Awakening

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From *"Madrâjis as-Salikîn"*
Printed in Al-Jumu'ah Magazine

The first of the ranks of the journey of servititude (*ubûdiyah*) is awakening, which is alarming and stirring up of the heart from the sleep of heedlessness. By Allâh, how priceless is that revitalising alarm! How valuable and indispensable for the journey! Whoever experiences it, by Allâh, he has indeed experienced the breeze of success. Without experiencing it, every one is lost in heedlessness. His hearing is asleep while his eyes appear awake. It is this blessed alarm that wakes one up and makes him a seeker of Allâh. The seeker now rolls up his sleeves and musters up his courage to set out on the journey to Allâh, station by station.

Perhaps it is this rising up from sleep that is mentioned in the following *Qur'ânic* verse:

"Say: I exhort you only to one thing, that you rise up for Allâh's sake in twos and singly, then ponder; there is no madness in your fellow citizen (Muhammad); he is only a warner to you before a severe chastisement." [34:46]

The first realisation that illuminates the seeker upon this awakening is the immensity of gifts of Allâh upon him. The believer's heart glances at the gifts and bounties of Allâh and is overwhelmed by his own sense of inability to even count them, let alone thank Allâh for them all. The second realisation is the realisation of the inadequacy of his gratitude and worship to Allâh. These realisations are in fact both the cause and the effect of the first station of awakening. As the believer (alternatively, the seeker, for there is no difference between the two, every believer is indeed a seeker of Allâh – tr.) advances on his journey and as his heart is sharpened by these two realisations, it becomes incumbent upon him to notice more and more the innumerable inner and outer, open and hidden gifts of Allâh and recognise his own shortcoming in thanking the Giver adequately. These two realisations make the seeker actualise the supplication of the Prophet, *may the prayers and blessings of Allâh be upon him*, in which he said: *"(O Allâh), I admit Your bounties upon me, and I admit my sin, so forgive me, for no one can forgive but You!"* (al-

Bukhârî) At this point, one realises why this supplication is indeed the master of all supplications for forgiveness (as the Prophet has told us). The believer also realises at this point that if Allâh were to punish all the dwellers of Heavens and the Earth, He would not be in the wrong. If, on the other hand, He were to exonerate and reward them all, his reward and mercy would far exceed their deeds. The believer, therefore, realises that he must be ever mindful of Allâh's bounties and his own shortcomings.

NONE ENTERS IT EXCEPT THE PURE

The seeker inevitable realizes his sins and failings, and feels that he is in serious danger on account of them. He remembers Almighty Allâh's censure for those who forget the verses of Allâh after they have been reminded of them:

"And who is more wrongful than one who is reminded of the verses of Allâh, yet he evades them, and forgets what is awaiting him." [18:57]

Once the seeker is fully cognizant of his offences, he rolls up his sleeves to compensate for what has been lost. He breaks off the shackles of sins with the strength of *istighfâr* (seeking forgiveness) and penance. He yearns for purification, just like the purification of gold and silver from impurities when they are burnt, so that he may enter the paradise prepared by his Lord for him, for nothing impure can ever enter the Paradise:

"…those whose lives the angels take in a state of purity, saying (to them), "Peace be on you, enter the Garden, because of (the good) which you did (in the world)." [16:32]

This purification is carried out by four means: (1) repentance by turning away from sins (*tawbah*), (2) actively seeking forgiveness (*istighfâr*), (3) good deeds that erase the bad ones, (4) and calamities that efface the sins. If one is purified by these four means, he becomes of those who is greeted and congratulated y the angles upon death, and assured by them of his abode in the Paradise, and that he shall see grief and fear no more. Without any of these four, one's repentance is not complete and is not likely to be enough to counter balance his sins.

After one's death, when he is in the state of *Barzakh* (the state between death and the Final Day), his sins may be effaced by the following: (1) funeral *salâh* for him performed by the faithful, (2) the trials of the grave (may Allâh protect us from this), (3) what his brothers from the Muslims present to him after his death, of virtuous deeds, like charity, *Hajj*, fasting, recitation of the *Qur'ân* and *salâh* on his behalf. The jurists agree that the charity and supplications of the living will reach him and benefit him after his death. Majority include *Hajj* in this list, while the

Hanâbilah include all good deeds in this list; the *Hanbalî* way being the most liberal of all in this matter.

