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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
*In the name of Allah, praise be to Allah and
Peace and Blessings upon the Messenger of Allah*

Ihsan Through Taqwa

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٣﴾

The Qur'an instructs and commands believers to observe *taqwa* (mindfulness of God),

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

"O you who believe! Have taqwa of Allah as is His due, and do not die except in a state of submission to Islam." [Aal Imran, 3:102]

This ayah emphasizes that believers must remain conscious of their Creator, revering Him appropriately. As He is the ultimate Master, it is imperative that one ensures, at the time of death, to depart this world as a true Muslim—one who has wholly surrendered their will to the Divine Will of Allah (*SWT*). This submission is not a mere nominal or cultural identification with Islam, but rather a complete and sincere devotion.

Achieving such a state at the time of death necessitates *taqwa*. However, this raises an essential question: What is *taqwa*? How is it defined, and what does it entail?

A precise understanding of *taqwa* requires familiarity with Qur'anic vocabulary. The Qur'anic lexicon is rich with layered meanings. The Qur'an employs specific terms that take on different connotations depending on their context and subject matter. A pertinent example is the term *deen*. While it is commonly translated as "religion," its meaning is not static across different ayat.

For instance, in *Surat al-Fatiha*, the ayah "*Maliki Yaum al-Deen*" does not translate as "The Owner or Master of the Religion" but rather as "The Master of the Day of Judgment"—the day when ultimate accountability takes place. In this context, *deen* signifies accountability rather than religion.

In another instance, in *Surat al-Bayyinah*, *deen* conveys the meaning of 'ibadah (worship),

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ

"And they were not commanded except to worship and obey Allah, being sincere in their deen." [al-Bayyinah, 98:5]

While one might initially translate *deen* as "religion" in this ayah, a more precise rendering would be 'ibadah (worship), as the subject matter and context of the ayah focus on devotion and servitude to Allah ('*Ibadah*).

Thus, understanding Qur'anic concepts—such as *taqwa*—requires a careful examination of their contextual meanings, allowing for a more profound comprehension of divine guidance.

Understanding Taqwa

So, what is *taqwa*? What does it truly mean?

Taqwa carries multiple meanings in the Qur'an. In some instances, it signifies *righteousness* or *God-consciousness*, as exemplified in the opening of *Surat al-Baqarah*,

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

"Indeed, there is no doubt in this Book—a guidance for the righteous (muttaqun - those who have taqwa, God-consciousness)." [al-Baqarah, 2:2]

In this context, *taqwa* is associated with a heightened awareness of God, leading to moral and ethical integrity. It refers to those who maintain righteousness by keeping their actions aligned with divine guidance.

However, *taqwa* can also denote *fear of God*, as seen in the command regarding *riba* (usury),

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَذَرُوا مَا بَقِيَ مِنَ الرِّبَا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ

“O you who believe! Fear Allah (have *taqwa* of Allah) and give up whatever remains of usury if you are (true) believers.” [al-Baqarah, 2:278]

Here, *taqwa* takes on the meaning of *fear*, as the subsequent ayah issues a stark warning,

فَإِن لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا فَأْذَنُوا بِحَرْبٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ

“But if you do not desist, then be informed of a war from Allah and His Messenger...” [al-Baqarah, 2:279]

This usage of *taqwa* implies an element of fear, given the severe consequences outlined for those who persist in engaging with *riba*. In this context, *taqwa* serves as a deterrent, urging believers to refrain from prohibited financial dealings due to the impending divine retribution.

The Root of *Taqwa*

To fully grasp the essence of a Qur'anic term, one must trace its linguistic roots. The root of *taqwa* is wa-qa-ya (وقى - يقي), which fundamentally means to preserve, protect, or safeguard from harm.

In his renowned *Lexicon of the Vocabulary of the Qur'an* (معجم مفردات ألفاظ القرآن) the eminent scholar Al-Raghib al-Asfahani defines *wiqayah* (وقاية), a derivative of *waqa*, in both linguistic and *shar'i* (Islamic legal) terms.

