

Essays on Character Building

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A Foundation for Islamic Research and Education

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Foreword

Character-building and personality development are essential for every human being. We must try our best to adhere to high standards of morality even before we become followers of any religion. Universal human values bond us in one fraternity. This book consists of an anthology of short essays that were written with an aim to provide tips to character-building and self-improvement. It is this spiritual advancement that may entitle us to the eternal kingdom of heaven.

More often than not we get lost in the intellectual sphere of religion and end up becoming oblivious to its practical sphere that teaches us to be good human beings. As individuals, we need to constantly strive to improve our character and conduct. What good is religious knowledge if it is not practically adopted in our daily lives? Our attitudes and inclinations need to be continuously polished and purified from stains that soil and spoil them. Dust and rust settles on our hearts and souls. Just as our houses need persistent cleaning, our souls too need cleansing on a regular basis. It is a life-long effort.

I hope and pray that these essays can provide some benefit for the purpose they were written. (Amen)

Shehzad Saleem
Al-Mawrid, 2015

The Cause of Truth

Lord! Make the cause of truth the most cherished thing for us to live and die for. If life, wealth, honour and freedom of expression are under threat, give us the strength to raise our voice against the aggressors. If people are persecuted and tortured for adhering to the truth, bless us with the courage to defend them. If people jeer and make fun of us for upholding the truth, instil in us the patience to politely smile back at them.

Lord! Make us true seekers of the truth. Make us possessed and obsessed with this undertaking. Make this quest and yearning burn in us till our last breath. Let not anything stop or discourage us when the chips are down and there is darkness all around. Let not the love of a near one overcome us in giving a false testimony. Even if our life is at stake, make the love for the truth conquer the fear of death. If seeking the truth inflicts us with worldly failures, make us patient, persistent and consistent to keep going.

Lord! Make us understand that it is the effort undertaken for the cause of truth and to strive to seek the truth that counts – regardless of the consequences.

Lord! Make us live according to what you have declared to be true. Make us forget our own will and make us walk the path of truth marked by you.

Lord! Let there be people among us like Socrates who drink the hemlock for inciting the youth to seek the

truth. Let there be people among us like Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal who in spite of severe physical torture never bend down against the voice of their conscience. Let there be people among us like Galileo who stand for the truth and bear religious persecution.

Let there be people among us who feel the desire to seek the truth burn even more within them with advancing years – who continue this fascinating voyage undaunted and unruffled as long as their eyes can see, ears can hear and minds can ponder:

O Truth!
Thou art crafty and elusive
Thy quest never conclusive
Restless and agitated
We continue unabated
To seek and savour thee
Relish and revere thee
Wherever thou be
Wherever thou be

Nothing but the Truth, Please!

Truthfulness was once a cherished trait. Such was its awe that people would hide their lies and would never dare disclose them. However, today people seldom feel ashamed of telling lies; in fact, many a time they are not even aware that what they are doing comes under its ambit. They proudly mention their feats – some of them falling under shameless lies, at times without realizing the horrible nature of their sin. Even more alarming is the fact that people do not even seem to have the courage to point out such things nor do they make an effort to play a prudent role in correcting and reforming their near ones in this regard.

At times, we misquote the opinions of others and at others, we transmit negative information about a person without checking it out; we chat and gossip and dwell on unfounded facts; We make lame excuses knowing full well that we have no excuse; we sell defective and counterfeit goods without disclosing the reality behind them; we seldom have any qualms in forging the signatures of a friend thinking that the application is merely a sick leave. We even bear false witness to show “faithfulness” to a friend. False birth certificates to admit our children to school, false medical certificates to cover an absence from job, false certificates to make someone a *mahram* to offer as noble a ritual as *hajj*, false degrees to qualify for a position, false identity cards and

passports seem to have become an everyday affair. We summarily make commitments and promises about which we are quite sure at the time of making them that we will never be able to honour them. Often we find lawyers proving the innocence of their client about whom they are sure that he is downright guilty. Students plagiarize their assignments and theses and merrily proxy the presence of their friends. Wrong opinions are given to please friends and flatter bosses. Polytheism is a falsehood imputed to God. What is more, people have concocted Hadīth narratives to inject force in their views. And the list is unending ...!

In these dismal times, when the difference between truth and falsehood has become blurred and the call of one's conscience has been lulled to sleep, speaking the truth is no less than the *jihad* of the tongue. Some tips may help us in being more truthful, more honest and more upright:

1. We should try to become true seekers of the truth – and cherish it whenever and wherever we find it. If truth becomes our prized possession, we will also always like being truthful.

2. We should stop thinking what others will say or think of us. This is because at times we lie to give others a false impression.

3. We should accept the fact that as human beings we can falter. One of the greatest things that induces us to lie is that we should not falter.

4. We should develop respect for blunt people because truth is seldom sweet. If we can bear unpleasant situations, we can bear the brunt of truth.

5. When we lie to people we should confess before God and also apologize to the aggrieved party.

6. Whenever we lie, we should impose a fine on ourselves and gradually increase this fine if the habit becomes more pronounced so that a fear of a heavy penalty may impede us.

7. We should avoid situations which tempt us to lie and misstate. We are the best judge of our own selves and know our weaknesses. We know best when situations can arise which may lure us to lie.

8. We should prize the state of guilt-consciousness whenever it arises for it is an impediment and a hindrance to lying.

9. Speaking the truth requires courage, and this courage can only be attained when we fear God alone.

10. Fasting is a very good training for telling the truth. A person however much of a liar he is will never be dishonest to God while fasting by secretly eating or drinking.

Finally, the words "I shall speak the truth and nothing but the truth" should be the motto of our life instead of being an undertaking while testifying in a court.

Gratitude

The favours of God are uncountable. If ever we try to make a comprehensive list of them, we will soon realize that it is a futile task. Unfathomable is God's mercy and innumerable are His blessings. If a person can eat two meals a day, has a shelter to live in, clothes to wear, a healthy body, the opportunity to get education and friends and family to turn to, he can count himself to be one of the luckiest persons on the globe. However, we seldom acknowledge the blessings of God; we often take them for granted and only when we are stripped of them do we realize what we always had. Our ungrateful attitude often leads us to depression and frustration; we brood and complain and show pessimism; we condemn others and become jealous of their happiness; we are seldom happy even when some good comes our way because we are always looking towards people who are blessed with more favours than us.

Here are some measures which may help us become more grateful to God.

We should specially plan to take out time every day to reflect on the blessings we have received from God. We should try to imagine our life without some of them. For example, we can reflect what we would have to go through if we did not have eyes or were deaf, lame or mentally retarded.

We should realize that we were never entitled to the

favours we have been blessed from God. They are purely a gift of God. We should contemplate that if God has given us such favours, He can also take them away from us whenever He wants to. So, we must not be indifferent to people around us who are inflicted with any calamity. Fortunes can reverse any time and if God wants, He can take away his blessings and reduce us to indigence.

We should always look at people who are less blessed than us. If we look around, we are bound to find so many people who are deprived of what we ourselves have. With this will come the appreciation of the favours we have and which we take for granted.

Finally, we must realize that perhaps the greatest way to express our gratitude to God is to share our favours and blessings with others. If we do so, we will soon come to realize that sharing them will make their treasures grow and make us spiritually satisfied individuals.

Forgiveness

God is Ever Merciful and we always expect that He will deal mercifully with us and forgive our mistakes even if we falter again and again. But often we do not show mercy to others. There are instances which warrant clemency on our part but we choose to become callous instead. If a person commits a mistake accidentally or does so in ignorance and forgetfulness, we still scold and punish him. Similarly, at times, we become harsh and unforgiving even after a person has made amends and is genuinely sorry for his bad behaviour. Sometimes, we do not forgive a person even after we have taken revenge. At other times, we castigate someone for a small mistake or chide him much more than his mistake calls for. Similarly, at times, we adopt an unforgiving attitude towards a person who comes forward and confesses his mistake even before it comes to our notice. No doubt, all these are instances which warrant clemency and compassion from us. But we become callous, cruel and ruthless.

The Qur'ān says that though a person can avenge the wrong inflicted on him by someone, yet forgiving and forgetting this wrong will earn great reward and indeed the pleasure of the Almighty.

Perhaps the most effective way to become a forgiving and forbearing person is to keep a constant and watchful eye on one's own faults and blemishes. We expect God

and our fellow human beings to be magnanimous towards us by forgiving our faults. So we should be all the more ready to forgive the faults of others.

However, there can be instances which warrant an unforgiving attitude on our part. For example if a person is not sorry for his mistake and repeatedly commits the same mistake. Similarly, if a person does not realize his mistake and in fact shows arrogance in this regard, we need not show mercy or compassion. We may do likewise if a person continues to show carelessness and indifference in realizing that he has done something wrong.

Perhaps, the real test in this regard is to correctly and judiciously choose the instances which merit our forgiveness and those which do not.

Courage

Courage is an enviable trait. It is also elusive because mustering courage requires courage. Instances which call for courage abound:

Courage is needed not only to speak the truth but also to support the weak who speak the truth.

Courage is also required to point out the faults of loved ones whose anger we fear.

Courage is also needed to admit one's faults; without courage we cannot say no to questions we have no answer to and without courage we cannot ask questions we are afraid to ask and which may open up new knowledge frontiers for us.

Facing the trials of life requires courage.

Forgiving others also needs courage.

To never give up in the face of adversity also requires a captain courageous.

Saying no to commitments we very well know we will not be able to honour also needs courage.

Refraining from venting anger on the weak asks for loads of courage.

Finally, most feats of physical courage spring from the moral courage within.

If courage is elusive and the instances to exercise it also are plentiful, how can we then acquire this enviable trait? Some measures may be helpful in this regard.

1. The opposite of courage is fear and if we want to be

courageous we need to conquer our fears. Perhaps the best way of conquering our fears is to fear God alone and make other fears subservient to His fear. If the love of God and love of the cause of God take root in us, if the love of the truth is more than the love of any other thing and if we ourselves try to be honest and morally upright, this will hopefully instil courage in us.

2. We should also look for people in our society who are courageous. If possible we should befriend such individuals and seek their company. It is a common experience that a person gets inspired by remaining near such people. Every now and then, even in our own society and surroundings, we do get to know of such people. It is only a question of remaining on the lookout for such individuals.

3. We should also try to gather anecdotes of people of the past which reflect courage. One receives motivation from such tales. We know that there were people in the past who stood up to and never gave up even when faced with repeated adversity. They wrote tales of courage from the way they led their lives. People like Mālik ibn Anas and Ibn Taymiyah, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Shāh Wali Ullāh, Socrates and Galileo were nothing but courage personified. They adhered diligently to the views they held correct and no amount of persecution could waver them from their stance.

Overcoming Selfishness

Many a time, we end up being selfish and self-centred. Seldom do we look beyond our needs and interests and seldom do the needs and plight of others bother us. Living for others is now the motto of only a few noble souls. We fail to realize that while selfishness keeps the mind under constant pressure, selflessness keeps it serene.

Instances of our selfishness are at times subtle and at times blatant. We are selfish when we do not give time to our children, our parents and our loved ones; we are also selfish when we do not shower praises our contemporaries deserve; not solving the problems of others when we very well can also falls in this ambit; not spending on the needy for fear of ending up poor is also a selfish act; we are selfish when we do not realize that a wedding function or festivity might bother our neighbours; we are also selfish in not supplicating for others as much and as frequently as we can; a thing as trivial as smiling to make someone's day too at times does not cross our mind.

Selfishness, it seems, is deeply ingrained in us and we need a constant effort to get the better of it. Perhaps the starting point to combat it is to start with not so difficult a task: we can begin by just looking around our house to find things which will never be needed by us and which are totally redundant. Experience shows that if one looks

with such an eye, one ends up with loads and loads of such things. Parting ways with them should not be very difficult as these things have little or no use for us in the first place.

Some of the following tips may help us further in this effort:

1. We should stop taking credit for good deeds we do, and in fact hide these deeds from others thinking that God knows them and He will duly reward us.

2. We should take up some voluntary work and try to spend time, effort and our skills for others.

3. We should save money every month specially to use it for the welfare of the needy. This money should be over and above the designated amount God has imposed on us.

4. Reading inspirational stories of selfless people and spending time in their company if one is lucky enough to have them around helps a lot.

5. A selfish motive may be of help here: we can forget our own pain if we become selfless. When we live and work for others, it makes us see how better off we are than so many others and this makes us thankful and satisfied souls.

