

February 27, 2010

Saturday



Title: [The Value of Patience and Perseverance](#)

DVD title: Increasing and Deepening Iman/Faith with Sabr:
Levels of Patience and Perseverance

Dinner blessing: O Allah, members of our community will be traveling tomorrow, the Hassouna family. Let them travel safely and reward them with their intentions fulfilled. Make them come back soon with success, Inshallah. And also for Raheel, success in her travel, and healing for her and Iman and everyone. Today Allah, You graced our yard with a crocus. Let it be a harbinger of the spring that is about to descend upon us. Give us new energy and life in our own bodies, and fulfill our wishes to serve You better. Give success to everyone who strives for it. Make our way easy for us tomorrow and our return easy and safe for everyone. *Amin*.

Suhbat: Imam Sadiq (ra) said, “*Whoever of the believers who bears patiently with a tribulation that befalls him has the reward of a thousand martyrs.*” He also said, “*When the believer enters his grave, salat is on his right hand, and zakat is on his left. Virtue faces him, with sabr taking him under its shelter. When the two angels charged with questioning, Munkar and Nakar, enter upon him, sabr says to salat, zakat, and virtue, ‘Take care of your companion. And if you fail to assist him, I will take care of him myself.’*” Such is the value of *sabr*.

To the person who has achieved a higher state of belief, who is really a *mu'min*, *dunya* is really a prison. So it is important that we gather all the strength we can and practice *sabr*, (perseverance and patience and forbearance) through our lives. To teach our children to be patient is a great thing, and [we should] not wait until they are older to figure out that

this is a virtue that has to be attained. We all have to stand up against difficulties, agitation, calamities, or things that cause us grief or anguish. [It is important] to understand how futile it is to try to fight these things and try to confront them, because you have no control over the calamities that come to you. Then the idea is to be content with what Allah gives us and not to complain, especially in front of others, about the commands of Allah and the inevitable challenges we have. When we look at the world we live in today, we see so many people in hardship.

Now there has been another earthquake. And there are the people in this country who have no jobs and are living on the streets. It is during these times of difficulty that we should turn our heart's attention to focus on not just being patient or persevering, but on the perfection of Allah so that our faith is not undermined by our difficulties, or by other people's trials and difficulties. When we can do that, then we can see through the momentary difficulties through our heart, and we can witness the effects of that kind of *niyyat* or *tawajjuh*/attention. We can begin to see that much of what we are perceiving are the manifestations of Allah's sovereignty, Ya Malik. The thing that patience and perseverance does is it fills your heart with a kind of wealth, richness, and contentment that pervades your heart. From your heart, it pervades the other things in this world.

Sabr and restraint have rewards both in this world, and in the *barzakh* and in the Hereafter. If we have faith in Allah and we believe our affairs lie in His Hands, if we become in harmony or resonance with certain attributes of Allah, then we actually view difficulties, hardships, and losses in a different way than if we don't. Even to the point where people, strangely enough, arrive at the state of being able to accept these challenges and difficulties with a kind of willingness. We were watching the Olympics this week and saw the Canadian girl who skated and won the silver medal, even after her mother passed away suddenly. You look at the interview with her. From a cultural point of view, especially Middle Eastern, everything would stop. Finished. People would

look at this as being some kind of callousness or selfishness. This girl's mother was her best friend and confidante. So she went and skated and won the silver medal.

In the beginning, she didn't want to give any interviews. But she realized that she needed to, and that it was more than just her mother would have wanted her to skate. She felt skating was a way that she could, in a way, grieve, and stay in contact with her mother. It's a cultural shift. Who thinks like that? You think, it's just selfishness or greed. But in a way, it is accepting the reality and being grateful for the *fadl*. She said she was grateful for all the advice her mother gave her and she was remembering it. When asked what she was thinking when she was skating, she said something like she was thinking about how the death of her mother made her want to fulfill her mother's dream for her more and more. That's a momentary *hal*, a state. We don't know what she will be like five or ten years from now.

