

THE QURANIC CONCEPT OF TAQWA

Awareness is central in the daily activities of the Muslim not only in his prayer, meditation, zikr, recitation of the scripture but also in his daily routines like work, eating and meeting. This state of awareness is described by the Quranic term Taqwa. This article explains the meaning of this important concept and the rewards and virtues accruing as a result of being muttaqee.

Introduction

Normally we are unconscious of the noises around us thus we tend to ignore lots of the unnecessary sights and sounds coming from our surroundings. It is as though we are on the "automatic pilot". Similarly in spiritual aspects of our lives there is a low level of awareness of the reality, this is akin to blindness a term used quite often by the Glorious Quran to describe the kafir, the unbeliever. This state of blindness hinders the devotee from performing his duties attentively. Taqwa is the antidote to this lack of awareness.

The word Taqwa is derived from the Arabic verb ittaqa which means; to be aware, be on one's guard, protect oneself. The verb ittaqa with its various permutations occurs 230 times in the Quran. The imperative form of the verb 'ittaqoo' (fear Allah) alone appears 69 times.¹ Thus emphasising the significance of acquiring Taqwa. In light of this it is important for us to understand the concept of Taqwa. Taqwa is also defined as:

To protect oneself from things which one fears will cause him harm. However in Shariah it refers to protecting oneself from sins. The idea one gets from these different shades of meanings of Taqwa is that the believer is expected to be constantly on his guard, lest he falls into the temptations of the self and the shaitan. It expresses a state of alertness, awareness and attentiveness. This leads to the idea of 'fear of Allah' which is a common working translation of Taqwa. A Muslim fears to displease his Lord, Master and Creator. "Because he believes that there exists a beautiful scheme of things, a divine pattern. But he can only conform with his divine pattern if he meticulously follows the Shariah. This compliance with Shariah an eagerness to avoid sin is known as Taqwa."²

Taqwa implies caution and therefore seriousness. A believer is very serious about his deen as worldly man is serious about his business and career! Taqwa in this sense is akin to 'zikr' an off-repeated word in the Quran which means remembrance, to bear in mind, invocation of God. "Remember me and I shall remember you" (Baqara:152). It is in this remembrance, awareness and bringing to mind that "the heart finds solace and peace" (Raad:28). The daily prayer is also defined as "the greatest zikr" (Ankabut:45). The opposite of this state of awareness and consciousness is expressed sometimes as 'forgetfulness' - "they forgot Allah so He forgets them" (Tauba:67). And also by the term 'ghaflah' to ignore, to be unmindful, inattentive and negligent. An apt description of the godless person, unaware of his Lord and unmindful of his duties.

Although Taqwa is a unique Quranic concept encapsulating the believers state of alertness, caution, seriousness and a sense of duty to his Lord. It is variously used in the Quran to convey inter-related meanings of 'faith, repentance, obedience, shunning sin and purity of intention.'³

¹ Mu'jam ul Mufahras Lialfaz al Quran, Cairo

² Islam and destiny of man - Gai Eaton, Islamic Textbook Cambridge

³ Tafsir ul Kabir, Fakhruddin Razi, Cairo.

For example Allah commands: *“O people of Pharaoh! have Taqwa”*. Taqwa here means faith. Taqwa is sometimes used for repentance for example: *“had the people of town behaved and repented”* (Al-A’raf:97). Taqwa is used for obedience as well as in the following verse: *“Warn mankind that there is no God but me so be obedient”* (Nahl:97).

Occasionally Taqwa is used to meaning ‘shunning sin’.

“So go to the houses from their gates and observe your duty to Allah so that you may be successful” (Baqara:189). The Arabs had the old habit of not entering their houses through the door whilst they were wearing Ihram. This practice is being condemned. And in Surah Hajj verse 32 Taqwa is used to convey the meaning of purity of intention. *“And whosoever respects the signs of Allah surely that is the purity of heart”*.