Linguistically, *wiqayah* means:

حفظ الشيء مما يؤذيه ويضره

“To safeguard, preserve, or protect something from that which may harm or damage it.”

According to Shariah, *wiqayah* is defined as:

حفظ النفس عما يؤثم، وذلك بترك المحظور

“To protect one's soul from that which is sinful by avoiding what is forbidden.”

Thus, in an Islamic framework, *taqwa* embodies a protective force—a shield that preserves one's soul from spiritual and moral ruin. It is not merely fear but a proactive state of mindfulness, ensuring that one remains within the bounds set by Allah (SWT).

Taqwa and the Soul

Since *taqwa* is fundamentally about safeguarding the soul, it is essential to reflect on what the Qur'an teaches about the nature of the soul (*nafs*). What do we know about the soul? How does *taqwa* serve as a means to protect it?

Human beings are a composite of body and spirit. Mysteriously, these two components come together to form the *nafs* (soul). The Qur'an categorizes the soul in different states, such as the *nafs al-ammara* (the soul inclined toward evil), *nafs al-lawwama* (the self-reproaching soul), and the *nafs al-mutma'inna* (the tranquil soul).

The Inclination of the Soul Towards Evil - *al-nafs al-ammara bis-su'*

At its lowest level, the soul is inclined towards evil. This is the state of *al-nafs al-ammara bis-su'* (النفس الأمارة بالسوء) the soul that constantly commands wrongdoing. The Qur'an confirms this inclination through the confession of Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him),

وَمَا أَزِيئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

“And I do not absolve myself. Indeed, the soul is ever inclined to evil, except for those upon whom my Lord has mercy. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful.” [Yusuf, 12:53]

The body has its own natural desires and instincts, much like the rest of the animal kingdom. It seeks to satisfy its hunger for survival and its reproductive urges for the continuation of the species. However, when left unchecked, these desires can lead one toward *haram* (prohibited actions). The body's inclination to seek gratification can overpower the soul, leading it towards transgression.

Allah (SWT) informs us in the Qur'an about these inherent desires, particularly the attraction toward the opposite sex and love of wealth,

زُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْأَفْضَةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثُ ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَبَاقِ

“Beautified for people is the love of that which they desire—of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land. That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return.” [Aal Imran, 3:14]

Islam does not suppress these natural desires but provides a lawful means for their fulfillment. Marriage serves as the *halal* (permissible) avenue to satisfy one's attraction toward the opposite sex, offering both spiritual and emotional stability. However, many people, including Muslims, fail to adhere to this framework, instead indulging in *zina* (fornication and adultery) due to the

overwhelming strength of these desires.

The Story of Yusuf and Zulaikha: A Test of Desire

One of the most profound Qur'anic narratives illustrating the intensity of human desire is the story of Prophet Yusuf (عليه السلام) and Zulaikha, the wife of Al-Aziz. Yusuf was renowned for his extraordinary beauty, and Zulaikha, overcome by her passion, attempted to seduce him. The Qur'an recounts this episode,

وَرَوَدَتْهُ الَّتِي هُوَ فِي بَيْتِهَا عَنْ نَفْسِهِ وَغَلَّقَتِ الْأَبْوَابَ وَقَالَتْ هَيْتَ لَكَ ۖ

“And she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him. She closed the doors and said, ‘Come to me!’” [Yusuf, 12:23]

Zulaikha did not attempt this seduction in an open setting. She meticulously orchestrated the scene, leading Yusuf into the depths of the palace, passing through seven locked doors. She adorned herself and made herself irresistibly attractive, fully intent on fulfilling her desires.

At that moment, Yusuf, being human, was not immune to temptation. His soul—like any other—was inclined toward the act. However, the Qur'an states,

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهٖ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَا اَنْ رَّءَا بُرْهَانَ رَبِّهٖ ۖ

“And he would have inclined to her had he not seen the proof of his Lord.” [Yusuf, 12:24]

What saved him from falling into *haram*? It was his *taqwa*, his deep connection with Allah (SWT). Yusuf recognized the dangers of his own soul and turned to Allah in supplication,

قَالَ رَبِّ السِّجْنُ اَحَبُّ اِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِي اِلَيْهِ ۖ وَاِلَّا تَصْرِفْ عَنِّي كَيْدَهُنَّ اَصْبُ اِلَيْهِنَّ وَاَكُن مِّنَ الْغٰفِلِيْنَ

“My Lord, prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me. And if You do not avert their plan from me, I might incline toward them and be of the ignorant.” [Yusuf, 12:33]

This profound acknowledgment highlights a fundamental truth, without divine intervention, without a strong foundation of *iman* (faith) and *taqwa*, even the most righteous can succumb to temptation.