Humility

Humility is perhaps the quintessence of all human values. It is the recognition of the fact that only God is great and the rest are meek and weak before Him. In other words, it is acknowledging the reality.

If we want to cultivate and strengthen this trait in us, we must watch out for things which are its antithesis or are detrimental to it. Although our conscience is enough to guide us in this matter, yet some blatant attitudes which are counter to humility may well remain in our minds. Thus when we make fun of others, do not let others speak, take credit for things we never did, boast of our achievements, do not take the initiative in greeting others, do not apologize even after realizing our mistake, walk and make gestures in an arrogant way, do not thank God enough, show conceit on our lineage and status, do not invite poor relatives to our banquets, splash our solo photographs all over house walls, put up a show of piety and religiosity, do not admit our faults, deliberately deny the truth and show self-righteousness, we are in fact doing things which are against humility and modesty.

Some practical measures may help to inculcate humility in us. Here are some of them:

1. We should stop claiming credit for the good things we do.
2. We must realize that all our talents and assets are a gift of God and He can take them away any time He

wants to.

3. We should highlight even small achievements and qualities of others.

4. We should not buy and use things which reflect status.

5. We must understand our limitations. No matter how talented, rich, powerful or beautiful a person may be, there are always people who have these traits to a more pronounced extent.

6. We must learn to confess our faults to God and make amends for what we have done wrong.

7. We must keep an eye on our own faults and shortcomings for the more we realize them the more lowly opinion we will hold about ourselves.

8. We must listen more than we talk. This gives others the impression that we do not want to impose ourselves on them.

9. We must give others the benefit of the doubt in situations where a better interpretation of a person's attitude can be made.

10. We should avoid making sweeping statements. More often than not, they reflect arrogance.

These are some suggestions that may help engender humility in us.

Sympathy

Sympathy is a trait that should surge from us like a gushing fountain. Like a mother's love for her child, it should be spontaneous and impulsive. Seeing a person in distress should perturb and agitate us. Even if we are helpless to do anything practical to redress the situation, concern should pour out from us and anxiety should stir us up. We too should writhe in agony – as if we ourselves were going through it. If such a situation does not affect us in any way, then surely there is something terribly wrong. We should then make a positive effort to awaken this dormant trait.

We can revive and enhance the radiance of this trait in ourselves by simply opening our eyes to the world around us.

We can learn sympathy from the prophets of God who were an embodiment of this attribute. They were selfless well-wishers of their people. They wanted to secure their people from the wrath of God. What greater an expression of sympathy than to awaken people from their deep slumber and to prepare them for the kingdom of heaven?

We can learn sympathy from a mother; how she continues to wait on her children and serve their needs even when this means sacrificing her own needs, forsaking her own comfort and giving up her own priorities.

We can learn sympathy from individuals who, risking

their own lives, attend to the sick and wounded both in times of peace and war.

And if all this is not enough to inculcate or enhance this trait in us we may think of a selfish motive: being sympathetic and kind to others makes us forget our own worries. It gives us peace of mind which is so elusive a thing these days.

And of course instances at which we need to show sympathy abound:

Attending persistently to sick relatives and friends; treating pets and beasts of burden with utmost humanity; doing whatever can be done for those afflicted with some calamity and praying to God if nothing else can be done; using our influence to help those in distress; not forsaking sinners for they need sympathy the most; treating those subservient to us especially servants with extreme kindness and affection; merely lending an ear to a person going through some agony; supporting the oppressed against the wicked; lending a hand to the old, the disabled and the handicapped; ignoring the weaknesses of others; welcoming guests wholeheartedly; tending vigilantly to plants ... of course there is no end to this list.

May God grant us the courage and will to overcome any shortcoming that we may have in being sympathetic.

Pretension and Pomposity

Pretension is a human weakness and at times has such a subtle garb that one gets afflicted with it without realizing. However, even its blatant forms seldom stop people from indulging in it.

More often than not our conversation and mannerisms reflect pomposity. Our gait and appearance too depict this trait. Affluence, fame, high status and physical attributes often lead us to bragging and boasting. We like to mention our contacts with rich and influential people; we like to boast about the posh locality we may be living in; we like to brag about our foreign tours and children studying abroad; at times, every room of our house will display our photographs with dignitaries and high-ups; we often publicly mention our staggering asset and property list; using expensive brands to show off has become quite normal; manipulating a conversation between friends so that an opportune moment is provided to boast what we have is a graver form of this human weakness; false modesty too is no less a compounded form of it; putting up a show of religiosity may strike us as unusual but it does not take much effort to see how this abounds in our societies. Amounts spent in charity, *'umrahs* done, *nafals* offered, *tasbīh* beads read become a shameful source of showing off.

What must then be done to check this tendency and proclivity human nature is so prone to? A number of

things come to mind but perhaps none more effective than the following two:

1. A primary motive to show-off is to impress others and get noticed. This is also a human instinct. The best way to curb is to modify its direction. Instead of impressing others and trying to catch their attention, we should make an effort to impress God and to catch His attention by trying to do deeds that please Him. And the more these deeds are brought to His notice *alone* the better the objective achieved.

2. Talents, abilities and blessings – some of the things which induce us to show off – should be regarded as a bestowal from God. Without His will and intention we could never have gained them. We are thus the custodians of these blessings and we should think that we have been blessed with them to share them with others and not to brag about them. Sharing them with others in fact is the proper way to express gratitude to God on His graciousness.

Taming the Tongue

“Wounds inflicted by the tongue are deeper than the wounds inflicted by the sword,” is an adage that we have often read and also experienced. These wounds cut deep into the heart and are not easily cured. Even after years, a person may feel their pain. At times, these wounds are caused inadvertently and at others in a planned and cold-blooded way. However, whatever be their nature as human beings it is our foremost duty to make an all out effort to control the tongue.

Abusing and cursing others, making fun of them, lying, misreporting facts, backbiting, slandering others, swearing false oaths and bearing false witness, lustful chatting, bragging, enticing others to sin, speaking disrespectfully, expressing arrogance, gossiping, giving sweeping statements and being judgemental, teasing, flattering and even talking incessantly are some prominent areas where restraining and containing the tongue is required.

The first step to overcome such blemishes is to realize that they are blemishes. Realizing faults means that the job is half done. The other half requires a concerted and sustained effort.

The starting point after this realization is to plan before hand to hold back the tongue from its evil habits or letting it enter into a frenzied state; more often than not, this is due to some reaction that arises within us.

Obviously, blemishes of the tongue can be classified in two categories.

Blemishes which are habitual and do not involve rage: like lying, backbiting and misreporting facts etc.

Blemishes which occur in rage, like abusing, screaming and shouting.

Blemishes of the tongue which are habitual need a concerted effort. They can only be overcome if a person makes up his mind to root them out by realizing that they are grave sins and not only besmear one's inner-self but many a time cause hurt, deceit and damage to others. These blemishes are a shame to humankind and bring disrepute to it. We should first enlist all these blemishes and work out a plan to eradicate them one by one. We should pray to God to prod and intimate us right before we commit a sin of the tongue and then the courage and strength to overcome it. Being prodded is essential because in blemishes committed as a habit we often are not even aware of what we are doing. The next step is to apply brakes. This needs will power to stop short of entering the highway that leads to excesses of the tongue. It may not work every time and it is not meant to work every time. We are not angels and neither can we ever be. There has to be some pilferage. We have to realize that we cannot be good all the time. However, we must try to be good most of the time. The first target is not humanly achievable; the second one is and it is to realize it that we should work for. A daily plan of self-accountability is needed for improved results. We must take time out every day to think over the blemishes we have committed with our tongues in the previous twenty four hours and then resolve to do better in the next twenty four hours.

Blemishes of the tongue which occur in rage need prior planning as well. When overcome with rage, we need to delay our reaction. Merely deferring our response at that time can go a long way in reducing the harm caused. Taking a deep breath, taking a glass of water, changing one's posture or location can help a lot. If our anger is caused by some person, we need should try to bring to mind the good qualities in that person. We can vent our rage by uttering whatever we have in mind in seclusion. Fasting helps to restrain rage and hence the misuse of the tongue. Even after adopting all these measures, it will still take time to overcome this habit and it will not go overnight. So during this time if one does lose temper and is not able to restrain his or her tongue, then one thing that should be persistently done is offering an unconditional apology to the aggrieved party.

Are We Ready to Die?

We very well know that none of us is going to live forever; all of us are destined to die; the icy hands of death will spare none. The young and the old young, the sick and the healthy, the rich and the poor are in equal danger to become its prey anytime anywhere. If death is so imminent and impending, should not we be very well prepared for it? Merely realizing that it can come anytime is not sufficient; some practical steps need to be taken so that not only we do meet our Lord such that He is pleased with us but also we do not leave our family and heirs in any spot of bother.

For a God-fearing person, the foremost preparation for death is that he leads a life of virtue and shuns vice. He never becomes persistent on a sin and whenever he is soiled by its stains, he immediately washes them by sincerely repenting before God. He has to maintain this priority all his life as far as he can.

Now besides this God-fearing attitude that is constantly required from us as a preparation for death, there are some other spheres as well that need vigilance and attention. Some of these include the following.

1. A will should be made for the assets and wealth that is being left behind. A person may be sensible enough that the will made should not in any way that infringe the rights of the actual heirs. In this regard, as directed by the Qur'ān, Muslim husbands must make a will in

favour of their wives regarding their maintenance in case they become widows. A will can also be made in favour of the heirs in case a particular heir has done some special service or is in some special need.¹

2. A person may own intellectual property like books, magazines, websites – in particular if they are a means of financial return. A clear view about these assets should be documented and given to the heirs.

3. A person may be involved in financial obligations and transactions known only to him. This includes borrowing, lending as well as business and work liabilities. A list of all these financial obligations must be documented and a responsible person must be directed about what he must do about them.

4. A person may have in his or her possession important documents and papers like licenses, agreements, cheque books, old bills etc. Similar is the case of keys and passwords. A list of all these should be made and the heirs guided about them.

5. In case a person wants to, he or she should also make a will to donate body organs that may prove useful for others. This is an act of great virtue.

6. Family relics and artefacts can also be in a person's possession. Their care-taking and smooth transfer to the next generation must also be thought of beforehand.

7. A person should be sensitive about body cleanliness and hygiene. His or her mortal remains will soon be in the hands of people who will bathe these remains, enshroud them and consign them to the grave. A lack of

1. This of course is a will that is not on the basis of familial ties which is forbidden since in this case shares have been specified by the Almighty.

physical cleanliness may make the bathers form an embarrassing opinion about the deceased.

These are some of the important areas about which we all should write a memorandum and a will as soon as we can and lodge them in the safe-keeping of a trusted one. Of course, as long as we live we can keep making changes in the will once made depending upon the circumstances that may arise.

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Anger Management

Anger is a human emotion that can wreak havoc. It can ruin relationships in the blink of an eye and hurt people irreparably. The tongue can inflict wounds deeper than the sword, as they say. In a few moments, irreversible damage can be inflicted. So extreme this emotion becomes at times that a person physically abuses others and even goes as far as killing people.

The pinnacle of human dignity is to show patience and restraint when the adrenaline of anger pumps within us. We need to realize that if things are not going our way, then they are going God's way. So why should a true believer vent his frustration when faced with unexpected situations? It is essential that a concerted plan be chalked out to manage our anger. Suggested below are some short term and long term measures to restrain this monster. Both these types of measures work in tandem and attention needs to be paid to both.

As far as the short term measures are concerned, they primarily relate to delaying our immediate reaction and response. They include:

- i. Changing of posture: for example, if we are sitting, we should stand up and vice versa.
- ii. Drawing deep breaths: it is recommended that we take ten deep breaths.
- iii. Repeating relaxing phrases: we should slowly repeat a calming word or phrase such as: "relax" and

“take it easy,” while we are breathing deeply.

iv. Drinking a glass of water.

v. Changing location: thus only leaving the place where one has experienced this surge in temper helps.

vi. Finding a physical release: It is suggested that “an anger workout” be done. Thus hitting a mattress with a tennis racket or slapping the sofa with a bat or punching a pillow releases the pressure built within us.

vii. Talking to God: some of the above measures may not completely release our anger, and in spite of controlling it for the time being one may find its surge arising later. In such cases, it is best to talk with God and share our pain and anguish with Him. Inevitably, we will feel relieved.

