Four Actions Towards Taqwaa

Notes from Hilyatul Awliya wa Tabaqat al Asfiya and Secondary References from Ibn al-Qayyim.

"And march forth in the way (which leads to) forgiveness from your Lord, and for Paradise as wide as are the heavens and the earth, prepared for Al Muttagoon." (Surah al Imraan: 133)

1. BRINGING THE SELF TO ACCOUNT FOR HIS DEEDS

Allah subhana wa ta'ala says in the Qur'an:

"O you who believe! Fear Allah and keep your duty to Him. And let every person look to what he has sent forth for the morrow, and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is All-Aware of what you do." (Surah al Hashr: 18)

When a Muslim takes account of his own deeds he is able to realize his mistakes and correct them. Those who do not engage in accounting their own deeds, only condemn themselves in front of Allah subhana wa ta'ala. Allah aza wa jal said in the Qur'an:

"So, by your Lord (O Muhammad) We shall certainly call all of them to account. For all that they used to do." (Surah al Hijr:92-93)

Ibn Qayyim rahimuh Allah said "Condemning oneself is a practice of the truthful. A servant draws closer to Allah in a moment (when he condemns himself) much more than he would do so through actions."

When a Muslim takes account of his actions, he is able to realize the right of Allah over him. Ibn Qayyim also said "A benefit of understanding Allah's right over the servant is that it breeds condemnation of oneself and delivers one from showing off and vanity. It also opens the door of humbleness in front of Allah and closes the doors of conceit. It allows one to realize that salvation is only through Allah's grace and mercy. It is Allah's right that He should be obeyed and not disobeyed: that He should be remembered and not forgotten and that He should be appreciated and not unappreciated. Whoever thinks over these things will know with certainty that he cannot fulfill these conditions and, thus, has to resort to Allah's mercy. Such a person will be convinced that he cannot rely on his actions, lest he be destroyed. Many people think about their rights over Allah and do not about His rights over them. This is how there are detached from Allah and deprived of the desire to meet Him. This is the epitome of ignorance of their Lord and of themselves." (Ighathatul lahfaan 1/99-101; secondary reference)

A'isha radi Allahu anha was once asked about the verse,

"Then We gave the Book the Qur'an) for inheritance to such of Our slaves whom We chose (the followers of Muhammad) Then of them are some who wrong their ownselves, and of them are some who follow a middle course, and of them are some who are, by Allah's Leave, foremost in good deeds. That (inheritance of the Qur'an), that is indeed a great grace." (Surah Fatir:32)

She answered "My son! They are in Paradise. Those who raced towards good deeds are those who lived during the time of Rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam who testified to their sustenance and Paradise. As for those who were moderate, they followed him among his companions and caught up with him. And as for those who wronged themselves are concerned., they are people like me and you."

Abu Darda radi Allahu anhu said "No one can achieve complete understanding of Islam until he condemns people for the sake of Allah and then returns home and condemns himself even more."

Imam Ahmed rahimu Allah related from Wahab ibn Munabbah rahimu Allah "It is written from the family of Dawood alayhi salam "An intelligent person should not be distracted on four occasions; when he is supplicating to his Lord, when he is auditing himself, when he is being informed by his friends about his shortcomings, and when he is alone with himself."

Omar radi Allahu anhu said "Take account of yourselves before you are taken to account [by someone else], weigh your deeds before they are weighed [by someone else]."

Hasan al Basri rahimahu Allah said about the verse "No. I do swear by the criticizing self..." (Surah Qiyamah:2): A believer will always be critical of himself in his food, his drink and his speech. A sinner will not criticize himself." He also said "A believer is a guardian over himself: he acounts himself for Allah. Those who take account of themselves in this world will be audited lightly in the Hereafter. Those who take this issue lightly will find their auditing very difficult."

2. DISCIPLINING ONE'S SELF FOR ITS SHORTCOMINGS

We are not made perfect by Allah subhana wa ta'ala and we inevitably have our shortcomings. The pious predecessors differed with us in that they were harsh on themselves when it came to their shortcomings because they knew that obedience can be very difficult.

