

## Characteristics of a True Believer

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It has been narrated that the Messenger of Allah (S) said to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as): "The true believer's faith will be completed when he possesses one hundred and three particularities and these can be divided up into five categories: actions that have been done in the past; actions that are done and continue to be done (in the present and future); (his) intention; the external characteristics; and the internal characteristics." The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali b. Abi Talib (as) said to the Prophet (S), "O' Messenger of Allah! What are these one hundred and three particularities?" The Prophet (S) replied, "O' 'Ali! Of the characteristics of a true believer are that he is continuously in thought; he performs the remembrance of Allah out loud; he possesses a great deal of knowledge; his forbearance is great; and his confrontations (with others) is done with beauty..." (Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 64, Section of the Signs of a True Believer, pg. 310, tradition 45)

In reality, this detailed tradition is a complete course in Islamic ethics (Akhlāq) which the Noble Messenger (S) presented to 'Ali (as). In this talk, the Prophet (S) summarized the Islamic morals into five categories which are: past actions, continuous and future actions, intention, internal characteristics and external characteristics.

What is the difference between [فعل] or past actions and [عمل] or continuous future actions? The first word refers to something which was done in the past and stopped in the past which a person sometimes still performs, whereas the second word refers to any action that is continuously being done.

The Noble Prophet (S) said that, "The first characteristic of a true believer is that he is one who is continuously in thought." By this we mean that he is not a person who is like a rock that is stationary and stagnant - rather he is one whose thoughts are always continuously progressing and he is always striving to grasp new views and is never satisfied with his level of knowledge.

In this part of the tradition, the Prophet (S) has mentioned that the first characteristic of a true believer is in relation to his thoughts - and this shows the importance of thought in Islam.

The greatest act for a true believer is to continuously be in thought, and as it is said that the form of worship that Abu Dharr performed the most was thought and contemplation. If we seriously think about the outcome of the events (before we perform them) then we would not fall into the difficulties that we are in today.

The second characteristic that has been mentioned is the remembrance of Allah (SwT) out loud - in some versions of the tradition the word [جوهری] has been replaced with the word [جهوری] - however both mean out loud. In our opinion, both forms (of the tradition) relate to the fact that the remembrance of Allah (SwT) should be performed out loud.

It should be noted that by performing the remembrance of Allah (SwT) out loud, this does not go against the intention of doing this act simply for the pleasure of Allah (SwT), since in the Islamic legislation, we have been commanded to remember Allah (SwT) both out loud and also quietly. In addition, we have also been told to give the Sadaqah and Zakat both privately and also in the open and each of these has their own benefit and advantage.

When these acts are done in the open (for others to know about) it is a form of tabligh or propagation of the teachings of the religion; whereas when they are done in private and secrecy, it also brings about a special spiritual effect to the person.

The third characteristic of the true believer is that he has abundant knowledge. It has been mentioned in the traditions that the Divine reward that is given to a person (for one's acts of worship) is based on their level of knowledge and intelligence. Thus, it is possible that one person prays a two Rak'at Salat and another person performs one hundred Rak'at of Salat, however the person who performed two Rak'at may actually receive more Divine reward than the other person. In reality worship has a coefficient and the coefficient of worship is knowledge and intelligence.

The fourth characteristic of the true believer is that he has a great deal of forbearance. By this we mean that just as his knowledge is vast, his forbearance too is great.