Some long term measures which can be useful to manage anger are as follows.

i. Figuring out what generally triggers our anger viz our relatives and friends as well as situations: once we are able to calmly evaluate these triggers, we should try our best that we stay away from scenarios that cause these triggers.

ii. Giving ourselves positive messages: this is particularly useful when anger is caused by a person. In this regard, we should always look at the qualities of that person, and any benefit we may have received from him or her.

iii. Learning to relax in our lives: if we take regular time out in our daily routines to relax and enjoy we tend to become individuals who in general are not stressed out; a relaxed body has relaxed nerves that provide a tremendous buffer in critical situations.

iv. Visualizing our response: we should imagine and visualize what we should do when the crunch time

comes. We should talk to ourselves that when it happens how we will react and what we will say. This may save us from spur of the moment flare ups which really can cause great harm and havoc.

v. Following exemplary people: we human beings are weak by nature and need encouragement and inspiration from role models. It is really worthwhile to read stories and anecdotes of people whose exemplary patience and forbearance in testing times make them unlikely victors.

vi. Reminding ourselves that no one is perfect: anger most of the time results because of various imperfections in life that we come across. We should continue to remind our selves that we have to live with imperfections – foremost with one’s own and remember that these may be a cause of anger for others. So if others tolerate us we should reciprocate this attitude.

vii. Learning to forgive: forgiveness mitigates anger. We expect God to forgive us for our own blemishes; all the more reason that we should forgive others in return for their faults and shortcomings.

These measures may prove helpful in restraining our fury. However, in spite of trying hard to contain anger, we humans can still err and lose our cool. And when we do, two things that befit us are:

i. We must always apologize to the aggrieved person.

ii. We should impose a monetary fine on ourselves and then spend the collected money in the interest and welfare of the aggrieved person.

Here is what some prophets of God say in this regard:

Muhammad (sws) is reported to have said that a strong person is not the one who defeats his rival in a dual; rather a strong person is the one who controls himself

when he is angry.¹

Jesus (sws) is reported to have said: “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you.”²

David (sws) is reported to have said: “Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing.”³

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1. Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 3rd ed., vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1987), 2267, (no. 5763).

2. Matthew, 5:44.

3. Psalms, 37:8.

Charity: Points to Ponder

To give in charity is a very coveted human trait. Looking after the need of others is an acknowledgement of God's favours on one's self. It is also our unwritten obligation towards the society. People who are sensitive to the needs of others will find others sensitive to their own needs. The pinnacle of this charitable attitude towards others is to spend on them even if we ourselves are in need. The Qur'ān while extolling believers says: "Those who, in spite of being needy, give preference to the needs of others." (59:9)

However, at times spending in charity is marred by blemishes and shortcomings. We need to be very careful about them. Some of the common ones are:

i. At times we condescendingly remind people of our charitable behaviour towards them and in this way hurt their self-esteem. The Qur'ān has emphatically stopped us from this and said: "Believers! Do not mar your charity by reminders of generosity and by hurting [the recipients]." (2:264)

ii. Many a time we show off and even blatantly publicize the amount we spend in charity. This obviously is very detrimental to our own inner-purification and spiritual advancement.

iii. More often than not we shy away from giving in charity if we do not have a substantial amount; we may be going through stringent circumstances and can only

afford a meagre amount to give in charity. We should realize that it is not the amount that counts; it is the concern and capacity that we have that counts. If our capacity is to give a few pennies, we should not shy away. It is our responsibility to look after the needs of others in proportion to our own financial status. The Qur'ān states: "Those who spend in all circumstances whether they are in ease or in hardship." (3:134)

iv. There are instances in which we do not take pains to find out the most deserving recipients of our charity.

At times, we do not realize that people among our friends and relatives are in need while we spend huge amounts in charity by giving to various charities not directly related to us. It is the natural right of our close ones that if they are in need they should be the foremost recipients of our charity.

Similarly, there may be people around us who in spite of appearing financially sound are in fact in deep financial stress; however, their self-esteem does not let them make fuss of the situation and they conduct themselves in a dignified manner. It is our responsibility to find out such people; it only requires a little insight and careful observation. The Qur'ān points out: "This [spending] is for the poor who are stranded in the cause of God and are not able to travel in the land to earn their livelihood. The ignorant take them for men of wealth on account of their modest behaviour. You can recognize them by their faces – they are not annoyingly insistent in begging." (2:273)

v. At times, we end up scolding a beggar or a person who asks for monetary help. This is something very despicable. If a person is not in a position to help, he can still show sympathy and then withdraw in a dignified

way. The Qur'ān says: "A kind word and forgiveness [at unpleasant instances] is better than charity followed by inflicting hurt." (2:262)

These are some points that we need to ponder while spending in charity. They often go unnoticed. Let us resolve to be more cautious and more vigilant about them.

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Turning Foes into Friends

We live among friends and foes. There are those who are fond of us and are very affectionate, and there are others who are jealous of us and conspire to make us sink in life. Some of these foes are covert while some can be easily identified. We really feel annoyed and frustrated at their attitude. But can we turn foes into friends?

The answer can be in the negative and can also be in the affirmative.

In the negative, if care is not exercised and we end up responding in a negative way and become worse foes to our foes than they are to us.

In the affirmative, if our guideline is the Qur'ānic verse: Retaliate evil with that which is better, and he who is your foe will become your dearest friend. But none will acquire this except those who patiently endure; none will acquire this except those who are truly fortunate. (41:34-35).

In other words, if with patience and endurance, perseverance and forbearance we keep on doing good turns to our foes and adversaries, it can melt their hearts and turn them into our dearest buddies. Moral victory is what we should aim for, as this subjugates hearts and conquers egos. Meeting our foes with a bright smile, extending out a warm hand to them, greeting them with enthusiasm and treating them with respect are just some

starters of this journey.

Giving them gifts at opportune moments, hiding their faults when others want to highlight them, praising their abilities when others want to play them down, helping them in times of difficulty when few are there for them are the next steps of this journey.

While doing our part by adopting these measures, we must also turn to God and pray for our foes. We must seek His help and invoke Him to soften their hearts and make them mend their ways. And more than that seek His help to identify our own flaws and mend our own ways.

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Leap out for Others!

We are often occupied with our own selves. Our desires, our fears, our ideals, our worries, our comforts, our families and the list goes on and on. Though it is certainly not wrong to think for our own selves, what can really be painful is to not look beyond us. It is outright self-centeredness and a cause of serious concern if we are not even able to detect the pangs of pain around us. A parent in distress, an employee in discomfort, a friend in agony, a neighbour in anguish, an ailing acquaintance, a relative in grief, a pet in pain, a plant in need of water – these are some situations which require our immediate attention. We must look about and be on the look out for such scenarios. Our minds' antennae should catch signals of grief and agony found around us and our eyes and ears should track down the misery and sorrow that lie in our vicinity.

If we are vigilant in this regard, then the next step is action: to do whatever we can to redress such situations: financially, physically and emotionally. However, if nothing of this sort can be done, there still are some steps that we can take:

- i. Hear out the person in grief; it will lessen his burden.
- ii. Communicate this grief to others; maybe they will be able to help.
- iii. Request others, if they too are helpless, to communicate this to their own circle of friends

iv. Beseech and invoke the Almighty from the depth of our heart and soul. It is said that at times prayers can move mountains!

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Secret to Inner Peace!

Tensions and worries seem to be an essential part of our lives. Strained finances, ill-health, failure in studies, fiasco in business ventures, fatal accidents, kidnappings, house burglaries, tragic deaths, handicapped children, unfulfilled desires, feeling of deprivation ... and the list goes on. It becomes very difficult at times to cope with these sufferings in life. And then troubles seldom come singly. They come in clusters and then continue to come. Relentless and ruthless they become as a result.

The consequence more often than not is frustration and depression. Inner peace and mental calm are lost. The agony of life stares us in the eye. How can we tackle such a scenario?

Besides a strong relationship with God, a three pronged strategy may help us win inner peace:

1. Let us always keep a track of our blessings. The favours of God on each of us are numerous – in fact limitless. A list of these blessings will easily outnumber the troubles we may be facing. We tend to lose sight of them and take them for granted. So it is recommended that we continue to count our blessings each day. The best occupation while sitting idle is to rehearse and review what we have. This will give us the strength and resilience to fight the miseries of life. Above all, it will bless us with that inner calm so missing in our lives today.

2. Let us set before ourselves a mission in life. If we have an objective in life and go all out towards achieving it, worries and suffering will not bother us as much – simply because we will have little time for them. A person who is focused on a cause is so deeply involved in realizing his mission that worries he may have – but seldom will they get the better of him. His commitment and devotion to a cause will contribute to his inner peace.

3. Let us start sharing the woes of people around us by reaching out to them and helping them as much as we can in their difficulties and worries. Knowing about the grief of others lessens our own grief. It gives solace to the mind that we are better off than so many. Lending a hand to others makes us contributing individuals to the society and makes us look at life in a positive way. Instead of brooding on what we do not have, we should see what others do not have. This will make us thankful to God and give us mental peace.

These then are three therapies that are the key to inner peace. Summing up:

The first of these can be called: Gratitude Therapy.

The second can be called: Mission Therapy

The third can be called: Reaching-Out Therapy

Saintly Sinners

As human beings, sinning and erring come to us naturally and at times persistently. Frenzy gets the better of us and we end up committing sins that we may feel ashamed of later. Though this is unbecoming of us yet if we realize the blemish and immediately turn in penitence to God and make amends, we have been given glad tidings of forgiveness by the Almighty:

It is incumbent upon God to forgive those who commit a sin while being overwhelmed with emotions and then quickly repent. It is they who are forgiven by God. God is All-Knowing and Wise. (4:17)

Sinning continuously, at times, takes us deeper into sin and reduces our inclination to seek forgiveness. If we continue to sin after repeated repentance, we are overcome with frustration and hopelessness. We think that since we are so incorrigible and return to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree in spite of frequent bouts of repentance, how can God forgive such a habitual sinner? It may be worthwhile to note that instilling hopelessness in us is one of the greatest weapons of Satan. In Arabic, his name is Iblīs which means one who has eternally lost hope. Hence, he wants to make all his targets lose hope like him. It is here that we need to stand up after every

fall and take hold of ourselves after every transgression. We must never lose hope in God's mercy even if we sin persistently. The above verse of the Qur'ān says that every time a person repents after being overwhelmed by emotions, God will forgive him. It does not say that this clemency of God is not for persistent sinners.

What thus needs to be understood is that it is not the sin which counts as much as our attitude after it. Like lost sheep that have wandered away from the herd, we need to get back into the herd minded by the supreme shepherd.

Moreover, let us not hate sinners; let us hate their sins. We ourselves are no less sinners. Hating sinners will be like hating our own selves. It also is worthwhile to note that however much we may try, we cannot rid ourselves from sins entirely. Saints we may become for a while but not forever. Even saints can slip because to falter and err comes to us naturally. So let us behave as humans.

Finally, in choosing to become saints or sinners, let us choose to become saintly sinners: whenever we sin, we should feel embarrassed, repent before God and go on to make amends wherever possible.

The Battle for Honesty Continues!

It is not easy to remain honest in a society where dishonesty is the name of the game, a society in which virtue and vice were once distinguishable and when people perpetrated evil they would feel ashamed about it; in fact, they would try their best to hide their evil ways. Alas! Today the once distinct line between virtue and vice has become blurred. People now openly indulge in wrongs and even have the audacity to boast about them. Illegal gratification, dishonesty, corruption, cheating and lying have become such common practices that hardly are they looked down upon:

O Judgement thou art fled to British beasts!
And men have lost their reason

What then should be done to counter these wrongdoings going on at such a massive scale? Should we sit and watch and let the tide sweep us away? What about our future generations? Should we allow them to fall prey to these monstrous evils? Should we not even put up some resistance? Surely, we cannot be so spineless as to let the flood of falsehood continue unabated and unchecked! Who knows that if we stand against it in the form of a human chain, we may be able to turn the tide with a collective effort?

So, let us declare war against these dissolute practices:

for their nature is diabolic, their fibre fiendish and their breed sinister. Let us launch an offensive against Satan and his agents. Let us try to become exemplars of morality and let this be our *only* weapon in this uprising. Lighting our own candle of truth in the desolate darkness that prevails can be the starting point. Protecting its flame from adverse currents should then become our mission.

Let us make a solemn commitment that we will be honest even if others are dishonest to us and that we will always follow the voice of our conscience. Let us then come forward and light up the path of honesty and justice, truth and righteousness – for whatever it takes. Yes, for whatever it takes!

Two Tough Trials

As soon as we reach mental maturity, we are faced with two tough and perpetual trials: one relates to the heart, one to the eye. At times, choices have to be made every second. The sequence is relentless and needs tremendous will power which only a strong relationship with God can provide.