The story of Yusuf reminds us that while human desires are powerful, they can be controlled through awareness of Allah. One must constantly seek His guidance and protection, for only through divine assistance can we restrain our souls from their base inclinations.

The Attachment to Wealth and Material Possessions

Just as human beings possess an innate desire for physical gratification, they also have a powerful attachment to wealth. Love for material possessions is deeply ingrained in human nature. Allah, our Creator, who knows us better than we know ourselves, informs us in the Qur'an,

وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا

“And you love wealth with immense love.” [al-Fajr, 89:20]

This profound attachment to wealth is also referenced in a previously cited ayah, *“Beautified for people is the love of that which they desire—of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land.”* [Aal Imran, 3:14]

Here, wealth—symbolized by “heaped-up gold and silver”—is listed among the powerful temptations of human life. This desire, if unchecked, can drive individuals to seek wealth by any means necessary, including deception, fraud, and unethical business practices. Some people, including Muslims, will go to great lengths—by *hook or crook*—to acquire wealth, blinded by the illusion of material success.

However, while they may evade justice in this world, they will not escape accountability on the Day of Judgment.

The unconscious attachment to wealth, which dominates the souls of many, including those who claim faith, leads to moral corruption and spiritual decline. When one is heedless of Allah (SWT) (*ghafil*), wealth becomes an idol, dictating decisions, shaping aspirations, and ultimately enslaving the heart.

The love of wealth, if not tempered with *taqwa*, leads people into a dangerous delusion believing that financial success equates to divine favor.

Islam does not advocate the renunciation of wealth, but rather, the purification of one's relationship with it. Wealth should be a means, not an end.

The cure for excessive attachment to wealth is *sadaqah* (charity) and *zakat* (obligatory charity). These acts not only purify one's wealth but also train the soul to detach from material possessions. A heart that gives is a heart that is free.

Elevating the Soul Beyond Materialism

For the soul to rise above *an-nafs al-ammara bis-su'*, it must overcome its attachment to wealth, just as it must control its physical desires. This requires a conscious effort to cultivate *taqwa*, remembering that true success is not in accumulation of wealth but in righteousness,

اِنَّ اَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ اَتْقٰىكُمْ ۚ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلِيْمٌ خَبِيْرٌ

“Indeed, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you.” [al-Hujurat, 49:13]

Sex and wealth, if left unchecked, are two of the most potent and destructive desires that can corrupt the soul. They both stem from natural human instincts, one for physical pleasure and the other for material security, but when they are pursued without restraint or moral boundaries, they can lead to spiritual ruin.

Thus, the journey towards spiritual purification demands vigilance over one’s desires. Whether it be the desire for pleasure, power, or wealth, the believer must always ask: *Is this leading me closer to Allah or away from Him?*

The Self-reproaching Soul - *al-nafs al-lawwama*

The *nafs al-lawwama* (the self-reproaching soul) is the type of soul that inclines a person toward Allah (SWT) rather than away from Him. In the Qur’an, Allah (SWT) swears by this soul, emphasizing its significance,

لَا أُقْسِمُ بِیَوْمِ الْقِیَامَةِ (١) وَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ (٢)

“Nay! (need) I swear by the Day of Judgment, and (need) I swear by the self-reproaching soul.” [al-Qiyamah, 75:1-2]

This stage of the soul represents a heightened level of spiritual awareness, where an individual becomes more conscious of their actions and their accountability before Allah (SWT). Unlike the *nafs al-ammara* (the soul that commands evil), which urges a person toward sin, the *nafs al-lawwama* acts as an internal moral compass, constantly reprimanding the individual when they are tempted to commit wrongdoing.