In the Qur'an we are told that (Iblis) said:

"Because you have sent me astray, surely I will sit in wait against them (human beings) on Your straight path. Then I will come to them from before them and behind them, from their right and from their left, and You will not find most of them as thankful ones." (7:12-17)

The pious predecessors were always fully aware of this and did everything to their capability to take their souls into account for its shortcomings, all out fear, love and hope in Allah subhana wa ta'ala.

Tameem Dari radi Allahu anhu failed to wake up for Tahajjud one night and he stayed awake at nights in prayer the whole of the next year. Talhah radi Allahu anhu became preoccupied with a bird on his wall on his orchard while he prayed and he donated the wall as redemption for that shortcoming. Imam Muhammad ibn Sireen narrated that Abu Hurairah radi Allahu anhu said "Sometimes I fell unconscious in between the mimbar of rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam and the chamber of A'isha. People would say "Maybe he is mad!" However, Allah knows best that I am not mad, but my hunger made me fall." Omar radi Allahu anhu gave a piece of land when he missed 'Asr prayers in a group, and ibn Omar used to stay awake the whole night if he missed a group prayer and then he would free two slayes.

Allah said in the Qur'an "And those who kept their duty to their Lord will be led to Paradise in groups, till, when they reach it, and its gates will be opened (before their arrival for their reception) and its keepers will say: Salamun 'Alaikum (peace be upon you)! You have done well, so enter here to abide therein." (Surah al Zumar:73)

3. BRINGING THE SELF TO DO ACTIONS OF OBEDIENCE

When a Muslim knows the value of the Hereafter, making an effort to have a pleasant abode is no longer difficult. This is why the pious predecessors acted upon the Qur'an and Sunnah. Abu Bakr Siddiq radi Allahu anhu said "Whoever enters his grave without any provisions is like the one who mounts the sea without a ship."

Bringing the self to do actions of obedience to Allah has a great deal to do with being content by Allah's subhana wa ta'ala decree. This state can only be attained by those who seek to have great knowledge and love. And so, by this it is possible to find pleasure in whatever they have been given by Allah whether it is a trial or a tribulation, JUST BECAUSE, it comes from Allah subhana wa ta'ala.

Allah said in the Qur'an "Whoever acts righteously, whether male or female, and is a believer, We will surely give him life with a good life, and We will surely give them their reward in accordance with the best of what they used to do..." (16:97)

Ahmad bin Bindar narrated that Abu Hurairah cried during his last illness, and when asked about it he said "Surely I am not crying being attached to your world, but rather for the long journey awaiting me, and the little provisions I have prepared for it. This morning, I am descending upon either paradise, or hell, and I have no idea towards which of the two I will be taken!"

Narrated Muawiya: I heard the Prophet saying, "A group of people amongst my followers will remain obedient to Allah's orders and they will not be harmed by anyone who will not help them or who will oppose them, till Allah's Order (the Last Day) comes upon them while they are still on the right path." (Sahih Bukhari: Volume 4, Book 56, Number 835)

Abdu Rahman ibn Abdullah bin Mas'ud narrated that someone asked his father "O Abu Abdu Rahman, teach me a few words that are all-encompassing and beneficial, so that I will need no further elaboration!" Ibn Mas'ud said "Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him. Live by the dictates of the Qur'an and pursue its guidance. Accept the truth and justice even if they come from a stranger you do not recognize, or even from someone you disregard as despicable, and refute falsehood even if it comes from a sibling you love."

Yahya ibn Mu'adh rahimu Allah said "Congratulations to those who leave the world before it deserts them; to those who build their graves before they enter them; and to those who please their Lord before they meet Him."

Thus we should try to bring ourselves to the very best of our abilities to do actions of obedience to Allah subhana wa ta'ala.

In Sahih Muslim it has been related that on the authority of A'isha radi Allahu anha that rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam said "Everyone of the children of Adam has been created with three hundred and sixty joints; so he who declares the Glory of Allah, praises Allah, and declares Allah to be one, Glorifies Allah, and seeks forgiveness from Allah, and removes stone, or thorn, or bone from people's path, and enjoins what is good and forbids what is evil, to the number of those three hundred and sixty, will walk that having removed himself from hell."