In the trial that relates to the heart, a person is faced with the ordeal of lending ear to the calls of his conscience – if it is vibrant and alive. Good and evil are innately found in his nature. He does not need any external help to distinguish between them. However, help and push is certainly needed to make the right choice. That a person prefers good to evil at most instances is not easy at all. It is indeed an exacting trial.

In the trial that relates to the eye, a person must guard his gaze from taking undue liberty when viewing members of the opposite gender. In an era, where ogling is normal practice and staring at physical attributes a common norm, it needs a concerted effort to not let our eyes go astray. Like the trial of the heart, this too is a perpetual and unrelenting trial.

The purpose of religion is inner purification and spiritual advancement. If we succeed in these two trials we purify ourselves and become entitled to the eternal kingdom of God in the Hereafter.

Let us make a resolute effort every day to consciously strive to succeed in these trials!

Discovering our Inner Talent

Every human being on this earth has some innate talent and ability which is more pronounced than the rest. In fact, it is this talent which shapes his aptitude for certain tasks. This talent and ability can become formidable if it is recognized at the right time. This is because talents are generally found in raw form and need to be groomed and developed.

Unfortunately, neither our parents nor our educational system generally help in discovering our latent talents. The result is that people deprive themselves of their own inner potential. Instead of discovering them, more time is spent on wishful thinking, day dreaming and making castles in the air.

Yet, it is never too late. Whatever our age, we can begin the exercise to discover our inner talent. Here are ten questions which may help us in determining it.

1. What do you think you are naturally good at?
2. How would you use a gift of a handsome amount of money if it is given to you to be spent for a cause, issue or problem?
3. What activities make you lose track of time?
4. Which qualities of a person inspire you?
5. If you had to teach something, what would you teach?
6. If you were to give a message to a large group of

people what would it be?

7. Who are your heroes and why?

8. People say: “Oh, you are so good at ...”

9. What do people typically ask you for help in?

10. In which fields / subjects have you won praise or awards?

Discovering our inner talent can radically transform our lives. Let's begin today!

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“Thank you” Culture

“Thank you” are two very powerful words. When said at the right time, they build confidence, enhance relationships and engender love and affection. People need to be appreciated for what they do for us. In fact, acknowledging their good gestures needs spontaneous expression. It is an unwritten obligation on us. It should be discharged magnanimously and graciously. While saying thank you to those who have done a good turn to us is imperative, words of gratitude even to those who are supposed to do what they are doing is a sign of courtesy and civility.

And there so many people we owe our gratitude to and that too persistently because of what we have received from them continuously.

Let us continue to thank our parents for the time, effort and resources they have spent on us.

Let us continue to thank our teachers for what we have learnt from them.

Let us continue to thank our children for bringing joy and happiness to our homes.

Let us continue to thank our siblings and friends for being there for us when we need them.

Let us continue to thank our employees for making our organizations prosper.

And then there are those instances in which we must show courtesy by expressing our gratitude whenever

they arise:

We must thank people who listen to our woes even though they cannot solve them.

We must thank those who hold the door for us and let us pass through.

We must thank the person who stops his car to give us the way.

Let us make a conscious effort to initiate this “thank you” culture in our lives to all those whom we are indebted to. And let us be persistent in this!

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“Sorry” Culture

To human beings erring and sinning comes naturally. Blunders and mistakes emanate from us every now and then. At times, these wrongs are advertent and at others they are inadvertent. Sometimes, when we try to avoid making a mistake, we end up making more. Yet when we realize our mistake, we must make amends and also apologize to the aggrieved person.

It is not the sin that counts as much as our attitude after it: it is essential to apologize and say sorry to the person we have caused any harm to. Making amends goes without saying. Saying sorry is never easy. It makes us small in the eyes of others. Yet it elevates us in the eyes of God.

We must also realize that saying sorry for a blunder is the requisite of accepting the truth. Acknowledging a mistake is acknowledging the truth. We have to be true seekers and accepters of the truth.

Let us be more sensitive in this regard and make it our constant practice to say sorry to the aggrieved person!

The Decorum of Criticizing Others

Criticizing others can prove destructive for them. It can also be very constructive and can achieve the required goal if a certain decorum and etiquette is followed. Some aspects that need our consideration in this regard are mentioned below:

1. Every criticism should begin with the acknowledgement of the good traits in the person we intend to criticize. It will engender confidence and make us stand among the well-wishers of that person.

2. Criticism should be directly communicated to the person we intend to criticize instead of talking to others. Such indirect comments may hurt that person's feelings when they become known and also create unnecessary gossip.

3. Criticism should not be based on hearsay and unfounded information. It should be based on well-investigated facts and concrete data.

4. It is inappropriate to criticize a person for a mistake at the very time he is making it. This often creates a reaction in a person and also does not allow him the opportunity to calmly reflect on the substance of the critique.

5. Over-criticism or repetitive criticism should be avoided. More often than not it proves counter-productive to the very objective we have in mind.

6. Criticism should not be couched in harsh words and

foul language. The most substantive criticism loses its impact if it is not conveyed in a polite manner. People shy away from callous words.

7. The timing of criticism is very important. We must find opportune moments – moments when a person's heart is inclined and his mind is receptive to critiques.

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Benefiting from Criticism

Facing criticism is not easy. It hurts our ego and self-pride. But should we let our ego get in the way? If the critique is sound, we must acknowledge it and change our stance. It is a corollary of seeking the truth. Our affiliation is with the truth wherever it lies. Moreover, if the criticism relates to our conduct and character, it is an opportunity to improve and enhance ourselves as human beings.

At times criticism is couched in harsh words but nevertheless is true and convincing. Such situations are a real test for us. Since unkind words elicit anger, instead of looking at the substance we often react on the unsympathetic style and more often than not end up dismissing the criticism. On such occasions, we must get hold of ourselves and not let such an opportunity go amiss. We must disregard the harshness and focus on the content.

After all it is we who will be the beneficiaries – none else! Let us disregard any harshness in the criticism and treat our true critics as are our benefactors!

Moreover, let us become harsh and stern critics of our own selves. We need to continuously evaluate and re-evaluate our deeds and actions and act upon the calls of our conscience. Self criticism teaches us humility and forgiveness as it makes us realize our faults. Realizing our faults cuts our ego to size and urges us to overlook the faults of others.

Do We have a Spiritual Part of the Day?

We have become a slave to our routines. It is a mechanical life plan that we generally tend to follow. Even praying to God at the appointed times has become a thoughtless process and does not bring the real benefits it should. Seldom do we get the chance to take time out to nourish our spiritual self in a thoughtful way. The need to appoint a spiritual part of the day is even more needed in a life that mostly consists of material parts.

We need more vigilance in this matter because like the body our soul also needs nourishment. A soul which is not nourished in the right way is likely to become weak and prone to superstitions. Just as junk food does nourish our bodies but is unhealthy and a gateway to diseases, similarly, all ungodly things that nourish the soul may make it live but this life will be inflicted with many spiritual ailments.

We need to take time out every day to nurture our spiritual self and care for it just as we do in the case of our physical self.

Besides trying to be more mentally attentive in our prescribed worship rituals, we must seize some moments every day to think about the blessings of God we enjoy, the favours from which many are deprived, helping out people in whatever way we can, gazing at the beauty of mother nature, gazing at the stars at night, reflecting on the immaculate systems and organs of our body,

enjoying living as free individuals of a free country, feeling exhilarated through deep breaths of fresh air, listening to the enchanting sounds of the birds, relaxing in the sun in winters, deliberating on our purpose of existence and that of the world around us the list continues!

Let us be more vigilant towards our spiritual needs!

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Let us Enjoy every Moment of our Lives!

Tensions and worries are a part of our life. Financial stress, disease, hopes dashed to the ground, putting up with a difficult spouse or an unruly child and death of a near one are some of the common sources of our tension. The best way to cope with these tensions is to accept that they are an integral part of life. God wants to test the attitude we adopt when troubles come our way. He wants to see if we are still grateful for the favours He has blessed us with or end up complaining and brooding.

We can literally enjoy and savor every moment of our life if we follow some tips.

1. Every calamity that befalls us has some good concealed in it, which we may not know at the time it comes our way. It does feel hard but out of darkness emerges light and we are stronger than before. It is here that we need to trust God and show full faith in Him. Try we must and try we should to tactfully handle every trial that comes our way. But at the same time we must resign to the will of God at this stage because it is this submission which is the essence of religion.

2. We should mentally prepare ourselves that a life of trial awaits us. If one trial goes, the next one will not desist from coming. It is a relentless process. If we mentally accept that this is a happening that is bound to befall us, we will feel less bothered by it and learn to live with it. In fact, live in peace of mind with it.

3. The favours of God we enjoy leave us much to think of what we have than what we do not. His list of favours easily outnumbers His list of trials. So let us keep an eye on this list.

Being happy in happy times is very easy; being happy in difficult ones is not. The former comes naturally and the latter needs a different approach to life. Some of its ingredients have been outlined above.

Let us revisit our attitude to life and enjoy every moment that lies in store for us.

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Tears of Old Parents ... for their Children

When you see us old and in bad shape, bear with us. We need your warmth, company and sympathy.

If we cannot live alone, even a small room in your house with broken furniture would be sufficient.

When we say something childish, do not scold us. Old age is like second childhood

When we repeat the same words again and again, do not get irritated. Our mind has lost its sharpness and our memory fails us often.

If we spill tea on our clothes, do not scold us. It is difficult at times to steadily hold a tea-cup.

If while talking we forget or pause, please be patient. The real thing is not conversation. We only want to find excuses to spend time with you.

When we cannot properly walk, lend us support. It feels as if we are not alone.

When we feel lonely, do take out time for us. Loneliness is killing at times. Staring at the walls and out of the window sometimes gets monotonous.

When we are dependent on you to go to a doctor, do not keep delaying or postponing it. We bring our illness to your notice when we simply cannot bear it.

When are not able to use the technology of modern times such as email, internet, facebook, whatsapp etc, make efforts to teach us. It can help us connect to the world and remain busy.

When we say that we do not want live any more, do not get mad at us. At times, it is difficult to cope with the miseries of old age. Often we do realize later that we should not have said this. So ignore us for our incoherent talk.

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Vows of Children – for their Parents

When you grow old, we promise to look after you and care for you. How can we forget the care and warmth with which you brought us up when we were helpless infants?

If you pause or forget during your conversation, we will be patient. We remember how we used to repeat the same thing over and over again and you would patiently listen and never get irritated.

If you dirty your clothes or spill tea on them, we will never express our anger and will recall the time when we would dirty our clothes every day while playing, and you would happily change and wash them.

It will be a pleasure and honour for us if you choose to live with us. What good is a house if it cannot accommodate you?

Feel free to speak out whatever you have in mind. If you utter something childish, we will never snub you and remember how you showed patience to us when we would blabber in our childhood.

If you would like to go the doctor, it will be our first priority to take you there. We very well know that you only make this demand when you cannot bear your sickness. How can we forget how you spent sleepless nights when we would be sick?

If to remain busy you would like to learn the technology of the modern era such as email, internet,

facebook, whatsapp etc, we will make an effort to teach you. We know how painstakingly you taught us to read, write, eat and change clothes.

Please bless us with your prayers and forgive us for any harsh words that we may have said to you intentionally or unintentionally.

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Vacant Time leads to a Vacant Mind

Time does not wait for any one. It moves swiftly and silently. Those who are able to value time, are valued by time. Those who waste time are in the danger of being wasted by time. A person who is wasted by time is a person who has lost the opportunity to bring out his true potential in this world for his own benefit and for the benefit of others. Every second counts if we take charge of our life. Vacant time leads to a vacant mind and a vacant mind is the devil's play ground. He will lure us in a jiffy and make us traverse terrains that we will be ashamed of.

The most important thing in this regard is to pre-plan activities for vacant periods of the day. We all know that there do come these time slots every day in which we have nothing to do. Instead of killing time or procrastinating, we must think of efficiently utilizing it. Some suggestions that come to mind are:

1. Counting our blessings: we can keep track of the comforts of life that we enjoy and start by naming them one by one in our minds. This will make us thankful individuals.
2. Increasing our vocabulary: a good occupation of utilizing spare time is to pick up a vocabulary book and add more words to our repertoire of words.
3. Hunting for spare things: our houses are replete with things which we know we will never use in the future.

So let us choose to part from them by collecting them and then giving them away.

4. Memorizing: Memorizing verses from our religious scriptures is a very good use of this extra-time. It keeps our minds tuned to God's remembrance.

