



ZUHD - SHORTENING LONG HOPES

According to Imam Ghazali, there are two causes of lifelong long hopes: Love of the World and Ignorance about the Reality

Love of the World

The love of the world is a result of the familiarity and the acquaintance with its delights, pleasures and relationships. This slackens the desire to depart from the world and its pleasures. Man becomes fond and eager for the worldly things. He continues to think that he still controls his ego yet his dependency on the world grows and grows. As time passes, his need for wealth, children, home, livelihood, family and friends grows; the attachment to the world becomes ever stronger. Now if anything appears as an obstacle between him and the world it is disliked. No wonder he dislikes death. If ever the thoughts of death comes to him, he postpones them and says to himself "You have a long time ahead of you before you get old, then you can repent". When he grows old, he says "until I become very old". And when he is very old he tells himself, "as soon as I finish this project" or "free myself of building this or that", or "until I return from that journey", etc...

He continues to postpone and delay repentance and fails to do good deeds. Day by day more and more new doors open up, opportunities present themselves and his attachment deepens with the world. He truly becomes worldly. The root of his long hopes is this love of the world.

Ignorance about the reality

The second cause of long hopes is sheer ignorance. He counts on his youth, expecting it to last for ever. Thinking it is far away from death, but he doesn't realize that death can come to young as much as the old. He considers death to be far away. His youth and health dupe him to think of death as something quite remote. He doesn't realise that death is not confined to old age or summer or winter.

However, the love of this world coupled with this ignorance spurs him to develop his long hopes and he walks along the funeral procession but never thinks about his own funeral. Imam Ghazali suggests that the way to tackle the long hopes is to get rid of the love of the world. However, this can only happen if there is faith in the day of judgement, the day of reward and punishment. This conviction and certainty will help to diminish the love of the world. The faith in the momentous event will wipe away the love of the inferior.

The Meaning of "Zuhd" and turning away from the world

Bin 'Ulan says, Zuhd literally means to be detached from something and despise it. Technically it means "dislikening the world and turning away from it." It is also defined as "passing over worldly pleasures for gaining heavenly pleasures." Others have said Zuhd is "emptying the heart of that which one doesn't possess."

Imam Ahmed gives a comprehensive definition of Zuhd when he says "Zuhd is not about making impermissible the permissible nor is it throwing away of wealth. Infact it is to be more certain about that which is in the divine hands than that in your own hands and when a calamity afflicts you, you are full of hope for its reward, and the reward is recorded.

So, there are three parts to Zuhd:

First, putting complete trust in Allah as the only provider and sustainer.

Secondly, when struck by a misfortune one is convinced of receiving divine compensation for it which exceeds the worldly loss occurred.

Thirdly, both being praised or blamed is equal in his view.

In brief, Zuhd is a peculiar mindset in which the person is completely reliant on Divine providence, confidently and positively handles misfortunes of life and is indifferent to praise and blame.

Zuhd is a mindset where the world is almost despised and looked down at. So much so that the "Zahid sees everyone better than himself", says Hassan Basri. Wahb Bin Ward says "Zuhd is when you have no regrets of worldly loss and no joy in gaining something."

Sufyan Bin Uyaina describes a Zahid as "someone who is grateful when given something and patient when afflicted."



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Imam Ahmad summed up the characteristics of a Zahid in these words “shortening of long hopes and renouncing for oneself what people possess”, in other words he does not yearn and long for worldly things. Imam Ahmad has also divided Zuhd into three categories:

First, to avoid the Divinely forbidden things (haram), and this is the Zuhd of ordinary people.

Secondly, is avoiding excess in what is permissible (halal) and that is the Zuhd of special people.

Thirdly, leave everything that distracts him from the remembrance of the Lord and this is the Zuhd of Arifeen – the people of realization and understanding.

Motivations for Developing Zuhd

Several practices can help develop Zuhd. These are:

Remembering the afterlife and recalling the scenes of standing before the Mighty Judge on the day of judgement. This will help to control lowly desires of worldly pleasures.

Realising that the worldly pleasures engage the mind are distractions from Allah.

The humiliation and efforts in earning the wealth and prestige, the deceptions, its fleeting nature and how little it is in Allah's sight. The Messenger ﷺ said: “if the world was equal in value to the wing of a mosquito then Allah would not give a sip of water to a kafir.” (Tirmizi)

Despising the world and warnings against its deceptions.

The constant Quranic reference to the world as “a source of deception” further strengthens the belief of the Zahid that the world is to be avoided as much as possible.

The Quran says “Nay, you prefer the worldly life yet the afterlife is better and everlasting” (Surah A'la, Ayah 16), and again “Say! The worldly provisions are little and the afterlife is better for the God-conscious (Surah An-Nisa, Ayah 77).

Describing the worldly people, the Quran says “and they are happy with the worldly life and what is the worldly life compared to the afterlife but very little.” (Surah Ar-Rad, Ayah 26)

What is the purpose of Zuhd ?

The following hadith sums up the purpose of Zuhd:

Sahl Bin Sa'ad says a man came to the Messenger ﷺ and said “O Messenger of Allah tell me about a deed which if I did would endear me to Allah and the people. He replied “develop Zuhd of world and Allah will love you and develop Zuhd of what people have and they will love you.” (Bin Maja)

Love of God and love of people are two purposes of Zuhd. Since Zuhd of world shows that a person truly loves God. The all-loving and merciful God reciprocates by loving the Zahid. Similarly a person who genuinely cares for others is going to be loved by the people too.