A person on this *sayr ul suluk* can arrive at a place similar to that, but it becomes lasting, a *maqam*, where the difficulties and challenges and struggles are incentives, affirmations, and a means to stay in deeper contact with Allah. But of course you have to come to it with belief. There is a parallel to that also. It is said that it is too late if, on your deathbed, you become a believer. In this sense, you practice this *sabr*, patience and perseverance. You tell a child to work hard at their school work or persevere with their music study, or their language, and to be patient with their fellow children. If you keep that going up until your adulthood, then you don't have to face the harsh reality that it's too late when you need it and you haven't developed it.

That's why that example of Imam Sadiq was given. When at the grave Munkar and Nakar come, if *salat* and *zakat* and virtue can't answer the questions, patience will help the person. Perseverance. *Sabr*. If you go to your grave with patience, *sabr*, you are guaranteed you will have the assistance. Even if all your *zakat*, prayers, and virtue are not sufficient, one thing is—*sabr*. If you buy into that, that's a good thing to believe.

Imam Ali said, “*The one who practices sabr will never be deprived of success, even though it may take a long time.*” Which is sort of interesting, if you think about it. And of course Allah says in Qur’an, “**Be patient and persevering, for Allah is with those who are patient and persevere.**”

Everybody speaks about *sabr*, patience and perseverance. It doesn’t mean sitting around and waiting, but practicing, and being patient with the practice. Imam Jafar said, “*Verily, sabr is to faith as the head is to the body. The body perishes without the head. So also when sabr goes, faith disappears.*” It’s very interesting that our faith becomes increased when we have *sabr*, and it cannot increase without it. The world gives us many changing circumstances and different people, the same problem under different circumstances. Conditions change, problems change, all kinds of things change. Perseverance means all the time. It doesn’t mean you persevere and then you don’t have to any more. Patience and perseverance are always to be with us. Maybe it just means to be patient until the weather report comes on tv, because you are anxious to know what the weather will be. Will the Montessori school be closed in Lynchburg today? That’s a low level of patience.

Patience and perseverance can be when have absolutely nothing, like what these poor people in Haiti or Chile are experiencing now, and you see their faith. You saw what happened in Haiti. These people have nothing, they lost everything; their family and friends are dead, and they are standing up singing praises of God. Why? Is it just because they are crazy believers and have nothing else to turn to? A lot of us intellectuals might say that, but it is because they have patience and perseverance, and their faith immediately increases. That’s what Imam Sadiq was saying: immediately, your faith increases. It doesn’t take a week or a month. It’s not like a genetic change that has to take place. When Imam Ali (ra) was asked about *iman*, he replied: *The structure of faith is supported by four pillars. Sabr, yaqīn (certainty or conviction), ‘adl (justice) and jihad (struggle).* Then he went on and said, “*Patience is comprised of four attributes.*”

Think about it when I read you these in terms of what your own state of perseverance and patience is. If you don't do practices, you don't have to persevere with them. It's easy; just don't do them. Then you don't have to be patient and persevere. But if you are doing them, and you are not seeing the results, then you have to be patient and persevere. It increases your faith, which increases the value of those practices. If you add faith to the practice, the practice gives up its secret to you. If you just add repetition, and there's no challenge to it in terms of patience and perseverance, it gives up nothing to you because it's not being asked to. The patience, the perseverance is like the sunlight over the seed in the water. The seed may sit there for years, maybe even a millennium. But if you add water, the seed grows and gives up its secret. In that sense, with patience, it gives up its secret. He said, *"There are four attributes: eagerness..."* You don't usually think of eagerness in terms of patience and perseverance, do you? *...fear, piety, and anticipation of death. Whoever is eager for Jannah will ignore the evil temptations, and whoever fears hell will abstain from sins. Whoever practices piety will easily bear the difficulties and hardships of the life of this world. Whoever anticipates death will hasten to perform good deeds."*

If you think about life and the horizon, the person who is on this *sayr ul suluk*, who is the Sufi, who has the real piety, will think, "I could die tomorrow," and they hasten to do good deeds and good work. That's the difference between a person who is pious and one who is not; a person who is on the path and one who is lost, wandering, wandering, here and there. Nasruddin al Tusi was a great Sufi. He said, *"Sabr means restraining the self from agitation when confronted with undesirables."* Ansari said, *"Sabr means restraining the self from complaint about hidden anguish."* There is a kind of demeanor, character, of a person of patience. They don't complain, even when they are in misery. Even when confronted with difficulties, especially with things that are not at all desirable to them, they don't get agitated.