For instance, when a person is inclined toward an impermissible act, such as engaging in *zina* (fornication), the *nafs al-lawwama* intervenes, reminding them of the prohibitions set by Allah (SWT) and urging them to refrain. Similarly, when one is tempted by dishonesty or unethical behavior in the pursuit of wealth, this soul generates a sense of guilt, cautioning the person against transgression.

The *nafs al-lawwama* and the *nafs al-ammara* are in a continuous state of struggle within the individual, creating an internal conflict between righteousness and desire. While the lower soul seeks to pull one toward indulgence in worldly temptations, the self-reproaching soul counters with moral awareness, urging self-restraint and adherence to divine guidance.

This ongoing battle is a defining characteristic of the human spiritual journey, where individuals must consciously strive to overcome their base desires in order to attain higher levels of spiritual purity and closeness to Allah (SWT). It is in this state that the soul wavers—sometimes inclining toward Allah, sometimes slipping back into heedlessness. The person with *al-nafs al-lawwama* recognizes their mistakes and strives to correct them.

The Tranquil Soul - *al-nafs al-mutma’innah*

The highest and most refined state of the soul is known as *al-nafs al-mutma’innah*—the soul that is at peace and tranquil. Allah (SWT) references this soul in *Surat al-Fajr*,

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ (٢٧) أَرْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مُّرْضِيَةً (٢٨) فَأَدْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي (٢٩) وَأَدْخُلِي جَنَّتِي (٣٠)

“O Tranquil soul, return to your Lord well-pleased and pleasing [to Him]. Enter among My righteous servants and enter My Paradise.” [al-Fajr, 89:27-30]

This level of the soul signifies ultimate tranquility and contentment, a state where an individual has overcome the base desires of the *nafs al-ammara* (the soul that commands evil) and has moved beyond even the internal struggle of the *nafs al-lawwama* (the self-reproaching soul).

The *al-nafs al-lawwama* is a necessary step toward the highest state of the soul—the *al-nafs al-mutma’innah* (the soul at peace), which is completely aligned with the will of Allah (SWT).

The goal is to strengthen the self-reproaching soul until it eventually reaches a state where it no longer struggles against sin but rather finds tranquility in obedience to Allah (SWT). This is the path of *taqwa*, a journey of constant self-purification and striving against the whispers of the lower self.

The *nafs al-mutma’innah* is completely at ease with divine decree and lives in harmony with Allah’s commands, experiencing a deep sense of serenity, gratitude, and unwavering faith.

A person who reaches this state is no longer constantly battling with temptation or remorse but has found peace in submission to Allah (SWT). Such an individual is grateful for what they have, saying *Alhamdulillah* with sincerity. They find fulfillment in what is lawful and do not feel the need to seek forbidden means to satisfy their desires.

For example, a person with a *nafs al-mutma’innah* is content with their lawful provision, whether it be a modest business or a simple lifestyle. They do not fall into dishonesty or corruption in the pursuit of wealth, nor do they seek illicit relationships to satisfy their desires. They have risen above these base inclinations and find their true satisfaction in their connection with Allah (SWT).

This soul has attained a level of trust in Allah (SWT) where it neither resents life’s challenges nor becomes overly attached to worldly gains. It is a soul that, when the time comes, will return to its Lord willingly and joyfully, knowing that it has lived a life in accordance with divine guidance. This is the soul that is invited into *Jannah*, for it has achieved the highest spiritual rank, one of peace, acceptance, and divine pleasure.

The Three Levels of Faith (Iman)

Having examined the three types of souls, we now turn our attention to the three levels of faith (Iman) as outlined in Hadith Jibril.

These three levels are Islam, Iman, and Ihsan, each representing a progressive deepening of one's faith and connection with Allah (SWT).

1. Islam: The Foundational Level

Islam is the entry point into faith and the most basic level. A person becomes a Muslim by declaring the *Shahada*: “I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.”