5. Sympathizing through Social Media: we must keep our eyes open for people who are in distress around us. Picking up the phone, writing an email, sending messages through facebook or whatsapp or other social media applications can be comforting for them and thus a constructive way to pass our free time.

These are some small suggestions that may help us occupying ourselves when we have vacant time.

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Sympathy@SocialMedia.com

If we have a keen eye, we are bound to see and mark people around us who may be suffering or going through a trial in life. Merely listening to them may lessen their burden. However, PERSISTENTLY keeping track of them and sympathizing with them every now and then may less their burden even more. Today's social media has afforded us so many opportunities to keep track of people. We can now quite easily and constantly re-assure people and express our concern for them.

Thus we can, for example, use email, skype, whatsapp, viber, and facebook for this purpose.

Even phones are quite cheap these days. Gone are the days when international calls were expensive.

Helping others may entitle us to receive help from others and also the mercy of God. We need this help and this mercy. We ourselves are weak and mean, wicked and sinful at times. If nothing else, then this selfish motive should egg us on. So let us then use technology to our advantage and make a special effort to remain in constant contact with people who are distressed.

This is a God-sent opportunity. Let us make sympathy@socialmedia.com our motto right from today!

Hearts that Melt

We all must have a heart that melts on hearing about the grief and sorrows of others. We need warm hearts and compassionate souls. This warmth and compassion is already found within us. However, it is lulled to sleep because of the hectic life routines that we generally tend to follow today. Hearts have become hard and emotions have become cold and feelings have gone dead.

We need to awaken the sympathy and compassion found within us. So, what can be done?

We can use our three faculties for this purpose:

- i. Listening
- ii. Reading
- iii. Observing

Thus we should listen to, read about and visit places where people are in misery. This is like going through a workshop to melt our hearts.

Listening to people in distress melts our hearts and re-kindles in us the sentiments of helping them.

Reading about the miseries of people in every-day news boosts our inner compassion.

Visiting old homes, hospitals, hospices and slums provides a natural impetus to the sympathy found within us.

These measures will hopefully melt our hearts and soften our souls.

So, let us make a concerted effort to train our hearts to

melt when they see others in misery!

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Depression – Is it a Vacant Mind’s Disease?

Feeling low and depressed occasionally and periodically is nothing alarming. It is but natural for all of us to be affected by the ups and downs of life. However, what is alarming is that we start living in a state of depression and the low feeling continues to overpower our routine of life. The most despicable and extreme form of this state of dejection and despair is that a person even take’s his life to end the misery.

One of the ways to overcome depression without going to a doctor is to make ourselves very busy in healthy activities. The best thing in this regard is to determine a purpose and mission in life. It is this lack of purpose which gives the vacant mind ample time to brood and worry. We need to get as busy as a bee and work like a beaver. We need to plan every single minute of our life and know exactly, as far as is possible, what to do when.

If we have a purpose in life, we will not have the time to get depressed. Let us find this purpose today and make ourselves useful to our society.

Self-Accountability

As individuals we all have qualities and we all have bad habits and wrong attitudes. Striving to become better individuals and get ridding of our bad traits should be our cherished target. To become a better human being and a better professional in our field, we must set tough and stringent standards for our selves. If we want to succeed in life we must resort to self-accountability.

We must make a list of our bad habits and attitudes and undertake a strong resolve to eradicate or at least reduce their intensity. This will has to be present before any remedial measure can begin.

The best time for this self-accountability is before going to sleep at night each day. We should close our eyes and let the events of the day flash before us. We must then evaluate the sins, vices and mistakes committed. And let us then resolve to not repeat them the next day. We need to continue with this routine every day even if we continue to repeat the same sins and mistakes again and again. Life is a constant struggle. We must never give up in the wake of repeated failures. It is the effort that counts before God.

So, before God holds us accountable in the Hereafter, let us hold ourselves accountable before our own selves!

Judging People

Judging people is a common habit of ours. In certain circumstances, when we have enough information this may not be entirely wrong. But what is absolutely wrong is to judge people by our own standards. We must judge people by their standards. If a person is conforming to his own standards, it means that he is a sincere and a truthful person even if he at times falters. We may differ with his standards but this is a very minor point in this given context.

When we judge people by our standards we are being self-righteous and egotistic. Whether we like it or not, this is downright injustice to the person we are judging. Two people can behave differently and have different standards. If we do not concede this, we in fact believe that people cannot think or behave differently and that they must reach the same truth come what may.

This is not how God has made us.

Judging the people from their appearance is equally wrong as well. If we think that bearded men and *hijābī* women are always more pious than non-bearded and non-*hijābī* women, then we are sadly mistaken. Appearance at times can be misleading. We cannot know how a person is from his or her inside. It is only God who has this information. So, why take up the work of God.

And if we are very fond of judging people let us judge our own selves instead of judging others!

Forgetfulness is also a Blessing

As human beings, each of us suffers from one loss or the other in some part of our life. At the time of some of these losses and sufferings, we often think that it will be virtually impossible for us to cope with their anguish.

And so many times have we experienced that as time passes, an agony that was unbearable was virtually deleted from our emotional memory. Time becomes the healer and we forget the greatest of our sufferings. Forgetfulness is generally a bad habit but it is on such occasions that it becomes a great blessing of God. Life moves on. Tears give way to laughter, agony is followed by ecstasy and dejection is replaced by hope.

We rise from a fall as if we had never fallen! We enjoy life as if we had never been stricken. We overlook the worries of the past as if they had never happened.

Thank you God for making us forget our miseries!
Thank you for giving us the will to move on in life!

The Book of Life!

Our life is like a book. Each day we turn one page and decrease the number of pages left. We do have a fair amount of freedom in writing the script. We can inscribe something that can prove worthwhile and we can also pen down something that we may regret or feel embarrassed about. The beauty is that each next page is blank. We can start afresh every day and forget about the bad things done on the previous days.

Let us save our selves from these regrets and embarrassments by resolving to write what we can feel proud of!

Let us try to make our own book of life a useful contribution to the huge library of books that his earth houses!

Let our book be read proudly by our progeny!

Let us Refuse to Lose!

Failures often disappoint us and bog us down. And if they come repeatedly we may end up in a permanent state of depression and dejectedness. Despondency and despair are the worst enemies of the mind. Their rust makes the heart lose its shine and turns a vibrant individual into a lifeless creature. Faith in God is shaken and endless is every road taken.

Yet, let us never get bogged down; let us rise after every fall and get up after every slip. Getting hold of ourselves in these times is not easy but a strong faith in God and believing in our own selves does help undoubtedly. However, further strength can be acquired if one looks at those around us who keep struggling in life and still seem to be at peace and find solace in their struggle.

Let us look beyond our own selves and see how the poor and the deprived cope with the hardships of life.

Let us see the physically challenged individuals around us who labour through their routines with intense difficulty.

Let us observe the orphans and widows of our society – how they strive in life knowing the endless misery that lies in store for them everyday.

Let us behold the sick and ailing people around us – especially those terminally ill. Some of them know that the end may not be far. Their plight is so very distressing

to the eye.

Let us finally reflect on all those in misery who still thank God for what they have and do not brood on what they do not.

If we can do all this and continue this journey of keen observation, we will, God willing, become people who find a new energy in themselves and the will to go on even the chips are down and hopes have been dashed to ground!

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Citizens of the Globe

Mankind was born of a single pair of human beings: Adam and Eve. This signifies that no person is superior to the other as a human being. All are equal and hence deserve equal respect. Colour, creed and clan may distinguish one from the other but it must never be a basis of regarding someone to be of a higher status.

Alas! We do forget this basic premise and not only engage in demeaning and belittling one race from the other but also in creating permanent class-based boundaries that cannot be crossed: some people are born and destined to remain inferior human beings in this inhuman division and others are born and destined to remain superior human beings in this categorization. Colour and ethnic divides have become a basis of classification of pre-eminence. We need to come out of this unjust typology and once again reconnect to the basic message: all human beings are equal and are the progeny of one man and one woman.

Let us consider ourselves to be citizens of the globe and inhabitants of the same planet. Let us feel for our global fraternity in much the same way we feel for our family, clan and countrymen. Geographical boundaries should be meaningless to us in this matter because to feel for others should be regardless of our co-ordinates on this planet. Sympathy and compassion should cross boundaries and surmount peaks. Colour, race and

lineage should become immaterial for them.

Let us live and behave as one big happy family – the humankind family!

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Finding Passion and Purpose in Life

Seldom do we set ourselves a goal in life. Our lives generally revolve around eating, sleeping, studying, partying and earning. Set in a gruelling routine, days, months and years pass and before we know it death stares us in the eye. Our lives are directionless and lack focus because we have not set any mission before ourselves.

Even if we find ourselves too old to set a goal in life, let us make a pledge that as parents or grandparents we will help our children and grandchildren do what we could not. We will help them in finding a purpose of life and not impose our own desires and wishes on them. They are independent human beings having their own personality. We should make them discover the talent they possess – the one God gave them when He sent them in this world. It is this talent which if unravelled at the right time will make them take the right decision regarding their purpose of life. It is not less than that Shakespearean tide:

There is a tide in the affairs of men.
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,

Or lose our ventures.

Polishing their talent could become a purpose in life – however it is not an end. It is a means to and end. And that end is to expend that talent and use it for making their own living as well as to contribute part of it to the society ex gracia.

If this passion becomes their profession, then they should count themselves to be the luckiest people on earth!

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Beware of the three C's: Cynicism, Criticism and Complaint

As human beings, we need to continuously work to become spiritually advanced as much as we can. We need to pick the thorns that surround the roses in our hearts. Three such thorns are: cynicism, criticism and complaint.

Cynicism is fruitless verbosity that only satisfies our ego. It is in fact an expression of our arrogance and to some extent narcissism. It is dismissive and disdainful and hacks the humility in us. The incisive words in which it is generally couched not only deeply hurt the person they are directed at, they also portray us as a harsh critic instead of a gentle well-wisher.

Criticism, when it is not constructive, is also an expression of our continuous dislike for what is happening around us. We feel elevated when we criticize others because this makes us feel superior – whether we realize it or not. The best criticism is self-criticism. Let us turn the telescope in picking the faults of others towards our own selves. If each of us is able to do this, the need for criticizing others may not even arise.

Complaining about things beyond our control is like showing mistrust in the grand scheme of things framed by the Almighty. It leads us nowhere. It shows that we have not submitted to God's will. More often than not

this attitude deprives us of the will to even strive to alleviate those of our complaints which require determination and self-effort.

Let us root out these three evil C's from our lives today!

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Essentials of Group Conversation

Often we get the chance to sit together and converse with one another. Family gatherings, luncheons, and all sorts of meetings are some of the occasions where we congregate one time or another. Unfortunately, we seldom follow the right decorum in such gatherings. Some of the things that we often indulge are against good manners and sound conduct.

Thus at times two people start talking or whispering to one another disturbing others and making them think that they are unwanted. Being involved in the general conversation requires a little sacrifice. Individual issues can be discussed in individual meetings.

Often we do not let the person who is speaking complete his conversation. We will interject and start making our own comments in a forceful way. This is like trespassing out of bounds. Patience is the name of the game here.

In a small gathering, sometimes we converse with one another by not including one of the persons present. He obviously feels embarrassed and left out and even wonders why at all he was there. This is very unfair to that person.

Many a time we speak out of turn and try to dominate the whole group conversation if not hijack it. This is a very despicable trait and smacks of arrogance.

These are some of our common failings in group

conversation. Let us be more careful in following the decorum of a group conversation.

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Becoming Responsible Individuals

Recklessness and irresponsible behaviour plays havoc with our credibility and we cannot be trusted to perform tasks assigned to us. We put up a worthless show and plunge into the lowest levels of dependability. We must get hold of ourselves and try to become responsible individuals. If the will to do so is present in us, some tips may help us in achieving this target.

Firstly, we should take up a voluntary responsibility relating to the society eg. free tuition or free community service. It will make us feel more responsible for others.

Secondly, we should share the chores of our house by allocating some tasks for ourselves. This will be a short training for us to take up larger challenges of life.

Thirdly, we can keep a pet if possible and then look after it very diligently. We must think that we are caring for a living being. Hopefully, it will make us more caring for human beings as well.

Fourthly, we should plant a seed and then patiently care for it. We should water it at the appointed times, keep in consideration its sunlight requirement and also see if it needs any other care for its development like adding manure to it.

Finally, we should analyze our failures in life. This evaluation teaches us to take responsibility of our failings. This should be accompanied by the urge to avoid this behaviour in future.