Those who are still not purified by these means, may be purified by the dreadfulness of the Day of Resurrection or by intercession of those whom Allâh will allow to intercede that Day, and finally and most importantly, by the pardoning of his Most Forgiving Lord.

If one's sins are still remaining, the Fire or the purgatory then purifies him, the extent of this punishment being proportional to one's sins. When one is cleansed of sins and corruption, and all that is left is pure and good, he is now entered into the Paradise, into which one but the pure may enter.

THREE PARTS OF THE REALISATION

The first of the two realisations, the recognition and appreciation of Allâh's endless bounties, is assisted by three things: the light of intellect, Allâh's favors, and consideration of the suffering of less fortunate people.

The light of intellect is the light that caused one's soul to wake up in the first place. One is able to appreciate the bounties of Allâh only as much as the strength of this light allows him. Some may not realise Allâh's bounties except in ordinary things like food, clothing, safety and their standing in the society. Such people may not have even a piece of this light from Allâh, for the real bounty to consider and appreciate is the bounty of *Islâm*, of *Îmân*, of Allâh's message, of the opportunity to remember Him and the honour to obey Him. This faith is the supreme bounty and gift of Allâh, and one cannot see it expect with the illuminated inner eye.

Sensing the rays of Allâh's favors through the clouds of mundane life and darkness of the desiring self is the second part of appreciation. One observes the unfortunate people who are heedless of Allâh, or lost in innovations (*ibtida'*) and forgotten the essence of the *Dîn* of Allâh. Such disbelievers and innovators are indeed greater in misery and suffering than those who are dying of starvation and disease. Once the seeker realises the misery of the misguided, he realises the immensity of Allâh's mercy upon him to have guided him, for things are known through their opposites.

THE SECOND REALISATION: OUR SHORTCOMINGS

The second of the two realisations associated with the Awakening of a believer is the realisation of one's sins, which again is assisted by three things. Realising the greatness of the Truth, knowing oneself, and certainty in Allâh's admonitions.

Realising His greatness from the core of one's heart is the key to understanding the enormity of defying Allâh, *the Most High*. If one contemplates in the greatness of Allâh and his own infirmity and weakness before Allâh, and his need for Allâh at every moment of his life, the enormity and wrongness of his sins becomes glaringly obvious. Knowing the nothingness of one's own self before Allâh, therefore, is an essential step in abandoning sins.

The axis of all success is belief in Allâh's promises and admonitions; and if this belief dwindles or weakens in the heart, so does any hope for success. Allâh has clearly told us that His verses and signs are of benefit only to those who believe in His promises and warning and fear the punishment of the afterlife:

"Indeed, in these there is a sign only for those who feared the Punishment of the Hereafter," [11:103]

"You are a warner exclusively for those who fear it (the Last Day)." [79:45]

Those deserving of salvation in this world and in the Hereafter are none but those who believe in and fear the admonition of Allâh:

"And We will establish you (the believers) on the Earth after them (the disbelievers), that is the reward for those who feared meeting Me, and feared my admonition." [14:14]

REMORSE OF THE LOST MOMENTS

One of the highest grades of this Awakening is the realisation of the lost days of one's life, which leads to the commitment to compensate for the lost time and fill the remaining days with goodness and virtue. Such an awakened soul then is miserly about wasting even an hour, indeed even a breath, in anything that is not helpful in its journey to Allâh. Every wasted moment is a regret and loss on that Day and a hindrance on the journey to Allâh.

Three things enhance the remorse for the lost days and the concern to compensate for them in the remaining days of one's life; knowledge, responsiveness to admonition, and company of the righteous. The more one knows the worth of deeds and enormity of their consequences, the more he realises the worth of his loss. Similarly, one's responsiveness to the admonisher of his heart (according to a *hadîth* of the Prophet, every believer has an admonisher in his heart who warns him against possible sins) determines how much he can improve. The company of people who have great concern for the condition of their hearts and determination to reach the highest levels is another great help in the path of the seeker.

Thus ends the description of the first station (*maqâm*) of the *Madârij* (ranks) of the seekers of Allâh.