How The Scholars Define Taqwa

Ibrahim bin Adham says: *“Taqwa is that people do not find a fault in your speech, and the angels do not find a fault in your actions whilst the angel of throne sees no fault in your inner motives.”*

Waqadi defines Taqwa as follows: *“You decorate your inner self for the Lord as you would dress up for the people.”*

Someone has also described Taqwa as follows: *“Your Lord should not see you in that place from which he has forbidden you. And he should not find you absent from the place where he commanded you to be.”*⁴

Abdullah ibn Umar (*may Allah be pleased with him*) was asked to explain the meaning of Taqwa, he replied, *“When you walk a narrow steep path lined with thorny bushes you tread very carefully so that your clothes are not torn by the thorns and you’re not injured.”* This is an apt simile for illustrating the meaning of Taqwa. Since the journey of life is on a narrow steep path hemmed on one side by the selfish desires and the other side by the Shaitan. So one has to exercise extreme caution and awareness to avoid falling into the traps.

Taqwa is also defined by the scholars as: *“To purge oneself of all evil traits and to embellish oneself with all good traits.”*

Another words to rid the heart of all wrong beliefs, false ideologies, evil deeds and bad morals is the first stage of Taqwa and then to adorn and decorate it with true beliefs, dress it with good deeds and morals!

Description Of The Pious In The Quran

From the above discussion we see that Taqwa is a state of mind and heart in which one is aware about ones duties. Hence a Muttaque is someone who is ever-cautious much like a soldier in a battlefield which is riddled with mines. Just imagine how carefully he treads. The following verses of the Quran describe the Muttaqeen:

“The Glorious Quran in it there is no doubt it is a guidance for the Muttaqeen; they are people who believe in the unseen and who establish the regular prayers and spend from what we have given them” (Baqara:2-4).

The Quran is a guidance for entire mankind but it carefully singles out the Muttaqeen. Thus highlighting the greatness of these noble people. It is as though Allah (glorified) is saying *“the only real people and true men are the Muttaqeen”*.⁵

The Quran here describes three qualities of the Muttaqeen; firstly they believe in the unseen; they have a deep seated conviction that Allah is their Creator, Lord and everseeing guardian. They accept the teachings of beloved Mustafa on life after death, the angels and the day of great reckoning. Iqbal the great poet of Islam asserts the importance of this conviction in most strong

⁴ Zia-ul Quran (Urdu tafseer of the Glorious Quran by Pir Mohamad Karam Shah) Lahore.

⁵ Tafseer ul Kabecr (Imam Fakrudin Razi)

terms possible when he says: *“O bewildered! by the modern civilisation listen! lack of faith is worse than slavery.”*

The second trait of the Muttaque is “they establish regular prayers.” His shahadah is not an empty slogan, far from it, it is a living belief which has to express itself. The believer enacts his belief through the different motions and postures of prayer. *“Prayer is the ascension of the believer”* said the Prophet (SAW); the pinnacle of spiritual state. Where the soul pours out its yearning of meeting the Lord. Where the veils are removed and the spirit is in the presence of the Mighty Lord.

The Quran tells us that they ‘establish’ the prayer not that they say the prayer. And ‘iqamah-t-shai’ is to do something properly and fulfill its requirements. Another words their prayers are performed meticulously and when they stand on the musalla - prayer mat - their heart and soul are present too - otherwise in the words of Iqbal *“my standing is veiled so is my prostration veiled.”* The third quality of the Muttaqeen is *“they spend from what we have given them”*. They are generous and charitable. The wealth they have, the skills they possess, the knowledge they’ve acquired they spend it generously. Helping and giving to those who are less fortunate than themselves and they give unselfish service to fellow humans.

THE FRUITS OF TAQWA

A Muttaque is thus a person who is spiritually awake. Attached to his Lord and linked to his creation. Such enlightened people are promised great rewards both here and in the hereafter.

a) Allah Helps And Supports The Pious

“Know that Allah is with the pious” (Tawba:36).

Allah will be enough for them. He is ever-hearing and all-knowing. As though Allah is guaranteeing them help and support and Allah will grant them success and good fortunes and lead them by his grace to prosperity. The pious has the comfort of knowing that Allah’s mercy, grace and favours are with him.

b) The Pious Receive Knowledge And Wisdom

“O believers! if you fear Allah he shall make criterion for you and he shall remove your wrongs and forgive you and Allah is of infinite bounty”.