A scholar interacts quite frequently with people within his society and if he does not possess forbearance, then he will definitely fall into troubles. We should take the forbearance and self-control of Prophet Ibrahim (as) as an example. In history, we do not have any group of people who were more corrupt than the people of Prophet Lut (as) and their punishment too was the most frightening of all other forms of punishment:

﴿ قَلَمًا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا عَلَيْهَا سَاقِلَهَا وَ أَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا حِجَارَةً مِنْ سِجِّيلٍ مَنْضُودٍ ﴾

“When Our decree which was issued came to pass, We turned (the cities) upside down and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay spread layer upon layer.” (Surat Hud (11), Verse 82)

Their punishment was such that their cities were turned completely upside down. At one point, the Angels came down to let loose the punishment on these people which consisted of the raining of stones upon them, however they first came to Prophet Ibrahim (as) and gave him the good news that a son was born to him and his wife which made Prophet Ibrahim (as) extremely happy. After hearing this, he prayed to Allah (SwT) for the permission to intercede for the people of the tribe of Prophet Lut (as) and it is quoted in the Qur`an that it was said:

﴿ فَلَمَّا ذَهَبَ عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الرَّوْعَ وَجَاءَتْهُ الْبُشْرَىٰ يُجَادِلُنَا فِي قَوْمِ لُوطٍ. إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَخَلِيمٌ آوَاهُ مِنْبِئٍ ﴾

“When fear had passed from (the mind of) Ibrahim and the glad tidings had reached him he began to plead with Us for Lut's people. For Ibrahim was without doubt forbearing (of the faults of others), tender-hearted, oft-returning to Allah.” (Surat Hud (11), Verse 74 &75)

It takes a great deal of forbearance for a person to pray for his intercession to reach to a tribe of people (such as that of the people of Lut (as)) and this is one sign of the nobility, forbearance and magnanimous heart that Prophet Ibrahim (as) possessed. Thus with this said the scholar too must have a great deal of tolerance and as much as possible, must try to correct the wrongs within the society slowly and try not to and remove all the wrong doings immediately.

The fifth characteristic of a true believer is that his method of speech is beautiful and when he discusses or speaks to others, it is through beautiful exhortation and he does not resort to a war of words or harsh disputes.

The conditions of our society today are very delicate. The dangers are only one step away from us and in these present conditions, what does our intelligence tell us to do? Should we just take any issue that comes up as a pretext or excuse to jump into the battle arena or does our intelligence tell us that the time we are living in right now is a time that demands harmony and unity?

Thus, we must always go back to the Qur`an:

﴿ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ﴾

“And hold tightly to the rope of Allah all together and do not be divided...”

Is today not the day of unity of the entire nation? What does our intelligence tell us in regards to this?

The writers, those in charge of the government, the representatives of the Parliament, the University students, and all others!! I swear by Allah - we must all wake up!

Does our intelligence tell us that anytime an issue comes up that we must use this as an excuse to gather together and make our way from the Universities to the Masjid or other parts of the city such that the enemies can take advantage of such movements and activities?

It is our hope and prayer that if there is discussion and even disagreement then these take place under the banner of:

﴿ جَمِيلِ الْمُنَازَعَةِ ﴾

That we must have beautiful discourses and dialogues with one another as this is one of the characteristics of the true believer we must keep in mind the rules and laws and that the standards of unity are maintained.

A majority of the people within our country are religiously minded and when the Month of Ramadhan or the days of 'Ashura come around, we see the entire scene of the country changes - thus we can say that the people have a strong connection with the religion. Thus, we must gather around the religion which is our source of power and worth and make the best use of this agent that we have!

In our previous discourse, we related a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) which he conveyed to Imam 'Ali (as) where he mentioned that a true believer would not be considered as such until he possess one hundred and three characteristics and these characteristics are divided up into five categories. In our previous discussion, we explained what these five categories were. Now we will relate five more characteristics.

