

Chapter Three

HOLDING OUR SOULS ACCOUNTABLE

We will discuss the following concepts:

- It is not easy to consider what we have done every day of our lives and to hold our souls accountable. It requires patience, perseverance discipline and struggle
- The Qur'an encourages us to hold our souls accountable promising great reward
- We should realize that Allah is aware of our effort and He will guide us

Holding our souls accountable is a difficult process and requires discipline and resolve

Controlling our vain desires is not easy, and requires sacrifice, patience and resolve. To ask ourselves every day whether we did the right thing and how can we improve our behavior requires commitment and proper understanding of our accountability to God. If we hold our souls accountable now, we can succeed when we stand judgment before God.

Yahia Bin Mo'adh said: (The enemies of man are three: His life, his devil and his soul. Therefore, be careful of this worldly life by not caring for its

material glitter; and be careful of your devil by disobeying him; and be careful of your soul by controlling its desires)

The Qur'an illustrates the necessity of patience and constant effort in controlling our vain desires:

﴿يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٢٠٠﴾﴾

[آل عمران: ٢٠٠]

O ye who believe! persevere in patience and constancy; vie in such perseverance; strengthen each other; and fear Allah; that ye may prosper.

Al-Imran 3 : 200

This verse explains that success requires patience and perseverance and striving against our vain desires. Success also requires helping one another in being patient and constant and setting good examples to others. Fearing Allah and being conscious of Him and watching our behavior are the elements of Taqwa (righteousness and piety).

Abou Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) said: (Striving with your soul requires patience and perseverance. Whoever patiently perseveres against his soul and his vain desires and his devil will defeat them and will achieve success and become a master of himself. But if he despairs, or becomes impatient and gives up, then he will fail and will be overpowered, and become a slave to his desires and his devil).

It is easy to give in and to satisfy our desires and experience instant gratification. The Qur'an explains the allure and temptations that we are exposed to as human beings:

﴿زَيْنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثِ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۗ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَقَابِلِ ﴿١٤﴾﴾

[آل عمران: ١٤]

Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the

possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to Allah is the best of the goals (to return to).

Al-Imran 3 : 14

The Qur'an then explains how we can control our vain desires and look forward to Allah's reward:

﴿ قُلْ أُوْتِيْتُكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْ ذَٰلِكُمْ ۖ لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَأَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ ۝۱۴ ﴾

[آل عمران: ١٤]

Say: Shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those? For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord, with rivers flowing beneath; therein is their eternal home; with Companions pure (and holy) and the good pleasure of Allah. For in Allah's sight are (all) His servants,

Al-Imran 3 : 15

﴿ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا أَمْنَا فَأَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَفِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ۝۱۵ ﴾

[آل عمران: ١٥]

(Namely), those who say; "Our Lord! we have indeed believed: forgive us, then, our sins, and save us from the agony of the Fire;" –

Al-Imran 3 : 16

﴿ الصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْمُنْفِقِينَ وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ ۝۱۶ ﴾

[آل عمران: ١٦]

Those who show patience, firmness and self-control; who are true (in word and deed); who worship devoutly; who spend (in the way of Allah); and who pray for forgiveness in the early hours of the morning.

Al-Imran 3 : 17

The way to control our vain desires is the following:

- 1- Understanding what is more important than fulfilling our desires, namely to gain the pleasure of God and His reward
- 2- Realizing that Allah is aware of our struggle and our efforts to control our vain desires, and that He will help us in this battle

- 3- Knowing that we are going to make mistakes, but we should not give up. Rather, we should seek God's forgiveness and renew our efforts
- 4- We should be patient and steadfast and persevere. It is a struggle that lasts for a long time
- 5- We should be honest and truthful, for only the truth can save us.
- 6- We should be obedient to God following His orders, submitting to His will and devout in our service, for then He will give us the strength and the ability to continue
- 7- We should not hoard our money, but share it with the needy and poor and those who need our help
- 8- We should turn to God seeking His forgiveness and His guidance at all times, but especially in the last third of the night, for it shows our sincerity and devotion

Those who are wise and righteous will ask themselves several questions before embarking on a course of action:

- 1- Is this action good for me or not good?
- 2- Will it benefit me during my accountability, or only has transient benefit but no lasting value?
- 3- Am I capable of doing it or do I need help?
- 4- Can I harm anyone else by my action?
- 5- Am I doing so to please Allah or my motive is selfish?

If we develop the habit of asking questions, and considering our actions and its merit, then we are on our way to holding our souls accountable.

The Qur'an encourages us to hold our souls accountable

The Qur'an asks those who believe to be conscious of Allah and to consider what we have done and what good did we forward that will help us during our accountability:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْتَنْظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ

خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٨﴾ [الحشر: ١٨]

O ye who believe! Fear Allah, and let every soul look to what (provision) he has sent forth for the morrow. Yea, fear Allah: for Allah is well-acquainted with (all) that ye do.

Al-Hashr 59 : 18

If we forget our accountability to Allah, we wrong our own souls because we did not discipline ourselves, nor controlled our vain desires. If we become wicked and dwell in bad deeds we are the losers:

﴿ وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴾ [الحشر: ١٩]

[الحشر: ١٩]

And be ye not like those who forgot Allah, and He made them forget their own souls! Such are the rebellious transgressors!

Al-Hashr 59 : 19

Many things can cause us to forget our accountability to Allah and preoccupy our time. Unless we understand what is important, we may put our priorities in wrong order, or we may not realize our mistake until it is too late, when another chance may not be available:

﴿ يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تُلْهِكُمْ أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ

ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴾ [المنافقون: ٩]

O ye who believe! Let not your riches or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. If any act thus, the loss is their own.