The reward of having Taqwa is three fold; Allah will give the pious a criterion, blot out the sins and grant forgiveness. Imam Razi explains the criterion as follows: *“This criterion can be considered to be given either in the worldly life or in the hereafter.”* In the worldly life it can be either the state of the heart or the outwardly actions. And in the respect of state of heart it can refer to three things. One of them is Allah (glorified) has honoured the believers with guidance and recognition of the truth. Second of them is that He has expanded their hearts. Allah declares *“Whoever’s heart Allah has opened for he has received his Lord’s light (Zumar:22)*. The third of these is that he has erased from their hearts deception, hatred and jealousy. Whilst the hypocrite and the unbelievers hearts are contaminated with these wicked and evil traits.⁶

The Rewards Of Taqwa In This Life

⁶ Ibid

As far as the outward conditions are concerned Allah has chosen for the Muslims greatness and victory, as he says: *“And the conditions of the sinner and unbeliever is opposite of this”* (Munafiqoon:8).

And as far as the matters of the hereafter is concerned the reward and everlasting benefits and honour from Allah and the angels for all these are included in the furqan. The second reward received for Taqwa is *“He will remove from you all your wrongs”* another words the eternal record will be straightened.

c) Abundant Sustenance

A constant fear that haunts people is *“How will my needs be fulfilled?”* In the following verse Allah is promising the pious that he shall provide him from where he least expects it!

“And whoever fears Allah, Allah shall make a way out for him. And will provide for him from where he has no expectation. And whosoever puts his trust in Allah He will suffice him” (Al-Talaq:2).

Imam Razi says: *“Commenting on these verses...Allah will make a way out for him.”* The blessed Mustafa said, *“He shall deliver him from the doubts of the world, and the mortal throes and from the punishment in the hereafter.”*⁷

Furthermore they shall be shown a way out of problems and troubles.

d) Allah Will Facilitate The Daily Business Of The Pious

“And whosoever fears Allah he shall make easy for him his work” (Talaq:5).

Another marvelous promise for the pious is that his burden will be lightened both in this life and the hereafter.

e) The Pious Are The Real Successful Ones

“So be pious and intelligent o people! so that you may be successful” (Maidah:100).

Special Favours For The Pious In The Hereafter

The greatest blessings that the pious will achieve will be in the hereafter, these are some of the promises of Allah to his devotes:

a) Forgiveness Of Sins

The burden of the sin will be removed and he shall be relieved of it. As Allah says, *“The pious people are not accountable”*.

b) Deliverance From Punishment And Fear

“Whosoever is pious and upright shall have nothing to grieve and fear” (al-Quran).

On the day of Judgement everyone will be worried about himself. When people will be trembling due to severity of the day of reckoning the pious will be sober and calm.

c) Entering The Paradise

⁷ Ibid

“The paradise will be brought close to the pious” (al-Quran).
 “And for the pious is a beautiful abode” (al-Quran).
 “The pious will be in a secure place of gardens and fountains” (al-Quran).

d) How To Grow In Taqwa

As we have seen from the above discussion eternal peace, endless bliss and salvation all depend on Taqwa. For the believer Taqwa is the most valuable asset. But how does one acquire this spiritual treasure?

Imam Ghazzali (*may Allah rest his soul in peace*) gives a simple answer to this question. He says: “The way to cultivate Taqwa is to resolve not to commit any evil. You shall even avoid excessive halal by guarding the eyes, ears, tongue, stomach and chastity from excess’s. By enforcing a strict regime of self-control on one’s body and restraining the mind and the heart from evil thoughts.”⁸

So the way to develop Taqwa is in first instance to avoid all haram and in second instance avoid excessive halal. Furthermore the practice of Shariah; daily prayers; fasting; zakah; hajj and zikr are all powerful means of developing Taqwa. Allah says: *O believers! fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may become pious*” (Baqara:183).

Cultivating Taqwa By Controlling The Senses

Senses	Improper Use	Proper use
	Gazing at unlawful scenes, film, literature.	Admiration & appreciation of Allah’s creation.
	Futile conversation & obscene music.	Listening to the Quran & constructive use.
	Swearing, back-biting and gossiping.	Remembrance & praise of Allah, use thoughtfully.
	Haram & Makruh food.	Eat & drink from Allah’s bounty’s but in moderation.
	Worldly desires, jealousy, arrogance & hatred.	Fear of the hereafter, kindness, humility & love of righteousness.

⁸ Minhaj ul A’bideen by Imam Ghazzali (Lahore).