﴿ ...كَرِيمِ الْمُرَاجَعَةِ، أَوْسَعِ النَّاسِ صَدْرًا، أَدْلَهُمْ نَفْسًا، ضَحِكَهُ تَبَسُّمًا، وَاجْتِمَاعَهُ تَعَلُّمًا... ﴾

“(The true believer is one who possesses) noble interactions (with others); his (spiritual) bosom is the most expansive from all other people; his soul is the most humbled (of others); his laughing is done (only) with smiling (not out loud); and his gathering (with others) is (only) in order to learn something... ” (Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 64, Section of the Signs of a True Believer, pg. 310, tradition 45)

The first characteristic mentioned above is that a true believer's interaction with others is

of a noble nature. This line actually has two meanings:

1. The meetings or interactions that the people have with him are dignified and venerable - meaning that when they want to meet him, if he has the ability he meets with them or he gives them a promise that in the future he will meet with them. If this are not possible then he excuses himself that he will not be able to meet with them. In this regards, the Qur'an states:

﴿ قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَدَىٰ ﴾

“Speaking a good word (to others) and asking forgiveness (from them) is better than charity which is followed by aggravating (the other person).” (Surat al-Baqarah (2), Verse 263)

2. When such a person goes to meet other people, he does so with nobility and dignity. By this we mean that if he needs something from another person, he requests it from him with the proper etiquette - not that he is forceful or persistent in asking the person for a particular thing. Thus, he does not impose himself on others and then due to humility, they are forced or compelled to give him what he wants.

The next characteristic of the true believer is that he is one whose (spiritual) bosom is expansive - meaning that his heart is much more (spiritually) open than all other people. In relation to the spiritual openness of the heart, the Qur'an states the following:

﴿ فَمَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ وَمَنْ يُرِدْ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُ يَجْعَلْ صَدْرَهُ ضَيِّقًا حَرَجًا ﴾

“So then that person whom Allah intends one who is deserving of guidance) to guide (to the Truth) - He opens his heart up (to receive) al-Islam and whoever He intends (that person who is not deserving of guidance) to leave in misguidance, He constricts his heart.” (Surat al-An'am (7), Verse 125)

What is the true meaning of having an expansive chest? Those people who possess an expansive (spiritual) chest are able to endure anything that happens to them (things one does not enjoy, difficulties, trials), and he is a person who is not affected by people speaking bad about him and is also one who does not become hopeless quickly.

He is a person who takes in knowledge and information of various types and if a person was to speak or do something bad to such a person, he would keep this in the back of his mind and would not fill his head with the bad things that happen to him. However the person who has a constricted spiritual bosom is the person who, when afflicted with the smallest difficulty becomes upset and does not have the ability to accept and handle trials and tribulations.

The eighth characteristic is that one's soul is humbled. In the language of the 'Arabs, the word [ذلت] means humility and the meaning of the word [ذلول] is that of one that is disciplined. However in Persian, the word [ذلت] carries with it a very negative connotation - thus, it should be said that this characteristic is in the meaning of humility, meaning that a true believer has extreme humility and is humble in the presence of other people.

Whether another person is great or insignificant, he respects everyone and does not wait or expect that others should show respect to him (first).

The ninth characteristic of a true believer is that he possesses the trait of not laughing with a loud voice. It has been mentioned in the tradition that the Prophet (S) never laughed with a loud voice - thus, even the laughing of a true believer should be done with dignity and following etiquette.

The tenth characteristic of the true believer is that when he is sitting in a gathering, he strives to learn and gain knowledge in something, and one does not busy himself with backbiting and other things which do not pertain to him or which have absolutely no benefit! In our previous discussions, we had begun explaining a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) in which this great personality detailed one hundred and three qualities which the true believer must possess. Ten of these qualities have been explained in detail, and now we embark on explaining six more characteristics:

﴿...مَذْكُرٌ الْعَافِلِ، مُعَلِّمٌ الْجَاهِلِ، لَا يُؤْذِي مَنْ يُؤْذِيهِ وَلَا يَخُوضُ فِيمَا لَا يُعْنِيهِ وَلَا يُشْمِتُ بِمُصِيبَةٍ وَلَا يَذْكُرُ أَحَدًا بِعِيبَةٍ ﴾

“(The true believer) is that person who continuously reminds those people who are negligent; they are teachers of the ignorant people; they do not aggravate other people who aggravate him; and they do not interfere in those things which are not their business; and if another person falls into a tribulation, (the true believer) does not rejoice at it; nor does he back-bite another person” (Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 64, pg. 310)

The eleventh characteristic of a true believer is that he “continuously reminds those people who are negligent” meaning that the true believer is a person who advises those around him who are inattentive (to the faith).