The Ailment of Self-Righteousness

Humility is the key to scholarship and self-righteousness is perhaps the greatest impediment to it. In the study of religion, contemporary Muslims scholars have generally adopted the latter approach. It is the opinion of this writer that this approach has contributed significantly in promoting sectarianism and dogmatism.

A student admitted to a conventional *Madrasah* is indoctrinated with the notion of self-righteousness throughout the years he studies there. From the very first day, he is labelled as an orthodox follower of a particular sect. His destiny seems to be carved out beforehand as one of a devout denouncer of every other sect and an ardent acclaimer of his own. He is made to believe that only his brand of beliefs is in direct conformity with the Qur'ān and Sunnah. An inference attributed to a highly revered scholar of his sect stands supreme till the Day of Judgement. That it can be challenged by cannot be dared thought of.

The time has come to realize how wrong this attitude is. As Muslims, we must understand that self-righteousness is actually a declaration of the infallibility of human intellect. Obviously, no human being can make such a claim. So if Muslim scholars want to become men of scholarship and erudition, they must abandon this approach. They should instead reflect, deliberate and then humbly submit their inferences to

criticism. They must always think that the religious opinions they present are not the last word.

No scholar can ever be totally sure that he has stumbled upon the final truth in matters that require interpretation of the scripture. So he must be keep his eyes and ears open and his intellect tuned to change for the better.

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A Greater Pollution

Today the world is becoming more and more sensitive to environmental pollution. Cleansing the atmosphere and human surroundings from things that are detrimental to any form of life has assumed unprecedented importance. This is of course a very healthy development. In the limited life span we all have, our quality of life should be as high as possible. However, there is another form of pollution to which God wants us to become sensitive to as well. It can be called 'moral pollution'.

Just as the filth around us pollutes our environment, the evil found within and around us also stains our environment. Eyes may not see it, yet it cannot be concealed from the mind's vision. Jesus (sws) is reported to have said:

... Things that come out of the mouth come from the heart and these make a man 'unclean'. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'. (Matthew, 15:17-19)

If environmental pollution is detrimental for man's physical being, moral pollution is detrimental for his spiritual being. A body which is morally polluted is perhaps dirtier than a place which is environmentally

polluted. It is only a question of recognizing this reality. Man tends to forget it and the Gracious God constantly reminds him of it.

Purification of the soul, consequently, has remained the objective of divine religions, for it is their verdict that only purified souls will enter the everlasting abode of Paradise. So, we must all vie to root out moral pollution if we are to enter this blissful life.

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Guard thy Gaze!

With the advent of the media revolution, we are witnessing an unprecedented exchange of information around us. This giant leap has afforded us the opportunity to explore frontiers as yet unexplored and potentials not yet realized. “Boldly, we are going where no man has gone before.” Cultural boundaries are being broken and a new global culture has emerged.

Nothing can be done to stop this advancement nor is there any need to do so. However, there is one dire need: protecting the heart from impurities by shielding the eyes from contamination.

The speed with which bits, bytes and photons continue to traverse the mind, heart and soul is mind boggling. One may not even begin to grasp what is happening until it is too late. In the humdrum of TV, Internet and Dish Channels, while hunting for entertainment one may end up forsaking one’s inner purity without realizing what has been lost. The faculty of sight is vital. Its effect on the heart is the most potent. If proper vigilance is not maintained, the eyes may still remain lit but the soul will be engulfed in desolate darkness. Almost two millennia ago, Jesus (sws) had warned:

You have heard that it was said: “Do not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew, 5:27-29)

Let us guard our gazes to preserve our inner purity.

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Enhance thy Radiance of Faith

Perhaps the greatest asset of a person is his faith. It helps him in warding off evil. The greater the level of faith, the deeper is one's relationship with the Almighty. Like a lamp, faith illuminates the places where darkness resides. A true believer is a person who not only benefits from the radiance of his faith, but also helps illuminate the path of others. The glow of faith he carries with him needs not only to be fueled, but also to be protected from the onslaughts of adverse winds.

To constantly think about enhancing the level and extent of our faith is something which pleases the Almighty and which earns us His special help in this regard.

Here are a few measures which may prove helpful to us:

1. We need to take out some time regularly everyday to study the Qur'ān with specific stress on its meanings.

2. We need to develop a habit of gradually memorizing parts of the Qur'ān. This will make us feel closer to God and will also make our prayers more involving. Needless to say, we should have an idea of all that we are reciting in our prayer.

3. We should memorize the supplications (*ad'iyah*) of the Prophet (sws), and remember to recite them at appropriate times of the day.

4. We should try to spend as much time as is possible

in the company of pious people. It is difficult to fight evil and more so when one is alone. Environment makes a great difference. The cleaner it is the more the strength to subdue evil.

5. Whenever we feel depressed or low, we need to recount the blessings of God which we have, and which others around us may not have. With the vicissitudes of life, one is bound to face trying circumstances. One needs to pull one's self up and fight one's way through. Remembering the blessings of God in such times keeps a person in a positive frame of mind and gives him the opportunity to earn more reward by being patient and steadfast.

May God always bless us with the concern of increasing our faith: this in itself is a sign of faith.

Four Steps to a Successful Marriage

If anything that can really make a marriage work, in fact work wonders, it is the attitude the spouses adopt towards one another. Seldom are two people alike and expecting that marriages of only like-minded people succeed is a failed assumption. It is how the two behave and conduct themselves with one another that makes a heaven or hell of marriage. Many things can be said in this regard. In my humble opinion, the success-attitude in marriage can be summed by four F's: forbearance, friendship, forgiveness and fidelity.

Forbearance means that spouses must exercise patience and self-control in accepting each others' personality especially in areas where both have conflicting habits and tendencies. As Tolstoy once famously put it: "What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much as how compatible you are, but how you deal with incompatibility." Empathizing with the other is the key word here. Working out a conflict resolution strategy is also part of this forbearance attitude.

Friendship needs no explanation. Nietzsche once so very aptly wrote: "It is not the lack of love, but a lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages." To be a friend in every sense of the word is needed. Friendship is the name of a complete attitude. Friends hides the faults of friends; they encourage one another; they fall-back on

one another; they are confidantes of one another; they put themselves into pain and discomfort to provide relief and comfort to one another; they do not score points; they are always grateful for what their friends have for them; they support one another in their psychological, emotional and financial needs. The pinnacle of friendship is to become soul-mates of one another.

Forgiveness means to overlook and ignore blemishes of one another and not maintain a register of mistakes. It means not to be on the lookout for mistakes and foregoing and forgetting. If spouses adopt this attitude, they will build mutual confidence and also develop the courage to share each and every thing. If a person is prepared to share his or her faults, it is quite likely that many other issues will be shared.

Fidelity means that the spouses vouch to remain sincere with each other at all levels. It is generally associated with sexual fidelity. However, it has a much deeper connotation. It means that the spouses will reserve their emotional attachment to one another. This starts with guarding the gaze and not lusting after others not only in the real world but also in the virtual world of the internet. In other words, the spouses should not let anyone get between them in the slightest way. More often than not it is some weakness or shortcoming in one spouse that makes the other find its remedy in someone else. We only need to think that every single person is fraught with shortcomings. The remedy is to look into the qualities a spouse has and forgo and ignore the shortcomings.

How to Avoid Clashes in Marriage

Many of us tend to dwell in idealism. As marriage partners, we think that a marriage should never be marred by unhappy moments. Marital tensions should never come our way. The husband should always remain the sweetest creature on earth and the wife should always remain thankful to the husband. These are expectations all married couples espouse. But the stark truth is bitter and sourer. Husbands are not sweet all the time and wives are not thankful all the time: husbands are dictatorial and bitter and wives unthankful and quarrelsome most of the time. Clashes between the spouses become a routine. Wives at times are so helpless that the only reason for them to put up with their husbands is the children. Those who are not helpless and can become financially independent often take the ultimate step of seeking divorce. More than ever before, today the institution of marriage is on trial and people are questioning the utility of getting married in the first place. To them, it brings more misery, suffering and despair than one can imagine.

What then must be done!

The first step perhaps is to realize the fact that it is next to impossible that a marriage can be clash-free. Even spouses having the same interests and views cannot avoid quarrels and disputes. So first of all a strategy needs to be worked out that can resolve clashes every time they arise.

It is the success or failure of this conflict-resolution strategy that can make a heaven or hell of marriage.

Here is a proposed strategy that can perhaps be considered as a starting point.

1. A husband should note down his own mistakes and shortcomings which he genuinely acknowledges as ones that may bother his wife. A wife in return should do the same.

2. A husband and wife should then note down each others' mistakes and shortcomings not covered in the first list. This would constitute mistakes and shortcomings which the other does not acknowledge as mistakes and shortcomings.

3. The lists should then be exchanged. Each of the two should now set about correcting the acknowledged mistakes and shortcomings. These mistakes will not go away overnight; however, the will to overcome them means that the job is half done. The next half is to hold oneself responsible each night before going to sleep for every outbreak of that mistake on that particular day and urging oneself to do better the next time.

4. In this regard, once the two know each others' acknowledged mistakes and shortcomings one thing will happen or in fact should happen: each time there is an outbreak of such a mistake, the one responsible for it should thoroughly apologize to the other and in fact ask him or her to give allowance and pray that this does not happen again; this will earn the one committing excess the sympathy of the other.

5. Once work is progressing steadily on this list, the other list should be taken up. Now this list would require some discussion between the two as it constitutes mistakes and shortcomings of a spouse which the other does not

acknowledge. If the difference of opinion continues, it is best that both realize that they will keep discussing the differences at opportune moments and at the same time try to put up with one another's shortcomings with patience and sympathy.

6. Besides the two lists just mentioned, a husband and wife should also make a third list: each should note down the qualities of the other. This list may also be exchanged. This will boost the confidence of both because of acknowledgment of the qualities of one another. One of the greatest reasons for clash and conflict is anger and frustration that may arise in one spouse for the other for various reasons. It is here that the utility of this third list lies. One's first reaction to the emotions of anger arising within oneself should be to at once remember the qualities of one's spouse and the benefits drawn from him or her.

These suggestions may help in improving marital ties and in understanding that the best way for peaceful co-existence and earning the respect of a marriage partner is to forgive and forget as far as possible. For this, we should remember that God graciously forgives us and we should in turn graciously forgive our offenders.

Men of Action not Hermits

This world is just a transient prelude to the real life to come. The Qur'ān says that this world in reality has not been made to reward a person for every good deed or to punish him for all his bad deeds. It is only in the Hereafter where results will truly be in conformity with the deeds done. Every person who had remained a sincere seeker of the truth would attain success in the world to come. Thus the Qur'ān is firm that real success is success in the Hereafter:

He who is saved from Hell and admitted into Heaven indeed attained success. (3:185)

Now what needs to be understood is that Islam wants its adherents to live a profound life in this world by doing whatever they can for its betterment. However, they must always give priority to the requisites of the Hereafter. If they have to choose between good and evil, they must always try to choose good. Other than this, they must strive to make this world a better place by becoming good scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers and the like. All this is inherent in the urges found in human nature. Islam does not curtail these urges; it only directs man to live with the priority of the Hereafter while contributing to this world through his skills and abilities. In short, one must strike a balance between

one's struggles and efforts to achieve material success, while not overriding the requisites of the life to come.

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Constant Vigil

As humans, we must never claim that we have totally conquered evil temptations and surmounted the peak of our base desires. We may be able to conquer evil most of the time, but never can we conquer evil all the time. The most pious of people succumb to the most ignominious of desires and to the most immoral of wishes. The victor may turn into the vanquished in no time and wonder what went wrong after being such a “blessed” and “favourite” creature of God. Fighting evil regardless of the extent of one’s faith is a continuous process – a relentless incessant struggle. Only death will bring an end to this tussle. We must strive throughout our lives to overcome adverse currents.

We must be bold enough to concede that we are after all “humans” and persistent enough to get up and start again – and again if despite the resistance put up evil overcomes us. One of the greatest weapons of Satan is to overwhelm a person with so much frustration and disappointment that he is left with little or no desire to repent and start over again.

Experience shows that one great factor in resisting evil is deep attachment to one’s goal. An idle mind is prone to all sorts of onslaughts from evil. The more a person is devoted to some cause, the lesser are the chances of his deviation. A target-oriented life is thus what we must aim for and pray that all targets that we set before us

contribute positively to this world and that to come.