At this level, one accepts the fundamental tenets of belief, including faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures, His prophets, the Hereafter, and divine decree (*qadar*). Additionally, a Muslim submits to the obligatory acts of worship: Salah (prayer), Zakat (charity), Sawm (fasting), and Hajj (pilgrimage).

However, merely identifying as a Muslim does not necessarily mean one is practicing or immune from sin. Many who profess Islam may neglect their religious duties or engage in unlawful actions despite adhering to its basic tenets. Therefore, Islam alone does not guarantee strong faith. It is the first step, but it must be nurtured and developed further.

2. Iman: A Higher State of Faith

The second level is Iman, which signifies a deeper conviction beyond just outward adherence. A *Mu'min* (believer) has faith that is firmly established in the heart. The comprehensive definition of Iman (*al-Iman al-Mujmal*) is,

أَمَنْتُ بِاللَّهِ كَمَا هُوَ بِأَسْمَائِهِ وَصِفَاتِهِ وَقِيلْتُ جَمِيعَ أَحْكَامِهِ إِقْرَارًا بِاللِّسَانِ، يَقِينًا فِي الْقَلْبِ، وَتَصْدِيقًا بِالْعَمَلِ

“I believe in Allah, as He is in His names and attributes. I accept all of His commands—attesting with my tongue, believing with my heart (certainty in the heart - يقين في القلب), and demonstrating my faith through actions.”

At this stage, faith is no longer just a verbal statement but a certainty that influences behavior. When negative thoughts or temptations arise, a *Mu'min* is conscious of Allah (SWT) and actively resists sin. Their faith is internalized, guiding their decisions and actions even in private moments when no one is watching.

A believer at the level of Iman continues striving for spiritual growth, engaging in worship with sincerity and performing good deeds consistently. However, the journey does not end here; there is still a higher level to attain, Ihsan.

3. Ihsan: The Pinnacle of Faith

The highest and most refined level of faith is Ihsan, which represents spiritual excellence and the closest connection to Allah (SWT). The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) defined Ihsan in *Hadith Jibril*,

أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ

“It is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and even if you do not see Him, know that He sees you.”

At this stage, an individual has reached a state of heightened God-consciousness (*Taqwa*) and unwavering devotion. A *Muhsin* (a mature *Mu'min*) worships Allah with full sincerity, as though they are in His direct presence. This awareness profoundly shapes their thoughts, emotions, and actions.

They perform acts of worship with deep sincerity (*Ikhlas*), ensuring that their prayers, fasting, charity, and daily interactions are done for Allah (SWT) alone. They abstain from sin not only out of fear of punishment but out of love for Allah, knowing that He is always watching. They treat others with excellence, embodying humility, patience, and kindness in all aspects of life.

This is the level of true spiritual enlightenment and fulfillment, where one's heart is completely aligned with the divine will, and one finds tranquility and joy in servitude to Allah (SWT).

The journey of faith is not static; it is a progression from Islam to Iman to Ihsan. While Islam establishes the foundation of faith, Iman strengthens conviction, and Ihsan represents its perfection. Every Muslim should strive to move beyond the mere formalities of Islam, deepen their Iman, and ultimately reach the level of Ihsan, where they worship and live with full awareness of Allah's presence. This is the path to true spiritual success and closeness to Allah (SWT).

The Driving Force Behind Spiritual Elevation

A fundamental question arises: What is the driving force that enables the soul to ascend from the state of *al-Nafs al-Ammarah bil-Su'* (the soul that inclines toward evil) to *al-Nafs al-Mutma'innah* (the tranquil soul)? Similarly, what empowers an individual to progress from the foundational level of Islam to the highest state of Ihsan?