A person is said to be negligent (Ghafil) when he knows something however he does not pay attention (concerning that thing). For example he knows that drinking alcohol is haram (prohibited) however he does not pay attention to that ruling.

The twelfth characteristic of a true believer is that he is a “teacher of the ignorant person” -

meaning that he teaches others around him who may be unaware (of their religious responsibilities). The ignorant (Jahil) is a person who does not know (something).

What is the difference between scolding the person who is negligent and guiding the person who is ignorant and (what is the difference) between Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar (Forcefully commanding to that which is ethically right and vigorously forbidding from that which is bad or evil)? These three obligatory acts must not be mixed up or confused with one another.

The negligent person is one who knows the (Islamic) rulings, however he is not attentive (meaning that he has forgotten the issue or ruling at hand). For example he knows that it is prohibited to backbite another person, however he forgets this and may get involved in an act of backbiting.

The ignorant person is the one who does not know the ruling and thus, we wish to teach him the ruling - for example a person who does not know the rulings in relation to backbiting.

The ruling of Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar is also something that is performed in regards to an issue in which the person is aware of the issue at hand and the rulings pertaining to it and is neither negligent of it, nor is he ignorant.

With this said, the question arises that what is the ruling of each of these?

In relation to a person who is negligent and inattentive, if the issue is not so important such as the eating of something which is najis (ritually impure), then it is not wajib (obligatory) to remind that person; thus this issue is only limited to those important tasks, for example, shedding the blood of an innocent person thinking that he is a sinner (one for whom the death penalty has been specified for in Islam and must therefore be killed after going through the judicial procedure).

The person who is ignorant to the rulings must be taught them and this act is a wajib (obligatory) one.

In relation to Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar in which a person knowingly and intentionally performs a sin, we must command him to good and prevent him from committing evil through the use of kind words.

Thus, each of these three acts is wajib (obligatory), however their scope is quite different from one another.

That which is normally seen among the common population is that they say "Let Musa be on his own faith and 'Isa be on his own faith" (meaning that we should not interfere with other people or pry into their lives) or some people say that, "You are not going to be in my grave" (so then do not tell me what to do and what not to do) but these are all words which have absolutely no meaning.

We must guide one another and not be indifferent to this issue. It is not equivalent to interfering in the lives of other people. Rather, it has been mentioned in the traditions that the example of a person who lives among a group of sinners is similar to a person who is sitting in a boat in his own area and drills a hole in the bottom of the boat. When other people start to ask him what he is doing he replies, "I am making a hole in my part of the boat" to which the people reply to him, "We all share the same eventual outcome. If the boat has a hole in it, then we will all drown!"

There are other examples in the traditions such as the one in which it states that if a store in the shopping market of town catches fire, then when the people who work in that plaza get together to help put out the fire, the owner of that shop has no right to say "Why are you interfering here - this is my shop!" Since in reply, the people would say, "We too are working in this same plaza and it is possible that the fire from your shop may also affect and burn down our shop."

These two examples are accurate portrayals of the philosophy behind Amr bil Ma'ruf and Nahi 'Anil Munkar and are proof that this is a general responsibility for all people since we all share a common eventual end.

**The thirteenth characteristic of the true believer is that he does not irritate people who irritate him. In the Islamic understanding, we have two terms which are different from one another:**

1. **'Adalah:** The meaning of this word is: To that amount that you have been oppressed, you are permitted to oppress the other party (not more than this).
2. **Fadilah:** This is something other than 'Adl or justice and in reality, is what we refer to as 'Afw or forgiveness. By this we mean that we do good to a person who does bad to us and this is one of the greatest characteristics, such that the Prophet of Islam (S) has said:

﴿يُغْفَرُ مَنْ ظَلَمَهُ﴾

"The person who has prevented you (from something) should still be given (his right)."

