sa’di, Gulistan.
- [24.](#) Bihar al–Anwar.
- [25.](#) Bihar al–Anwar.
- [26.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Sermon no.218.

[27.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon no. 198

[28.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon no. 183.

[29.](#) Sa'di, Advises, Ghazals no. 33

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