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The Real Contest

Not all people are sharp and intelligent, not all are good looking. Not all are born with a silver spoon in their mouth and not all achieve fame. However, the yearning to be intelligent and the desire to be good looking, the wish to be wealthy and the thirst for fame can cause sadness in a person because these are not always achievable. To brood over what one does not have is one of the most common causes of depression and frustration. A person loses interest in life and becomes a victim of inferiority complex if he is persistently overwhelmed with feelings of deprivation. His desire to become superior to others persistently haunts him.

The Qur'ān corrects our approach by pointing out that the real contest among human beings lies elsewhere: the sphere in which they should strive to outdo others, is not the sphere of ordained circumstances and inherent traits: it is the sphere of virtue and piety in which each person has equal opportunity to excel and surpass others. It is just as open to the ugly, the poor and the ordinary as it is to the good looking, the rich and the intelligent. Wasting one's effort in the wrong sphere only instils a negative approach towards life. If a person really wants to test his mettle and enter into a contest with others, he must select the sphere of piety and virtue. The Qur'ān says:

And in no way desire those things in which God has bestowed His favours on some of you over others: to men is allotted what they earn [in the sphere of piety], and to women what they earn [in the sphere of piety]. And ask God of His bounty. For God has full knowledge of all things. (4:32)

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When Death shall Die

We are all born to die. Death is the greatest and perhaps the most ignored reality of life. Some fleeting moments and then off we go. We may fall to the deception of this transience -- but not for long: the dawn of life relentlessly gives way to the dusk of death everyday only to herald the advent of a new dawn, a new life. The process continues and life goes on under the shadow of death. Inexorable is this practice, unrelenting this law.

And then one day, the glorious sun and the milky moon, the dazzling stars and the stormy seas –would also meet their fate. The Qur'an proclaims:

At the time [O People!] when the sky is rent asunder, and when the stars are scattered, and when the seas burst forth, and when the graves are opened, at that time each one [of these people who have wronged their souls] will come to know what he has sent forward and what he has left behind. (82:1-5)

And then, as these verses say, man would be made to stand before his Lord. He who was vanquished by death would now forever be free from its claws: "Death shall be no more: death thou shalt die."

But realize he should: death he may have overcome – but now he would face a dilemma more critical: the blissful life of Paradise or the torment of Hell.

Before such a time comes, would that we all remember that on that fateful day:

The disbeliever would cry out: “Would that I were dust.” (78:40)

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Quest for the Truth

The quest for the truth can prove to be the most despondent of tasks. At times, it may seem a lost cause, a mission impossible. So rough and rugged may be the terrain traversed that one tends to lose hope. Yet if a person persists in this quest and keeps searching for that elusive needle in the haystack, he might feel a divine force grasping his hands and taking him to the brink of his destination. He would then feel God – experience Him. Doors are opened, locks unbolted, the concealed revealed, the unknown known. Jesus (sws) is reported to have said:

Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened. (Matthew, 7:7-8)

A person who has gone through this experience is sure to learn that despair is the worst enemy of this yearning for the truth. He is bound to realize that to hope when there is no hope and to keep going when the going gets tough is the only way that may lead to success. To strive, to struggle and to never lose hope is what he should keep doing – for even if failure vanquishes him, he should know that it is the effort undertaken that would

ultimately count. He would be able to stand up in the next world and say to the Almighty:

Lord! I had sought to seek the truth with all my mind,
with all my heart and with all my soul!

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The Sword of Poise

The Almighty has made this world a place for trials and tests. Here each person has been given the chance to prove his mettle and become worthy of an eternal reward in the Hereafter. If he is unable to do so, he shall have to face the ignominy of Hell. The *Qur'ān* we read every day and the prayer we offer five times a day actually serve to remind us of this reality, which we tend to forget so very easily.

However, this does not mean that one should not get involved in worldly affairs. In fact, a person should use whatever talents he has been blessed with for the betterment of the society he lives in. He should try to correctly assess himself and choose a life which best suits his talents and abilities. A person who contributes towards building a society is actually fulfilling his duty not only towards His Creator, but also towards his fellow human beings. The only thing he must remain mindful of in his struggles in the affairs of this world is that whenever, he has to make a decision in life and there exists a clash between interests of this world and those of the Hereafter, then he should always give priority to the Hereafter. Islam is not a religion of hermits and recluses, nor does it condone leading a life that is cut off from the rest of the world. It wants a person to live in the mainstream of events and face the harsh realities of life. It wants people to become tough and get going when the

going gets tough. Escapism and indulgence are two extremes which a person must avoid.

In other words, the key word is poise and giving each thing its proper due. Neither should a person get so involved in life that he forgets the Hereafter, nor should he forsake the life of this world, lest he lose the chance to achieve high honours in the Hereafter.

The poise we are required to maintain in life is our real test. The circumstances each one of us is put through may vary, but the trial each one of us is put through is the same. Once a person realizes this fact, he must try to adjust his life and his attitude towards life according to this barometer. This of course requires a lot of inner conviction and discipline from him. A tall order it may be, but once a person sets out in this direction, he is sure to experience that his solitary soul is not solitary after all. He would then live close to His Creator and experience the joys of the world to come in this very world.

Remembering God

A believer's day should be spent as much as is possible in his Creator's remembrance. This remembrance not only reinforces his relationship with God his Lord, but also provides him with the inner strength to ward off evil when it comes his way. It blesses him with inner peace and serenity and endows him with a life that is spent to serve and please the Almighty.

There are a number of ways to remember God: some of the important forms include saying the prayer, reading His scriptures, making supplications, asking His forgiveness, expressing gratitude at His favours and blessings and deliberating on His attributes and established laws and practices. However, in order to reap the benefits of God's verbal remembrance there is one primary requirement: one must pay special attention to what is said and recited. The more one concentrates on the words he utters, the more meaningful the whole exercise becomes.

Today, unfortunately, the spirit of keeping God in remembrance seems to be marred by two things:

Firstly, certain words that express God's remembrance are repeated in a certain fixed quantity often counted on beads and ticker-machines. This has given this remembrance a sort of mechanical and artificial element. One tends to be more attentive to the count than to what

is actually being said. In fact, one seems to be so overwhelmed with the figure he or she has in mind that words which might otherwise be a beautiful expression of God's remembrance fail to move the heart or stir the soul.

Secondly, God's remembrance in general has assumed the form of congregational recitals. This is something which was not found in the time of the Prophet (sws). The only congregational *dhikr* which the Prophet (sws) seems to have undertaken was the collective prayer offered in the mosque. All other forms are generally more suited to be done when a person is alone. In seclusion, a person's emotions and feelings are very pure and flow naturally out of him; remembrance of God in such circumstances is also more free from false pretense.

It is, therefore, strongly recommended that people should adopt only those forms of remembering God which do not deride its spirit and are a means of illuminating both the mind and the heart.

The Trials of Life

According to the Qur'ān, a Muslim should always try to remain thankful to the circumstances the Almighty has ordained for him. Our objective as a Muslim is to surrender to His will since we know that He always means well for us. It is His will which has to ultimately prevail and it is to this will that we must submit. This resignation is the essence of Islam.

In this regard, the true philosophy of life should be understood. We have been created to be tested and tried regarding our deeds. This trial has been conducted through the circumstances which we are put in. If we are put through good circumstances, then our trial is whether we remain thankful to the Almighty, Who gave us without asking and without our having any right. If we are put through difficult circumstances, then our trial is whether we show perseverance and patience in these times or not.

Both these circumstances generally come in a person's life. They are his real test. He cannot be given total happiness or total misery since that would make the trial profoundly difficult.

Though good circumstances often make us forget God, trying circumstances at times are a blessing in disguise: they strengthen our inner-self and increase our resilience to face adverse circumstances; similarly, they are a means of bringing us closer to God for in such situations

we tend to remember God more; moreover, trials also bring to the fore our latent potentials and abilities because some abilities are only nurtured if the going gets tough. Finally, trials are a time of soul-searching and should push us to re-evaluate our moral blemishes.

It is evident from the Qur'ān that the Almighty tests us through trials and difficult circumstances for various reasons, some of which are:

- i. to punish us for our own misdoings (42:30),
- ii. to shield us from greater misery (18:74, 18:79),
- iii. to sift out the evil within us (3:179),
- iv. to give us the opportunity to earn reward by showing patience (3:142, 76:12).

In such circumstances, it is expected that a person should surrender to God's will and always seek Him. He is our only saviour and refuge – One Who we will never lose like our other relations.

...Till you Find your Dream!

Climb every mountain
Ford every stream
Follow every rainbow
Till you find your dream

A dream that will need
All the love you can give
Every day of your life
For as long as you live

It was in my school years when I first heard these beautiful stanzas. Sung by Patricia Routledge for the movie "Sound of Music," these words indeed carry a great message for all of us:

To strive, to search and to never lose hope.

To try, try and try again and to never despair.

The will to go on and the will to leave no stone unturned in seeking one's goal is a person's greatest asset. Like that mountain rivulet that flows on a rocky surface but still smoothly glides down, fight we must against adverse circumstances and smoothly make our own way.

To dwell on dreams is great – to launch a relentless effort to realize them greater... but if a person is unable

to fulfil his dream in spite of all the effort, he must accept the will of the Almighty. Mere dreaming is ambition, but dreaming with care is submission. So, our plans may not always materialize, but the effort expended should always be in line with what Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī once said:

دست از طلب ندارم تا کام من بر آید

یا تن رسد بحباناں یا حبابان ز تن در آید

(I shall never rest at peace until I achieve my goal.
Either I shall win my beloved or shall perish in this
cause)

All is Well ...!

Not always do our plans materialize; not always do our expectations fetch congruous results; not always do our efforts bear fruit. And then, at times we are faced with staggering circumstances: a handicapped child is born, a person dies in the prime of his youth, a flourishing business suddenly runs into great losses, a young lady becomes a widow, cruel relatives deprive their blood relations from even the basic necessities of life. The list of course is unending.

The result of all this more often than not is quite predictable: depression, continued sorrow and sometimes severe anger and rage. The unexpected brings out from within us reactions which cross limits.

The Qur'ān says that there may be various reasons for such untoward circumstances. While explaining one of them it says:

And sometimes you dislike a thing and [in reality] there is great welfare for you in it and sometimes you like a thing and [in reality] there is great harm for you in it. God knows and you know not. (2:216)

It is thus expected of a Muslim to submit to the Almighty in all circumstances with the belief that whatever has happened was best for him. We cannot always grasp the profundity of the Almighty's wisdom.

Time, however, often tells how the “untoward” happening actually positively influences the course of our life. So instead of becoming upset and frustrated we must resign to his will and wait to see how things ultimately take shape.

In short, “all is well even if does not *seem* to end well.”

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Trial of the Affluent

There are people who think that the affluent people of the world are put through a lesser trial since they have wealth and riches to play about. They do not have to worry about their food and shelter. The luxuries of life open their arms to them.

This perception is not true. The Almighty has created this world as a trial and test for all of us. Every one of us undergoes this trial in some form or the other. It is not that only the poor and the needy are put through this test. Affluence also is a form of trial. Here the trial is to test a person regarding his attitude towards the Almighty. He is tested on whether he shows gratitude to the Almighty on His favours and blessings. As such, since a person generally tends to forget his Lord if he is blessed with an affluent life, this trial is perhaps tougher than that of a person who is put through the trial of poverty and adverse circumstances; in such circumstances, a person tends to remember the Lord more – or at least, has more opportunities for this remembrance.

Moreover, affluence is just one form of comfort a person may have. There are people who maybe affluent and very rich, but still have various forms of mental worries, troubles and tribulations.

Besides, having a strong relationship with the Almighty, the best way to fight out the ups and downs of life is to always look at people who are worse off: a

cursory glance would bring many to our mind. One will begin to realize what one actually has in contrast with millions of others. Where others have been deprived, he would find himself blessed with many favours.

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The Key to Everlasting Friendship

Making friends is easy; maintaining friendship is not. In fact, making ourselves unpopular is a job so easily done. One slip of the tongue, one harsh word, one instance of anger and we might end up losing our best of friends. What's more – friends may even turn into foes if this tendency is not checked.

The key to a lasting friendship is self-control. But then, this is not easy. It only comes through a strong relationship with the Almighty, and a firm commitment to the notion that self-control and self-restraint in this world will lead us to great reward in the Hereafter.