Each one of us has our challenge with patience every day. Do you agree? I believe each one of us has a challenge with being patient every day. And yet, I'm not sure that at the end of the day we make *muhasabah*. We may promise we are going to, on our way out of the shower or putting our pajamas on, but I wonder how many people really make *muhasabah*? I don't want to think about it very much. Maybe you go to bed and have a kind of quasi-*muhasabah*: "Tomorrow I'm going to do this." It's a kind of *muhasabah*. You recognize today you didn't do something, and decide to make the change tomorrow. "Tomorrow I'm going to pray Asr on time." So you set your Iphone or you Kyocera or whatever. It rings, you turn it off, but somehow you forgot to do it. You don't pray it on time, or at all. Now it's Maghrib, and what are you going to do? Just a little thing like that is a kind of *muhasabah*, if you feel guilty about that.

I tell myself, I'm going to exercise today. Three or four times during the day I think, I should go to the machine and exercise for 5 or 10 minutes. Maybe the phone rings, or I decide to check one more thing on the email or do a little more research. I don't have any trouble getting up and making myself another cup of tea. That's no problem. Maybe my brain is in my taste buds. Then I'm lying in bed at night and I remember, Oh, I didn't exercise today! I promise myself I will do it tomorrow. That's a kind of *muhasabah*, an accounting for myself. The next day, the same thing happens. Then you get to the point where you don't even feel guilty about it. You think, "Ah, that's who I am." You build this big mountain you have to go through, jump over, cut through or build a road through.

Every day, all the anxiety, your own promise has become a wall that you can't get through. It starts to agitate you. It starts to give you hidden diseases that wear you down and wear you out. Until, like Imam al-Ghazālī (ra) says, the angel writes down your bad deeds, and it only goes on until you forget to erase it. Inside yourself you start to worry about these things. You have all this patience with your worry, but no patience to do what you need to do. You can persevere with your miserable state of worry, right? We don't have any trouble persevering in our misery. "I'm going to have to draw on my

perseverance here because I'm miserable. I'm going to have to really work hard to stay miserable." We don't have to work hard at all. We just have to open up the valve of perseverance with misery. But that's not real perseverance, is it? It is just habitual patterns over and over again, and it is the way you identify yourself.

If indeed, you practice patience and perseverance, and if it deepens your faith, what does that mean? If it deepens your faith in Qur'an, in the Hadith, in Allah, in the *shaykh* and the *shuyukh*, your faith in what is good and right, your patience has now given you ease. Once you break through it, you can do your exercise or eat balanced meals, whatever it is you are trying to do. *Sabr* is not monolithic. There is *sabr* you have at the time something difficult happens, and in that moment, you become patient. Someone you love gets sick, and you were very, very busy. But you stop everything to take care of that person. Patience that you have in the moment is one kind of patience. Then there is the *sabr* with regard to obeying Allah, obedience. That is interesting, because your lower nature doesn't want to obey. It wants to be free, on its own, and has an inflated evaluation of its capability, its own discernment, its ability to stop just short of the line.

In regard to disobeying, there is a kind of patience. In regard to obeying, it is you buy into the path, you accept the path, you accept the guidelines and the teaching, and many, many times you have to be patient in your obedience. You have to set every critique, question, criticism aside, and just accept. That takes patience, too. Patience in obedience, and patience in disobedience—those are two aspects. The patience in disobedience to Allah is higher than the other two. Because, and I think it is obvious, if you see yourself as disobedient and you persevere in your effort to overcome that disobedience, the torpor, the laziness, the reluctance, the criticism (however you describe it), then the reward is very great for that. Now, you are patient with something you vehemently dislike, that has put you into a very difficult situation with your own self and with others. It's made life difficult for you. Where everybody else would be impatient, you have to be patient and accept that this has come from Allah.

As soon as you can achieve that balance where, whatever the difficulty, the challenge, the pain and the struggle, it is offset by that amount of patience and faith. Then all the difficulties go running, because now there is nothing to lay difficulties on. The person has become transparent. The person has become *insani kamil*, a perfected being. Believe me, none of us are perfect, until we have perseverance and patience, until we persevere with our practices and our responsibilities, and we are patient at times of difficulty.