The answer lies in *Taqwa*, consciousness and mindfulness of Allah (SWT). This concept is beautifully illustrated in *Surat al-Ma'idah*, where Allah (SWT) addresses the final stage of the prohibition of *khamr* (intoxicants). Some companions had unknowingly consumed *khamr* before its absolute prohibition, and to alleviate any distress they may have felt, Allah (SWT) revealed the following ayah,

لَيْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جُنَاحٌ فِيمَا طَعَمُوا إِذَا مَا اتَّقَوْا وَءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ثُمَّ اتَّقَوْا وَءَامَنُوا ثُمَّ اتَّقَوْا وَأَحْسَنُوا ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“There is no blame upon those who have consumed (intoxicants) as long as they have *Taqwa* (are conscious of Allah), believe, and do good deeds (Islam). Then, they increased in *Taqwa* (deepened their consciousness of Allah) and believed (Iman as conviction), and then further increased in *Taqwa* (elevated their consciousness of Allah even more) and attained Ihsan. And Allah loves the *Muhsinin* (those who achieve spiritual excellence).” [al-Ma'idah, 5:93]

This *ayah* highlights a crucial spiritual progression:

1. **Taqwa at the level of Islam** – A general awareness of Allah that leads one to faith and good deeds.
2. **Taqwa at the level of Iman** – A deepened consciousness that transforms belief into unwavering conviction.
3. **Taqwa at the level of Ihsan** – A heightened state of spiritual awareness where one worships and lives as if seeing Allah (SWT).

From this, we can conclude that Taqwa is the driving force that elevates the soul—from the lowest state of *al-Nafs al-Ammarah* (which is inclined toward sin) to *al-Nafs al-Lawwama* (the self-reproaching soul) and ultimately to *al-Nafs al-Mutma'innah* (the tranquil soul). Likewise, *Taqwa* is the essential catalyst that propels an individual from Islam to Iman to Ihsan, culminating in the highest level of spiritual excellence.

Taqwa plays a central role in transitioning from a state of moral weakness to a state of spiritual tranquility. It is through *taqwa* that one cultivates *ihsan*, the highest level of faith, where a person worships Allah as if they see Him.

Thus, *taqwa* is not only a means of restraining oneself from sin but also an instrument of self-purification and spiritual elevation. It fosters a state of constant awareness and reverence for Allah (SWT), ultimately leading to *ihsan*, the pinnacle of faith and moral excellence.

The Essence of Taqwa: A Thorny Path to Spiritual Elevation

Walking the Path of Taqwa – A Lesson from Umar and Ubayy

To further elaborate on the essence of *Taqwa*, a well-known conversation between Omar ibn al-Khattab (RAA) and Ubayy ibn Ka'b (RAA) provides a profound analogy. Ubayy, one of the scribes of the Prophet (SAW) who recorded divine revelation, was highly regarded for his knowledge of the Qur'an. The Prophet (SAW) himself honored him with the title, "*Aqra'uhum likitabillah Ubayy*" أَقْرَأُهُم لِكِتَابِ اللَّهِ أَبِي بْنُ كَعْبٍ (The one most proficient in the recitation of the Book of Allah is Ubayy.)

In their conversation, Omar (RAA) asked Ubayy about the nature of Taqwa. Ubayy responded with a question, "Have you ever walked on a thorny path?" Omar replied, "Yes, I have." Ubayy then asked, "What did you do?" Omar answered, "I tucked in my garment and carefully navigated my way through, ensuring that I did not get pricked by the thorns." To this, Ubayy said, "That is *Taqwa*."

This analogy beautifully encapsulates the essence of Taqwa—it is about navigating the journey of life with vigilance and care, being conscious of the many spiritual and moral "thorns" (temptations and sins) that can harm the soul. Just as one carefully treads a thorny path to avoid being injured, a believer exercises caution and restraint in life, avoiding actions that would lead to disobedience to Allah (SWT).

Lessons from the Analogy:

This analogy teaches us three fundamental aspects of *taqwa*:

1. Awareness of the Path

- a) Just as a traveler is aware of the dangers on a thorny path, a believer must be conscious of the trials, temptations, and sins in this world.
- b) The Prophet (SAW) said, "Indeed, in the body, there is a piece of flesh; if it is sound, the whole body is sound, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Truly, it is the heart." (Bukhari & Muslim)
- c) Taqwa begins in the heart—it is the awareness of what pleases and displeases Allah (SWT) and acting accordingly. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, "*At-taqwa hahuna* - اتَّقُوا هَاهُنَا *Taqwa* is here) three times while pointing to his chest." The statement emphasizes that *taqwa* (God-consciousness or piety) is rooted in the heart.