﴿يُغْفَرُ عَنْ مَنْ ظَلَمَهُ﴾

"The one who has done oppression should be forgiven."

﴿ يُصَلِّ مَنْ قُطِعَهُ ﴾

“Try to establish ties with the one who broke off relations.”

The perfect true believer does not go after 'Adalah, rather, he goes after Fadilah.

The fourteenth characteristic of a true believer is that he does not interfere in things which are not his business. The phrase in this tradition [ما لا يعينه] is in the meaning of [ما لا يقصده] which means that the true believer stays away from anything that is not related to himself.

One of the most important challenges that people face is when others interfere in things which are none of their business. This even happens at the level of government and also as we see when one country tries to interfere in the affairs and business of another country.

The fifteenth characteristic of a true believer is that if another person falls into a tribulation, he does not rejoice at the misfortune of that person.

In life, we have both good and bad days and a true believer is that person, who when difficulties fall upon him, does not resort to rejoicing at another's misfortune. The true believer is a person who does not say, “You see what kind of troubles Allah has placed upon you! I told you that you should not do such and such an act!” Speaking in such a way to another person is a very cowardly, foolish thing to do and is just like rubbing salt into a wound on the body. Although it is very likely that the person is facing some tribulation due to some bad deeds that he performed, however a true believer must not rejoice at this sort of thing because maybe tomorrow, a tribulation may come his way, since all of us face difficulties in our lives.

The sixteenth characteristic of a true believer is that he does not backbite another person. As for the importance of not backbiting another, it is sufficient for us to mention that the Late Shaykh al-Ansari, in his book al-Makasib has mentioned that if a person who backbites does not ask Allah (SwT) for forgiveness before passing away, then he will be the first person to enter into the hell fire and if he asks for forgiveness and it is accepted from him, then he will be the last person to enter into Paradise.

Backbiting destroys the character and respect of another Muslim and as we know, the character and respect of a Muslim is sacred, just as his blood is sacred and sometimes it can be seen that his character and respect are actually more important than his blood (life)!

In the previous discussions, we had narrated a tradition from the Noble Prophet (S) in which he listed one hundred and three characteristics to Imam 'Ali (as) that a true believer must possess in order to be classified as being complete and one who possesses true faith. Up until now, sixteen characteristics were mentioned and in this discussion, we will cover six more.

﴿...بَرِيناً مِنَ الْمُحَرَّمَاتِ، وَاقْفًا عِنْدَ الشُّبُهَاتِ، كَثِيرُ الْعَطَاءِ، قَلِيلُ الْأَذَى، عَوْنًا لِلْغَرِيبِ، وَ أَبًا لِلْيَتِيمِ...﴾

“(The true believer is one who) stays away from all prohibited things; is at a standstill when it comes to things which are doubtful (in the religion); gives away a lot (to others); bugs and annoys others very little; is a helper to the stranger; and acts as a father to the orphans...”

The seventeenth characteristic of a true believer is that he stays away from all prohibited things, meaning that not only does he refrain from that which is prohibited, but he also keeps away from sins.

There is a difference when we state that a person does not commit sins and when we say that he stays away from sins. There are people who find that when committing certain sins brings about pleasure for them, however because of Allah (SwT), they keep away from these acts. However, sometimes it is possible that through a person's self-building and purification of the soul, one reaches a level that he actually develops an aversion to committing sins and does not gain any sort of pleasure from these acts. It takes a great amount of work and struggle to reach this stage in a person's life such that one can develop pleasure in obeying Allah (SwT) and an aversion to sinning.