Otherwise, we may be relatively developed, but we are not fully developed. As long as we feel upset and misery over unfortunate events, hardships, and difficulties, then we are deficient in the knowledge of Allah. We have not matriculated through the institution of *tarbiyya*. We have not increased our knowledge enough, or our own piety enough, that we can matriculate and really understand the knowledge of Allah.

When a person gets some level of *ridā*/contentment and satisfaction, even during the most adverse times or conditions, it is said that person's soul reaches nearness to Allah. That person's soul comes near to Allah. The kind of patience and perseverance that gets you to that is related to the regularity of your prayer and practice, the struggle to speak kind words; the humility you have in front of those who are older or wiser or kinder or more representative of Allah. This is what happens when you worship correctly, when you become very engaged in that Divine Presence. You see, moment to moment, when you are not engaged. You note your own distractions and deviations. You see your own self deviating. We all see it. Don't you see something like that every day? But do you pay attention to it? It's like my screen comes up with, "Allahu Akbar." It's Asr. I see it, but maybe I'm on a phone call, maybe I'm editing. I see it. I click, "Close." Half an hour goes by. An hour goes by. Oh, it's almost Maghrib and I haven't done Asr! We see it, but we don't act.

We have to persevere in our obedience and in our disobedience. We persevere in our disobedience until it become untenable to us, and we persevere in our obedience because

the immediate lifting of the reward is there. “Allahu Akbar....” “Oh, it’s time for Asr. I’m going to make wudu and go stand for prayer. Ah, I did the prayer on time. *Alhamdulillah*, I feel so much better.” Why don’t we want to feel better? Why do we think there is another agenda that is more important? What happens is the joy becomes much greater than the anguish. The happiness that comes is much greater than the misery. There are incredible good results that come from being persevering and patient!

We have *sabr fi Allah*, meaning we are very steadfast and persevering while we try to get rid of those difficult habits we may have, or traits we don’t like, or attitudes we carry around with us as we go through this purification process. Then there is the *sabr ma’Allah*, the *sabr* with Allah. The person who travels on this path sincerely is always traveling with Allah, and always feeling the presence of Allah, and is patient with whatever is brought. This is the story of Musa and Khdir. This is what Musa couldn’t do. He didn’t have perseverance with Allah. Then there is the *sabr an-Allah*, which is *sabr* that comes from Allah, when people have tremendous amounts of love and affection in their hearts, when they have survived through the most difficult of times, when they have lifted themselves up from above the milieu of human trials and tribulations. This is when your patience is coming directly from Allah.

Then there is *sabr bi Allah*, *sabr* for Allah. Wherever you go, whatever you do, you bring with you an attitude of perseverance and patience. You love people. You say, “Ah, that person just persevered and persevered!” Not even in a religious context. Go back to the Olympics. The girl who had all those injuries – Vonn. She persevered and persevered and tried all these remedies. She persevered for the sake of her sport, and look at what she accomplished. What could she have accomplished for the sake of Allah? It tells you something about human capability and focus. A human being can focus themselves in such a way that they can persevere no matter what. Where does that come from? It comes from the source of all perseverance, As-Sabur. It comes from Allah. If it takes that form in the physical world, over a physical thing like a sport, what can it do for us in

the midst of all the tests and trials and challenges that a Sufi, a mystic, a *mu'min* should feel as they deal with the vicissitudes, trials, and tests of life?

I actually have a philosophy, which is if you persevere you get better. It's very hard to stand up for an hour doing *dhikr* when your ankle is bad, your knee is bad, or your shoulder or your backside is bad. A little pain teaches your perseverance. A little discomfort is good. What's wrong with it? I've just told you about the levels of *sabr*. How do you go from level one to level four? You have to have perseverance. On the day when it's all counted, with all the sins I've had in my life, maybe the fact that I stand on my rotten ankle and my crummy knee might get me through the gate. That's my hope, anyway. My other hope is that someone I know will be nearby to vouch for me. "Oh, yeah, I know that guy. Let him in." So, think about it. It's not a gross analogy. Ask yourself how many times a day you are impatient, and what are you impatient with yourself about. *Asalaam aleikum*.