Al-Munafeqoun 63 : 9

﴿ وَأَنْفِقُوا مِنْ مَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ فَيَقُولَ رَبِّ لَوْلَا أَخَّرْتَنِي

إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ فَأَصَّدَّقَ وَأَكُن مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴾ [المنافقون: ١٠]

And spend something (in charity) out of the substance which We have bestowed on you, before Death should come to any of you and he should say, "O my Lord! Why didst Thou not give me respite for a little while? I should then have given (largely) in charity, and I should have been one of the doers of good."

Al-Munafeqoun 63 : 10

Those who understand their accountability will do what is right. Their good deeds will be waiting for them to help them:

﴿ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثِي اللَّيْلِ وَنِصْفَهُ وَثُلُثَهُ وَطَائِفَةٌ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ مَعَكَ
 وَاللَّهُ يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ ۚ عَلِمَ أَن لَّنْ نُحِصُوهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنَ
 الْقُرْآنِ ۚ إِنَّ عِلْمَ أَن سَيَكُونُ مِنكُم مَّرْضَىٰ ۙ وَءَاخِرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَبْتَغُونَ مِن
 فَضْلِ اللَّهِ ۙ وَءَاخِرُونَ يُفْتَنُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۖ فَأَقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ
 وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا ۚ وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنفُسِكُمْ مِن خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ
 اللَّهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا ۚ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴾ [المزمل: ٢٠]

Thy Lord doth know that thou standest forth (to prayer) nigh two-thirds of the night, or half the night, or a third of the night, and so doth a party of those with thee. But Allah doth appoint Night and Day in due measure. He knoweth that ye are unable to keep count thereof. So He hath turned to you (in mercy): read ye, therefore, of the Qur-an as much as may be easy for you. He knoweth that there may be (some) among you in ill-health; others travelling through the land, seeking of Allah's bounty; yet others fighting in Allah's Cause. Read ye, therefore, as much of the Qur-an as may be easy (for you); and establish regular Prayer and give regular Charity; and loan to Allah a Beautiful Loan. And whatever good ye send forth for your souls, ye shall find it in Allah's Presence, yea, better and greater, in Reward, and seek ye the Grace of Allah: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Al-Muzzammil 73 : 20

The Qur'an praises those who hold their souls accountable:

﴿ لَا أَقْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ﴾ [القيامة: ١]

I do call to witness the Resurrection Day;

Al-Qiama 75 : 1

﴿ وَلَا أَقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ ﴾ [القيامة: ٢]

And I do call to witness the self-reproaching spirit; (eschew Evil).

Al-Qiama 75 : 2

Omar Bin Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) said: (Hold your souls accountable before you are called to account for your deeds. And weigh your deeds before your deeds are weighed on the Day of Judgment: because it is easier for you to hold your soul accountable now, rather than later, because on that day everything that you have done will be exposed and revealed, and nothing will be hidden). Then he recited the Qur'anic verse:

﴿يَوْمَئِذٍ تُعْرَضُونَ لَا تَخْفَىٰ مِنكُمْ حَافِيَةٌ﴾ [الحاقة: ١٨]

That Day shall ye be brought to Judgment: not an act of yours that ye hide will be hidden.

Al-Haqqa 69 : 18

Allah is well aware of our struggle to hold our souls accountable and has promised us great reward for our effort

The realization that Allah is well aware of our effort and struggle allows us to persevere and renew our effort. We know that Allah will help us and will reward us for our struggle:

﴿وَمَا تَكُونُ فِي شَأْنٍ وَمَا تَتْلُوا مِنْهُ مِنْ قُرْءَانٍ وَلَا تَعْمَلُونَ مِنْ عَمَلٍ إِلَّا كُنَّا عَلَيْكُمْ

شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ تُفِيضُونَ فِيهِ وَمَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْ رَبِّكَ مِنْ مِثْقَالِ ذَرَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي

السَّمَاءِ وَلَا أَصْغَرَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرَ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ﴾ [يونس: ٦١]

In whatever business thou mayest be, and whatever portion thou mayest be reciting from the Qur-an, and whatever deed ye (mankind) may be doing, We are witnesses thereof when ye are deeply engrossed therein. Nor is hidden from the Lord (so much as) the weight of an atom on the earth or in heaven. And not the least and not the greatest of these things but are recorded in a clear Record.

Yunus 10 : 61

﴿يَوْمَ يَبْعَثُهُمُ اللَّهُ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا عَمِلُوا أَحْصَاهُ اللَّهُ وَنَسُوهُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

شَهِيدٌ﴾ [المجادلة: ٦]

On the Day that Allah will raise them all up (again) and show them the truth (and meaning) of their conduct. Allah has reckoned its (value), though they may have forgotten it, for Allah is Witness to all things.

Al-Mujadela 58 : 6

Allah will help those who control their vain desires and hold their souls accountable

﴿ وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا ﴾ [الشمس: ٧]

By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it;
Ash-Shams 91 : 7

﴿ فَأَهَمَّهَا جُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا ﴾ [الشمس: ٨]

And its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right;
Ash-Shams 91 : 8

﴿ قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا ﴾ [الشمس: ٩]

Truly he succeeds that purifies it,
Ash-Shams 91 : 9

﴿ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا ﴾ [الشمس: ١٠]

And he fails that corrupts it!
Ash-Shams 91 : 10

And:

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴾

[العنكبوت: ٦٩]

And those who strive in Our (Cause), We will certainly guide them to Our Paths: for verily Allah is with those who do right.

Al-Ankabut 29 : 69

* * *