2. Caution and Self-Discipline

- a) Just as a traveler lifts their garments and carefully chooses each step, a believer must be mindful of their actions, words, and decisions to avoid sin.
- b) Allah (SWT) says in the Qur'an,

وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا (٢) وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ (٣)

"And whoever has *taqwa* of Allah – He will make for him a way out and will provide for him from where he does not expect." [al-Talaq 65:2-3]

- c) *Taqwa* is not just avoiding major sins but also being cautious of small missteps that can accumulate and lead to heedlessness.

3. Staying on the Straight Path

- a) The thorny path represents life's challenges and trials. Just as a traveler is careful not to get entangled, a believer must remain steadfast in avoiding what displeases Allah.
- b) The Prophet (SAW) said, "The most beloved of actions to Allah are those that are consistent, even if they are small." (Bukhari & Muslim)
- c) *Taqwa* is not a one-time act but a lifelong journey of striving to do what is right.

How to Cultivate *Taqwa* in Daily Life

1. **Guard Your Speech:** The Prophet (SAW) said, “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent.” (Bukhari & Muslim)
2. **Be Mindful of Your Surroundings:** Choose your company wisely, for the Prophet (SAW) said, “A person is upon the *deen* (way) of his friend.” (Tirmidhi)
3. **Strengthen Your Connection with Allah:** Regular prayer, recitation of the Qur’an, and sincere supplication keeping the heart aware of Allah’s presence.
4. **Practice Self-Accountability:** Reflect daily on your actions. Umar (RA) said, “Take account of yourselves before you are taken into account.”

Taqwa is the key to success in this life and the next. Just as a traveler carefully walks a thorny path, we must navigate this world with mindfulness, self-discipline, and sincerity. If we cultivate *Taqwa*, Allah promises us guidance, ease in hardships, and eternal success in the Hereafter.

Let us strive to embody *Taqwa* in all aspects of our lives, for as the Prophet (SAW) said,

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَاهُ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

“The most honored among you in the sight of Allah is the one with the most *Taqwa*.” [al-Hujurat, 49:13]

The Path of Struggle and Divine Guidance

The journey towards Allah (SWT) is filled with trials and temptations. However, Allah assures the believers in the Qur’an,

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“As for those who strive for Our cause, We shall surely guide them to Our paths. And Allah is indeed with the *Muhsinin*.” [al-Ankabut, 29:69]

This *ayah* reinforces the idea that *Taqwa* is not a passive state—it requires effort, struggle, and perseverance. Those who actively strive against their desires and obstacles for the sake of Allah (SWT) will find divine guidance illuminating their path and more importantly loved by Him.

The ultimate reward for those who strive to reach *Ihsan* is the Love of Allah (SAW). When Allah loves someone, He declares this love to the angels, “When Allah loves a servant, He calls upon Jibril and says, ‘O Jibril, I love so-and-so, so love him.’ Then Jibril loves him, and he announces in the heavens, ‘Allah loves so-and-so, so love him.’ Then the inhabitants of the heavens love him, and acceptance is placed for him on earth.” (Bukhari and Muslim)

The question then arises: Who would not want to be loved by Allah?

Moreover, Allah (SWT) promises in the Qur’an,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ

“Surely, Allah is with those who have *taqwa* and those who are *Muhsinin* (those who strive for spiritual excellence).” [al-Nahl, 16:128]

Remarkably, Allah (SWT) does not mention *Muslims* or *Mu’minun* in this *ayah* but rather *Muhsinin*—those who reach the highest level of faith, *Ihsan*. This implies that the true companionship of Allah is with those who continuously refine their faith, elevate their consciousness of Him, and strive towards excellence in worship and character.

In conclusion, by consistently increasing *taqwa*, one gains the ability to navigate the thorny path of life, resist temptation, and ascend from the lower inclinations of the soul towards a state of true submission and contentment in Allah (SWT).

May Allah (SWT) grant us true *Taqwa* and make us among those who walk the path of righteousness with wisdom and sincerity. Ameen.

END