One of the toughest impediments in exercising self-control is an unfavourable response from a friend. One often gets put off by a cold response. It is not easy to put up with such behaviour. The best and perhaps the most successful way to tackle it is to keep doing good regardless of what one encounters in return. This requires great effort and profound patience. It also requires that a person should not expect anything in return for a favour he does. If it is returned, he should consider it a bonus, and if it is not, he should continue to do good as long as he can and adhere to the dictum:

Do all the good you can
By all the means you can
In all the ways you can

In all the places you can
At all the times you can
To all the people you can
As long as you can

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Soul Searching!

Experiencing some loss is a taxing time of a person's life. It reminds him of a great reality he often forgets and ignores: trials and tribulations are a part and parcel of life; they change form but as long as a person breathes they can come anytime, more so when least expected.

But when they come, it is not the time to get depressed and feel defeated. It is time for some soul searching.

Feelings of anguish and distress at the loss should soon be replaced with review and re-evaluation of one's life. Sometimes, damage and loss are a blessing in disguise. They serve to correct and redirect a person. The disarray and unsettlement they cause afford him an opportunity to break away from the ruthless routine of life and re-assess his priorities. When a person is wandering in a desert, everything around him looks so deceptively similar that he may serenely tread on a path which actually leads him away from his destination. It is in these circumstances that sometimes stormy winds and jolts of thunder induce him to re-think his way.

But if a person wants to see the silver lining behind that dark cloud, he must adopt a positive attitude when he experiences some loss or deprivation. Nothing other than a relationship of deep trust with the Almighty is needed to engender this positive attitude: He is the haven and sanctuary for all of us; and He, in reality, never wishes ill for His creation. We only need to seek and

serve Him:

The Lord is the Refuge for the oppressed,
A stronghold in times of trouble
Those who know your name will trust in you
For you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek
you. (Psalms 9:9-10)

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... And the List is Unending!

We often become thankful to our Creator even though His favours abound. Even a very partial list of these favours would outdo a loss or deprivation we may be experiencing. It is just a question of opening our eyes to the world around us. We need to look at the shimmering sun whose warmth is so vital for life, the glittering stars which light up the heavens to show us the way, the towering mountains which maintain the balance of this earth, the rain which enlivens desolate terrains; the bustling day which dawns to herald new opportunities in life, the serene night which aligns to provide us with peaceful slumber, and still closer ... the selfless mother who is an embodiment of affection for her children, the tireless father who sweats for the family and dutiful children who are a bliss for their parents ... and the list is unending!

And if this is not enough, we need to think of the mishaps we have been shielded from; tales of sorrow and sadness are writ large in our surroundings: every now and then we hear of a young lady becoming a widow, a child being born handicapped, robbers looting the dowry of a poor girl, a sole bread runner of a family being murdered on a trivial issue ... and the list is unending!

Our souls should thus be drenched with gratitude and return favours we must in whatever form we can:

remembering God in solitude to thank Him for His blessings, being kind to parents for love which is matchless and which cannot be repaid, spending on the indigent who are too shy to ask, bearing ourselves with humility which is not pretentious, controlling anger over the subservient who are too weak to speak out and ... and ... and even meeting others with a smiling face ... and, of course, the list is unending!

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Travelling Alone!

Travelling alone in a journey is a very revealing experience. It reminds us that man is in fact alone in his voyage on this earth. His only companion is God, and his only solace in this journey is the time he spends in God's remembrance. A living relationship with God gives him the piece of mind in the humdrum of this expedition.

All supports are temporary and transient, and friends are not forever. God has been kind enough to provide this ephemeral backing to man. However, man must realize that if he wants to remain at peace with his heart, he must remain connected to the abounding mercy and unfathomable benevolence of the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He should know that God is even closer to him than his life-vein. He may not be able to see him or touch him, but he most certainly can experience him. And this is no new an experience to him: after all, he never sees the gust of wind which refreshes him up, but he can feel it; he never sees the scent of a rose which enthralls him, but he can smell its fragrance.

Coming close to God requires some extra effort. And why should that extra effort not be expended if it can lead to a close companionship with Him. One step in this direction is to make an effort to get up late at night and stand in prayer before Him. It is the best time to sleep for those who sleep and the best time to be awake at for

those who can break their sleep. Real sacrifice is the sacrifice of what is most cherished. It is at this time that the Almighty descends to the nearest of heavens to answer the prayers of those who have forsaken their sleep to converse with Him. It is at this time when He proclaims: "Is there any person who repents at this time that I may forgive him? Is there anyone who seeks My mercy that I may enshroud him in My mercy?"

Lo and behold! the lone traveller will find himself to be in divine company!

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Illness can be a Boon!

Flu, fever and body aches incapacitate us at times. We are so busy in the hectic routine of life that such instances are very frustrating – in fact, annoying. Many a time we become cranky and vent this frustration on our attendants and close ones who look after us.

What if we turn this bane into a boon!

Yes we can.

In the humdrum of life we lose track of many things. Most of us are so mechanically stuck in our routines that we seldom have time to think and re-evaluate our lifestyles and our priorities. At times, something is severely wrong with our priorities and we do not follow the right moral conduct. We might not fulfil certain obligations we owe to God or to our fellow human beings. So content we may be that we are fulfilling our obligations that a thought to the contrary does not even cross our minds in normal circumstances. However, it is situations like sickness that suddenly take us out from the set routine of life and place us in a new paradigm. Intense schedules are dashed to ground. Incessant meetings and relentless appointments have to take a break.

Annoying this may be but slowing down teaches us patience and with patience comes the opportunity not only to review and re-evaluate our lives but also to keep a more vigilant track of our blessings. A temporary shut-down in life should not shut our eyes to the favours of

God. This is the best time to count and cherish them, savour and relish them. It is an opportunity, therefore, to strengthen our relationship with our Creator. It is a time to say a big thank you to Him and a time also to look at people around us who are deprived of God's favours and who need our affection and sympathy.

Another way to avail this illness-afforded free-time is to think of unconventional solutions to conventional issues. In illnesses which do not affect our intellectual powers, it can be a time to use our brain to think in an out-of-the-box manner. We can tune our brain to novel ideas and creative thinking. The starting point is to look at an issue that bothers a lot. We can make our mind solution oriented to this issue by simply thinking of bizarre and unusual ways of solving it.

Still another benefit that we can derive from this God provided break from life is to conquer our fears. Fears have their roots in our brain and need resolve and determination to overcome them. If this resolve can be mustered, then the best way to vanquish our fears is to gear ourselves during this time to plan to start doing exactly what we fear, consistently and rapidly if possible.

Illness then is a bane that can be turned into a boon with the right attitude!

Hobbies we must have!

After going through all chores and routines of a day, each of us is left with vacant time. Many a time it is hours and not minutes that we have at our disposal. More often than not we end up wasting this precious period of the day. Indulging in gossip, watching TV, surfing the net for all sorts of motives and hanging out are some very popular activities to kill time. Not that these activities are bad per se, but that their excess makes us forget our responsibilities in life.

We can create a balance in life by having constructive and meaningful hobbies. These hobbies not only provide this balance, they also have many other benefits.

Each of us needs to relax from the tensions of our every day life. Modern day pressures have made our routines so very exacting. Hobbies provide us with a healthy means of relaxation.

Sins and evil have become more and more difficult to avoid today. We are bombarded with all sorts of evil temptations and lures. Hobbies serve to keep us away from such enticements.

Every human being has latent potentials and abilities that only come to the surface once they are efficiently tapped. Hobbies help us harness our hidden talents.

All round personality development is a need of everyone. Hobbies give us exposure to new experiences that shape and groom our personalities.

As individuals of a society, each of us owes a lot to it. Even small contributions can matter. Hobbies give us the opportunity to contribute to our society in a healthy way.

The inclination to a hobby is found within many of us. It is just a question of making an effort to discover it!

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The Power of One

At times we are too shy to take the initiative and too timid to take the first step. But experience shows that once a person is bold enough to break the ice, several people stand up by his or her side. These people are the silent majority who are silent because they need a forceful first voice. They do not have the guts and courage to speak out or take action unless they find someone taking the lead.

Such then is the power of one voice, one step, one initiative – one person.

People who are bold and courageous must realize that if they too sit back and ignore issues that need to be checked or set right, then they are actually depriving the silent minority of the force to unite and make an impact. It is generally carelessness or at times, a lack of concern which accounts for the disinterest of such bold people. They must realize that they are a special breed of people created by God to give voice to people who cannot speak for themselves.

We must also realize that this boldness should never lead to rashness and foolhardiness. Boldness at inopportune times becomes rashness and may actually become counterproductive. A bold and courageous person must be equally wise and prudent when the time comes to strike and take the initiative. Selecting the right moments and right situations are of paramount importance.

But when the right time arrives, a single person can move mountains!

Lighting a Candle in the Darkness

Criticizing our society and condemning the circumstances we live in are very common topics of discussion when we get together. Pointing out faults and shortcomings in the society is not only intellectually very relishing, it also makes us feel superior. Nothing is perfect around us and neither can it be. In fact, some societies epitomize many evils and wrongs. But the question is: can drawing-room criticism and intellectual bludgeoning rectify the situation?

A society generally reflects the trends of its majority. If it is afflicted with wrongdoings, then we all have a role in it. We do condemn these wrongdoings but when the time comes, is it not true that most of us indulge in the same wrongdoings that we take exception to?

Brooding, complaining and criticizing will take us nowhere. It may satisfy our ego and vent our emotions, but the energy spent in such statements and discussions will dissipate into thin air.

But then there is a way to channelize this energy and make the best use of it. When darkness is deep and all-embracing, let us light a small candle and let it shimmer through the fuel of our commitment to set right our own selves and whatever is under our jurisdiction. This perhaps is the only way out and the only constructive strategy we can adopt.

Imagine the effect, if each one of us lights a candle in the pitch darkness that prevails.

Restraining our Wounded Pride

As human beings, all of us have self-esteem and pride in us. We would not like any person to ridicule or condemn something we never did. If anyone does, our natural response is that we react and at times react very badly. This is because if the accusation or mockery has no basis, we feel cheated and insulted. If the critic is a person who knows us well, the reaction is much stronger because we think that at least someone who knows us the way we know ourselves will show empathy and sympathy.

More often than not we do not get this sympathy. More often than not we end up severely wounded. This leads to a reaction that roars with rage. Venting out anger may relax our body mechanism after some time, but it will never remove the accusation that we consider was false. It will complicate matters and give the accuser and the onlookers if present that we do not have any sound defence, and that this weak defence is being bolstered by frenzy and fury.

The only way out is to patiently hear out false accusations and wrong charges. No doubt our self-esteem gets hurt. But here lies the test from God. We must not hit back through insults and pungent words. All we should do is to let the other person finish and then in a very calm and cool manner present our response and that too if the situation is conducive to it. Otherwise, it is much wiser to wait for opportune moments and till then

consign our matter to God.
He is our best DEFENDER!

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Acquiring Patience

One of the greatest assets of a human being is patience. Impatience seems to be a part of our instincts and often gets the better of us. Enduring situations which are unexpected and coming across scenarios that jerk and jolt us is common in life. One often reacts in such situations and becomes either frenzied or depressed. Both are actually forms of frustration. The key to high conduct is self-control. We should not lose cool when anger and frustration overcome us. At times, our impatience is predictable because we have a particular personality type that reacts on specific situations and at times, our impatience is not predictable because the situation that has arisen was unforeseen.

Here are some practical tips to help us acquiring this all important trait:

i. We must evaluate the triggers that make us lose patience. We will often see a pattern. This will help us evaluate our personality and plan beforehand how to react. We must continue to suggest ourselves that when the crunch time comes we will not lose our cool. Such auto-suggestive behaviour does help.

ii. We should think of people who are in distress: observing the orphans, the handicapped, the widows, the sick and the needy around us increases our resolve and helps us prepare to tackle tough situations.

iii. We must develop a habit of preparing for the worst.

Worst case scenario preparation is something which is instrumental in making us shockproof as far as possible.

iv. We must remind ourselves that things take time and materialize only after they have passed through a natural process. Showing impatience on such occasions is like showing dissatisfaction on the scheme of God.

v. We must think of the harms which losing patience cause and how it adversely affects our reputation and character. It causes tension and uneasiness among those around us. Our friends start to avoid us.

vi. We must read stories of people whose patience and endurance won them the day. We need human examples to inspire us and if we keep looking for them, we will find plenty.

vii. Fasting is a worship ritual that instils loads of patience in us if we fast while keeping its essence in mind. Besides the mandatory fasts, we must try to keep some optional fasts each month.

viii. When all these efforts besides others are made, we must also turn to God and pray to Him to grant us patience. Praying without making an effort is not going to win us God's favour. We must do all we can and then pray to Him.