Abu Dharr radi Allahu anhu reported "Some of the people from among the companions of Rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam said to him: "O rasulullah the rich have taken away all the reward. They observe prayer as we do; they keep the fasts as we keep, and they give sadaqa out of their surplus riches. Upon this rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam said "Has Allah not prescribed for you by following which you can also do sadaqa? In every declaration of the glorification of Allah there is sadaqa, and every takbir there is sadaqa and ever declaration that He is One is a sadaqa, and enjoining of good is a sadaqa, and forbidding of that which is evil is a sadaqa, and in man's sexual intercourse with his wife there is sadaqa." The companions said "Rasulullah is there reward for him who satisfies his sexual passion among us?" He said "Tell me if he were to

devote it to something forbidden, would it not be a sin on his part? Similarly, if he were to devote it to something lawful, he should have a reward." (Muslim)

Abu Dharr radi Allahu anhu asked rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam "Which action is best?" Rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam said "Faith in Allah and Jihad in the way of Allah." He asked "Which neck is best for emancipation?" Rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam said "That which is dearest of them in price and most valuable of them near its masters." He asked "If I cannot do it?" Rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam said "You shall help a laborer or work for one who is disabled." He asked "If I cannot do it?" Rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam said "You shall call the people from wrong doing, because it is charity which you bestow upon yourself." (Agreed upon/Riyadhus saleheen)

Allah subhana wa ta'ala said in the Qur'an "If anyone does a righteous deed, it is for his own soul." (45:15) And, He has promised us in the Qur'an "And whoso does good an atom's weight will see it then." (99:7)

4. SEEKING THE COMPANY AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE PIOUS

Unnecessary company is a disease that causes much harm. The wrong kind of companionships often afford one to be deprived of Allah's blessings Companionship in this life should be beneficial for one's akhirah. Ibn Qayyim rahimu Allah cites four different kinds of companionships:

- a) People whose company is like food. It is indispensable, night or day. Once we have taken our need from this company we can leave it until we need it again. These are people with knowledge of Allah, who are pious, who wish well for Allah, His prophet and His servants. Associating with them is an achievement in itself.
- b) People whose company is like a medicine. Their company is only needed when a disease sets in. When you are healthy you have no need for them, but mixing with them is sometimes necessary such as livelihood, business and consultation. Once what you need has been fulfilled, mixing with them should be avoided.
- c) People whose company is harmful. Mixing with these people is like a disease, in all its variety and degrees. You will never benefit from them in this life or in the next life if you have them for company. You will lose either one or both of your deen and your livelihood because of them. If their companionship has taken hold of you and is established then it becomes fatal.

Among such people are those who neither speak any good that might benefit you, nor listen closely to you so that they might benefit from you. They do not know their souls. Their words are like lashes, while all the while they are full of admiration for and delight in their own words. They cause distress to their company, while believe they are the center of attraction. Mixing with such a person will inevitably come to an end and is destined to be doomed. In such cases a person should just hold on to good behavior, only presenting such company

with his outward appearance, until Allah subhana wa ta'ala offers him a way out of this company and out of its afflictions.

d) People whose company is evil in itself. This is like taking poison, its victim either finds an antidote for it or dies. Many belong to this category. They are people of shirk and misguidance who abandon the Sunnah and bring their personal beliefs as the truth. A Muslim should not sit in their company nor mix with them. The result of which will be a death of the heart.

With these kinds of companionships, we need to be more aware of what we choose to surround ourselvers with. In addition, Hasan al Basri said "The heart becomes corrupt in six ways: commiting sins in the hope of repenting, seeking knowledge and not applying it, practice without ikhlas (sincerity), eating the sustenance of Allah without appreciating Him, not being please with Allah's decree and burying the dead without learning from them."

Thus, in our effort to have increased taqwa we must surround ourselves with company who only seek to please Allah subhana wa ta'ala in speech and in actions. We must also take time to acquire knowledge from the pious of the past and of the present. And finally, we likewise must make an effort to keep company of those who are hungry for knowledge about Allah subhana wa ta'ala and Rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam.