

Surah Al-Ma'arij

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The word Al-Ma'arij has been translated as “The Ascending Stairways”. It brings to my mind the image of stairs rising towards the sky and people climbing on different levels of faith and goodness. We are in a sort of race against time to accumulate as many good deeds as we can. But all our life our focus remains on the exterior actions, while the root of goodness lies in the heart. We remain in an illusion of righteousness because self analysis is a task, which we think that we don't need any more. While the truth is that the higher you go on the ladder of goodness, the more you are at a risk of falling prey to these tricks of the devil. Therefore we should stay connected with the Quran and keep asking Allah to protect us from all the diseases of the heart specially arrogance because it is the root of all evil. It was arrogance which made *iblis* (the devil) into the most hateful creature in the eyes of Allah. And it was arrogance which made the Makkans reject the warnings of Allah. They were so full of their ego that they ridiculed the Prophet (s.a.w) when he warned them of Allah's punishment; and challenged him to bring the punishment if he was truthful:

سَأَلَ سَائِلٌ بِعَذَابٍ وَاقِعٍ {1}

A questioner asked for a punishment bound to happen

The illusion of being in control of everything makes people forget their real state of helplessness. It is a test from Allah that He is invisible and all the other resources are visible. And so people become attached to the visible “gods”. Whereas if we use our insight it will become very clear that our choice and control in life is very limited and that too has been given by Allah. Therefore all greatness belongs to Allah:

مِّنَ اللَّهِ ذِي الْمَعَارِجِ {3}

It will come from Allah, the Owner of the Ways of Ascent.

The words of the Quran are awesome... they go straight into the heart and make you see things in the light of truth. But what can you do if people want to remain in their state of ignorance and disbelief? Often we face this dilemma of trying to present Allah's message to people but they react in an offensive manner... at such times one feels literally helpless with anger but Allah is cautioning us to remain peaceful and patient:

فَاصْبِرْ صَبْرًا جَمِيلًا {5}

Therefore, endure with graceful patience.

Just imagine how much torture was inflicted on our Prophet (s.a.w) but He never reciprocated in a rude manner. His goodness of character was so impressive that the same enemies accepted faith in later years. But do you think it was easy? Of course not! But He endured all the pain for the sake of Allah. If we want to be close to Him in Paradise then we will also have to display the same patience and goodwill towards people. But our problem is that we are so impatient and selfish...

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا {19}

Indeed, man has been created impatient

All our energies of thought and action are being spent in safeguarding our selfish interests and this attitude is reflected in the following words:

إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا {20} وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا {21}

When evil befalls him, he becomes despondent; but when blessed with good fortune, he becomes stingy

So how can we develop patience...??

A well balanced character can only be achieved through consistent and sincere worship...If we bow down to of Allah in *salah* five times a day He will bless us with a special kind of patience, peace and tranquillity.

الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ دَائِمُونَ {23}

Those who remain steadfast in their Salah (*prayer*)

But then why is it that we are regular in prayers but still not consistent in goodness? The answer is that prayer should not just be an exercise of limbs but a conscious act of purification through a dialogue with Allah. Such a person, who develops a bond with Allah through prayer, will also be eager to connect to people by sharing his blessings with them:

وَالَّذِينَ فِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ مَّعْلُومٌ {24} لِلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْرُومِ {25}

And those who set aside a due share in their wealth; for the beggars and the deprived,

The third characteristic of these people is that they confirm their belief in the hereafter, both in words and deeds:

وَالَّذِينَ يُصَدِّقُونَ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ {26}

And those who accept the truth of the Day of Judgment,

And even while doing all these things they remain in fear of their Lord... isn't this amazing?!!

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّهِمْ مُشْفِقُونَ {27}

And those who dread the punishment of their Rabb

You see that nowadays we do a little act of goodness and we feel so satisfied with ourselves... it is because we think that the test of the hereafter is so simple. But the ones who are really knowledgeable about Allah think very differently:

إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّهِمْ غَيْرُ مَا مُونٍ {28}

Surely the punishment of their Rabb is not something from which anyone can feel safe.

The greatest motivating force for a person to stay away from all evil is this realization of Allah's justness and His terrible punishment. Otherwise if this faith is not right then the shaitan has an easy task of portraying all sorts of evil practices in a beautiful covering. The only way out, is to abstain from all forms of indecencies:

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِفُرُوجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ {29}

And those are the ones, who guard their private parts,

And not to forget that faith is not a personal thing. Rather we have to be faithful to others in all our dealings:

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ {32}

Those who keep their trusts and honour their promises

This is a complete picture of a true believer, someone who is true to himself, true to Allah and true to people. But in fulfilling all these responsibilities, he remembers that the basis of his faith and stability lies in his lifelong connection with Allah, and so he guards it like his life:

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ {34}

And they are those who strictly guard their Salah (*prayers*)

What is the end result of all this patience, sacrifice and consistency of goodness? It is the honour of Paradise... something that we cannot ever imagine with our limited intellects because Allah has not made anything similar to it on this earth...

أُولَئِكَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ مُكْرَمُونَ {35}

It is they who shall live with honour in paradise.

At the time when these beautiful words were being revealed and believers were being given the great promise of paradise, the disbelievers were rushing from all sides to oppress the Prophet (s.a.w) and they tried to prove that it was a fabrication. Just imagine yourself in such a situation... how awful it must have been for the Prophet (s.a.w) to put up with their taunts and rudeness. But Allah was with him and gave him comfort through these eternal words:

فَذَرَهُمْ يَخوضُوا وَيَلْعَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يُلَاقُوا يَوْمَهُمُ الَّذِي يُوعَدُونَ {42}

So leave them to plunge in vain talk and blunder about until they face that Day of theirs which they are being promised.

The reason for this attitude, even in today's scenario, is that the disbelievers want to safeguard their interests and feel threatened by the one true religion which demands worship of only one God. They are too much in love with their wealth and status to come out of their worship of these "idols". But on the day of judgement, the same people will be rushing towards Allah, like in this world they rush towards their goals and targets:

يَوْمَ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ سِرَاعًا كَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَىٰ نُصَبٍ يُوْفَضُونَ {43}

The Day when they shall rush forward from their graves, as if they were racing towards a goal.

But for the disbelievers it will be a most humiliating day... their arrogance will be turned to shame:

خَاشِعَةً أَبْصَارُهُمْ تَرْهُقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ الَّذِي كَانُوا يُوعَدُونَ {44}

With downcast eyes and countenances distorted with shame. Such will be the Day, which they are being promised.

Just imagine this scene and think deeply... can we afford this pain of regret and humiliation on a day from which there is no turning back?

So turn back to Allah now when you can and enter into His shade of mercy. Allah's obedience is the only protection from the trials of this world and of the hereafter. May Allah guide us all... ameen.