The eighteenth characteristic is that one is at a standstill when it comes to things which are doubtful in the religion. Areas of doubt can actually lead to the (performance) of forbidden acts and the one who falls prey to performing acts which are doubtful in the religion, will eventually find himself following the prohibited acts (as well). These doubtful acts resemble the shoulder on the side of the road (which a person driving a car must avoid to stop himself from falling into the ditch) and is something which the true believer must stay away from.

In reality, the doubtful acts are the sanctuary of the prohibited acts and thus, we must stay away from these since their force and power is just like electricity which is so great such that if a person was to get too near this electricity, it would not only pull the person close, but it would also burn him!

In our traditions, there is a good explanation which has been given that states, “Do not enter into the private property of other people otherwise you may be pulled towards usurpation.”

There are many people who have been pulled towards drug addiction in their lives and in the beginning we see that they give the excuse that they are smoking just to pass time and for

pleasure, however it reaches a point where they are completely dependent on such things. The nineteenth characteristic of a true believer is that he gives a great deal to other people. As we know, the word “a lot” is a relative term. For example, if in order to build a hospital which is needed in a society, a rich person (who has millions of dollars) gives \$100,000.00 then this amount may be - in relation to his amount of wealth - something very small. However if a person who is not well off gives \$1,000.00 (which may be a large portion of his savings), then everyone would congratulate him. Therefore, giving gifts and charity are things which are relative.

During the battle of Tabuk, the Prophet (S) asked the people to prepare the Muslim troops for battle and everyone helped quite a bit. Amongst those who gave in the way of Islam, there was a simple worker who in order to help the Muslim army - worked an extra night and whatever earnings he gained on that night, he presented to the Prophet (S). The Munafiqun (Hypocrites) started to make fun of this person, then the following verse of the Qur`an was revealed:

﴿ الَّذِينَ يَلْمُزُونَ الْمُطَّوِّعِينَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي الصَّدَقَاتِ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ إِلَّا جُهْدَهُمْ فَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنْهُمْ سَخِرَ اللَّهُ مِنْهُمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴾

“Those who taunt those of the Faithful, who give their Sadaqat (charity) freely, and also those who give to the extent of their earnings and scoff at them (as well); Allah will pay them back their scoffing, and they shall have a painful chastisement.” (Surat al-Tawbah (9), Verse 79)

It was at this time that the Prophet told Abu 'Aqil (the man who had worked extra to help the Muslim troops) to place the dates that he had earned on top of the other dates that others had given so that through his hard work, the entire supply would be filled with Divine spiritual blessings.

The twentieth characteristic of a true believer is that he tries to limit inconveniences to other people. In order for this point to be made clear, we present the following example.

Life is filled with troubles and inconveniences such as the need for everyone to build a house to live in and thus, when this is being done, the place where people would pass from becomes blocked while a house is being built. However that which is important is that those inconveniences that come about naturally in our daily life must be avoided as much as possible. Thus, a true believer is the person who, if he needs to inconvenience other people, keeps it to a minimum amount.

The twenty-first characteristic is that one helps and assists another person who is in a strange land and is an outsider (in that area).

It is very good to help your neighbours and your close family members however in reality, this is nothing more than “give and take” as today you may help your neighbour and tomorrow he will come to your aide. However that which is important is that you help and assist another person and do not expect that he gives you something back in return for your help. Thus, the highest level of assistance is shown to a foreigner or stranger.

The twenty-second characteristic is that one acts as a father to the orphans. In this tradition, the Prophet (S) did not tell us that the true believer is one who helps, feeds and takes care of the orphan - rather, he told us that he acts as a father to the orphans. This means that any job or responsibility that the father would have over his own children is the same thing that the orphan is entitled to receive.

We must keep in mind that these ethical commandments were explained and brought forth in an environment in which anger and hatred for other people ran strong and had a negative effect on the people and the way they interacted with others.

We hope and pray that Allah (SwT) makes us all successful in being able to fulfill these obligations and that we pay close attention to these characteristics of a true believer who has perfected his faith!